

An Excerpt from

Living Well is the Best Revenge

the debut novel from Elle Bailey

Chapter 22
Sisters' Superlatives

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Chapter 22

Sisters' Superlatives

Lauryn woke on Friday morning not feeling better but at least feeling apologetic. She showered and dressed then walked a couple of blocks to Bombon Café to get breakfast. After returning home, she called Charlene to make things right.

The phone rang four times but Charlene didn't answer at the office. Her voice mail picked up. Lauryn didn't leave a message, instead she called Charlene on her cell phone. Same response. She decided to try again later. In the meantime, she turned on the TV to drown out the silence in her abode and retreated to her office to go through her mail, pay bills and do some work before her afternoon hair appointment.

A few hours later, she was interrupted by the phone. She pressed a button on the keypad and spoke into the headset.

"Hello," she answered.

"Hey, girl," Charlene said. "I saw your number in the caller ID. What's up?"

"I just wanted to apologize for last night."

"Oh, I'm the one who should apologize for calling so late, for being so naïve as you call it and for hanging up so abruptly."

"Don't mention it. I'd had a rough day and rather than forewarn you, I lashed out at you. I vented out of frustration without considering your feelings and I was wrong for doing so."

"So are we still cool?"

"Absolutely," Lauryn declared. "We'll chalk it up to the being single blues. Anything said when you're in a blue mood can't be taken personally."

"Bet. That'll work."

"So, listen, I wanted to treat you to dinner as a peace offering," Lauryn said. "I can't go tonight since I've got plans with Chad. But, the girls and I are getting together on Saturday night. You're welcome to join us if you'd like."

"Where are you going?"

"We're going casual this weekend. Bennigan's on Michigan."

"What time?"

"Around 7 o'clock."

"Sounds good. I think I'll take you up on the offer."

"Great!" Lauryn was pleased that she'd accepted the invitation.

"Catch me on my cell if you need to reach me between now and then."

"Will do."

"Talk to you later," Lauryn said.

"Have a good one."

"You too."

"Bye."

Charlene navigated through the crowd gathered in the waiting area at Bennigan's. As she approached the hostess' desk, she noticed Jezebel waving Lauryn over to their table. She followed and joined the hugs and kisses already in progress.

"Heeey!"

"Hey, diva!"

"Hola, chica!"

"How're you doing?"

"Smoochez."

"What's up, queen?"

"Oooh, you look good, girl!"

"Give me love, give me love."

"Hey, girl," Lauryn greeted Charlene. "I'm so glad you could make it."

"So am I, girlfriend," she said while taking off her coat and getting situated in the booth.

Jubilation was in the air as they settled around the table. Charlene was amazed by the fact that they literally lit up on sight of one another. Their collective bubblyness was certainly enviable if not infectious. They really did behave and relate to each other like sisters. Her heart ached as she thought about how much she missed her own sisters. She'd allowed too much time and distance to creep in between Jackie, Angie and her. The situation was in desperate need of repair. As soon as she was fit, she planned to make amends.

"So refresh my memory," Charlene said. "How do all of you know each other?"

Peninnah said, "Well, Lauryn and I grew up together. We sang in the youth choir at church."

Jezebel added, "And Peninnah and I were roommates at Spelman."

Rahab said, "And Lauryn and I pledged together after I transferred from Southern to Hampton."

Lauryn added, "Yeah, Rae and I were roommates both at school and when she moved here from New Orleans."

"Oh, OK," Charlene said as she fit together pieces of the puzzle in her mind. "So where are you from, Jezebel?"

"I'm from St. Louis."

"Missouri, the Show Me state," Charlene remarked.

"Girl, yeah. And I'm up here hoping somebody will show me the money soon."

Lauryn explained, "Jez is a sports writer but she's trying to get into broadcasting."

"That's great," Charlene said as she and the others perused their menus.

"I told you what your problem is, girl," Lauryn's remark was directed at Jez.

"What? What's my problem?"

"Your name."

"What's wrong with her name?" asked Rae.

"Yeah, what's wrong with my name, Miss Know-it-All?"

"Nothing per se. But if you want to make it in sports and entertainment, you need to pick a name that's catchy or at least memorable. For example, you need to pick a moniker with a season or a natural disaster in it."

"Say what?!" Peninnah shrieked.

"Mmm...hmmh, you need to pick a name like...," Lauryn tapped her fingernails on the table while contemplating. "You need to pick a name like...Mary...Monsoon...Hail...Mary..." As the light bulb came on, she snapped her fingers. "That's it! Change your name to Hail Mary Monsoon and NBC Sports will snatch you up in a heartbeat!"

"You have lost your mind, girl," Peninnah said dismissively.

"Oh really," Lauryn said sarcastically. "Hannah Storm, Willow Bay and Summer Sanders, need I say more?"

They laughed hysterically.

"Need I say more?" Lauryn asked saucily.

"Go on, girl," Rahab said between laughs.

"You are a fool," Jez said. "Girl, you're a fool."

"Don't sleep," Lauryn warned humorously. "I know of what I speak."

"That's right, baby. You've got the gift," Charlene mocked. "You've got that sixth sense."

As the laughter subsided, all eyes were once again on the menus. After ordering drinks and appetizers, the fabulous foursome gabbed about hair dos and don'ts, fashion, pop culture and other hot topics. Meanwhile, Charlene took note of her surroundings.

So this is what they do, she thought. It was like a scene from the TV show *Friends*. The place was crawling with twenty-somethings some gathered around the bar watching college football and others huddled around tables eating or sipping designer coffee and ranting about bosses, parents, professors and dates or mates in no apparent order. She felt a little out of place but it was an interesting study of the cultural curiosities

known as Generation X.

After surveying the crowd, Charlene returned her attention to the present company. As the lone sister on the wrong side of 30, she was the doyenne of the *viva la diva* dinner party. As for the others, the 5'10" sepiaskinned Rahab was a knock-out, simply put. With flawless skin, long ebony swirls and curls and a body that would put any super model to shame, it was easy to see why she was seldom home alone. Peninnah was a life size black satin doll. At 5'7" with a cool cocoa complexion, she was of that rare breed of women who could dare to wear one inch of hair and work it something fierce. Ebony Fire was a nickname tailor-made for Jezebel, the lone redbone in the clique. She was 5'5" and thick in the thighs with fiery auburn hair and beautiful hazel eyes. She looked like a woman who could raise cane to the point that Hell wouldn't have her. And last but certainly not least, the fashion bug, Lauryn, provided the bridge and the glue to hold together the crew. Though the upwardly mobile, down-to-earth homegirls had bourgie tastes and tendencies, Charlene decided that she liked them all.

