

READING and WRITING in the

DARK

A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

TER

**THIS MONTH:
A READING and WRITING
in the DARK Newsletter:**

**SPECIAL
EDITION**

Make a

WISH...

**An EXCLUSIVE look at IYAPO YAPA'S
new horror/suspense series:**

Tales of the
MONKEY'S PAW



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READING and WRITING in the DARK Newsletter
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NEWSLETTER

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WELCOME BACK!

Hello everyone!

Well it's JUNE and I know you are STILL waiting for the first installment of *Tales of the Monkey's Paw*! This turned out to be more of an undertaking that I thought when I first started the project, so I'm delaying it for a July release, because I want this first story to be GREAT! I apologize for keeping everyone on pins and needles, but I will say this for sure, once you read the entire story, you will definitely feel it was worth the wait.

Tales of the Monkey's Paw will have all the usual Iyapo Yapa twists and turns, and is sure to please. So while you're patiently waiting for the flagship story, I have included in this special edition of the Reading and Writing in the Dark newsletter, an EXCLUSIVE sneak peek at the first couple sections of the story for my subscribers!

I think you'll enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.



And What of the CARGO? Is finally here!

"Kylah Mbaye of the Zahnoka people, lay as silently and still as she could, halfheartedly petitioning the ancestors that at least for one night she would not be spirited away and taken above deck to endure yet another in a procession of endless rapes. Another woman would have long ago given in to despair--but Kylah--in the face of such crushing odds against her and her people within the bowels of this floating nightmare, knew that eventually, this voyage would not end well... for her captors." And so it began. AND WHAT OF THE CARGO? is a tale of love and hate, tears and triumph, suspense and horror that leads to an unimaginable conclusion.

"The Atlantic crossing, or "Middle Passage," as it was called by European slavers, was notorious for the number of deaths incurred, averaging in the vicinity of 15-20%"

— Walter Rodney. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa

Much is rightly said and written about the enslavement and fates of Afrikans who were kidnapped from their homeland and transported to the Americas and other lands along the Middle Passage. Absent however is an expanded examination of the fate of those who did not make it through the journey. Whether victims of an inability to survive the unimaginable environment in which they were forced to occupy, or due to murders while attempting to revolt, or by simply jumping overboard, choosing death as a better alternative to chattel enslavement.

What of those ancestors in the depths of the oceans, and what of their souls and spirits. Or to put it bluntly—what of the CARGO?

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Story of The Monkey's Paw

In 1902, a postal clerk turned writer named William Wymark Jacobs (better known as W.W. Jacobs) wrote the story that would arguably become his best known work, a cautionary tale titled "The Monkey's Paw."

There are few people who have never heard of the work (or seen some work influenced by it). Though it could be argued that "The Monkey's Paw" borrowed from stories like "The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus" by Christopher Marlowe (aka Kit Marlowe), published around 1592.

Even before that, there have been stories about people making wishes (sometimes with genies emerging from bottles) that nearly always went awry.

Faustian bargains tend to be some of my favorite stories... even more than time travel - and THAT'S saying something! We have seen the theme played out time and time again in one form or another, from the *Arabian Knights*; to "The Devil and Daniel Webster"; *The Twilight Zone* series; to the movies *Bedazzled*, *The Wishmaster*, and the recently released (2022) motion picture *Three Thousand Years of Longing*.

People just can not seem to stop WISHING! No matter HOW badly things always go sideways.

No matter the setting, and no matter the wisher or even the wishes, the moral of the stories are typically, that problems, whether perceived or real, can not simply be wished away. Just as with time travel, every action can create unpredictable outcomes, and in most cases, disastrous outcomes. Some might say that tales of wishes and Faustian bargains are different. Unlike Faustian bargains, wishes don't involve forfeiting one's soul.

Don't they?

There are many ways for a person to sell their soul, they need not always involve striking a deal with Mephistopheles. If we are paying at least a cursory amount of attention to what is going on around us presently, we (especially in Black social media), are witnessing many of our people selling their souls daily...

for fame,

for money,

for clicks,

for a wish.

At the end of the day, the way to deal with life... is to DEAL with it. / *That* is the moral of the story.

I digress.

The first time I remember hearing the story "The Monkey's Paw," was when I was a little boy. My older sister Linda read it to me and our other siblings. (She was always reading to us.) I remember the story having me scared... and I mean 12 year old, not wanting to go to sleep with the lights out, scared! In later years, I've seen and read many incarnations of the story and the thing that always struck me was that it was always some retelling that was very close to the original story. I always wondered: Why--just as with Faust or those who come across a mighty genie--there were not a host of people who got to have their opportunity at the brass ring of the monkey's paw and a their chance to attempt to cheat fate?

In the original story, W. W. Jacobs made the story closed ended. The person making the wishes on the paw would be the last person who was able to ever use it for that purpose. (Although, I can't imagine any other purpose for an old shrived up monkey's paw at that point.) However, just because Jacobs closed that particular door, it didn't mean that door had to stay closed. I decided to open it back up.

After all, if one mystic were able to bestow such power onto the icon... could not another?

Sure they could, and within the universe of my written works... they did.

The result is what you are now holding and reading: a new series of short stories featuring people seeking to get whatever they want the easy way, but discovering the easy alternate path to be far more treacherous than expected. There are quite a few of these paws floating around out here (relatively speaking), and each one may have different rules governing them. One thing is certain; there is going to be a LOT of wishing going on, and plenty of horror, suspense and chaos to follow.

Enjoy reading *TALES of the MONKEY'S PAW*.

What are readers saying about *MELANIN: A NOVEL*?

"Melanin is an uncompromising and timely tale of speculative fiction, brimming with thought-provoking ideas and imaginative twists."

- Brandon Massey, award-winning author of *The Quiet Ones* and *Dark Corner*

"Iyapo Yapa has earned a place among the great science fiction writers with *Melanin*. The plot twists will keep you reading long after midnight. As well the imagery is captivating. Replicating the Black experience, you are drawn into the story as if you are there."

- T.J. Riley, author of *The Path to Brightness*

"The whole world needs to read this book!"

- M.A.D.M. Precious, author of *Michelle's Story* and *Loving Betrayal*

"Every Black person needs to read this book!"

- Gwen B

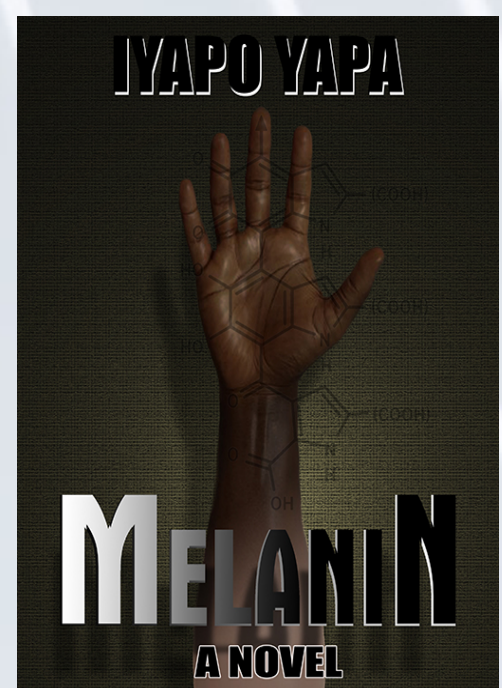
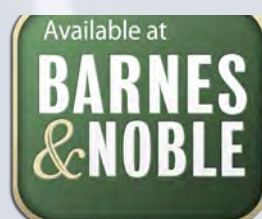
"It was exciting! I stayed up a few nights wanting to see what was coming!"

- Ayoka B.

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TALES OF THE MONKEY'S PAW (A sneak peek at the first two sections)

Michaels was a small round man who wore thick horn-rimmed glasses that made him look like Clark Kent (a fat, dumpy balding Clark Kent). He always wore a hat when outdoors, to cover his severely receding hairline. He had a very distinctive kind of voice. It was like a cross between Sterling Holloway--the actor who voiced the Disney cartoon character Winnie the Pooh--and the actor Cary Grant, if one could imagine that. Michaels' voice had always made Mary laugh. Right now, though, there was something in the mood of his voice that Mary couldn't quite put her finger on, but she knew she didn't like.

