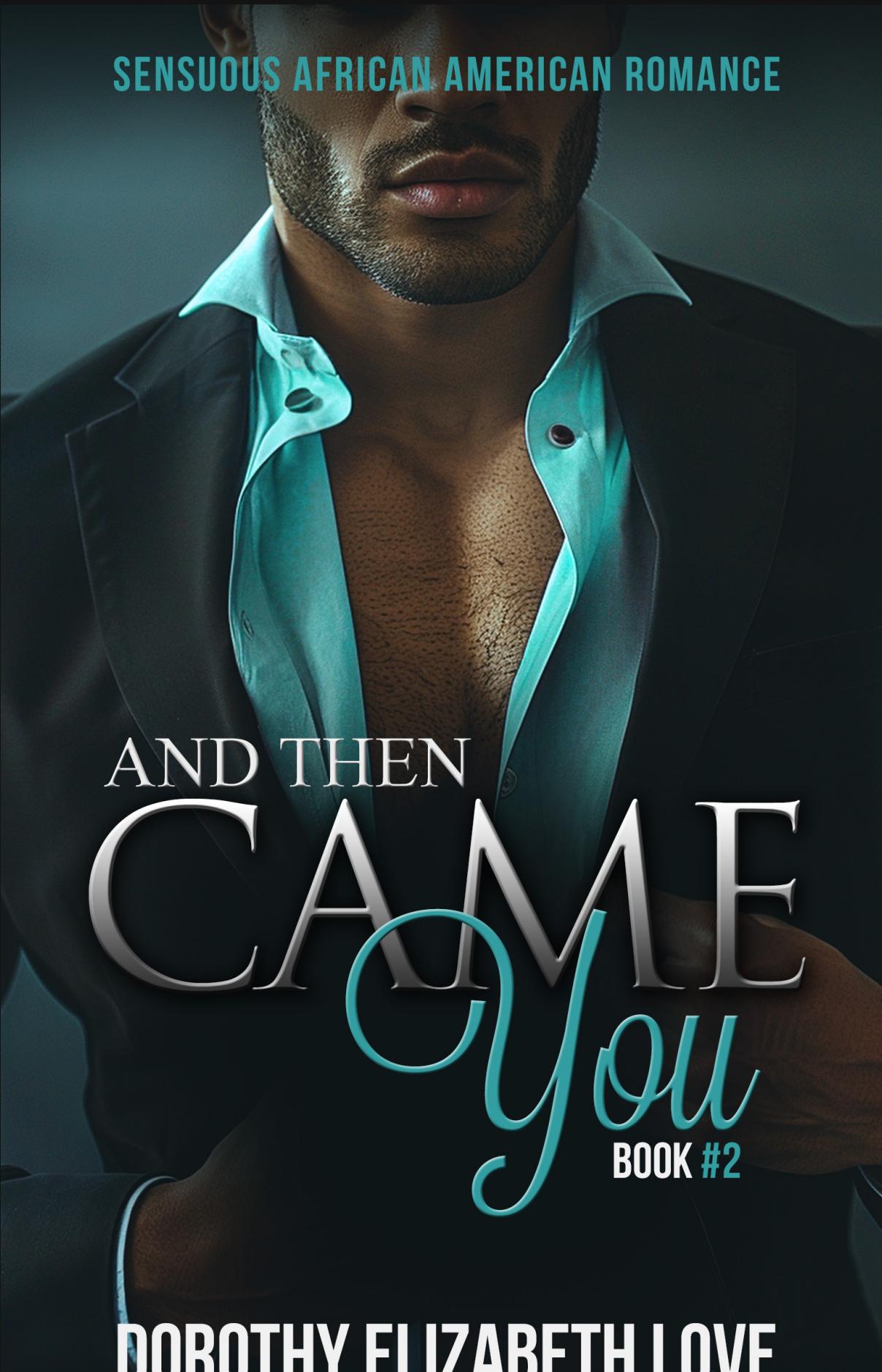


SENSUOUS AFRICAN AMERICAN ROMANCE



AND THEN
CAME
You
BOOK #2

DOROTHY ELIZABETH LOVE

Sensuous African American Romance

And Then Came You

by

Dorothy Elizabeth Love

The Ryan Family Series

Book-2

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LED Literature and Publication

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Chapter 1

Parker Ryan knew this night would end in disaster.