The server returned with their drinks and sampler platters then disappeared to put in their orders for entrees. Peninnah said grace then the gab fest kicked in to high gear.

"OK, let the girltalk begin," Jez said. "Let's start with good news. Who's got good news?"

Peninnah tapped her glass with a spoon. "I'll go. I've got good news." She reached into her purse and pulled out a key.

"And this would be good news why?" Jez asked.

"It would be good news because it's the key to my new Mercedes-Benz CLK," she beamed.

"What?!" Rae screamed.

"Get out of here!" Lauryn said.

"What happened? How'd you get a new Benz?" Jez asked.

"Well, it's not brand-new," Peni admitted. "It's two years old."

"It's new to you," Charlene said.

"OK?!" Jez added.

"Well, y'all know mom got paid when UPS went public and since I was having so much trouble with my old Honda, she and Dad decided to get me a new car as a combination birthday, Christmas, law school graduation gift."

"Go 'head, girl!" Lauryn cheered. "That's not good news, that's great news!"

"I'll drink to that," Jez said.

They raised their glasses and saluted Peni's good fortune.

"All right now, who's up next?"

"I've got one more small bit of good news to add."

"What's up?"

"A guy in my Ethics class, Malik, asked me out on a date."

"Well, all right then, sister-girl."

"He's a youth minister and he's being groomed for a career in politics."

"You go, girl!"

"A preacher's wife!"

"Whoa!" Peni cautioned. "It's just a date, one date."

"Which could lead to another and another and yet another if you're lucky."

"Who knows?" Peni said. "He may be a no-show."

Lauryn chimed in, "Oh, I've cornered the market on no-shows. And do you know the guy from the BMW Service Center had the nerve to pull the same stunt as the guy from the airport?"

Peni said, "Yeah, you told me about it."

"What happened?" Rae asked.

"Girl, it was the same scenario. The service advisor that schedules maintenance appointments for my car, he pulled the same stunt as the guy from the airline. He'd been my service advisor for like 2 years, so we had a decent rapport. He had all of my contact information at his disposal thanks to the dealer's computer system, so when he asked me out for a date, I couldn't give him my nightclub name and number. So reluctantly, I accepted. And wouldn't you know it, the day and time came but brother-man neither called nor showed to pick me up for our date."

"What?!"

"Girl, it was like Groundhog's Day! I couldn't believe it. It was just like Groundhog's Day!" Lauryn exclaimed.

The others laughed.

"When I realized that he was going to be a no-show, I was hot and bothered."

Peni laughed and said, "Yeah, she called me and said, '*What's today's date?*' And I was confused. I didn't know what she was getting at, so I gave her the actual date, it was like August 13th or something. And she said, '*For the rest of the world, it's August 13th. In my little parallel universe, however, it's February 2nd as in Groundhog's Day!*' And I cracked up laughing because I knew instantly that homeboy must have pulled a disappearing act."

Lauryn continued, "I'm telling you. This can not keep happening to me. I can not keep meeting the same inconsiderate, low-down, no-show Bozo over and over again! It has got to be against a law of some kind. Shoot. If anybody wants to know whether or not God has a sense of humor just look at my love life. It's a joke! It's His own personal gag reel."

They continued laughing as Lauryn continued raving.

"I'm serious. Nobody's love life should resemble Groundhog's Day, yet mine does. That is so ridiculous," she complained still shaking her head at the memory. "I've been lied to, cheated on and now stood up more times than the law should allow," she continued. "Girl, if one more brother crosses me, I think I'll grab a bat and just start swinging!"

"*She was raaaised in Illinois right outside of Chicago,*" Jez sang a line from a popular R. Kelly tune drawing laughter from the crowd.

"OK, now that the peacemaker is contemplating violence, I think that's a clear indication that it's time to move on to a less incendiary topic," Peni said.

"Yeah, let's save the men behaving badly topic for another day," Rae suggested.

"For real though," Jez added. "She's taking a page from my playbook and that's not good," she polished off a chicken tender.

"All right let's get back to good news. Who's next?" She looked around the table. "Jez, you're next. What's going on in your world?"

"Mmmm...not much...let me see..." she hesitated, "well, actually, I do have a bit of good news."

"OK. Let's hear it."

"Well, Boone is going out of town next weekend to work a case and my maintenance man will be in town next weekend to take on the Bears."

Rae raised her hand in protest, "Hold it right there, girlfriend. We didn't ask for an update on the *Young and the Restless*, we just want to hear about good news."

"Girl, that is good news," Jez sassed. "The good news is that I've got a man to *keep* me and I've got a man to keep me happy. I've got the best of both worlds. Who could ask for anything more?"

The vivacious, flirtatious and very curvaceous vixen had maintenance men from coast to coast—Erwin in Indy, Darrell in Detroit, a couple of honeys from "The House", an old flame back in St. Louis and a couple of VIPs who remained nameless for their sake and hers.

"Hopeless," Rae said. "That's what you are, Jez. You are hopeless."

"Hey, don't knock it 'til you try it," Jez teased. "I figured I couldn't beat the canine crew so I decided to join 'em. And you know what? It works for me."

"Enough with the drama," Peni said as she continued working her way around the table.

"OK, Charlene, it's your turn. What's your good news?"

Charlene rested her knife and fork over a fajita chicken quesadilla and thought for a second. "Well, I don't have anything solid. But there is a guy at the gym who has been trying to holler at me."

"Hey, now!" Rae said.

"What's up with him?"

"Yeah, give us the dirt," Jez said.

Lauryn started the inquisition. "What's his name? Where is he from? And who are his people?"

"If you want to have him checked out just say the word. My roommate, Boone--"

"Your boyfriend, Boone," Rae corrected Jez.

"Whatever. My friend, Boone, is a bounty hunter. And he's got friends in both high and low places. So if you want to know where the bodies are buried, just say the word," Jez informed her.

"Forget all of that," Peni said. "How does he look?"

"And what does he do?" Rae inquired.

Charlene smiled. She was starting to feel like one of the girls, a member of the club. When she could get a word in edgewise, she answered most if not all of their questions.

"His name is Derek Joseph Wright. But most folks call him DJ."

They listened with anticipation hanging on to her every word.

"He lives in Oak Park. I don't know who his folks are, but I do know that he's divorced with one son. Mmmm...let me see...what else can I tell you?"

"What does he do?" Lauryn asked.