"Mrs. Ickleman? Is that you?" the voice on the other end of the phone asked.

"Yes, it's me. This is Milton right? Milton Michaels?"

"Yes ma'am it is. Uh, Mrs. Ickleman," Michaels began, "Mrs. Ickleman... Mary... A-are you sitting down?"

"Sitting down? Why, no. Sitting down for what? What's happening? Has something happened to Cliff?!" Mary said, a feeling of dread beginning to wrap around her like a blanket.

After a long pause, Michaels finally spoke again. "Y-yes ma'am. Yes Mary, there's been an accident."

"What?" Mary whispered as she attempted to process the thoughts that immediately flooded her consciousness. "Where's Cliff? Is he hurt?!"

Again, there was a long pause, this time longer than the first.

Milton Michaels attempted to keep his voice even and as unemotional as possible. "Yes."

"How bad is it?" Mary said as she fought to keep her composure, hoping that her husband would have suffered nothing worse than a broken limb, and that soon she would be complaining about what a baby he was being when asking her to work non-stop getting this or that, or changing the channel on the television or turning the volume up or down. That was what she hoped, anyway, and looked forward to playfully complaining to him about.

"I-It's bad Mary," Michaels said solemnly.

"What happened?! Is he on his way to the hospital?! Is he at the hospital? Which hospital did they take him to?!" Mary demanded in rapid succession.

"Cliff was working with one of the cutting machines," Michaels said, "when it somehow malfunctioned and the guard came off. His arm got caught in a gear and it pulled him in. Mary... Cliff... Cliff's dead. He was pronounced dead at the scene."

"Dead?!" Mary whispered as she placed a trembling hand over her mouth and staggered back toward the kitchen table in the

middle of the kitchen. She fell onto one of the chairs that was angled enough that, though nearly missing it and ending up on the floor, she found her balance and stayed upright on the seat. She then looked at the chair at the head of the table. "B-But he was just sitting here and had breakfast with me and our son this morning. Pancakes, eggs and sausage... a cup of coffee and some orange juice. He kissed me and rubbed Lawson's head and told him to have a good day at school. H-he can't be dead."

She continued to stare blankly at the unoccupied seat, unable to say anything more as she realized that her breathing was becoming more and more labored. She took deep breaths that became a struggle each time she attempted to inhale. Mary's chest became tight, and she started feeling dizzy. She stood up unsteadily and walked over to the kitchen counter. She placed the phone down on it and used that hand to steady herself, and the other to open the "junk" drawer just beneath the surface of the counter. Inside she found one of the many inhalers that were strategically placed throughout the home that she could immediately grab in the event of a sudden asthma attack.

On the counter Mary could hear the concerned voice of Milton Michaels through the phone receiver. "Mrs. Ickleman?! Mary?! Mary are you alright?!"

She lifted the inhaler out of the drawer and weakly shook it, then put it to her mouth, pressed down, inhaled and filled her lungs with the lifesaving mist. After a few moments she could feel her chest loosening and her breathing became once again even and easy. Mary slowly put the device back in the drawer and closed it; she picked up the phone receiver, walked over to the kitchen table, sat down, and put the phone to her ear. Michaels continued calling Mary's name through the small speaker that distorted his voice causing his words to have the common "phone voice" timbre. "Mary? Mary? Mrs. Ickleman? Are you still there?!"

"I'm still here," Mary whispered, "Give me just a moment."

Mary slowly closed her eyes and sat back in the stiff kitchen chair as best she could. She waited until her breathing was more or less back to normal before asking Milton to continue.

"M-Mary, I don't know how to say this, but once they get Cliff's body to the morgue... well... I don't even know how to... I've been told that once they get him there, you will still need to go and identify the body."

"Ident—identif—no. No. I'm not going to do that."

"But they said it has to be a relative. You are the only relative he has listed on his paperwork."

"I'm not going to the morgue Milton."

"But you have t—"

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“I’M NOT GOING TO THE MORGUE!”

Mary jumped up from her seat and quickly walked over to where the body of the phone hung on the wall. She could hear Milton on the other end saying something, but she wasn’t listening. She hung up the phone causing the voice to stop abruptly mid-sentence and causing the metal bell inside the phone to produce a slight sound.

The distraught woman leaned against the wall sobbing and asking God why her husband was dead, when the phone rang again, this time startling her. She knew it had to be Milton, so she lifted the receiver to make the ringing stop and then once again, as Milton spoke, she disconnected the call, this time using her fingers. Mary then placed the phone on the counter and let the dial tone sound until it became first a busy signal, and finally no sound at all.

After crying a while longer, the widow turned her head and looked past the dining room and into the living room. Another commercial was on, the voices on the commercial were saying something about ring around the collar. She looked at the kitchen clock and saw that her son would be coming home from school in a few hours. For the briefest of moments, she considered the logistics of going to identify her husband’s body, and then that evening, before or after dinner—if dinner would be prepared at all—informing Lawson that he would never see his father alive again.

The thought passed quickly as Mary stood up straight, adjusting her clothes as she did, and then wiped her eyes with her apron. “I’m not going to the morgue,” she said defiantly to the refrigerator.

Mary walked quickly out of the kitchen, through the living room and over to the staircase. She strode up the stairs with purpose. Upon reaching the second floor of the split-level home, she made a quick right at the top of the staircase, and then down the hallway passing a couple bedrooms until reaching the attic door. She opened the door and flicked the light switch illu-

minating a single 100-watt lightbulb. It didn’t make the space bright, but lit it enough, with the help of natural lighting that came in through attic windows on either side. With as much focus as she exuded when climbing upstairs, she again trudged upward. Mary’s mind was singularly focused on the one item she felt could deliver her from this waking nightmare . And she single-mindedly intended to get her hands on it.

Upon reaching the top of the staircase, she took a quick survey of her surroundings. A spider, or a few was expected, but she had no time to tangle with any raccoons, mice or squirrels that may have found their way in—there didn’t seem to be any.

Like most attics, this one ran the length of the house front to back, and like most attics that aren’t finished or regularly used as family space or offices, this one was hot and stuffy. The air within it smelled of old clothes, furniture, and various holiday decorations for various holidays.

She quickly made a bee line to the far end of the attic—the end out of which she could see the backyard and swimming pool. She walked over to a stack of boxes that she hurriedly moved to the side, obviously knowing that what she sought was not in any of them. In the oppressive stagnant heat of the space, she pushed the large boxes aside. Sweat beaded on her forehead and began to drip down her face as the collar and armpits of her blouse became moist and dark with perspiration. Having moved all the large boxes out the way, she looked down near the floor and saw the single, small box she’d come up to the attic to get.

It was an old cream-colored shoebox with a dark brown lid. The box was slightly discolored with age, but mostly just covered with dust and cobwebs. The lid of the shoebox was held to the body of the box with what looked like kite string that was looped around it several times and tied in a bow at the top. Using an old rag that was lying on one of the larger boxes she had just moved out the way, she attempted to wipe off the dust, but ended up only swapping the dust that was originally on the box for that of the rag. Mary tossed the rag back onto the top of the box from which she’d gotten it, then turned her attention



Part of the Keepin’ it a BUCK HORROR/SUSPENCE Series!

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back to the shoebox. She pulled the string loosening the bow and then quickly unwrapped it from around the box. After unraveling it, she let the string sprawl to the floor and then slowly opened the lid of the box almost as if she was fearful that what she was looking to see within it might somehow be gone.

Mary removed the box top and sat it to the side. Within the shoebox was yet another smaller silver box. Mary lifted the lid to the silver box, which was hinged at the back, and her eyes widened in both slight surprise and relief. She stared at the contents for a moment taking in what she felt was the key to the salvation of her family.

A monkey's paw.

