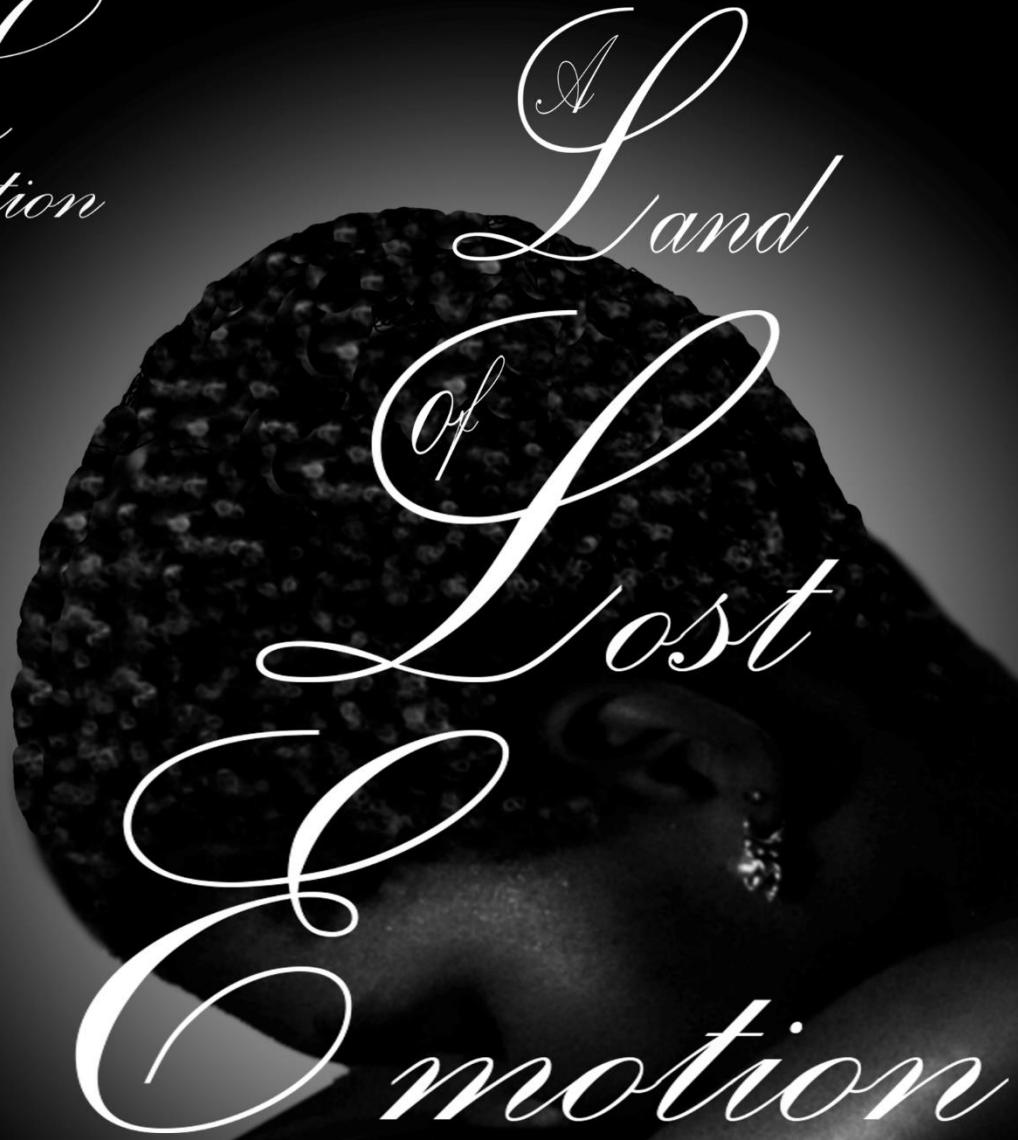


The  
*AL*  
Collection



*Land  
of  
Lost  
Emotion*

“It’s a matter of LOVE and DEATH.”

*Adrien M. Lane*

# A Land of Lost Emotion

## *A Love Story*

*The Complete Prologue*

ADRIEN M. LANE

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# A Land of Lost Emotion: A Love Story

Adrien M. Lane

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## PROLOGUE

re raindrops the tears of Gaia, or do they fall in empathy for those who are grieving, lonely or heartbroken as a way to make them feel not quite so alone in the world?