"Oh, he's a math teacher by day and he works part-time as a personal trainer on some nights and weekends."

"Uhm, hmmm. OK. Now, get to the good part. Is he tall, dark and handsome?" Peni inquired.

"Or short, fair and fine?" Rae asked.

"I'd say the former." Charlene maintained a faraway look in her eyes as she described him. "He's very tall, I'd guess 6'5" or 6'6". He's in great shape obviously since he's a fitness expert. He's got a rich brown complexion and an amazing pair of jet brown eyes that are as deep and dark as the sea."

"Oooh, girl. A tall chocolate brother with a hard body," Jez surmised.

Whimsically, Peni followed up, "I was thinking something more along the lines of a succulent, 6'6" Hershey's Kiss with eyes as deep and dark as the sea."

"Either way you say it, he sounds like a winner to me," Rae said.

"Well, before you crown him Prince Charming, let's spin the wheel of Sister Wit," Lauryn suggested.

Charlene looked confused. "Sister Wit? What's that?"

"It's a little thing we do to pass along pearls of wisdom to a sister in need of advice," Rae explained.

"OK, I'll go first," Peni said. "My mama always said that you can tell a lot about a man by looking at his shoes."

"How so?"

"Well, her theory goes something like this, cheap shoes, cheap man. Dirty shoes, lazy man. Nice, polished shoes, good man."

"Oh, I can tell a lot about a man by looking at his feet," Jez said. She grinned mischievously then added, "But it ain't got nothing to do with his shoes, if you know what I mean!" she laughed.

"Girl, get your mind out of the gutter," Peni said.

"OK, here's another pearl for the strand," Rae offered. "My Nana always said that you can trust a man with a dog."

"Why?"

"'Cause you know he's going home every night. If he doesn't go home every night, he'll have a mess to clean up when he does finally get there."

"Maybe so. But that's nothing a pooper scooper can't fix."

"True."

"OK, here's one from Big Mama," Jez said. "What's the difference between a boyfriend and a husband?" she asked.

"School us."

"With pleasure," said Jez. "A *boy*-friend will let you work to provide for him. But a husband will work to provide for you."

"Say that again," Lauryn said.

Jez continued, "A *boy*-friend will lay around your house while you're at work. But a husband will work to buy a house for you."

"I know that's right," Peni agreed.

"Lastly, a *boy*-friend will ask you to live with him. But a man who is marriage material, he won't be satisfied unless you marry him."

"Go 'head Big Mama!" Rae cheered, raising her glass in salute to her words of wisdom. "Papa Charles once shared a similar sentiment with me. He said that when a man sees something he wants, he will go after it because it's in his nature to pursue, to conquer. And it's true. Look at Jacob," she prodded. "He worked for 14 years to earn Rachel's hand in marriage."

Several women nodded in agreement.

Rae continued, "So, Papa Charles said that if a man is not bending over backwards or jumping through hoops to get to you, get a clue. Chances are, he doesn't want you."

"I'll drink to that," Jez said, raising her glass.

"Yeah, sisters do themselves a disservice chasing after men," Peni said. "If he's the one, God will bring the two of you together. Just like He brought Eve to Adam, He'll do the same for you."

"Speak, my sister," said Lauryn.

"And best of all, you'll be a match made in Heaven."

"Believe that," Rae said emphatically, drinking a toast in salute. The others followed suit.

"OK, I've got one," Lauryn said as the dialogue resumed. "It's an oldie but goodie. Never trust a man wearing suspenders and a belt."

"'Nough said."

"Oh, but here's an even better one. It's a classic from the pulpit." She eyed Peni who took the cue. Lauryn said, "If he don't love you with your clothes *on*—"

"He cain't love you with 'em off!" Peni finished the line.

"Dang! That's pretty potent stuff. Where'd that come from?"

"Girl, that one came straight from our late pastor. As did this one. If you want to hide something from a Negro, do what?"

"Put it in a book!" Mocking the old preacher, Lauryn pounded the table as she delivered the rest of the line.

"Ouch! And this came from the pulpit on Sunday mornings?"

"Girl, Rev. was wild like that, he didn't play. He did not mince words. He'd speak his piece and go on about his business."

"If your feelings got hurt, oh well, you'd get over it," Peni asserted. "That's the way it was back in the day."

"My Aunt Hattie was the same way. She didn't sugarcoat anything," said Rae. "She used to tell all of us girls, '*Keep your legs closed and your options open*'."

"I know that's right."

"Enough about what mama used to say. It's a new day. So, let's fast forward to the future," Jez said impatiently. "Here's a piece of advice from the new school, after 12:00 midnight and before 6:00 AM are not 'visiting hours' if you get my drift. And here's one for good measure, 'say my name, say my name' is the name of the game."

Peni looked at Jez disapprovingly. "Girl, it's amazing. It's absolutely amazing. Every time we think you've bottomed out, you find a new low."

"What?!"

"Get your mind out of the gutter," she chastised Jezebel.

"No, you get your mind out of the gutter!" Jez shot back. "I'm trying to hip her to the no-name game that some brothers play." Jez turned to Charlene and explained, "If every other word is 'uh, huh', 'yeah', 'OK, man' and he never addresses you as 'baby' or by your first name, chances are he's running game. That's the no-name game. Homey, don't play that." She turned back to Peni, "Now. You were saying Miss Priss?"

Before she could answer, Lauryn intervened. "Talk about running game, I'll tell you who to beware of – married men who don't wear wedding rings."

"Especially young men 'cause chances are they're trying to run game," said Jez.

Rae added, "If he's trying to look the part of a single man, chances are he's trying to play the part of a single man."

"That's why you have to be smart," Jez said.

"And not just smart, but cyber smart," Peni added.

"Especially if you have a man," Lauryn said.

"You've got to check out MySpace, Match.com and any other social networking sites to see if your man is using those services."

"If he is, chances are he's doing dirt."

"Yeah, he's leading a double life."

Charlene's head was spinning with so much information being hurled in her direction. Still, she tried to heed their advice.

The voice of experience, Jez said, "Now, disposable phone numbers, those are a sister's worst nightmare because they're free."

"And you know that's brothers' favorite price," Rae interjected.

Jez continued, "They're nationwide, so a brother can have private numbers in multiple cities across the country. All calls go straight to voicemail. And he can check messages and respond by phone or e-mail at his convenience."

"Obviously, this type of tool presents challenges for sisters on both ends of the spectrum – the main squeeze and the other woman," Rae said.

"But, if you're his main squeeze then you have the home court advantage."