The paw was black and shriveled. The thing had no real odor to speak of except that of possibly a little mildew or perhaps old attic smell. The paw was one of the few secrets she ever kept from her husband, being that when he first found out about it, and saw the severed appendage, he immediately insisted that she "Get that damned, grotesque thing out of this house!" Cliff wasn't a squeamish man by any stretch of the imagination, but he did have his proclivities in terms of what gave him the willies, as he would call it. One day she simply told the man that she'd gotten rid of it—a lie to be coupled with her secret. Instead, she'd taken the paw and hidden it safely away in the one place Cliff seldom went, the attic, and even there, in a section far to the back and near a corner where the rafters met the floor. The box was small and hidden behind several larger boxes that contained shoes and purses, a few clothes and a *nik nak* here or there. These were the type of things she was fairly certain that even if Cliff did go up into the attic looking for something (which he seldom did—and usually only to retrieve the Christmas lights that were always kept near the entrance of the attic), would be of little or no interest to him.

The monkey's paw was dry and looked as if it might fall apart just by being held. It was the size of a human hand—a comically small human hand, about the size of that of a newborn. It had five digits—four fingers and a thumb.

The thumb and pinky finger were bent inward toward the palm and the three other fingers pointed straight up forming what is commonly used as the sign for 'three.'

Three fingers outstretched.

Three wishes.

* * *

Archie Marlow was a world traveler of sorts.

He was no adventurer by any stretch of the imagination, but in his business (imports and exports), he had made his fair share of trips to exotic places that most people only dream about going. On every trip Archie would take his wife Claudine. She loved that aspect of their marriage. She would often brag and comment to her friends that going on overseas business trips with Archie Marlow was like going on a honeymoon several times a year. However, there was one trip Archie reluctantly took alone. Claudine was seven months pregnant, far enough from the delivery date that Archie could be fairly certain she would not go into labor while he was out of country, but close enough that he couldn't be completely confident that there would be no emergencies, like a premature labor. After several assurances from his wife and her doctor that she and the baby were fine and there

didn't seem to be any chance she would go into labor ahead of the due date, Archie gave in and when on his business trip.

The trip was to broker the export of cocoa beans from the Democratic Republic of Congo. While there he met with Joseph Kasongo—who was often confused with the politically powerful Congolese businessman whose name he shared--the owner of Cocoa Kasongo, the largest cocoa plantation and distributor in the world. Marlow would be staying for a few days, taking the obligatory look at Cocoa Kasongo's operations, and signing paperwork that would renew their contract with Kavanaugh Imports Ltd, the company Marlow was in the DRC representing. Cocoa Kasongo, with that contract, would continue as Kavanaugh Imports' sole partner for the import of cocoa to the United States.

Marlow stood in Kasongo's office admiring the many artifacts, decorative masks and Congolese art objects that adorned the space, with Kasongo standing beside him giving brief histories of when and where he got the items and what they represented as they patiently awaited the arrival of the partnership renewal paperwork they would need to sign. Once the signing was done, Marlow and Kasongo would go out to a celebratory lunch after which Archie could be on his way back to his hotel room. He would likely make a pitstop at the hotel bar, even having already had a few drinks at lunch, and then make a call to Claudine to check in. Kasongo's secretary, Mayumi entered the office, carrying the paperwork the two men were waiting for. Kasongo excused himself from the man he was standing with and made his way over to his desk and sat down before his secretary reached it. She laid the papers lightly on his desk and asked him if there would be anything else. With a polite "No, that will be all, thank you." Mayumi left the room. Kasongo looked over the contracts as if it were his first time seeing them. He then stood up from his seat, and walked over to Archie Marlow, leaving the papers lying on his desktop.

Joseph Kasongo was an imposing man. He looked to be at least six feet three inches tall. He typically wore a dashiki that did not give away any hint of the build of the body beneath it, Marlow had seen Kasongo one time at his home, where he was just getting out the swimming pool. Kasongo had the kind of imposing muscular build that made him seem more like a professional athlete than the owner of a massive company. His complexion was such a deep brown that it was difficult to tell where his skin ended, and his short black afro started. He was handsome by the standards of most women he'd ever met and had a smile that made him look almost boyish when he flashed it—his chiseled, mature features and penetrating dark brown eyes notwithstanding. His voice was commanding but not overpowering. He had a French accent and sounded like Moise Tshombe, but with a deeper more resonant voice.

Kasongo, relaxed but stern faced, walked over to Marlow and stood in front of him. "I need to tell you something Archie. We've had some problems with a lack of rainfall this year and lost entire crops." Kasongo said, "This is not something my company cannot overcome, but we will need time to grow more crop so that we may fill your order. In the meantime, I want to go ahead and sign the contracts and would ask that you speak with your people and ask them to give me an extension."

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“I don’t know if I can do that,” Archie said, a little taken off guard and tilting his head slightly to the side. “When the company sent me, they were thinking everything was done and that this trip was mainly for handshakes and signatures.”

“And so it is. But I will be needing a bit more time.”

“How much time are we talking here?”

“About five, possibly six months.”

“Six months?!?! Joseph, even if I wanted to, I couldn’t do that! Yes, I have great latitude to make decisions on the spot in terms of signing or declining contracts, but if I signed papers and then went back and told them there would be a six month wait for the product, I’d lose this client! Kasongo, if you knew you wouldn’t be able to deliver the product on the time table we were expecting then why even have me come all this way?! I mean, you could have told me this by phone.”

“Because I have an offer that I could not make by phone. What if I give you something in lieu of immediate delivery, eh?”

“In lieu of delivery? I don’t understand.”

Kasongo walked over to the far side of his office to where hung a large oil painting of Patrice Lumumba. He placed a hand on the left side of the painting, pulled outward and the painting swung slowly open on hinges on the right side of it, like a door. Kasongo stepped behind it as for a moment during which time Marlow could only see Kasongo from the waist down, along with the painting itself as it now stood sticking out, as it were, from the wall. Behind the painting was a wall safe which Kasongo opened and from among the money, deeds, and other paperwork, he grabbed a small box. The box itself looked to be made of some kind of steel, or perhaps sterling silver, and was some five inches wide, seven inches long and perhaps four inches high.

Kasongo closed the door to the safe and jiggled the handle on it to ensure it was locked. He then slowly swung the painting back in place flush against the wall, once again revealing his full self to Marlow. Archie stared at Joseph who was now walking toward him holding the small silver box. Once he was directly in front of Marlow, Kasongo grabbed the edges of the box. “This is what I have to offer you,” he said as he flipped the top of the box open to reveal the secret it held. Marlow’s eyes narrowed as he reached behind the breast of his suit jacket and into his shirt pocket, producing a pair of thick black horn-rimmed glasses. He put on the glasses and leaned in to look more closely at what the man in front of him was holding.

“What is it?” Archie said as he studied it.

“It is a monkey’s paw.” Joseph answered.

The paw was dry looking, but not quite shriveled, brown with several black highlights and the fingers and thumb of it were balled into a fist.

Kasongo offered the paw to the man in front of him.

“Joseph, with all due respect, I don’t think my people would be interested in that... that... hand, is it? I realize that perhaps it is

a valuable artifact for your countrymen, however, I can’t accept it. The heads of the company would never be interested.”

“Cocoa Kasongo is a large and powerful company, but like all businesses we do run into difficulties. Kavanaugh is our biggest contract, without it Cocoa Kasongo will not fail, but our position in the global cocoa market will definitely be harmed. I need you to see that Cocoa Kasongo does not lose that contract so, I’m not offering this to your company. I’m offering it to you personally.”

“To me? For what? Is this some kind of a bribe? Because if it is then—”

“No. No bribe. A gift. This will be for you, and for anyone in your family. It can make all your dreams come true.”

Archie glanced again at the paw within the silver box and shook his head. “No Joseph, I couldn’t take it. Sure, I work in imports and exports, but I wouldn’t know the first thing about selling anything like that, how much it’s worth, who would buy it and—”

“No, no. You don’t understand Archie. This is not to sell. It is to wish upon.”