Alolé Scott casually sipped a glass of white wine as she sat naked atop a throw blanket on an overstuffed leather armchair in front of the thirty second-floor panoramic overlooking the Cleveland skyline and onward to Lake Erie. This spot had always been one of her favorites for sitting, relaxing and gathering her thoughts, especially late at night. She appreciated the comfort of taking in, from the other side of the glass, the light speckled landscape that stretched out before her. The scenery was interesting to see in daylight, even artistic in its way—but within the embrace of the night, Alolé found it truly mesmerizing, and she was grateful she had her own secure perch from which to view it.

Her literal window on the world.

Alolé was always captivated by the lights of the city and those of the skyscrapers that populated it—lights that never seemed to go dim—the ever-present glimmer of which reflected off the water of the lake and created its own form of light show just for her. Presently it was mid-June, and for as beautiful as the sights were right now, the lights during the Christmas season made what she was looking at in this moment sadly pale in comparison.

With each light she saw in the towering skyscrapers, she wondered if anyone was in any of those rooms... maybe a housekeeper buffing to a high shine, the surface of some CEO's massive mahogany desk and dusting the huge rubber plant that sat next to it—a janitor emptying the waste basket of some law partner, shaking his head while grudgingly replacing a plastic trash bag with only three sheets of wadded up paper inside that could have been easily picked up out of the can, but for the spillage from a discarded one third full cup of mocha that made complete replacement of the bag necessary. Maybe in the window above the janitor some businessperson was taking care of business—or even perhaps—behind the darkened window of an office two floors above the janitor and the workaholic was yet another businessperson using the office for a late-night tryst where, were their spouse to call, they could legitimately say they were at the office equally... ‘*taking care of business.*’

So many lights, so many things that could be happening in the darkness. The possibilities were endless. Is that why the floors of a building are called ‘stories? She pondered.

Every now and then Alolé would look below, to ground level, or as much of ground level as she could see from her vantage point. The structures at the feet of the taller buildings were never as well lit, but they were still interesting to view and contemplate. This late at night, Alolé could know for a certainty that someone was sleeping.

Someone was crying.

Someone was laughing.

Someone was staggering home, or worse—to their vehicle after a night of too much libations.

Someone was passing from this life to the next, whether by nature, by force, or even by choice.

She did not have to guess at this, nor did she need to be a prophet or clairvoyant to know it. The late-night goings on in the city of Cleveland, Ohio was something she could predict merely by knowing the culture of the city and the patterns of things—anyone could who cared to. Cleveland was not dissimilar or unique from any other large city when it came to crime and other unsavory things that happened in the hidden parts... its “underbelly.” All cities are alike and to greater or lesser degrees share the same characteristics—both good and ill. That’s what makes them cities. There was little doubt in her mind that in the morning she could hear about those who had been caught and arrested in the commission of some overnight crime, or some unfortunate soul having been robbed, raped, or murdered. She would need only turn on the news first thing in the morning—or open her police scanner app right now to hear that her imaginings would be confirmed.

Once again, she looked up toward the lights that had comforted her and the ever more distant lightning that so dazzled her. For now, she wanted her mind on less weighty

things than the evil that men do and the pain and sorrow that are its inevitable aftermath--though presently, under the circumstances, she knew it was all a diversion, a way for her to avoid dealing with her present reality—an unavoidable reality.

Yes. This space was one of Alolé's favorites. Her only misgiving about it was that the small corner of solitude did not belong to her. She turned slightly in the chair and looked over her shoulder without straining and stared at the bed, pillows on the floor, along with various articles of clothing. The typically immaculate sheets and comforter that usually had a showcase look about them were now disheveled and upon them lay the owner of the space---her fiancé of two years, Darren Murdock—one of the wealthiest men in the state of Ohio, one of Forbes Multi-Millionaire 40 under 40, and one of the kindest most generous people she had ever known.

Male **or** female.

She met him at a toll booth of all places.

