

INTRODUCTION



Sonya swallowed another bite of her third entrée. As always, she filled uncomfortable silences by gorging herself with the trendy food of the fancy restaurants she frequented on other people's dime. Constantly hoping to see this reality star or that real celebrity, she could be found at Beso's, Mr. Chow's or the new en vogue spot-of-the-month. And she always wore a damn-near-painted-on dress with a side order of extra tight, as if she needed additional assistance. Girlfriend was blessed with major "backs" and beautiful long legs. Her entrance into nightclubs was often followed by played out remarks such as "Girl, you got a bright future behind you!" or "I could set my drank & my remote on that rite therre." Brothas could be so tired sometimes. But that didn't mean they were wrong. Sonya Walters definitely had it goin' on physically.

She was stereotypically LA chic in her style and dress. She possessed a long, flowing, silky black high-end weave that was difficult to detect to the untrained eye, giving new meaning to the term, "un-ba-weavable." Her hair—it was hers now because she brought it!—hung down to the small of her back. Pouty lips, a button nose, wide-set, chestnut-colored eyes and an oval shaped face combined to give her an exotic appearance. People often wondered if and with what ethnicities she was mixed with. Although a pretty girl, the manner in which she carried herself didn't allow men to see beyond the booty.

Sonya cleared her throat, signaling an end to their silent stand off.

“Why so quiet tonight?”

“No particular reason,” her date responded. “I hadn’t even noticed we weren’t talking much.” He lied instead of telling her that he wasn’t enjoying himself. His thoughts referred to more than just tonight’s dinner. He’d had his fill of dating depthless chicks who were more interested in cars, clothes and the size of his wallet.

“I know how we can liven up the conversation,” she garbled between chews. “Why don’t we share something about ourselves that the other didn’t already know?”

Christian rubbed his hand across his bald head and down his face. *Damn! Don’t people stop playing this game in high school?* Besides, he doubted she’d put her fork down long enough to form sentences. He played along, though, for the sake of efficiency. Explaining his disdain for this kind of child’s play would take longer. “Okay. You first,” he told her.

“Promise you won’t make fun of me?” Sonya replied coyly.

“I won’t.”

“Well,” she stalled, “I guess you could say I’m a little attracted to women.” She let him to absorb her revelation.

Christian smiled and chuckled a little.

“Hey, you *said* you weren’t going to laugh!” Sonya formed her lips into her signature pout.

“I’m not. It’s just the way you said it. That’s like saying ‘*you’re kinda’ Buddhist*’ or ‘*you’re a little pregnant*’. Either you are or you aren’t. That’s not one of those middle of the road things.”

Inside, however, he wasn’t smiling. He was tired. Dating in Los Angeles was like trying to find your wallet in the aftermath of a train wreck—damn near impossible. Now here he was out another \$200 or so for this not-so-entertaining entertainment. Not to mention the gas burned on this little escapade.

Sonya summoned the waiter over, ordered dessert, requested the

bill and a couple of “to-go” cartons to haul off her loot. The girl took drink-pimpin’ to a whole ‘nother level. Christian wondered if she’d seen D.L. Hughley’s stand up routine on “doggie bags”.

According to the comedian, how a woman ordered and took food home determined whether the evening ended with a hug “good-bye” or a “nudge” in the morning. At this rate, Sonya would discover he liked his eggs scrambled hard.

The waiter returned with her bounty and placed the bill between the couple. He must’ve placed it too close for comfort. Sonya slid the tab closer to her date by pushing it with one of her cartons, as she positioned it better for dumping the uneaten contents of her plates. Recognizing the production for what it was, Christian wondered why she wasn’t an actress instead of a preschool teacher. He snatched up the check. *Drama!*

The monologue about her sexuality continued on the drive to her place. Sonya mentioned first discovering her appreciation for the clothing, make-up and hairstyles of other women.

He turned his focus from the road to her, nodded and gave the obligatory “*oh, really?*” & “*that’s interesting*” at appropriate intervals, but his mind was elsewhere.

Of course, his road dawg, Dorian, would play devil’s advocate. He’d say, “Fool, that’s how you get your ménage-a’ trios on!”

Maybe so, but the contrast between Christian’s recent dating experiences and what he actually wanted wasn’t lost on him. He wanted something more substantial.

Sonya was so engrossed, she was surprised to find them parking outside her building. “Ooh. I hoped we were going to your place tonight.”

“You didn’t have any clothes so I thought you wanted to come home tonight.” Christian lied again. He’d simply decided it was time for her to go.

“Well, why don’t you come in for awhile,” she offered as she reached around his neck and played with his ear.

Christian thought too many women believed sex was a good substitute for conversation and company. He hated the way some overestimated the power of the na-na. He could get that anywhere. *And anywhere wasn't here tonight.*

“Actually, I’m meeting Dorian in the morning so I thought I’d turn in early.” He told the truth.

“Okay. Well, uh, I had a nice time. Can’t wait to do it again.” She kissed him deeply. After pausing to gauge if the smooch had any effect, she opened her door and sauntered away as only a woman with incredible sex appeal could.

Christian pulled back into traffic. He started to call Dorian. Though not blood related, he and “D” were as close as brothers could be. They’d known each other for over 24 years. Damn near from the playpen and probably to the grave. They’d been, in the words of a rap star, “like nappy-headed nature boys,” searching for baby frogs in the drainage channels of Rowley Park in Gardena.