“Wish?!”

“Yes.”

“You mean like some kind of genie?”

“Something like that.”

Marlow shook his head and said, “I don’t believe in mumbo jumbo. No offense.”

“Mumbo Jumbo, eh?” Kasongo said as he relaxed and lightly flipped the cover back down over the paw. “Archie, do you know how I come to own such a successful Cocoa farm?”

“I assume that it was something that has always been in your family and was passed to you.”

Kasongo grinned almost imperceptibly as he walked over to his huge mahogany desk and leaned against it. He sat the box containing the paw on the desk and took a cigarette from a gold cigarette box. Lighting it and taking a few drags before speaking, Kasongo said finally through a stream of smoke, “How long have we been doing business together Archie?”

“I dunno... two, three years.”

Kasongo made a sweeping gesture with his right arm, the cigarette in his hand leaving an arc of blue smoke in its wake. “You have seen the vastness of my Cocoa empire. How long, do you suppose, has my plantation been in operation?”

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“Shit. I dunno,” Archie said, feeling a little embarrassed and on the spot. This was something he should have researched well and already known, especially after three years of being the go between for Kavanaugh Imports Ltd. and Cocoa Kasongo. “Judging by the amounts of money it makes, the size of it and the place it holds with both the Congolese and American governments, I’d say several decades.”

Kasongo smiled widely and took another drag of his cigarette. He blew out three effortless smoke rings that floated lazily outward and upward in front of him before dissipating. “Three.” Kasongo said.

“What? Three decades? Thirty years?”

“No my friend. Three years.”

Archie had been in the import/export business long enough to know what it took to build an operation the size of Cocoa Kasongo, and there was no way that a company like this could have been established in the way it was in anything less than two decades minimum. “You’re joking.” Marlow said.

“I couldn’t be more serious,” Kasongo said as he drew in one last deep, long drag before smashing and twisting out the cigarette butt into a crystal ash tray.

“Are you trying to tell me that you built this Cocoa empire in three measly years? Impossible!”

“I never said I built it. But yes, Cocoa Kasongo has existed for only three years.”

“Impossible.”

“Not impossible. Not with this.”

Kasongo again picked up the box and took it over to his colleague, once again raising the lid to reveal the monkey’s paw.

“And where did you get it?”

“From my father.”

“And where did he get it?”

“We were poor and my father would do whatever it took to feed us... so he got this from a white man like yourself. According to him, as payment for labor he had done.”

“And where did this ‘white man’ get it—?”

“Maybe from his father. Archie, I don’t know. I only know that I used it to get this business among other things. I am offering it to you now.”

“If you used it to get the business then why isn’t everything running smoothly enough that you wouldn’t need to ask for extensions?”

“I only wished for the most successful Cocoa business on the planet... that’s what I have. I still must run it wisely; it does not run itself.”

Archie slowly shook his head, in part silently chastising himself for even discussing this offer as if it were something to seriously consider. “Joseph,” Archie said, “I can’t take that in lieu of the promised delivery. Even if I could I—”

“Make a wish,” Kasongo interrupted.

“Pardon?”

“I said, make a wish. You obviously don’t believe. But if you accept this and you make a wish that manifests, then will you take the paw and give me the time I ask?”

Archie looked suspiciously at the man whom he had grown to consider more than just someone he did business with. He glanced at Joseph’s face and then to the box containing the monkey’s paw. Marlow felt beyond skeptical as he sized up the small, severed limb in the box, but he didn’t think it would hurt to humor the man.

“Ok Joseph,” Archie said finally. “How about this. I’ll accept the paw and make a wish and if the wish does not happen by...” Archie looked at the wall clock, it was 2:30 pm. “by 6:00 this evening... no... make it midnight, I have another couple days here. By midnight tonight, then we work something else out.”

“And if you receive your wish?”

“Then I’ll keep the paw and work out with the partners the fact that we’ll be waiting for up to six months for delivery. Even if it puts my work with them on the line.”

“Fair.” Kasongo said.

Reluctantly Archie took the box as both men looked at the unmoving paw.

“You are just taking the box Archie. You must accept the paw.” “Accept it? Like formally say I accept it?”

“No, nothing like that. In your mind you must accept it as your own.”

“I see.”

Archie took a slight breath, closed his eyes for a moment and let his mind bypass the silliness of what was happening and accepted the silver box and its contents. When he did, the pinky finger and thumb of the paw continued to rest on the palm, but the other three fingers slowly straightened out. “Now you have accepted the paw.” Kasongo said, smiling.

Archie looked at it and then lifted the box high to look underneath it and turned it from side to side, trying to see what chicanery was afoot that caused the paw to suddenly become animated. “What is this? Some kind of a trick?” Archie asked the man in front of him, mildly amused.

READING and WRITING in the

DARK

A space for avid Black readers and Black authors

“Not at all. You have three wishes, and anyone in your immediate family may have three wishes of their own. Each finger represents one wish, each time you make a wish and that wish is granted a finger will curl.”

“If this really is what it is. Why give it to me? Why not use it for yourself and your own family?”

“Who says I haven’t? My family has already used it and exhausted every wish we can make. Now I can pass it along to someone who is not in my family.”

“And you’re offering it to me. Not one of your friends or closer colleagues?”

“I have few colleagues and even fewer friends. I have been saving this for a time when I might need a favor and would need something to offer. I need that favor now, and I don’t mind offering the paw to you.”

Ever skeptical, Archie said nothing as he looked suspiciously at both the man in front of him as well as the paw.

A smile so large as to almost seem unreal had become a fixture on Kasongo’s face. “So... make a wish.” he said.

“Do I have to speak it out loud?”

“No, but you do have to concentrate on the paw and at least think ‘I wish,’ while touching the paw and making your wish.”

“Alright.” Marlow said as he reluctantly placed a couple fingers on the paw inside the box and held them there, He stood with his eyes shut for a moment, his fingers pressing upon the monkey’s paw, and then quickly opened his eyes and snatched his fingers from the thing he already had no desire to be touching. “Oh, I can’t do this. I feel like an idiot!”

“Make your wish!” Kasongo insisted.

Archie looked at Joseph for a moment, then with an, oh what the hell, shrug of his shoulders, Archie again slowly laid a couple fingers on the paw, and this time he had a wish in mind. He smiled, taking a breath as he did, and only opened his eyes when he felt the paw

seemingly coming to life beneath his fingers. He was startled but did not drop the box. The paw seemed to emit a kind of greenish glow as slowly the index finger of the withered appendage began to curl. Once the finger was completely turned and bent forward in the direction of the paw, it stopped moving altogether and the glow faded. “What just happened?” Archie asked the man who had given him the thing.

“Your first wish has been granted.” Kasongo said, still smiling widely.

* * *

Archie had seen no proof that his wish had come true, all he knew was that he thought something and a finger on the dried-up monkey’s paw bent into the palm, leaving two straight. There were any number of ways such an illusion could have been pulled off. So, without the proof, there was no way to know this wasn’t some clever trick to get him to sign the contracts. Yes, he had gotten to know Kasongo, had dinner and a swim at his home, met and dined with Joseph’s wife and children, but Archie still didn’t fully trust Kasongo. Archie had made his wish silently because though outside the United States, where things were a bit more difficult to get hold of, Joseph Kasongo was one of the wealthiest businessmen in the DRC and was definitely a man of means. If he had heard the wish, there was little doubt that he had the resources to make that wish come true.

Or at least seem to.

When Marlow told Kasongo that he was not yet willing to sign the contracts, Kasongo didn’t seem bothered even remotely. He simply told Archie to go back to his hotel room and that he would see him sometime the next morning to sign the contracts. The degree of confidence with which Kasongo spoke, and his absolute certainty that Archie would be back the next morning to sign was slightly unnerving to the man who was now in possession of what, if it really did what was vaunted to, could indeed change his life—possibly the world.

* * *



If you’re needing to get your **THEORETICAL EBON FICTION (TEF)** fix, **THIS** is the place to go!