This crazy rich, self-made millionaire, this celebrated philanthropist was stuck at a toll booth and would not be let through because he had forgotten his wallet and had no money or cards on him or in his vehicle. As traffic backed up behind him, and the sound of car horns became an orchestra, Alolé who was several vehicles back from ground zero of the backup, got out of her car and walked all the way to the front to find out what was going on—because that was just her way. She remembered being taken aback for a moment by

how good looking the man behind the wheel was—but she had seen handsome men before—hell—she dated a bunch of them. The man behind the wheel of the factory fresh looking white Spyder, looked at Alolé and smiled sheepishly for a long moment, as if suddenly so transfixed on her that he had forgotten the matter at hand altogether—then, having a close car horn snap him back to reality. The man’s face went from a disarmingly gorgeous, silly grin, to obvious embarrassment—something Alolé immediately found oddly endearing in its sincerity. The man in the car and the one in the toll booth explained their versions of the reason behind the holdup—both men were talking over each other in a way that Alolé couldn’t fully understand either of them but was able to get the gist of the problem.

Needing no further explanation, Alolé held up her right hand, signaling both men to please stop talking, then dug into her purse, grabbed a fifty-dollar bill and handed it to the man in the booth.

“Lady, what am I supposed to do with this pineapple?!” He said.

“Take it and let this man through so that everyone can get moving.”

“You expect me to break this?!”

“It’s the smallest thing I have besides the money I have for my own toll.”

The man in the booth, noticeably flustered from already having carried on an extended conversation with the Black man in the expensive car held the fifty dollar bill out the window to Alolé. “Miss... I can’t take this. I can’t break it.”

Alolé said nothing and turned her head to look at the ever-growing line of cars that was now spilling into other lanes and causing them to back up, then looked back at the attendant. The man in the claustrophobic desk fan cooled structure likewise followed the direction of her gaze and saw the trouble that had formed and the disaster that was to come if he didn’t do something PDQ. “We’re not supposed to do this...” the toll booth attendant said, red faced as he lifted his hip so that he could reach into his back pocket for his wallet. He pulled out a twenty-dollar bill, two tens and two fives. He handed Alolé the whole fifty, then put her bill inside his wallet and replaced it to his back pocket. Alolé took one of the fives and paid the toll, then along with the change she got back, handed it and the forty-five dollars to the man in the car. “Here, this is so hopefully you don’t get caught at anymore toll booths before you get home and hold anyone else up. And if there are no more booths, you can just use it to buy yourself some lunch or dinner on me.”

After giving him the money Alolé turned and made a bee line back to her own vehicle. “You might want to start carrying some extra change in that fancy car of yours!” she called over her shoulder amid the honking.

“Thank you! But hey wait a minute!” yelled the man in the car who she would later come to know as Darren Murdock. “What’s your name?! I need to pay you back!” he called after her. “Don’t worry about it!” the beautiful Samaritan yelled, voice becoming ever

fainter as she walked away. “Hey wait a minute!” Darren flung open the door of the extravagant, still running car as much as he could in the tight space, banging it hard against the toll booth and not caring that he did. “Hey! What the hell do ya think you’re doin”, yelled the attendant. Darren, oblivious to the man in the box, angled himself sideways so he could slip from the driver’s seat and out into the environment. “Hey Buddy! You can’t do that! You’re holdin’ up the line! Don’t you leave that vehicle Mister!” Continuing to ignore the man in the little box, Darren kept struggling to scoot free, he called out to his benefactor, even as he was dealt some choice words from apoplectic drivers immediately behind him who saw him trying to leave his vehicle. After managing to break free, Darren took several brisk steps as the voice of the attendant that was fighting to be heard above the car horns and losing, became more and more faint behind him.

Nearly breaking into a trot so that he could get to the woman in front of him, Alolé wasn’t so far ahead that he had no hope of catching up to her, but eventually Darren became acutely aware of his surroundings and especially his self-centeredness in this situation. He stopped walking but continued calling after the woman who was nearly to her own car and insisted that he pay her back even over her repeated protests of “No worries”, “It’s nothing.” “Pay it forward”, and so on that were now mixing with the noises in the background. Alolé was in no particular hurry to be anyplace that day, but she was aware that just because she wasn’t that didn’t mean that other victims of this man’s forgetfulness didn’t have pressing matters requiring their attention. There was always the “If you clock in late one more time, you’re fired!” crowd. (Something she

unfortunately, was well acquainted with from another life, when she wasn't working for herself). There were planes and trains to catch, sick children at home and any number of reasons that people needed to be on their way, where literally every minute counted. So, she wasn't too keen on further holding people up so that she could flirt with some guy no matter how dreamy of a smile he had, or how disarmingly charming, or deliciously muscular, or devastatingly handsome he was.