"That's right," Rae said. "You can follow his money trail meaning you can keep tabs on him through his bills and bank statements. And you can follow his footprints online or track his movements through the GPS device stored in his car or phone."

Jez picked up the thread. "On the other hand, if you're the other woman, not that anyone here would ever knowingly play that role, but if you want to know whether or not there is another woman in his life, intuition is really the only tool available to help you discover what's up with the brother."

"That's true," Rae said. "Family, friends and co-workers may be his co-conspirators, so you can't expect them to dime him out."

"That means you have to rely on your God-given gift of intuition to let you know what's up."

"You can also observe his behavior," Peni added. "For instance, if voicemail and e-mail are your primary means of communication, that's a red flag."

"If you can't call him on his home phone, that's a red flag."

"We've said it before, but it bears repeating," said Jez, "if he won't refer to you by name when you're on the phone with him, that's a red flag."

"If he won't take you to his place of residence, that's a red flag."

Lauryn piped in, "If he only calls or visits you during business hours, that's a red flag."

"If he's afraid to be seen in public with you, that's a red flag."

"If he won't take you around his people—to the family cook-out or Sunday dinner—that's a red flag."

Jez issued the summation. "If two or more of those red flags apply to your situation, chances are you're the other woman."

"And if that's the case, there are only two things that you need to do," Rae said.

"Dump him quick, fast and in a hurry," Peni said.

"And then put him on 'the list' with all the other PNGs—personas non grata," Lauryn added.

Unawares, Charlene asked, "The list? What list?"

In unison, the cyber-savvy sisters said, "DontDateHimGirl.com."

"Say what?" she asked.

"*Don't Date Him Girl dot com,*" Rae said.

Lauryn explained, "It's a website that sisters use to put brothers on blast when they've been found out—when they've been caught cheating."

"Aye, y'aye, y'aye," Charlene said as she massaged her temples. "You know, I'm not a suspicious person by nature," she confessed. "But I'm getting the impression that I need to be in order to play the dating game effectively." She added, "In retrospect, my blind faith may explain why Pierre had been so duplicitous during our marriage."

"That's all right, girlfriend. You've hooked up with the right crew," Jez said. "We'll teach you everything you need to know."

"That's right, we're well versed in the rules of the game. So, we'll get you up to speed in no time," Rae said confidently.

"I don't doubt it," Charlene remarked. "I don't doubt your ability. I just hope I can keep up considering there is so much to learn."

"One thing is certain," Peni said.

"What's that?" Charlene asked.

"Blind faith is a thing of the past," she answered.

"Girl, you ain't said nothin' but a word," Jez commented.

"That's our worst enemy," Rae remarked. "That's what's putting us under."

"Mmmh, hmm. That's right."

"That's why I always say Know X and a blood test are two things every girl needs to check before she gets involved with a man. Know what's in his files on KnowX.com and know the results of his blood test before you make *possible*."

"Make possible?"

"Mmmh, hmm," Peni said, "Before you make possible life beginning or life ending moves with a man."

"That's real," Jez said. "Too many sisters are dying of AIDS for you to take a brother at his word nowadays."

"That's the truth Ruth," Rae remarked.

Lauryn said, "OK, enough with the Sister Wit." Turning her attention to Charlene, she said, "We've taught you the rules of the road, so to speak. So, what's the deal? Are you going to go out with Derek?"

"Yeah," Jez added. "Are you going to give him some rhythm?"

"Objection!" Peni protested. "Move to strike that last remark."

"Sustained," Lauryn banged her imaginary gavel.

"I haven't made up my mind just yet. I'm still trying to recover from the last two natural disasters known as Pierre and Barry. I don't know that I'm ready to have a third one added to the list if he's not the person he presents himself to be."

"I understand your position, but you've got to get back out there," Rae said.

"That's right," Jez added. "My Aunt Sally used to always say that the best way to get over a man is to get under one."

Peni rolled her eyes. Lauryn smirked. Meanwhile, Charlene continued soaking up the information like a sponge.

Rae advised, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Who knows? The third time really may be the charm for you. Give him a call and see what's up."

"That's a lot easier said than done," Charlene commented.

"It's just a phone call," Rae remarked.

"Yeah, but I'm a bit inexperienced in that respect." Charlene confessed, "My grandmother never let me call boys. She said that dealing with men was like playing chase the fox. And she said that I'm the fox. So, I never really developed the courage to call guys."

"There's nothing to it," Jez said. "Just remember, active people are attractive people. So, give him a call to see if he wants to hang. If he does, make a date. If he doesn't, push on. It's that simple."

"And make sure he treats you like a red carpet kinda girl," Rae said.

"What does that mean?"

Peni explained, "That means make sure that he treats you like a queen."

"More importantly, make sure there's no shame in his game when you're out on the town," Rae added. "That's where the red carpet analogy comes into play."

"Gotcha," Charlene nodded, duly noting all the advice that had been shared with her.

On that note, the ladies returned to the roundtable on good news. It was Lauryn's turn to share.

"L Boogie, what's up with you? Tell us something good, Fly Girl," Peni said.

Lauryn thought for a few moments and realized that she didn't have any good news of her own to tell, so she did the next best thing. She talked about other folks' good news. "Well, it's not exactly my own personal good news, but it's good news nonetheless."

"OK, shoot."

"Well, Chad got accepted to grad school in London."

"Off of your essays?" Rae asked.

"Yes." Lauryn tried to sound upbeat but she faded fast as she delivered the next piece of good news. "And I just received a wedding invitation from Bernadette and Stephen."

"Who met at your Bulls' victory bash last summer?" Jez asked.

"Yes, that would be the couple," Lauryn confirmed, her spirits fading even faster now. "Oh, and Sergei, my boy Sergei from Uzbekistan, he just got engaged."

"Off of your dating advice?" Rae said.

"Right you are again, my dear," Lauryn deadpanned. "Oh and get this, Sergei wants me to be his special guest at the reception since I was instrumental in helping him woo Tatiana." With that delivery, she hit rock bottom.

Unsure of what to say, they remained silent.

Finally, Rae tried to put a positive spin on the situation. "Daaaang, girl. Good things are just happening all around you. You've got the Midas touch!"

"Oh, yeah," Jez piggybacked. "You're batting a thousand."

"For everyone else, I'm batting a thousand. For myself, I'm striking out every time at bat. I've got a big fat O-fer going. It is unbelievable. Girl, there is no justice in the world. No justice and no peace!" Lauryn protested.

"Well, as long as you're on a hot streak for everyone else, I might as well tell you that my little sister wants you to decorate her honeymoon suite," Rae informed her.