PARADIGM VOID is a collection of short stories written by Iyapo Yapa, one of the new leaders in the field of Black Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction. Each story explores possibilities and concepts that were not long ago only within the domain of the standard Sci-Fi reader.

Now, with the insurgence of Black writers of TEF, Iyapo is adding his powerful voice to the chorus, and moving at full speed to work in our people taking control of our narrative!

In *PARADIGM VOID*, Iyapo explores things like:

- What if somewhere in the universe numerous alien races observed earth and concluded that there is a faction on the planet that in no way should ever be allowed to reach out beyond the bounds of its own atmosphere?
- What if the universe itself started taking measures to correct and bring balance to itself in terms of justice?
- What if time slowed down nearly to a stop ... but only for YOU?

These possibilities and more are examined in “PARADIGM VOID” a collection of ten short stories in the genre of **THEORETICAL EBON FICTION**.

READING and WRITING in the

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WOW! We're already halfway through 2023, and so far it's been a GREAT year, and only going to get better! Have fun with this month's word search! Just as with the last word search, the words to this puzzle are also the ANSWERS to last month's crossword puzzle, so it you're still struggling with the crossword, and want a little help (rather than going to the back of the newsletter and getting the answers), here are the words.

The solution to this puzzle will be in next month's edition of Reading and Writing in the DARK!

[CLICK ON THE IMAGE BELOW TO DOWNLOAD A PRINTABLE COPY OF THE PUZZLE!](#)

P M Y T K C Q P H K F J T T B T U N B J C M K H L Z U K A C H G Z X I E X T T Z
Z T L Z O R C T L G L C P T K H R N G M S Z T D A V D Q J F C K M J J B O T D L
E A Z T J H T D A V B G F R W A N P E M H L O C W K E U D L I W Z P W D A T D S
L W Z O K J W J T X T X H R Q A M M W A A Y V Z M E M Q K B S H W J V Y W O V S
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D O L W T E B C Q V B E J Z R D B B K U G I S L U D M B M Z I A D P V H X A G Y
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R H E F P B P T I S N W J S Y L N H R E Y H N K P V A Q A O Q W C N V R C B O G
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X K X U J I Z O R E P T U Q X T F X B I E J P T Q Q R H Z L M O M M I I K H V E
P V U S I W E F C V G A C M X Q T G U G U T B B O C N N J B L E I S C A R S J C

JUNE WORD SEARCH WORDS

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PARADIGM
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MOENEESUS
SUNDOWN
JOURNEYS

READING and WRITING in the

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Book Review: My Husband Was a Mass Murderer

MY HUSBAND WAS a MASS MURDERER has more twists and turns than a country road at midnight—and you're driving with the headlights off!!!

I thought I knew what I was in for just by the title of the book. But the old adage, "You can't judge a book by its cover," definitely applies here! And I mean that in the BEST of ways.

Sometimes, I read book reviews before purchasing a book. (They NEVER stop me from buying because ultimately 99% of the time what a person thinks is subjective. You will ALWAYS find someone who LOVES something or HATES it. I will say that if 5000 people read something and all 5000 hate it, that would give me pause, but that's hardly the case in real life, and certainly not the case with this book.)

I digress.

I am admittedly not what I consider a fast reader. That said, I started reading *My Husband Was a Mass Murderer* around 10:00 pm one night and finished it at around 10:30 the next morning—and YES, I slept five or six hours. That night, before I turned off my tablet to stop reading, I told my wife that I was doing my best to force myself to stay awake because I literally didn't want to stop reading it. So, I grudgingly went to sleep, and when I woke up the next morning, within about 15 minutes, I was back at it until I finished!

What a page turner!

I started out thinking I knew what I was getting into, but not totally certain. By the time I was several chapters in, two things were clear: 1) The book was NOTHING like what I was expecting. Which is kind of a dubious thing to say, since admittedly I didn't really know WHAT I was expecting. & 2) I thought I'd figured out the plot (something upon which I pride myself when reading a book, watching a movie and so on), but in time it became painfully apparent that I had NO FREAKIN' IDEA what was happening!

I applaud the author for these! One of the most common digs I find when reading people's reviews of various books is that they were "predictable". Well, there might be negative things one might say about this book if they want to nit pick it. (I'd like someone to show me a work of art, literature or music that couldn't be criticized if a person really wanted to ding it.) But no one can never, EVER say *My Husband Was a Mass Murderer* is PREDICTABLE!

Not only is the book full of twists and turns, but there is also action, a surprising amount of violence. (Which maybe I should not have been surprised by, given the title.) *My Husband Was a Mass Murderer* is DEFINITELY in the category of a disorienting mind f**k!

To say anything about the plot would be to give something away ... that's how many twists we're dealing with here. I will say that the story left me wanting more!

There are several points at which the reader may have to stretch their disbelief. To those who say the book is "dumb" or the plot "stupid" or even that the resolution is "unrealistic," I will say this:

Saying the story is dumb is tantamount to watching the movie *Airplane* then come out of it saying it's "dumb." Uh yeah... I guess if you are going in to watch a documentary about the airline industry, then it WOULD be dumb, but if you are expecting a screwball comedy, then THAT'S what you just got.

If you REFUSE to suspend disbelief and say, "It is IMPOSSIBLE for a human being to FLY or lift cars or buses!" Then you can NEVER enjoy a superhero movie - EVER!

I will admit that sometimes a writer or director will ask their audience to go to a place where we finally say, "Ok, I just REFUSE to go there with you." And that's fine, we ALL have our line. I do. Everyone does. For me, some parts took me up to

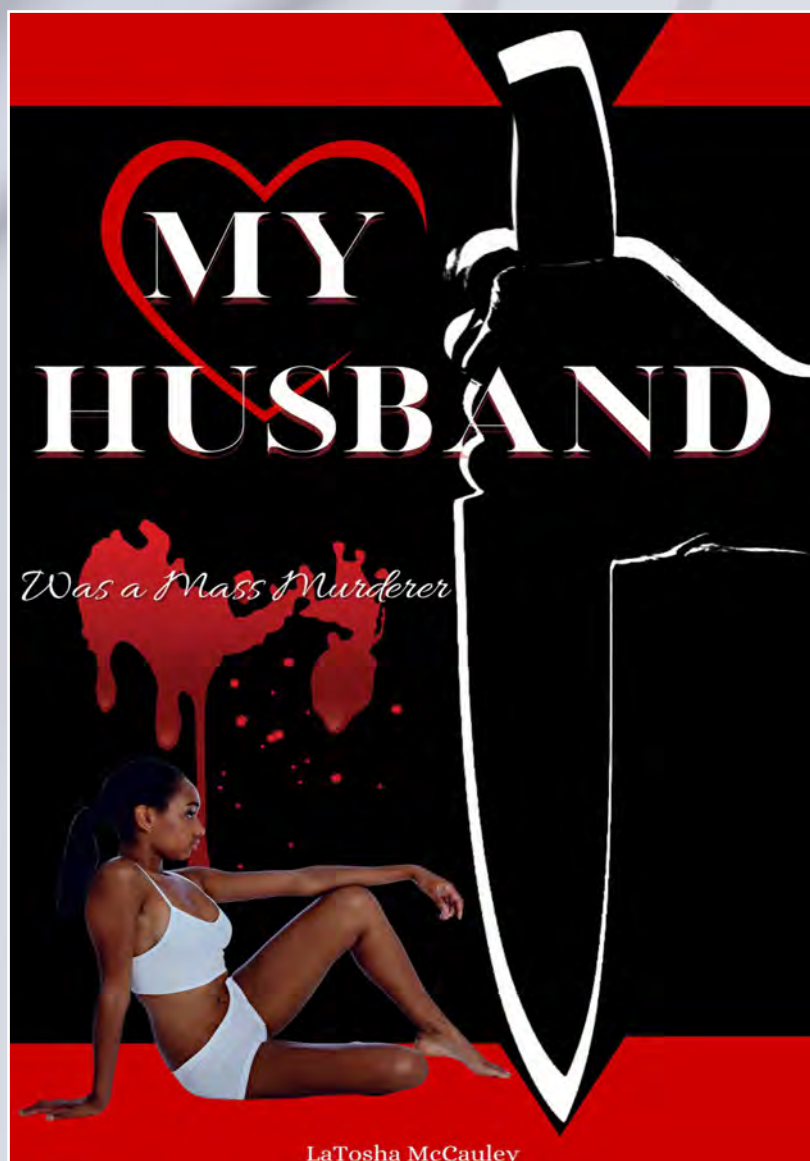
that line, but never quite crossed it.