Alolé had made it back to her car and had her hand on the handle of the door when she finally looked back toward the front of the line for the first time. At first, she was going to just get in, but there was something about how absolutely pitifully hapless he looked, as he called out to her, coupled with how this handsome Black man called out, "Please let me repay your kindness." That made her pause. "Can I please have your number?!" he yelled. Without taking even one step in his direction and a little apprehensive about what she was about to do, Alolé yelled over the ever intensifying blaring of car horns, her phone number to him, God and everybody. She was certain he could not hear what she was saying over the sound of the incessant noise all around them and she could see he had nothing with which to write. He smiled widely and waved to her, and she courteously waved back as she opened the car door, sat in the driver's seat, buckled up and waited for traffic to start moving again.

Darren walked back to his waiting vehicle that was still running, the driver's side door ajar, and began the task of once again angling himself, this time in order to enter his vehicle. As he did his dance, he looked at the attendant who, to his profound surprise was

grinning widely at him. “I know she’s pretty n’ all, but damn man! Really?!” he said. Finally plopping down in the seat, and closing the door, Darren prepared to drive off as the gate before him slowly raised. “Didja at least get her phone number?” The toll booth man asked as a door behind him flung open, and in stepped a stout, red faced, balding man with glasses. He was dressed in a similar kind of uniform as the attendant but wearing a badge that made Darren think he must be the man’s supervisor.

“Hells going on out here Jim?! Traffic is backed up a quarter mile and growing!”

“Sorry Roger … this guy didn’t have his wallet and no cards or money.”

“Okay… so why didn’t you just write him a ticket for it and send him on his way?”

“A ticket?”

“Yeah Jim, a ticket! How long you been doing this?!”

“Little more’n two years.”

“And in all that time no one has ever pulled up and didn’t have money for the toll?”

“Never.”

“Ok... still ... weren’t you told you just write out a ticket for people who don’t have the toll money?! Whaddya think THESE are for?” The supervisor said sternly as he held the old, obviously unused pad of tickets, receipts and carbons up and shook it at the other man.

Darren only looked over to the two men, back and forth at them like watching a ping pong match, and the attendant had entered into a new squabble—just not his day it seemed. Darren grinned a little and looked in front of him. The gate was up, his toll paid and there was no need for him to sit and watch this hapless attendant being dressed down by his superior. He turned his attention to the road in front of him and drove forward.

\* \* \*

Though for the rest of the day, Alolé did think about the handsome stranger from time to time that day, she had dismissed any thought of him ever reaching out to her.

So much for thinking.

To her surprise, roses were delivered to her home the next day along with an envelope containing fifty dollars along with a thank you note and an invitation to dinner on a card that read:

“I promise I won’t forget my wallet this time.”

Alolé took the handsome stranger up on his offer, and as it turns out, as Darren later recounted, he never did hear the phone number she called out over the blare of the impatient, angry vehicle horns. At some point he recognized her as the famous cartoonist Alolé Scott (that was the point at which he grinned widely and waved), and immediately upon getting to his office, Darren had his secretary contact Alolé's PR firm, and that was that.

She stared at him as he lay on the bed, as naked as she was. The light from outdoors, creating shadows against his muscular body that accentuated his physique in a way that made him look almost like an artist's rendering. Darren was only the third man in Alolé's life, besides her stepfather, to ever declare his love for her and back up those words with actions.

Alolé turned her attention to the city sprawled out before her as she listened to the hypnotic sound of the light rain that deceptively veiled the ferocity of the powerful thunderstorms that had just passed through the city less than an hour prior and was now making its way east; no doubt to awaken with a start some other hapless dreamers from their slumber by way of intense flashes of lightning followed by explosive bursts of thunder.

The now calm and light rain mirrored the past hours of Alolé's existence. It was during the height of the storm, not long ago, that the intensity of the thunder, the power of the

lightning, the relentlessness of the down pour mirrored the love making between her and Darren.

Did the storm mirror them or did they embody the storm... or both?

And now was the calm... or what should have been.

As Alolé watched the storm move slowly into the distance, her mind drifted back to life as a young girl in Georgia. During thundershowers or storms of **any** magnitude, her mother would have her quickly move away from any windows lest a bolt of lightning come through and strike her as surely as if she had been standing outdoors in a field under a tree. She long since learned that the danger of watching lightning from a window was not in the strike coming through, but the lightning hitting the glass and causing it to explode, thus resulting in injury to the watcher by projecting toward them sharp shards of superheated glass.