"You have got to be kidding me," Lauryn said flatly.

"I wish I was."

"Why don't they just go to the Sybaris or something?" Peni asked.

"Cause they don't have Sybaris money," Rae retorted. "Besides, she saw the pictures from Senara's shower in DC and she liked the way Lauryn hooked it up, so she wants her to do something similar for Nigel's and her honeymoon suite."

"Well, that'll be my gift to them," Lauryn answered.

"That's cool. She was banking on it."

"Great. That's just great. I couldn't find romance if it was wearing a lo/jack, but I can help others keep their romance and relationships alive. Arranging dates, buying gifts, hosting showers, decorating suites, planning anniversary parties, giving away trips, maybe all that's a sign," Lauryn rambled. "Maybe I should start getting paid for my services, at least then I too would get some benefit from all of my hard work." The others let her prattle on for a moment. "Mmmh, hmmm. I should start a company and call it *Something Blue* 'cause that's just how I feel."

"Well, Miss Bliss," Peni interrupted, "I bet your mom's wishing she'd have accepted those 11 goats in exchange for you in South Africa, isn't she? She'd have herself some grand 'kids' by now."

"Don't give up your day job," Jez panned the pun.

"What?!" Charlene was mortified. "What are you talking about?"

Peni tried to contain her laughter while she explained, "When Lauryn and her mom went to South Africa a few years ago, two guys approached them in a marketplace and offered to give her mom 11 goats –"

"It was 10 goats, wasn't it?" Rae interrupted.

"Truth be told, I thought it was 12 goats," Jez added.

Lauryn rolled her eyes as they mocked the situation and contemplated her trade value with common livestock.

"It was 10," Rae stated.

"No, I'm pretty sure it was 11," Peni countered. "Which was it, Lauryn?"

Perturbed, she answered, "If you must know, their initial offer was 10 then they upped it to 11 after giving me the once-over."

"See, I was right!" Peni said still making light of the situation.

"We were both right!" Rae argued.

"Well, I say you're both wrong for being so cold and callous. Can't y'all see a sister is in pain?" Lauryn said in her own defense.

"My bad, boo," Rae apologized. "But you've got to admit, that was a funny story. And most of the time, you laugh at it as much if not more than the rest of us do."

"Well, today just isn't my day."

"That's cool. Give me love."

Rahab reached out to hug Lauryn who sat there arms folded, silent and still. Undeterred, Rae hugged her anyway.

Peni said, "Well, we've been around the table, so let's -"

"Not so fast," Rae said. "I haven't had a chance to tell my good news."

"What is it, girl?"

She paused, then said, "You are looking at McDonald's new VP of Marketing for the Central Division."

"What?!!!"

"You go, girl!"

"My sister!"

"And," she glowed, "I've been appointed to sit on the board of a very prestigious charitable organization. And guess who we'll be working with?"

"Who?"

"General Powell!" she exploded.

"Get out of here! That's great, girl!"

"Girl, that is awesome!"

"Kudos to you, girlfriend. You are truly blessed."

"I'll say."

"Kai took me out to celebrate last night."

"Oh, how are things with you and Kai?"

"They're going well."

"How long has it been now?"

"We've been seeing each other for about four months now," Rae said while reaching for a skewer of Bamboo Chicken & Shrimp.

"Soooo, is he the one?"

"Who knows?" Rae answered casually. "Music is his life right now. He's not necessarily looking for a wife."

"Well, enjoy it while it lasts."

"Believe me, I will."

"Well, I say all of this good news calls for a toast."

When the server returned, they ordered a fresh round of drinks—Amaretto sour, Mai Tai, raspberry iced tea, cranberry juice with a twist of lime and Coke. Then the girltalk continued.

"Oh, I forgot to mention the most exciting part of my new job," Rae said.

"What's that?"

"I get to use the company's luxury suites and premium seats at venues around the city to entertain clients at various events. First up, I've got tickets to go see the Bulls battle the Bucks provided they don't go on strike this season."

"Oh, you are so lucky," Lauryn clutched her chest. "You get to go see fine Ray Allen play in person."

Jez chimed in, "Yeah, Walter is cool and classy and cute *but* he ain't no rim rocker like my man Vince!"

"Veeee Ceeee!" Peni echoed.

Rae added, "I can't wait to see how he fares in the league."

"Yeah, Vince is *Phi Slamma Jamma* but he ain't no *Human Highlight Reel* like my man, Dominique!" Peni roared.

"Antique!" Jez teased.

"Girl, please," Peni said dismissively. "'Nique is *Sensual Chocolate* and you know it."

Lauryn piped up, "Oh, I beg to differ, dear. *Sensual Chocolate* lives right here in the Windy City. His number is 'two Trey' and his initials are M Air J."

"Hold up, wait a minute!" Rae said. "That sounds like a challenge to me."

"Say what???" Jez squawked.

"Shall I proceed?" Rae asked.

"Yes, indeed!" Jez, Peni and Lauryn answered playfully in unison.

Charlene watched with amazement as a spirited round of *Sisters' Superlatives* got underway. She couldn't be sure whether the girls had turned guy watching into a sport or vice-versa, but she observed with keen interest as they honored their favorite male athletes and other luminaries with various and sundry distinctions.

"OK, the vote is for *Sensual Chocolate*," Rae served as moderator. "All in favor of Antique, oh, I'm sorry, I mean, Dominique, put 'em up."

Peni and Jez raised their hands.

"OK, now all in favor of His Airness, put 'em up."

Lauryn and Rae raised their hands.

"Charlene, what's up, girlfriend? Are you gonna vote?"

"I think I'll pass. I think I'll just observe for the time being."

Rae continued, "All right then we have a tie."

"That's no good," Lauryn said as she prepared to broker a deal. "I'll concede on *Sensual Chocolate* in exchange for the title of *Sexiest Man Alive* for Mike."

After a moment of deliberation, heads nodded in agreement.

"OK, cool. That's reasonable. 'Nique gets the title of *Sensual Chocolate* and MJ gets the title of *Sexiest Man Alive*."

"Agreed."

Having secured the more prestigious award for her all-time favorite athlete, Lauryn posed the question, "So, who's joining the newly named captain on the *All-Sexy Team*?"

"What slots need to be filled?"

"I know one," Peni said. "*Best Back in Boxing*. That title has got to go to another Georgia boy, Evander 'Real Deal' Holyfield."

"Amen."

"That's a done deal."

"OK, I've got one," Lauryn added. "*Best Biceps in Basketball*. That's got to be D Rob."

