



Trouble In My Way

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Trouble In My Way Chapter one

Dear Me,

Derrick is cute -- NOT! I can't believe I risked my life by having Tamisha take me over to his house instead of the football game. Seriously, if my mom found out, I would be writing my eulogy instead of writing this journal entry. And for what? Some boy who does not have one single real DVD in his famed DVD collection! I swear, every single movie he had was bootleg. I think his whole room was bootleg. His whole game is bootleg, when I think about it! He acts like one thing in the beginning, but when you look closely, you realize it's not exactly as good as the real thing. Okay, here's what happened: Tamisha took me over to his house -- we synchronized our watches -- she was to pick me up in EXACTLY forty-five minutes. There was no one except Derrick at his house, so I knew I didn't want to be over there too long. Anyway, we started watching a movie on the floor in his bedroom. Everything was fine at first. I mean, so long as I didn't stare at him right in the face, it was okay. I just kept trying to think about all the wonderful things we'd talked about on the phone because he was NOT as cute as I remember him. So, there we were watching the movie to the best of my ability since it was a little blurry. I was just getting beyond the fact that I had to ignore the line running through the middle of the screen, and the next thing I know, Derrick is trying to

kiss and hug and all that. I was like, "Hold up! Wait a minute!" and he was like, "What's wrong, baby?" like this is some kind of bad music video. I could not believe how he was trying to turn our movie-watching into some kinda romantic rondayvu (spelling??). When we're on the phone, he's an innocent little boy, but when we were together, he was a grown octopus! I'm not saying I wasn't feeling his kisses -- I'm just saying, I wasn't trying to do all that. See, I know how and when to draw the line. I know when enough is enough. Thank God, Tamisha came right on time! I was outta there so quick! I know Derrick is nice and all, but he is not the one for me. Maybe we should just be friends because #1, he is not that cute, and #2 he is having some issues right now that I cannot help him out with. I think I'll leave him alone until his hormones settle down.

-- Karis Laying-Low Reed

I don't know which is more stupid -- me going over to Derrick's house, or me writing about it in my journal knowing how straight-up nosey my mother is. I mean, I know that a momma's gotta do what a momma's gotta do. But does a momma *have* to read my journal and get all up in my personal business? What about my American rights? My Texas rights? My basic human need for privacy? First my journal -- next thing you know, she'll be following me into the bathroom.

The bathroom; that's a good place to go right about now.

I wait until my mother turns her back and takes a breather between the yelling spells. I'm doing my best to rise from the couch without making a sound. Her head whips around instantly. "Where do you think you're going?"

"To the bathroom," I reply, throwing in a bit of whine for effect.

"Sidown," she hisses.

I bounce on the balls of my feet, faking the biological emergency. "But I've really gotta go."

She throws her hands up in the air and they land on her hips as she half-laughs, "*That's* what you should have been saying when Tamisha dropped you off at your little man-ish boyfriend's house when you were supposed to be at a football game: '*I've really gotta go.*' But noooo, you couldn't say it *then*, so don't be sayin' it *now*. You ain't really gotta go *nowhere*. Okay?"

I've already slipped back onto the couch, and I mumble, "Yes, ma'am."

My mother does a cha-cha slide over to me and pushes hot words onto my face. "I can't hear you!"

I look her in the eyes and answer again, "Yes, ma'am."

Then she takes a few steps back toward the center of our living room and reaches down to the coffee table, picking up my beloved pink-heart journal again. I still cannot believe she read it. "And what is this?" she traces over the entry until her pearl-tipped fingernail lands on what she's looking for. She wags her head as she mocks me, "'When we're on the phone, he's an innocent little boy, but when we were together, he was a grown *octopus*.' What's that supposed to mean, huh?"

Mrs. Clawson, my pre-Advanced Placement English teacher, would have appreciated my fine use of figurative language. "It's just a metaphor, Mom."