Tonight, Alolé had no such worries, nor did she particularly care about the consequences of lightning strikes on glass or anything else.

Typically, after making love, especially with a lover like Darren, Alolé would fall into a deep, long, peaceful sleep.

Not tonight.

She looked to the left at the large wall clock that was as much a piece of art as a functional timekeeper.

3:37 am.

She had been sitting nearly half an hour and was wide awake with her thoughts. Her eyes and cheeks were by now dried from the initial tears that occupied them a short time earlier. She simply sat in silence now. Looking out the window and thinking. She lifted her forearm to her nose and inhaled deeply. She smelled the fragrance of her perfume, mixed with that of Darren's cologne, combined with that of the light perspiration that activates them both, and is a consequence of passionate lovemaking—if one is doing it right.

In her mind she could still hear his whispers and feel his warm breath lightly glide over her ear just enough to make her faintly convulse beneath him, strengthening the stiffness—were such a thing possible--of his body inside hers. As she recalled the sensations, Alolé slowly wrapped her arms around herself and with gentle hands tenderly caressed her shoulders and upper arms. She could still feel the weight of him on top of her, making it hard to breathe, causing her to feel weak and unable to escape his passion, and as she worked for every breath, head getting light and swirling at times—her ecstasy heightened.

As she gently ran her hands up and down her body her mind accessed the pathways that opened back to the flourish of orgasms, she had experienced oh so recently. The sensation of the trembling of her diaphragm that moved lower, still lower and inward throughout her form—the essence of her femininity. The sensations that solidified in her spirit and soul the fact that she was a woman and at that moment ecstatic to be so to exclusion of all else.

Alolé experienced orgasms of the kind that raised the legs, bent the knees and curled the toes without her even realizing she was doing it, the kind that made her clutch her lover's back with her left hand, and with the other, the perpetually shifting alternately relaxed, and flexed, muscular ass cheek of the man atop her—embracing him and desperately pulling him to her as if were she to let go he might float away and disappear. The kind that turns into a sort of undulating struggle for escape—not because of displeasure, but the exact, profound opposite. The kind of struggle that made her lover squeeze her more tightly as if trying with all his might to prevent her from getting away from him as his manhood became more solid within her to the point Alolé contemplated on a subconscious level, how any part of the human anatomy that was not an actual bone, could become so unimaginably rigid—and whether that part of him might somehow literally explode inside of her.

They were both caught up in the passion of it.

The heat of it.

The sweat of it.

The cool of it.

The scent of it.

The chaos of it.

The overwhelming order of it all.

And the knowledge that in the end, and very soon, a part of this man would be left inside her.

That night.

The following day.

She would carry part of Darren's physical body with her—a knowledge and secret shared by only the two of them.

And a part of his spirit well beyond that.

The dance upon the Egyptian cotton bedsheets in the darkness produced strange shadows on the walls, and sounds both recognizable, but yet somehow unfamiliar as their most primal motivations—motivations of which neither of them were not even aware dwelled within them—took over their bodies until finally, Darren uttered groans that sounded more like agony than pleasure, Alolé felt the warmth of Darren filling her in powerful, unrelenting waves that seemed as if they would never end—and with each wave she let out soft cries in the darkness that she did not realize she was making, but caused Darren to squeeze her more tightly as if he was determined that every fiber of his being, both physical and spiritual must enter into her. Simultaneously, Alolé grasped tightly the sensation of her own final climax. It was an orgasm that caught her by surprise, one of the rare orgasms that coincide with that of the lover. The sort of orgasm that is impossible to describe—the kind that in seeking to quantify or put into words would be more difficult than attempting to describe the color blue to someone who was born blind—or catching a breeze with a net.

When it came upon her, coupled with Darren's body flooding hers, Alolé was at once everywhere and nowhere.

For a split second she heard nothing—

and she heard everything.

Uncreated in that moment.

And then recreated.

Flashes of lightning continued to glow in the night sky as they became ever more distant on the horizon, but still demanding attention, catching Alolé's eyes, pulling her from the show in her mind, to the one on the other side of the window. The storm was still unapologetically displaying the braggadocio of their power by illuminating the city and lake beneath it. With the flashes of light, the glass shined, intensifying her reflection upon it. Against the glass, Alolé caught glimpses of her own nude form, deep dark skin and auburn eyes.