"The Admiral, for sure."

"That's a done deal."

"Next!"

Jez tossed out one. "*Best Buns in Baseball*."

"Jeter!" It was a unanimous decision.

"OK, here's a good one. *Body Adonis*," Rae said.

"That's got to be Michael Johnson," Peni said.

"No way!" Jez protested. "That title has got to go to none other than Eddie George of the Tennessee Titans. He is chiseled."

"Girl, have you seen his abs?" Rae asked.

"And his arms?" Lauryn added in disbelief.

"Ooooh, all the better to hold me with, my dear!" Jez declared.

The others laughed as she fanned herself.

"Talk about fantasy football," Jez added, "I've got a football fantasy."

"Calm down, Red," Rae cautioned.

"That's right, try to keep that blaze under control, Ebony Fire," Peni warned.

"OK, sounds like it's 3 to 1 in favor of Eddie."

"Whatever," Peni conceded.

"So what's left?" Rae asked.

"*Kodak Kid*."

"Oh, yeah, *Mr. Photogenic*."

There was a moment of silence before anyone offered up a nominee.

Finally, Lauryn said, "It's gotta be Tamia's man."

"Grant Hill."

"Yeah, he does photograph well," Rae agreed.

"The camera loves him."

"OK, he's a lock."

"Moving right along, *Prettiest Smile*?"

"That's easy, C Webb."

"Yeah, Webber's the man."

"OK, who've we got for *Jeepers Creepers*?"

"Dan Marino."

"Cal Ripken, Jr."

"Oh yeah, he's got the bluest eyes."

"Cris Carter."

"Jason Kidd."

"Nice try, ladies. But this one's a lock," Jez bragged.

"Give it up. Who've you got?"

"I'll give you a clue, he's Seattle's shortstop."

Without hesitation, they cheered, "A-Rod!"

"Oh, girl. I'm feeling you on that one. A-Rod has beautiful eyes."

"Oooh, speaking of A-Rod, we forgot to give the *Almond Joy* award after we chose 'Nique for *Sensual Chocolate*."

"Besides Alex Rodriguez, who've we got for *Almond Joy*?"

Rae buzzed in, "Oh, I know. Dude from the Giants. You know, the fine white boy from the Giants."

"Sehorn?" Jez asked.

Rae snapped her fingers, "Yeah, that's it! Jason Sehorn. He is fine."

"No can do," Peni said as she munched on a cheese and bacon potato skin.

"Why not?"

"He's cute and all but he's *Blue-eyed Soul* and not *Almond Joy* material."

"What's the difference?"

"The difference, my dear, is that *Almond Joy* is reserved for Latinos and light-skinned brothers. *Blue-eyed Soul*, on the other hand, is reserved for white boys and all others."

Rae wrinkled her nose.

"That's cool. We'll just name Sehorn, *Blue-eyed Soul*, and A-Rod, *Almond Joy*," Lauryn reasoned.

"That'll work."

"Cool."

"OK, we've got one more spot to fill on the *All-Sexy Team*," Rae said.

"What is it?"

"*Hot Pants*."

"What's that?" asked Charlene.

Lauryn explained, "That title goes to the wide-out or defensive back who looks the best in his football uniform."

"Why just those two positions?"

"Because guys at those positions tend to be long and lean. So they have the hottest bodies on the team."

"I mean, think about it," Rae said between fries. "Running backs are cool but they're usually built like powerhouses."

Jez added, "Yeah, and quarterbacks and kickers...words can't begin to describe. They come in all sorts of shapes and sizes."

"And linemen, I think it goes without saying..." Peni stated.

Lauryn, chomping on a juicy bacon cheeseburger, continued, "Yeah, I mean, I love 'em to pieces but I don't think Warren Sapp and Nate Newton are *Hot Pants* material—for obvious reasons."

"Neither are the linebackers," Peni said.

"So that pretty much leaves receivers, corners and DBs," Jez finished.

"That said, let's set it off. The nominees are..."

"I'd like to nominate my all-time favorite behind Sweetness," Lauryn said, "#80, Jerry Rice."

"His body is tight," Jez said. "But not as tight as the Playmaker's! That's right, I'm nominating Michael Irvin."

"Whatever," Lauryn commented.

"Charlene, get in the game, girlfriend," Peni said. "Who's your money on?"

"Let me see...let me see...," she thought aloud. "I'm gonna have to represent for the old school players since I don't know half of these folks y'all are talking about."

"That's fine," Rae assured her.

After careful consideration, she said, "OK, I've got one."

"Let's hear it."

"Eric Dickerson," Charlene said proudly.

"A good choice," Jez said hesitantly. "But he was a running back."

"Hmmh. OK, then I'll have to go with Marcus Allen."

"Another good choice, dear. But he too was a running back," Rae explained.

"Shoot!" Charlene pouted.

Lauryn tried to jog her memory. "Think of some of the teams that were popular back in the day like the Cowboys and Steelers."

"Oh, I know!" Charlene perked up. "Lynn Swann!" she said proudly.

"Excellent!"

"Way to go, girl!" Rae applauded.

"All right. Any others?"

"I've got a sleeper," Rae said.

"Who?"

"Darrell Green."

"From the Redskins?"

"Yep, yep. That brother's body is tight and he looks good in his uniform."

"All right, let the balloting begin," Rae ordered. "All in favor of Darrell Green, put 'em up." She noted the count then continued. "All in favor of the Playmaker, put 'em up." Again, she noted the count and continued. "Lynn Swann," she counted. "And last but not least, all in favor of Jerry Rice, put 'em up." She noted the final count then announced, "It was a close call but it looks like JR is the winner of the *Hot Pants* award and as such he's the final addition to the *All-Sexy Team*."

"Whoo...hooooo!" cheered Lauryn as she raised her hands in victory.

Jez protested. "I demand a recount!"

"Tell it to somebody who cares," Peni remarked.

"Next up, we've got the *All-Armani Team*," Rae proceeded to the next category.

"I thought we renamed that team," Lauryn said.

"Yeah, we did," said Jez. "Since MJ was a fixture on the team, we renamed it the Michael Jordan/All-Armani Team. That way we give Jordan his props for being a fashion plate and we free up a spot on the team for another brother."

"Yeah, that's right. That's right. We did make that change," Rae

recalled.

Charlene marveled at the logic and thought that was applied to each situation. It was unbelievable. If she hadn't witnessed it herself, she wouldn't have believed it.