"A meta-four!" She slams my journal shut, and the resulting puff of air makes her soft brown bangs do the wave. "According to this diary, it would have had a meta-*five* and a meta-*six*, given a few more minutes. Tell me, Karis, what would you have done if Tamisha hadn't come back to pick you up when she did, huh? What if Tamisha hadn't been on time? What if you had started 'feeling' your little boyfriend's kisses? Then what?"

I want to tell her that, first of all, Derrick is not my boyfriend. But somehow I think that might damage my case, so I keep that bit of information to myself. The second thing I wish I could tell her is that there was no way I would have done anything stupid with Derrick. I want to tell her that I timed things precisely to protect myself from crossing the line. I also want to tell her that Derrick and I talk on the phone for hours at a time and I have intense feelings for him. Next to Tamisha and Sydney, Derrick is my best friend, kind of. Well, I used to trust him until he turned into that eight-legged marine creature. Besides, he is really only a six on the face and body scale. When I saw him on the basketball court, he looked like Bow Wow. But when I saw him up close at his house, he looked like *maybe* he could be Bow Wow's half brother. Plus one of his front teeth was longer than the other. Believe me, my mother does not ever have to worry about me sneaking off to Derrick's house again.

Nonetheless, my mother would not understand these things. She's a minister. Need I say more? So in response to her question about what I would have done, I default to my standard answer, which turns out to be the stupidest thing I can say. "I don't know."

"You don't *know*? What you mean, you don't *know*? I betcha Derrick knows. I betcha Tamisha knows. I know what would have happened, 'cause it happened to me and that's how I ended up pregnant with you when I was your age. You think I don't know what boys and girls your age do when they're together for hours unsupervised? And, really, it don't take *hours*. It only takes a few minutes to do something that can change your life forever!"

She stands there for a minute, towering over me. I jump a little when, out of the corner of my eye, I see her right hand approaching my face. It's moving too slowly for a slap, so I calm down a bit as she puts her forefinger and thumb on either side of my chin, raises my face, and makes me look at her.

Her light brown almond-shaped eyes are a mirror of mine. We've both got the same eyes, the same light brown skin, the same dark brown hair and roughly the same skinny shape. Right now, my mom is about three inches taller than me. But if it weren't for her pudgy stomach and her wider hips (which she, of course, blames on me), we could probably trade jeans. Everybody says we look more like sisters than mother and daughter. She thinks it's a compliment. I don't. Who wants to look like her mother? But these eyes, they are both mine and hers. And just when I see a pool of tears forming in them, she points me toward the hallway and says, "I can't stand to look at you right now."

I wish she'd make up her mind. Does she want me to look at her or not?

Minutes later, we start with the all-too-familiar routine. She comes into my room to collect my cell phone and my modem. I can keep the computer for the sake of school. I can go on the internet in the den, but only for academic purposes. There goes my social life.

"Where's the iPod?" she asks.

This is a new one. "That, too?" I protest. "Daddy gave it to me!"

She raises her eyebrows. "And?"

I cannot believe my mother is this mean! This is straight boo-dee, but I can't say so without getting into more trouble -- not that that's possible at this point. Slowly, I reach into my Louis Vuitton drawstring bag and pull out the hot pink iPod, a gift my father gave me only two weeks ago to celebrate my sixteenth birthday. Unlike the other items she's taking away, this one hurts. I try real hard, but I can't stop the tears from falling down my cheeks. It feels like she's taking my daddy away from me. Again.

That's all she ever does is take, take, take. She takes my freedom, she takes my friends, my family, everything! I think she wants to take my life because she didn't have hers. She missed the homecoming games because she couldn't find a babysitter, she missed her senior prom because I had pneumonia, and she didn't graduate with her class because she had to sit out a semester. Basically, she lost her teen years when she got pregnant with me at sixteen -- but how is that *my* problem? Why do I have to pay for her mistakes? I'm not my mom, and she's not me! The more I think about it, the madder I get.