Alolé knew she was attractive. There was a time early in her life when she felt the need to have that fact affirmed to her by others—to validate her, but in time, after learning how to truly see herself and her people... after learning not to judge herself or her appearance by European and Western standards, Alolé discovered a profound love and acceptance of herself and who she was as a person.

All of that notwithstanding, Alolé Arlene Scott was strikingly beautiful by **any** standard.

Her physical beauty unfortunately was as off putting to some men as was her profession. Alolé was the creator, writer and illustrator of "*The Miss-Adventures of Nora*" a highly successful daily comic strip that garnered her worldwide acclaim and was said by many to be second in edgy urban humor only to Aaron McGruder's "*The Boondocks*".

In some circles, she was considered to be first.

She sat silently and continued listening to the distant thunder and watching the lighting of the skies which preceded it. The thunder now sounded subdued and harmless to her—while Alolé sat knowing that whoever was now in the vicinity of the strike was likely startled awake from a peaceful sleep and was pressing a calming hand over their hard thumping heart. She had always been fascinated by perspective and the thought of here and there. Even to the degree that as she looked at the stars on a cloudless night, she would often wonder if someone, somewhere was at that very moment staring back at the small light that held the planet in its orbit on which she stood and wondering the same thing.

Alolé lifted the wine glass to her lips to take another sip and found it empty. She closed her eyes and sighed as she gently sat the glass on the round table beside the armchair, and reluctantly picked up the cell phone she had been making every effort to ignore from the moment she sat it down close to an hour prior, in favor of nursing the glass of Chablis.

With the index finger of her left hand, she brought up the numeric keypad that represented the telephone feature, and with her right thumb of the hand cradling the phone slowly tapped the illuminated screen.

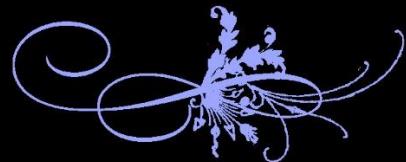
A woman's voice came from the speaker after two rings. "9-1-1—what is your emergency?" she asked.

"My name is Alolé Scott. I am at The Lumen at Playhouse Square in the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor penthouse. I need for you to send someone out."

"I'll send someone immediately Alolé, but first I need to know the nature of your emergency please so that I can dispatch to your location those who are best equipped to assist you."

Alolé once again turned her attention to the panorama before her. Being so high up and far removed from the dangers of the harsh streets below had created for her a false sense of security—a feeling of invulnerability, or even superiority to those who existed in such spaces. Tonight—this morning, Alolé would be taking an express elevator to the ground floor. "Ma'am are you still there?" came the voice that shook the beautiful Black cartoonist from her daze. "Yes." She said softly and slowly with a bit of a drawl, "Technically there is no emergency. I am here with Darren Murdock of Murdock Imports Limited.

Darren Murdock is dead."



## IT'S A MATTER OF LOVE AND DEATH!



Aole Scott has never been in love.

Oh, she came close a few times ... dangerously close, but she could never bring herself to take the plunge. Only four men have ever loved her in her life.

Her stepfather.  
Randal Thomoston.  
Harrison Masters.  
and  
Darrin Murdock.

All four of whom are dead.

Having given up on the prospect of love altogether, Aole focused all her energies into her already successful career as an award winning cartoonist. That is until D'Maskus Walker strolled into her life. She can tell he is falling in love with her but men who fall in love with her have a strange habit of dying, and eventually she finds out WHY, along with the reason SHE can not love. So to protect him, she can not let him fall in love with her, and as it is, her first time falling in love ...

could be her last.



*Adrien M. Lane*

Adrien M. Lane, or "Addie" as those close to her affectionately call her, was born in Costa Rica into a large family and has eight siblings. She always enjoyed spinning stories for family and friends but never committed anything to paper, until her mentor and fellow writer R.J. Blakman said, "Baby, you have a head full of stories the world is just waiting to hear and you need to put them on paper so everyone can read them!" So, she took her mentor's advice, dug out an old laptop she hadn't touched in years, and after typing the first few sentences, has never looked back!

Adrien lives in the tropics (because she hates the cold) with her pet gecko, (whatever one has wandered into her home for a given time), and is a member of a local Black writers group.

She enjoys looking at the lush colors of her surroundings, taking walks on the beach, and always, always thinking of new stories to write!