As he apprehensively looked up from the glass he was holding, another jolt of the unexplainable, eerie feeling seized him, then metamorphosized into a shiver. Parker looked around the crowded banquet room; everything looked normal. He cursed himself for allowing his gloomy thoughts to distract him from this glorious event. This was a celebration of both his wedding engagement and the grand opening of his second restaurant.

Pasting a superficial smile on his face, he glanced around the room again. Teal green, white and gold balloons with streamers decorated one side of his new restaurant, Parker's Place. Half-finished meals and gifts littered the tables as glasses filled with champagne, wine and other assortments of drinks were lifted in anticipation of a toast. Parker's best friend began to speak.

"I want to wish Parker and Cynthia all the happiness in the world. Parker, you and I have been good friends ever since I introduced you to Cynthia, and that's the only reason I let you have her." Marcus, the best man, bent and kissed Cynthia's cheek. "If he ever gives you a problem, you know where to find me," he joked. "Okay everyone." Marcus lifted his glass again. "May the two of you be forever happily married."

Cynthia gently squeezed Marcus's hand before turning to face Parker. Caringly, she stared into his warm brown eyes. "I will always love you," she whispered.

He leaned over and kissed her. That was what he needed to wash away the anxiety. He pulled his fiancée into his embrace. Everything was right; life was wonderful. He closed his eyes and inhaled her fragrance. He had always loved the floral scent she wore. He pressed another kiss against her forehead and reveled in the joy of her.

Pop! Pop!

Parker flinched before whirling around to see where the sounds were coming from. Two of his waiters were opening more bottles of champagne.

Why had he thought it was gunfire? He practiced at the shooting range periodically and was aware of the sound. He didn't realize he was holding his breath until he exhaled.

He shouldn't be this jumpy. What the hell was wrong with him? Was it wedding jitters? He didn't think so. He loved Cynthia; he wanted to marry her. The wedding was in two days.

"Are you okay?" Cynthia asked.

"Sure," Parker said after restoring a smile.

"You aren't planning to change your mind about the wedding, are you?" she asked. His delay took too long. "Well, are you?"

Parker lightly kissed her lips. "I can't wait." He wished he could remove the concerned look on Cynthia's pretty face. His problem was affecting her.

Damn! He didn't want to upset her. How could he tell her what he was thinking?

Parked tried another approach. "I can't wait to make love to you," he whispered in her ear. "Are you sure it's bad luck to make love to you just before the wedding?" Her concern evaporated. He wished his could be extinguished so easily.

A burst of laughter from the end of the table caught Parker's attention. He looked in the direction of the laughter and saw his sister, Patricia, scolding her husband, Mac, for telling a bawdy joke. Parker winked at her, and she blew him a kiss. The merriment was beginning to lessen some of Parker's concerns. Besides, everyone else was enjoying the festivities. *So, should I*, Parker scolded himself.

As the party ended, everyone hugged or kissed Parker and Cynthia as they began leaving. Parker and Cynthia held hands as they walked through the double doors leading outside into the warm summer night in Atlanta.

Cynthia pointed at a shooting star. "Make a wish," she insisted.

"Sure." Then he said, pulling her close to kiss. "We've just told God, family, and friends that we want each other. There's no turning back," he said softly.

"There isn't for me," Cynthia said.

"I got you now. And the chase was worth it. I want to walk out of my restaurant thirty years from now with your hand in mine."

She laughed. "That will probably be because we'll be too old to hold ourselves up." Rubbing a finger across his bottom lip, which tipped up in a grin, she added, "Did you forget to wish upon that star?"

"I've already got everything I've wished for." He kissed her again. "But can we go home and play in bed?"

"I think you just may get a wish after all," she winked wickedly.

"So, tonight will be the most memorable ever?" Parker asked.

"No. I'm saving that for our wedding night," Cynthia answered, smiling. "But I've got something planned for you tonight."

"I can't wait. Let's go." They stepped off the curb, heading for Parker's Lexus parked across the four-lane street.

"Hey, Parker!"

Parker turned and saw Marcus calling him.

"Wait a minute," Marcus said.

Cynthia squeezed Parker's hand before releasing it. "I'll wait in the car."