That said.

My point is that if you are looking for something that is flawless, then you might be disappointed—as would be the case with just about any work, by ANYONE. But if you are willing to sit down, go with the author, and want to be THOROUGHLY, MIND BENDINGLY entertained ... then it would be hard to go wrong with, *MY HUSBAND WAS A MASS MURDERER!*

I give it FOUR and a HALF stars!

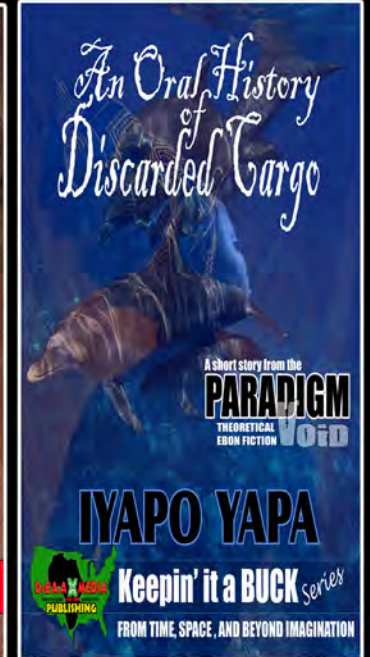
The only half star deduction is because of a plot hole that I just couldn't push past. I can't mention because it would be a spoiler. It may be possibly resolved in the sequel, which I eagerly look forward to reading, as well as other works by this author!



READING and WRITING in the

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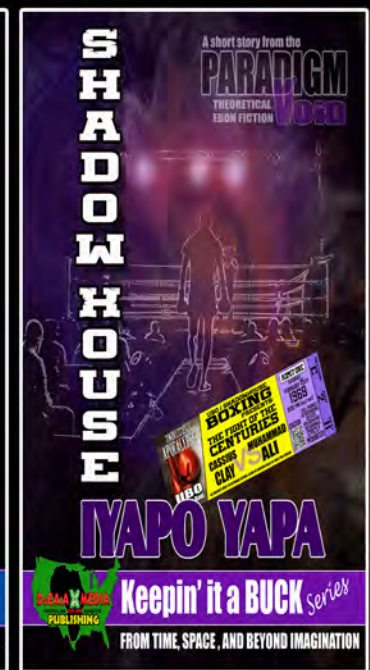
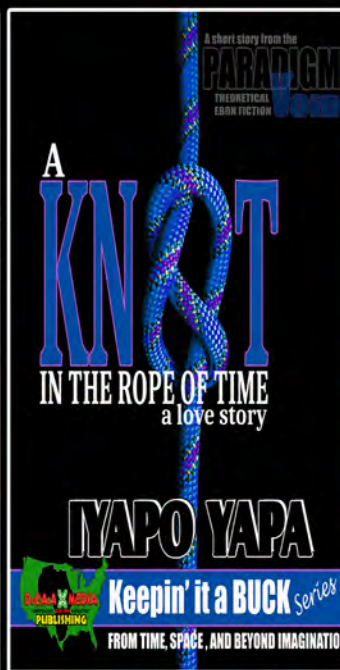


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MAKE A WISH!

If you could make any wish, and that wish was guaranteed to come true, what would you wish for?

Money?

Fame?

Love?

Eternal beauty?

World peace?

Revenge?

There are as many things to wish for as there are people, and all wishes it seems come with unexpected consequences. No wish is "air tight".

That said, would you still be willing to take that chance?

To make that wish?

Or do you think that you could take your time, think it through and make a wish that is fool proof, a wish that CAN NOT go sideways?

Keep in mind, fate is older than us and has seen many wishers and dreamers come and go. There may not be any such thing as a fool-proof wish... maybe.

But maybe you're different.

Maybe you're clever.

Maybe YOU'RE the exception to the rule.

Maybe YOU are the one who can outsmart fate and come up with the perfect wish. One for which there are either few negative repercussions, or better yet, no repercussions at all!

They say there is no such thing as the perfect crime, but the fact that there is no knowledge of said crime (if it has been committed), may be the proof that the perfect crime has in fact been pulled off.

And so it may be that the perfect wish HAS been executed for some or many who have dared to test the power of the MONKEY'S PAW! Those brave souls who tempted fate and won!



But the variables! There are SO many variables! Some paws bestow one wish, others three, some have as a stipulation that one wish on the paw can not undo another wish. Some can be passed down through families, some can be used only once.

Do you still feel lucky?

Do you still wish to test the paw's power?!

Then grasp the paw, take a breath, close your eyes, and...

MAKE A WISH!

Could YOU survive?!

Five years ago, a cataclysm now known as THE COLLAPSE occurred. Dimensions merged with horrific results. It is now common to see creatures of myth, legend, and nightmare along with once long extinct animals populating the landscape. Carl, LaTanya and Lester, embark on a quest to find a lost book that can't change the madness of the new normal but may assist them and others in the now nearly impossible task of: SURVIVING the WORST! Enter a world of action, adventure, science and horror on Kindle vella!

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Be sure to take some time to visit my website at:

<https://www.iyapoyapa.com> - or just click the image to the right!

There are a LOT of things to see and interact with! There are also a couple special surprises hidden in the site. They aren't marked, but if you take a little time to search for them, you'll defiantly be pleasantly surprised!



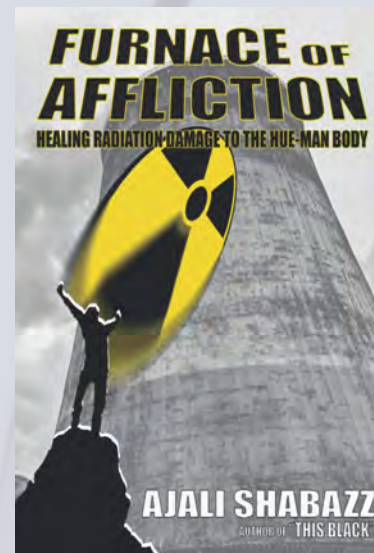
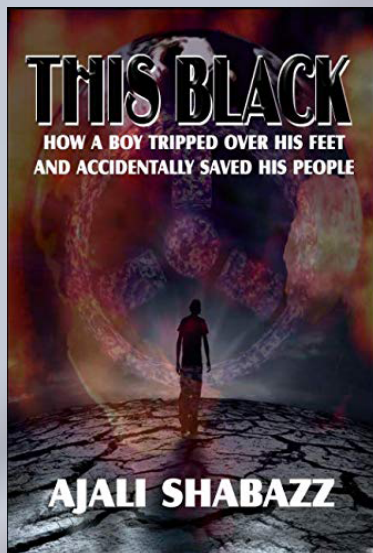
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Books by:

AJALI SHABAZZ



Author of: *This Black* - *This Black NATION* and *Furnace of Affliction!*

The Reading and Writing in the DARK Podcast Interview!

You don't want to miss this discussion with this new POWERFUL voice in PRO BLACK FICTION in the genre of Theoretical Ebon Fiction, and Non Fiction!

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<https://www.spreaker.com/show/a-conversation-with-author-ajali-shabazz>



Did you know there is also a **READING and WRITING in the DARK PODCAST?! Well there IS and you can tune in to it and listen just by clicking the block to the right.**

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Alright, enough about ME!

Below are AWESOME stories on the KINDLE VELLA platform by some authors I know!

Just click the cover art to be transported to their stories!