Pounding her fist on the table to command their attention, Peni announced, "My boy, Zo, has got to be *Dapper Dan!*"

Lauryn joined in, "Yeah, Zo is fly. I've got your back on that one. I'm down for naming Zo captain of the *All-Armani Team.*"

"No argument here," Jez said. "I'm in favor of Mourning as captain. But you've got to make room for my boy, Curtis Martin, on the roster," she bargained.

"Oh, no doubt. Curtis is definitely on the team," Lauryn agreed.

Rae said, "Keep a spot open for #27, my boy, E. George, 'cause that brother can wear a suit."

"You're right about that, girlfriend," Jez said.

"What about Deion?" Peni asked.

Hesitantly, Jez said, "Neon Deion is cool—some of the time. But at other times, he can look like Giorgio Armani meets Huggy Bear."

"You are so wrong for that!" Lauryn laughed.

"Girl, I'm serious," Jez explained. "I've got mad love for the brother but sometimes those fur coats and all that flashiness is just...it's just too much even for me."

"Soul Phi Soul," Peni said.

"Exactly. That's my point exactly," Jez said.

"So what's up? Yea or nay?" Rae asked.

"Well, all in favor, put 'em up."

One, two, three hands went up quickly.

She stewed for a moment. Then reluctantly, Jez made it unanimous.

Lauryn did some quick math then protested. "Hold up, wait a minute! The team is loaded with football players. We need some more hoop stars on the team. So far, we've got one—Zo. Who else can represent?"

"Wait a minute. Why does the fifth spot have to go to a hoop star? We don't have any baseball players on the team," Rae challenged.

"Yeah, we do. We just picked Prime Time, he's representing for football and baseball."

"Oh," Rahab relented. "A convenient answer, no doubt."

"I've got the last spot on the roster," Lauryn said confidently.

"Who?"

"Hakeem," she smiled. "Hakeem Olajuwon."

Jez agreed, "Oh yeah, Dream can dress."

"Yeah, he's fly. He's got a very nice sense of style. Very nice," Peni said.

"OK, cool. That takes care of the *All-Armani Team.* What's next?"

"Who gets the *Howard Cossell Award?*"

"Marvelous, Marv Albert!" Rae said.

"YES! And the basket counts," Lauryn mimicked.

"Not!" Jez vetoed.

"Oh, I know. Craig Kilborn," Rae said.

"Newsflash, honey. He left Bristol for late night in La La."

"Oh, yeah. I forgot. My bad."

"That's cool. Any others from Sports Center? Dan Patrick? Kenny Mayne?"

"Boo-yeah! How 'bout Stuart Scott?" Peni asked.

Jez offered her professional opinion, "Stu is cool but Bob Costas has got to be the man in this category."

"Why?"

"Cause he gave the eulogy at Mickey Mantel's funeral. Now, I'm sorry for betraying the brother, but when a person starts giving eulogies and such that just puts him or her on another level in my book."

"You've got a point," Lauryn said.

"A very good point though I hate to admit it," Rae said. She finally surrendered, "OK, Costas is the man, agreed?"

All agreed.

"Next up, *Reel Love*."

"What's this one about?" Charlene asked.

"It's about our favorite sports films."

"Oh, I see. R-e-e-l love versus r-e-a-l love. Nice play on words. You ladies are pretty clever."

"We try."

"So what's up?" Rae asked.

Jez went first. "I'm sticking with my favorite sport of football and I'm casting my vote for *Rudy*."

"Not bad, not bad," Peni evaluated the selection, "but the Oscar has got to go to *Hoop Dreams*. That was a good movie."

"Both are good, solid choices," Lauryn commented, "but I'm going with a classic, *Cornbread, Earl and Me*."

"Girl, you are really reaching."

"I'm saying."

"Be that as it may, I've saved the best for last," Rae bragged.

"Let's hear it," Jez said.

"You should be happy, Jez. It's a football film."

"Whatever. Speak."

"And the winner is," Rae tapped a drum roll on the table, "...*Brian's Song*!"

"Oh, yeah, Rae. That was a tear-jerker."

"Excellent choice," Peni took a breather from her Monte Cristo sandwich.

"Thank you, dear."

"So do we even need to vote?"

"Yeah, to make it official."

"We'll use the Siskel & Ebert method of rating the films."

"OK, all in favor of *Brian's Song* being selected as the fan's favorite,

show 'em. Thumbs up."

It was yet another unanimous decision thus confirming the notion that great minds think alike.

"Speaking of film works and related matters, what's up with the *All-Denzel Award*," Rae asked.

"The *All-Denzel Award*?" Charlene asked.

"For real though," Jez rested her juicy French Dip. "He's not even an athlete."

"It doesn't matter!" Lauryn rebutted. "He's played a basketball dad."

"In *He Got Game*," Rae added.

"A boxer," Lauryn continued.

"In *The Hurricane*," again Rae added.

"And he's getting ready to play a football coach in some film called *The Titans*," Lauryn explained.

"Remember the *Titans*," Rae corrected her between sips.

"Yeah, that's it," Lauryn continued. "So that makes him more than qualified to have an award named for him."

"OK, you two are really reaching," Jez said. "This is getting scary."

"But what's his award for?" Peni asked. "Please don't tell me it's for the best on-screen performance by an athlete."

"Coach, I'm homesick," Jez jokingly mocked a line delivered in *Blue Chips*.

"I assure you, it is not for that purpose," Rae explained. "Instead, it goes to the brother who's fine, who's married to a sister and who's a good, responsible family man."

"Oh, I like that," Charlene interjected.

"And Denzel's a Christian man too, girl," Peni remarked.

"Even better," Lauryn agreed. "There's nothing more beautiful than a brother who loves the Lord."

"I know that's right."

"Honey, the Lord knows He hurt Himself when He created *that* son!"

"I tell you, He broke the mold."

"Yes, He did."

"Girl, Pauletta is a blessed woman."

"Yes, she is."

"You can say that again."

"Mmmh, mmmh, mmmh," Peni shook her head.

"So start the bidding, Charlene," Rae said.

"Let's see, I'm gonna nominate JR—Jerry Rice."

"OK, let's work it out," Rae said. "He's fine."

"True dat," Jez agreed.

"He's married to a sister," Rae continued.

"The lovely Jackie," Jez added.

"And he's a good, responsible family man."

"Good ol' country boys, you've gotta love 'em," Jez said.

"Cool. We've got our first candidate!" Rae said.

They all cheered for Charlene.

"Heeey!"

"Way to go, girl."

"Good answer, good answer," Lauryn applauded.

"Are there any others?"