Parker nodded and handed Cynthia the car keys and remote. He turned to his friend. "Make it short, Marcus. I'm in a rush." Parker watched as Cynthia moved away. He wanted to hold her, touch her, all night.

Marcus teased Parker about his libido's over-activity. Then he started to ask the question he'd stopped Parker for in the first place. "I wanted to know..." Marcus stopped and stared into the distance, alarmed by something. "What the hell?"

Parker turned and saw a car was racing toward them, headlights off, swerving from side to side, barely visible.

Parker's heart plummeted at the sight of Cynthia frozen in the middle of the road. She looked terrified, not knowing which way to run.

"Cynthia!" Parker began running toward her, but Marcus caught his arm.

"You're gonna get yourself killed," Marcus said to Parker. "Cynthia, move!"

Parker shoved Marcus out of the way. As if in slow motion, because he didn't believe his feet were moving at all, he ran toward her, one impossibly slow step after another. Though he willed his strong, athletic body to move faster, it didn't seem to be listening. Fear, heart-wrenching and immeasurable, was what he saw in her eyes as she slowly turned to face him.

Then she screamed his name, terror in her voice, and reached toward him. As the tips of her fingers brushed his, the car slammed into her body, catapulting her into the air.

And then Parker saw nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing real. Because it couldn't be real. It couldn't be happening. Cynthia couldn't be taken from him.

"Noooooooo!" Parker's anguished bellow was louder than the cries and screams from the crowd forming behind him. "No!" He pleaded with whatever savior watched over him. "No!" In a voice filled with anguish, he pleaded for the life of the woman he

loved because somehow, he felt God had just turned His back on them. "No! No! Noooo!"

When he reached Cynthia's body, he ignored the blood, her twisted legs, her whimpers of pain. Carefully cradling her in his arms, he sobbed, "Don't leave me Cindy. Please don't leave me."

Her pain-wrenched eyes, normally filled with love and merriment, struggled to remain open. Those eyes were the ones that he always saw the best of himself in.

Then those eyes closed. Forever.

Parker sat dazed. Everything he held dear slipping away from him. Holding tightly onto Cynthia's lifeless body, he knew the torment he was feeling would only grow, that he could never be the same again.

Pain, deep and interminable, tore at the core of his heart. It wasn't supposed to end this way, but the unthinkable had happened. He had lost the part of his life that made him whole. And, somehow, he had known it would be this way.

He looked toward a dark dreary heaven and howled.

Chapter 2

One year later

It was dangerous to drive the sloping road at the speed he was traveling. If he didn't take the upcoming curve precisely, his black Corvette would go over the edge of the cliff and crash 100 feet down. He had traded in the Lexus for something with more speed and this car satisfied his need.

As Parker Ryan approached the curve, he pulled his foot off the gas long enough to downshift from fifth gear to fourth but didn't apply the brakes. As he sped around the curve, the car fishtailed and skidded backward.

The excessive speed forced the car forward toward the edge of the road overlooking a hundred-foot drop. The back wheels teetered on the shoulder's edge, spinning, unsuccessfully attempting to grip the road. Burning rubber spoke of the heated battle for traction. Parker floored the gas, and the tires finally took hold in the gravel. The car roared back onto the pavement and down the winding road. An oncoming car veered off the road and out of the way as Parker's Corvette raced past.

Parker looked in the rearview mirror and smiled at the other driver's consternation as he also congratulated himself on how he had handled the curve. Still traveling far too fast, his past suddenly flashed in front of his mind's eye. Someone had been driving carelessly the night Cynthia Thomas, his wife-to-be, was killed. The difference to Parker, was that he wasn't drunk like that driver who had hit Cynthia.

He didn't want to experience the past from a year ago just now, so he pressed on the gas. Speeding, he had discovered, made him feel as though he was outrunning his misery. At least temporarily. It was a fool's thought, but driving fast somehow

allowed him to keep slightly ahead of the twisted game that represented his life. But every time he managed to get ahead; life threw him another curve ball it seemed.

As hard as he tried not to, the memories came back.

Cynthia had loved living in these northern suburbs he was passing through. A drunken driver took away their chance to enjoy what was to be their custom-built dream home located there.

Why did God take Cynthia from me? He wondered.

Why couldn't I run fast enough to save her? "I should have made it," he whispered.