And remember, the first THREE episodes are FREE to read!



I DeClaire Love

Angela Riley

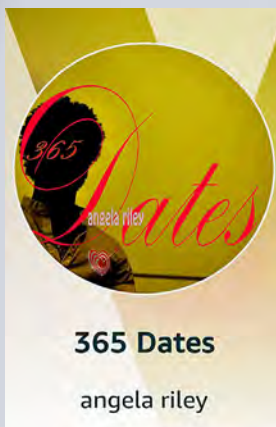
DeClaire and Tyrone meet and sparks fly. They fall in love with each other quick, fast, and in a hurry. It seems too good to be true. But is it? Is it safe to love? Are there any “good” rules when it comes to love? Do we have to fight for love? Are there always games being played when it comes to love? Is simple, sane, “old-fashioned” love out of style? CAN LOVE SET US FREE? *** New Episodes Weekly!



The Love X TamuTamu Agency

Angela Riley

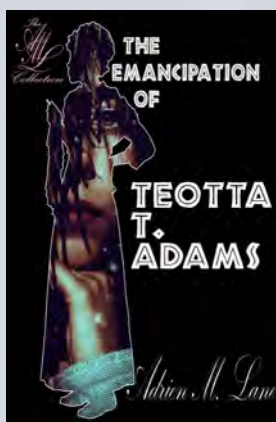
Love is natural but it ain't always easy. And Mama Tamu should know! She is a 91 year old match maker who has run “The Love X TamuTamu Agency” for FIFTY years. She has personally experienced and been a witness to all kinds of love. And, as she says, “Love is more than a notion!” Follow along as she stands up for and works to support and encourage the natural flow of Black Love.



365 Dates

Angela Riley

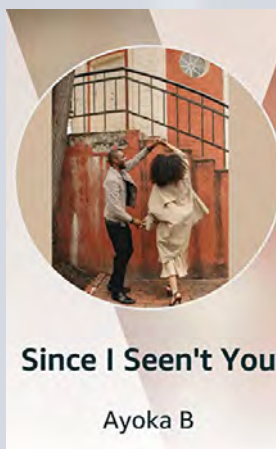
Single again, after my first divorce, one day I had a new thought: I WANT TO DATE. And... NOTHING. No one came knocking on my door to woo me. No one approached me when I was out wanting to court me. Nobody asked friends/family to be set up with me. Just crickets! So, thinking that maybe my goal was too vague--I want to date.--to make anything happen, I decided to pursue a HUGE goal of going on 365 dates. Not 3, 5, or 6 dates but three HUNDRED and SIXTY-FIVE dates. So...LET'S GO!



The Emancipation of Teotta T. Adams

Adrien M. Lane

Teotta T. Adams has it all, big house, nice car, fine clothes, and a private chef, one of the best in the world, and a successful husband. Yes, Teotta has everything. Everything except her FREEDOM! She spends her days in the lap of luxury, but inside she knows something's wrong. Her 'husband' is just this side of a stranger, and worse, Teotta knows even less about herself. When she finally discovers why, and the incredible truth behind it, she will long for the bliss of her lost ignorance.



Since I Seen't You

Ayoka B.

She and David met when they were 18. After a rough start, they build a friendship that would span decades: marriages, children, love and heartache. When they lose touch, she thought that she would never see him again, but she was wrong. Can men and women truly be just friends? Can their friendship withstand what life has in store?



The Match

Ayoka B.

Have you ever changed someone's life? I mean in a life and death sort of way. I opened a letter that I almost threw out, thinking it was junk mail; it said that I was a possible bone marrow match for someone! I couldn't even remember being tested. The letter asked me to contact them if I was still a willing donor... what would you do?

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Just click the cover art to purchase their book.



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angela riley

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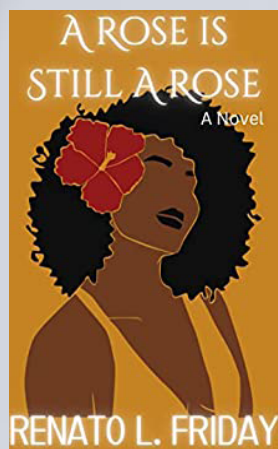
Episode 2: *Being Wanted*

Episode 3: *GOoD Lawd!*

Episode 4: *On Purpose*

Episode 5: *GOoD Magic*

Episode 6: *Into The GRIT of Integrity*



A Rose is Still a Rose

Renato L. Friday

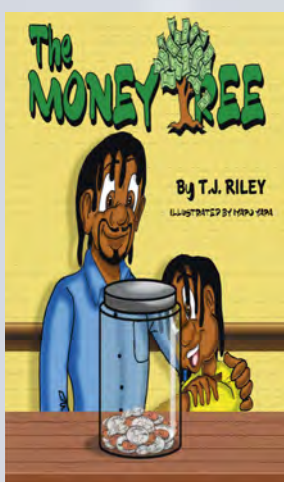
Rose thought life was going great: she was engaged, had a beautiful set of twin girls, a recent trade school graduate, and a new job right around the corner. Unfortunately, her fiancé, David, turned out to not be what she needed, and she chose to break things off. In the midst of her failing relationship, she met a man named Falcon, who ironically turns out to be her new boss. They quickly go from acquaintances to lovers, which opens up a fire pit of drama. Then comes Landon, a self-made millionaire, who is very humble about his accomplishments. He shows her all the things she was lacking while with David, and ultimately proposes. Naturally, Rose is scared to fall for Landon and accept his proposal due to David's lies and Falcon's toxic choices, but she takes a chance and allows Landon to love her the way she needs. Will her love for him forsake the feelings she's still harboring for Falcon, or will she give into temptation?



Longing for the Night

Ms. KJ

Inspired by the poem Goblin Market by Christina Rossetti, two young sisters face the trials and tribulations of the hood in this coming-of-age story about the harshness of living in South Central Los Angeles.



The Money Tree

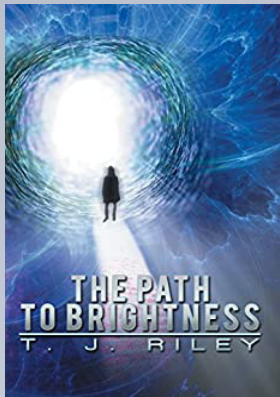
T.J. Riley / Illustrated by Iyapo Yapa

Every child wants money to buy something, right? Our hero does too. But, his father has a surprise, a Money Tree. Join the fun journey to find out how to grow your own money tree.

READING and WRITING in the

DARK

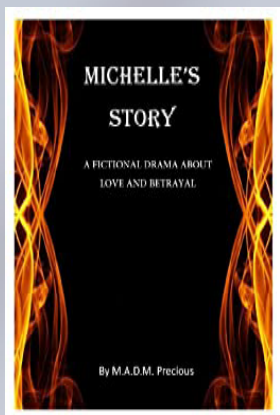
A space for avid Black readers and Black authors



THE PATH to BRIGHTNESS

T.J. Riley

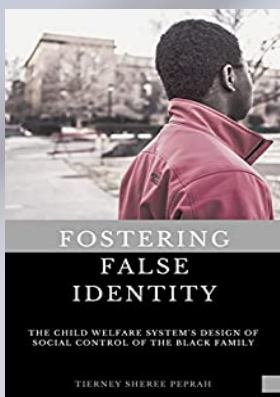
Fatima, a young woman, has a near-death experience. When she awakes from a coma and recovers, she has mystical powers. She begins to see auras and experiences life with her new abilities. For the clever character, Fatima, life is about to dramatically change. Follow Fatima's journey as she tries to convince others of the astounding esoteric knowledge she has brought back from beyond the veil. However, there are some that wish to stop her from sharing an ancient secret. A secret that will change life on earth, forever.