There was a moment of silence as they contemplated other possible candidates.

"OK, he's fine...I know he's got a kid...but I don't think he's got a wife. Shoot," Peninnah snapped her fingers.

Rae too thought out loud, "Yeah, he's fine...he's got kids...oh, but, shoot he's married to Goldilocks. Dang!"

"Yeah, that wife thing is going to be a sticking point for a lot of brothers."

"Can we drop that from the criteria?"

"Absolutely not! We love brothers who love *and marry* sisters."

"I know that's right."

"Think...just think...," Jez encouraged them.

Lauryn snapped her fingers, "I've got it."

"What, who?"

She smiled, "Vanessa's husband."

"Rick Fox!" they erupted in unison.

"You go, girl!"

"Give me some on that one!" Rae high-fived Lauryn.

"Hold up, wait a minute!" Jez protested. "He's not even American."

"It doesn't matter!" Lauryn argued. "He married Miss America that makes him qualified!"

"OK, you are off the chain," Jez remarked.

"You know, I think we need to factor in longevity too," Peni said thoughtfully. "'Cause Denzel and Pauletta have been at it for a minute. They've got some years under their belt."

"Agreed. Longevity is added to the list of qualifications."

"So, do we have any more candidates' hats to throw into the ring?"

"Nawh, let's go with those two."

"OK, ladies, let me hear it. All in favor of Rick Fox for the *All-Denzel Award* let me hear you make some noise!"

The distinguished panel of judges weighed in with whistles, cheers and thumps on the table.

"OK, now all in favor of Jerry Rice for the *All-Denzel Award* let me hear you make some noise!"

They responded with an especially boisterous round of whistles, cheers and thunderous applause. The decibel level was off the charts clearly indicating Rice as the victor.

With that matter settled, Rae swiftly moved along to the next category. "I've got a new award to add to the list," she said.

"What's that?"

"*The Sense and Sensibility Award.*"

"What's that about?"

"That award goes to the person who consistently displays good behavior and/or common sense."

"Sounds like you have someone in mind."

"I do."

"Let's hear it."

"That award has got to go to my boy, Emmitt Smith."

"Why?"

"'Cause Jez and I were watching a show on HBO the other day. *Inside the NFL* or something."

"*Six Days to Sunday*," Jez added.

"Yeah, that show," Rae continued her train of thought, "and 'E' was reading a newspaper article —"

"One of those Stars Behind Bars-type articles," Jez provided more color commentary.

"Yeah, it was an article about another player getting into some trouble and 'E' was so disgusted by it. He said something to the effect of 'All this talk about being a role model, it ain't hard. All you have to do is look at the mistake that one person made and *don't do the same thing!*' And Jez and I were both like, Eureka! One of 'em has finally seen the light. And I just think that's noteworthy. So I say we add a new award to the list, the *Sense and Sensibility Award.*"

"Well, I'm sold," Lauryn said. "I like the idea and I like 'E', so he's got my vote."

"Mine too," Peni added.

"Cool. It's unanimous," Jez said. "'E' gets the inaugural *Sense and Sensibility Award.*"

"Speaking of folks with good behavior and common sense, we forgot to name the *Athlete of the Century.*"

"Let's pick an *All-Century Team.*"

"Yeah, that would be better. We could recognize more people that way."

"OK, cool. Who's on first?"

"Jackie Robinson."

"Excellent choice! All in favor?"

It was unanimous.

"OK, here's another great one, Arthur Ashe?"

Another unanimous decision.

"The Greatest," Lauryn declared. "You've got to give it up for the champ."

"That's a no-brainer."

"OK, Ali is on the team."

"Who's gonna represent for the ladies?"

"Wilma Rudolph?"

"Good choice."

"Jackie Joyner Kersee?"

"Excellent!"

"Both ladies get the nod."

"How many spots are on the team?"

"Let's say seven," Lauryn suggested.

"OK, so we've got two more slots to fill."

"Well, I'm gonna go out on a limb here and say the sixth spot should go to Tiger," Rae said.

Peni looked unconvinced.

"Regardless of whether he's Amer-Asian or cablinasian or whatever the hell he wants to consider himself, you've got to admit, the boy is bad. And you know he's putting up with hella stink on the tour yet he's still blowing up leaderboards. So I say, we do the right thing and give the brother his props," Rae lobbied.

Color me unimpressed was the look registered on Peni's face.

Lauryn coughed up her vote, "You make a good argument. He's got my vote."

"Mine too. I'm down," Jez said.

Peni finally caved and made it a unanimous decision.

"So that leaves the seventh and final spot," Lauryn said. "And it can only be reserved for one person."

"Well, I'll tell you now," Jez said, "I'm not voting for a baller so don't even think about it."

"Good, 'cause I'm not nominating a baller."

"Wonders never cease," Rahab said in disbelief.

"So who is it? Who's the shoe-in?"

"The seventh spot goes to my would-be choice for *Athlete of the Century*, Olympic Gold Medalist, Jesse Owens."

"Excellent choice! I've got your back on that one, girlfriend, 'cause brother showed off in Berlin."

"Yeah, I can get with that nomination," Peni said.

"It's unanimous," Jez said as she raised her glass in salute to him.

As the ladies toasted the *All-Century Team*, the server placed the folio on the table. Charlene tried to reach for it but Lauryn swiped it before she could grab it.

After the bill was settled, they laughed and talked for a few minutes more.

"The holidays are coming."

"Yeah, when are we going to get together to celebrate the season? And what are we going to do?"

"Let's shoot for some time between Thanksgiving and Christmas. How 'bout dinner at Heaven on Seven? I'm craving some Cajun cooking," Rae said.

"I say we go to the Red Door salon and spa then swing by Keefer's for lunch."

"Let's do something upscale for the holidays. How 'bout dinner and the theater? We can go to dinner at Morton's and then check out a performance at the Shubert."

"Here's an idea. Since we're going to have to celebrate Jez's birthday at the same time, the choice should be hers."

"Keefer's sounds good to me. Let's have dinner at Keefer's then catch a game or concert or something."

"Cool. Whose turn is it to make the arrangements?"

"Lauryn is the reigning birthday girl so it's on her."

"No problem. I'll get on it."

"Bet."

With the plans for their next girls' night out solidified, they rose from the table and gathered their belongings. The mood was light and all were jovial. Once again, laughter and love had proven to be just what each lady needed to keep her spirits up and give her strength to continue her journey along the road of life.

After a short hike through the restaurant, good-bye hugs and kisses were exchanged before they departed into the cool crisp air of the early autumn evening.