Dorian was born in Atlanta. He spent his first few years with his parents in an upper middle class African-American suburb in Fulton County. His father was a prominent physician. However, his upstanding reputation in the community differed greatly from the man his son knew at home. Behind the closed doors of their plush home, young Dorian spent many nights hiding in the closet, under the bed, or in any other crawl space that would conceal his then small body. Night after night, he tried to flee the noises that filtered through his bedroom walls, but there was no escaping the sounds of chaos in nearby rooms. Sounds of combat burned his young ears: the thundering footsteps of running; the heavy breathing of struggling; the crash of shattering household objects, thuds mixed in with smacks, screams, pleading; and finally crying. There was no reprieve from this boogiemán

Most nights, Dorian cried himself to sleep in his hiding place only to wake the following morning tucked in his bed. When he mustered the courage to venture out into the rest of the house, he always found

it restored to pristine condition, each room cleaned from top-to-bottom. If the neighbors heard anything, they didn't let on that they shared his family secret. His father's skill as a doctor further hid evidence of this nocturnal activity. It was a perverse compliment to the professional abilities of an evil person.

The end came fast. On this particular night, the battle waged for what seemed like forever. Noises exploded like sonic booms into his hiding place. He shook and cried like he always did, but there'd be no falling asleep. Anger raged in his little heart. On this night, he discovered his hatred for his father. He wished him dead. He wished he was big enough to do something about it.

Before realizing it, he turned the knob to his door. Into the hallway and down the stairs he cautiously went, following the shrieks he heard. Passing through the foyer to the family room, he found it in a shambles. Lamps had been knocked over, some shattered. The portraits on the mantle and artwork from the wall took up new residence on the plush brown carpet.

He tiptoed into the dining room. It was in a similar upheaval. The black lacquer vase, usually an elegant centerpiece for the large table, was in pieces on the Italian tile floor. The tall dining chairs were knocked over, onto their backs. The glass doors on the china cabinet were pushed in slightly and looked like spider webs.

A scream from the kitchen jerked his head toward the other side of the room. Like a blind man feeling his way through unfamiliar territory, his outstretched hands led him to the door. Young Dorian was about to enter another world, a place where pain replaced innocence. His life would never be the same.

Shoving the door with too much force, he stumbled into his new reality. The door crashed into a set of over-the-counter cabinets surrounding the kitchen, announcing his arrival.

He couldn't believe the scene before his eyes. A butcher knife lay by itself on the floor next to the gourmet-island. His mother clung to

the leg of the table in the breakfast nook with outstretched arms. She bled from the mouth and nose. A bloodstained skid mark streaked the tile between she and the table. His father's large hands were wrapped around her ankles. He pulled with hostile intentions.

The noise from his arrival distracted his parents long enough to interrupt the assault. His mother acknowledged his presence first.

"Baby, go back to bed . . . everything's ok. Go back to bed," she pled more than demanded. She didn't want him to see his father's brutality. Dorian stood stunned by the unfamiliar pictures attached to the sounds he knew intimately. "Mama," he said barely audible. Then he overcame his speechlessness.

"Leave her alone!" He commanded. He hoped his voice sounded bigger than he felt.

"Mind ya' business, boy!" The father returned his son's assertion with greater vinegar.

"I said 'Leave her alone!'" This time Dorian didn't wait for a response. He ran and threw his arms around his father's neck. He hoped to pull the giant off his mom. But his effort was doomed from the beginning. The monster's paws were too strong for the child. His father pulled him off and smacked him across the face. The blow sent Dorian flying backwards into the island, nearly knocking him unconscious.

"Don't hit my baby like that!" His mother jumped to his defense. She pounced on his father, but lost her balance and soon her advantage. She attempted to crawl away, but was trapped between the table leg and the round couch of the nook.

Her husband pummeled her with closed hands. Again Dorian hurled his body onto his father's back. This time his heroism was rewarded with a blow to the chest. However, his offensive gave his mom enough time to escape her trap. She flew through the kitchen door, dining room, living room and into her husband's private office. In a fury, she went to the desk and snatched out the drawer. Its con-

tents littered the floor. She found what she was looking for and ran back to the kitchen.

Armed with a new confidence, she yelled at the doctor. “If you hit my chile’ one more time, I will kill you!” He looked up. At first, his countenance was filled with rage and disbelief at his wife’s insolence, but it quickly slipped into fear. Bright lights reflected off steel. *Now HE begged for his life.*

Words were exchanged, but Dorian didn’t remember what was said. His eye hurt and his nose bled. He wondered if his father drank a glass of water too close to bedtime, as he was often warned not to do. There was a large circular wet spot on the man’s pants leg.

That was the last time young Dorian saw his father. He and his mother moved in with his grandmother in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

Dorian’s mother sustained permanent damage from this last encounter. She had a noticeable limp from there after. And she never remarried. When she died at thirty-two, people wondered if this abuse contributed to her far-too-early demise.

Confusing loss for manhood, Dorian felt this was the night he grew up. It was true he lost childhood innocence much earlier than he should’ve. He lost a lot that evening. It was this type of loss that linked he and Christian together. They understood each other very well. This was especially true after they celebrated their thirtieth birthdays last year. It was also why Christian wanted to talk to his friend right now.

NONA



“Nona, it’s just drinks. Nobody’s asking you to marry him!” Stacey huffed. Forty-five minutes on the treadmill was taking its toll. Not that she needed it. Stacey was blessed with toned legs and a tight behind.