MICHELLE'S STORY

M.A.D.M. Precious

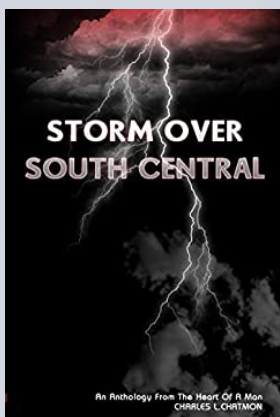
When Michelle met Michael, she thought that she found the love of her life. She was young and coming out of a bad marriage. A single parent of two children, she was scared, broke and had no self esteem. Michael seemed perfect, except for one little problem...



Fostering False Identity: The Child Welfare System's Design of Social Control of the Black Family

Tierney Peprah

THE ORGANISM OF RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES CRAFTS VARIOUS SYSTEMS MEANT TO ACHIEVE ONE OVERARCHING PURPOSE, that is to ensure that peoples and groups designated for an inferior existence pose little to no threat to the social structure of wealth and privilege that is propped up on their backs. These systems are allowed to exist, oftentimes unchallenged, by propagating dishonest descriptions of why these systems exist. Many people are without the proper means to challenge these systems, camouflaged as being charitable or in the public interest, for their unjust outcomes. In *Fostering False Identity*, the American child welfare system is explored as such a system. While the child welfare system is portrayed as a moral arbitrator in the abuse and neglect of children, in actuality this system was formulated for the specific purpose of regulating disenfranchised populations by removing children from those communities to assimilate them into White society. Thus assimilated, they are believed to pose minimal threat to the social order. *Fostering False Identity* will explore this phenomenon through a lens of Black liberation and self-determination of African families who are consistently victimized by this system.



Storm Over South Central

Charles L. Chatmon

The Storm has been unleashed, which means it's time to share what's inside the much anticipated anthology by author Charles L. Chatmon.

Chatmon, a refreshing voice in the world of modern poetry and author of *The Depths of My Soul & The Voices of South Central* returns with engaging short stories and thought provoking poems.

Read *Storm over South Central* and discover the thoughts he writes about in this volume filled with verses and tales of despair, stories of hope. It will also reveal a lot about American society – its strengths, its flaws and its people. This is a literary journey you will enjoy taking.

And there will be more authors to come, who are working to

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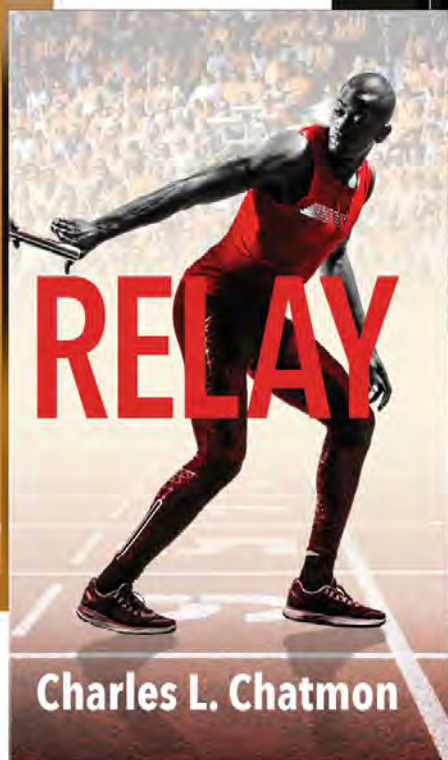
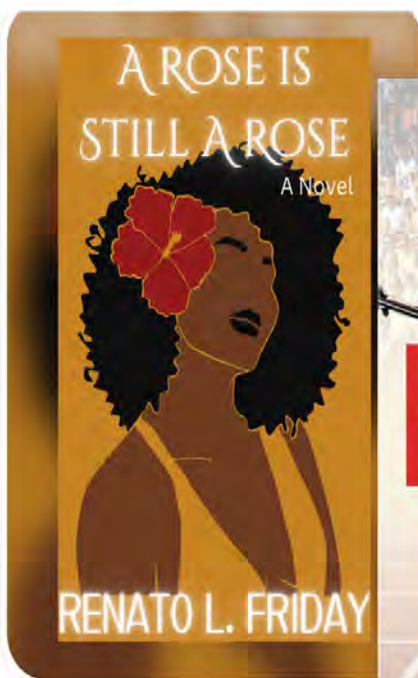
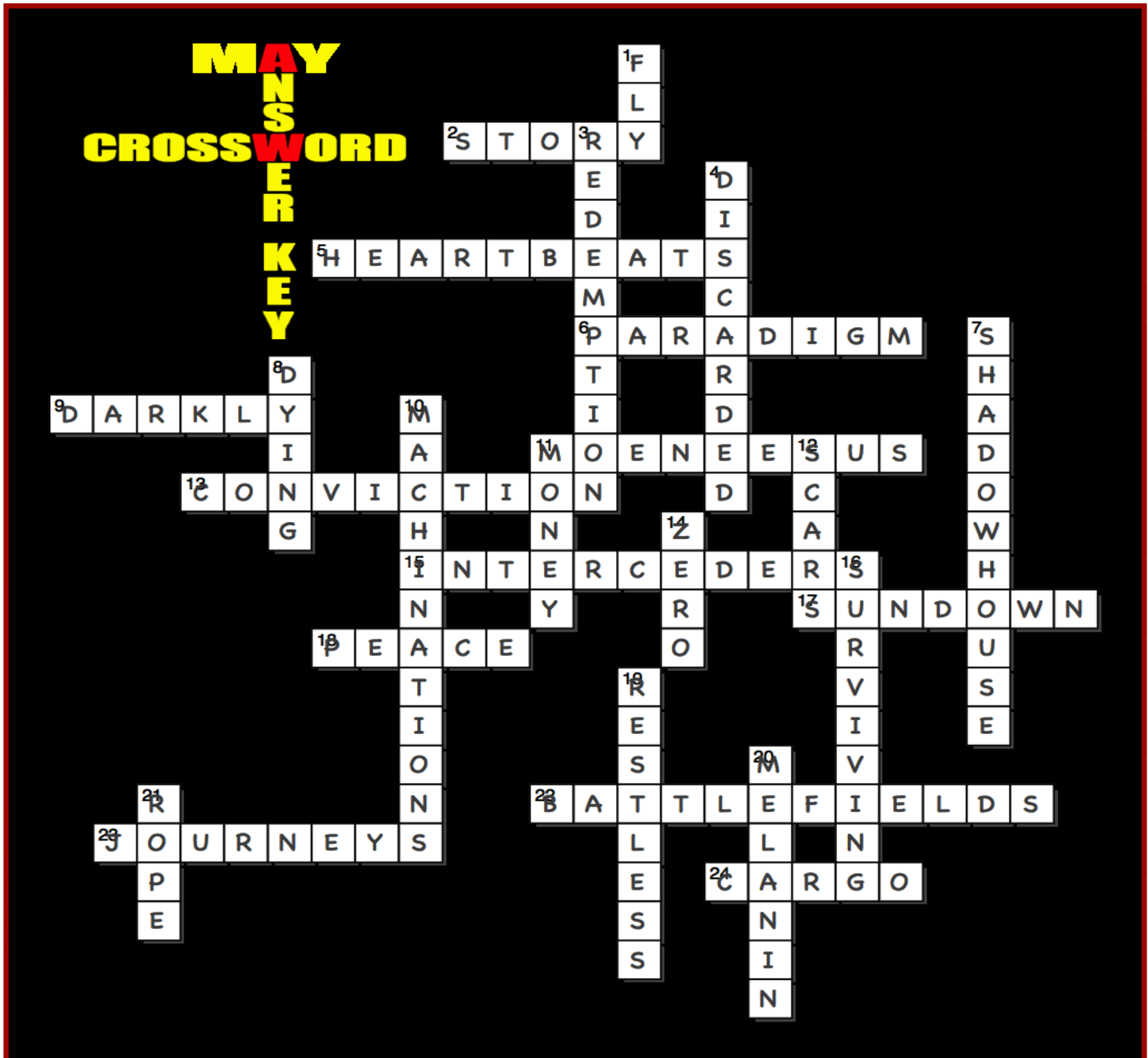
YouTube

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