

**SOMEONE  
LIKE  
*Me***

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*In loving memory of*  
*Uncle Alvin, Angela, and Winston.*



*“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you  
can start where you are and change the ending.”*

— C.S. Lewis



## Prologue



**Y**ou started as an assignment for me, but became my way of life—a daily task that wouldn't let me rest unless I'd shared my innermost thoughts, be it at two in the morning or eight in the evening. You have been my savior on dark and lonely nights.

You have been like a second mother, allowing me to tell you everything that happened during the long hours of the day, everything that ripped my heart open with joy and laughter, or pain and tears.

No judgment you gave, only a listening ear to my scribbling. My wild talk.

Frankly, I don't know if I would have survived this year without you.

I can't say that I love you; you are not a person, although I suppose one can love a thing, too.

So, I say to you, my dear journal, thank you.

You have been a good friend and my closet, as Jack once said.

Thank you for understanding. For understanding everything.

Even today, as I sit here with only minutes left to write in you, you understand why I'm wearing this dream of white and lace, and why the person I gave my heart to told me that he could love...*someone like me.*

## Chapter One



May 24, 1985

We're under the stars, blending in with the black sheets covering the sky—or, so I hope. Zee sits next to me. Both of our hearts racing. Zee's eyes staring into mine like he's checking to see if the bones in my body are strong enough to do what he's asking me to do.

Rob Mr. Johnson's gas station.

"What if we get caught?" I ask him, trying to hide the fear in my voice and knowing I haven't put on the big girl panties required for a task such as this.

Zee laughs, but I, of course, don't get the joke.

"Relax, we ain't gonna get caught. I got this thing completely figured out, baby. Besides, if we don't do this, how are we gonna pay rent this month? Mr. Johnson ain't giving me my job back. That old man fired me for something I didn't even do, so the way I see it, I'm simply giving him a real reason for firing me."

"We can find another way to pay the rent, Zee. Let me get a job," I plead.

"You don't need a job, and you're barely legal anyway. If anyone finds out that I got an eighteen-year-old living with my thirty-five-year-old behind, I'll get locked up just because of that. You understand what I'm saying?"

"I guess."

"Look, ain't I been good to you these last six months?" He places a finger on my lips and slowly trails it down to my heart. "Ain't I been taking good care of you since I found you on the streets after your mama died? I mean, you ain't had to dig in no trash cans or sleep on those cold benches since you been with me, right?"



Zee always goes there, reminding me that he rescued me from Georgia's mean streets. Most times, I feel like I'm his maid, cooking and cleaning like a Hebrew slave after his boys come over and wreck the place—a one-bedroom apartment in a building with more holes in the wall than a poor girl's shoes.

"Zee, you know I'm grateful."

He looks at me with one eyebrow raised, not fully convinced of my sincerity.

"Look, Mýa, I can't pull this thing off without you. I need my girl to have my back. You're my girl, right?" He grazes the side of my cheek with the warm tips of his fingers. "You love me, don't you, Mýa?"

I nod slowly, but I know my heart would have answered quite differently.

"That's my girl. And since you ain't shown that you love me in the way I want, I figure this is your chance to prove it."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know what I mean, but we ain't got time to go into that. Just know that I ain't gonna wait forever. I'd hate to see you end up back where you came from." Zee leans over and places his chapped lips on mine. "Let me go get this rent money."

I try to force a smile, like the moon sometimes does when the air is just right. I always swear you can see it smiling even when everything below it is a mess.

Zee looks out his window to check our surroundings once more. "It's two in the morning, so there shouldn't be much traffic. Do me a favor and keep your pretty little hands on that steering wheel and the car running, okay?"

My knees tremble as a couple walks past the car. Zee sits up in his seat, but quickly relaxes when he sees that neither of them glance in our direction. The moment they turn the corner, he opens the glove compartment.

I gasp in horror. "Please tell me that's not a gun!"

"It ain't a toy."

The sweat from my forehead begins to drip down my temples. "What in the world do you need with a gun?"

The sly smirk on Zee's face makes me feel like a five-year-old girl. "What did you think I was gonna use to rob the place, my finger? That kind of thing only happens in movies or white neighborhoods. This is Decatur, baby. It most def ain't Beverly Hills. Besides, the old man keeps a gun right under the register, so I had to come prepared."

"What if—?"

"Stop it, Mýa! I ain't got time for twenty questions," he snaps as he slams the glove compartment shut. "Look, the car is stolen, and the cops may be out looking for it, so we gotta do this now."

I can feel the tears falling as I watch him hold the gun like he knows every inch of it with a certain familiarity.

"I'm sorry, baby. I didn't mean to rage out on you like that. It's just that I need us both to be at the top of our game. Can you do that for me?"

Before I can say anything else, Zee jumps out of the car and slips the gun into his coat pocket. It's eighty degrees outside. Anyone would wonder why he's wearing a coat.

Anyone. Especially Mr. Johnson.

I get out of the car and run toward the store window, hoping to get Zee's attention and maybe stop him.

But it's too late.

I am too late.

The next few minutes happen in slow motion.

A young man runs up to Zee and tries to grab him and the gun at the same time.

Shots are fired. From Zee's gun. From the one Mr. Johnson keeps under the register.

Blood covers the twenty-year-old, white and black tiled floor of the store.

Three hearts stop beating.

I don't have my mama's Vaseline to heal any of them.