My mother takes the iPod in hand and wraps the headphone cord around the rectangular box as she walks toward my bedroom door. I want to scream something from one of those poor little rich girl movies -- something like "I wish I was never born!" -- but there is always the possibility that my mother will do her best to make my wish come true by killing me now. The safest thing I *think* I can get away with while she's still in the room is crossing my arms on my chest. I'm pushing it.

Somehow, my mother sees me and says under her breath, "Keep on and you won't be getting a car for Christmas."

I know she did not just threaten me with the car my daddy has already promised me for Christmas when I pass my driver's test! "What's the point? It'll just be one more thing for you to take away from me." Who said that? I hold my breath and wait to see what my momma will bop me with. She's got a cell phone, a modem, and an iPod in hand. Those shouldn't hurt too badly.

She keeps her back to me as she grabs hold of the doorknob. She stops and takes a deep breath. I feel like I'm in a movie theater, waiting for the bad guy to jump out of the closet and attack the innocent victim. But instead,

my mother says in a calm, even tone, "For your sake and mine, I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that because I don't believe that God has called me into the prison ministry."

When my mother shuts the door behind her, I bury my face in my pillow and scream as loud as I can without letting her hear me. That's when the door opens again and my journal comes flying across the room, barely missing my head. I grab the journal and, for a moment, consider ripping each page to shreds. I still don't understand what gives her the right to read my stuff. In that whole forty-five-minute lecture she gave me, she never once mentioned the violation of my privacy. Where is the justice? Instead of destroying my journal, I grab a pen from my desk and write:

Dear Me,

Mom just read my journal. Here is what I'm thinking:

#1 -- Nothing happened at Derrick's house, so I don't know what the big deal is.

#2 -- I can take care of myself, which was actually proven in the journal!

#3 -- What gives my mother the right to just go in my room and pick up my journal and read it?

#4 -- If my mom keeps me from getting the car that my daddy promised me, I will leave this house!

#5 -- Derrick does not look like Bow Wow. Do not ever fall for a guy that you have only seen from the 9th row up in the stands at a basketball game.

Maybe I should stop writing all of my personal stuff down. But if I do that, who will I tell all my problems? I mean, I have my friends, but they don't understand me like this journal does. No, I can't give up the journal. I will just have to find a good hiding place for it.

-- Karis I've-Been-Wronged Reed

Now I'm searching all over my room for a journal hideout spot. I've got to hide it in a place where it's so out of place no one would ever look there. There again, I have a problem. My mother might have the voice to be a minister, but she's got a nose that could outsniff a hound dog. She can

smell trouble all over me. When I was little and I got a bad note from school, I could barely get off the bus before she'd say, "Something's wrong with you. What happened at school today?" And since I've never been a good liar (at least not to my mother, anyway), I'd have to break down and tell her the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

I'm searching through the closet now for a place big enough to hold a journal but small enough to be inconspicuous, and that's when I decide to forget it. Deep down inside, the truth is: I don't want to hide things from my mother. Once again, the tears start to sting my eyes. It bothers me that she read my journal. My mother and I have been living in this house alone for the last five years. When she and my father divorced, she got the house and me. She's always talking about how we only have each other and God. Always talking about how levelheaded I am, what a blessing it is to have a daughter who is so self-reliant. So what made her think that she had to read my journal? What happened to the trust? In a way, I feel like she deserves whatever she got for reading it.

I figure the best thing I can do is stop writing in the journal until I'm eighteen, at which point I can do and write whatever because I will be *grown*. You hear me -- *grown!* I cannot wait for that day! Go where I want to go, do what I want to do, answer to nobody but myself. And God, I suppose, but that shouldn't be too hard, since He already knows everything.

I close my journal and put it where I have always put it -- in my top drawer. If I can't have my privacy and if my mother can't trust me, then...whatever. That's on her, except right now it's on me because I'm the one who's grounded. There's something seriously wrong with this picture.

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