Parker still didn't have answers, but he kept torturing himself with the questions.

Unlike most days, today, he had a reason for driving fast. His mother, Harriett, was visiting when she fell, injuring her knee and hip. She was having surgery on the hip today, and Parker didn't want to be late this time. She had wanted to have the operation at home in Florida, but Parker wouldn't hear of it. He wanted his mother near him. It was critical that he be there if she needed him. He will be there in time... this time.

Careening into the parking lot of the hospital, Parker wheeled into the parking space closest to the entrance. Again, he had tested fate, and again, he had won. But he felt little satisfaction. Why hadn't he won the battle against fate the night of Cynthia's accident?

"Stop thinking about Cynthia's death," he scolded himself.

Entering his mother's room, Parker said, "Mom, you look as though you're comfortable here." He smiled, glad to see her looking less nervous about the surgery.

"Hey, baby, come give me a hug." As Harriett wrapped her arms around him, she added, "You didn't have to come back to see me again. I'm going into surgery in a bit."

"That's why I'm here." He sat in the chair next to her bed and scooted close enough to fold his arms on the side of the bed. He put his chin on his hands. "How's room service?"

"Okay, but I'm scared, Parker. I don't know if I want to go through with this or not."

She had no choice if she wanted to walk again. Parker suspected she needed his comfort and was glad to be at her bedside. "Remember how you used to climb into bed with Patty and me when we were kids? We would be scared about something, and you would get into bed with us and tell us a bedtime story."

"Did I do that?"

"All the time," Parker said. "Move over, I'm coming in. It's payback time." As he carefully maneuvered onto the edge of her bed, trying not to aggravate her injured hip, she said gently. "I can't remember any of the stories though. You tell me one instead."

"What are you doing!" That shout came from the doorway.

Parker looked over his shoulder and saw one attractive woman entering the room. She would be even prettier if she weren't frowning at him with her mouth gaping open.

"I'm trying to think of a bedtime story," he said. "Know any?"

The woman ignored his question. "Get out of that bed before you aggravate her hip."

"Look, miss... Or nurse—" Parker couldn't read her name badge from where he was positioned.

As he was about to ask her name, she interrupted him. "It's doctor," she said matter-of-factly.

Harriett hurried interrupted their exchange. "This is one of my favorite doctors, Parker. Her name is Dr. Chi Addams," his mother offered. "Her first name is pronounced *Chee* with the 'e' sound although it's spelled C-H-I. Dr. Addams, this is my son, Parker."

Parker, noticing how the good doctor was still standing with her hand on her hip, turned in his charm and flirted blatantly. "If I had known the doctors here were this attractive, I would have gotten here earlier." He lazily crossed his booted ankles on the starchy white bedsheet.

"Parker, behave," his mother commanded.

"Yes, Parker, take your mother's advice." Chi folded her arms beneath her full bustline. She was accustomed to men staring at her chest, but Parker Ryan made no attempt to hide his observation, as other men had the decency to do. "Take my advice as well. Get out of that bed."

"Is that an order?" he asked. He didn't budge as his eyes roamed over every flattering aspect of her figure.

His mother started swatting at his jeans-clad leg again for misbehaving.

"It is," Chi said with finality. This man, son or no, was jeopardizing her patient's well-being. And the way he was undressing her with his eyes was definitely influencing her well-being as well. She was beginning to feel chilly from the imaginary draft caused by the way he mentally removed her clothes. Then his stare caused her body to heat up.

Parker was just about to make a sarcastic retort of "Make me move," but his mother swatted at his leg again. He turned to her and said, "Mom, would you please stop hitting me. You thought this was a good idea, too!"

Harriett frowned at him, embarrassed at how loud her son had made that announcement. Dr. Addams had given her strict orders not to move her hip. Even though she appreciated her son's attempts to comfort and alleviate her fears, her hip was now aching more from his moving on the bed. Harriett also didn't want to upset her doctor any more than she already was.

She whispered to her son through stiff lips, attempting to hide her chastisement from Dr. Addams, "Get out of my bed."

"Mr. Ryan, may I speak to you alone?" Chi asked, turning toward the door without waiting for his response. As she opened the door, she looked over her shoulder to see if Parker was coming. He was, so she said to his mother, "I'll be right back, Mrs. Ryan."

"Mom, don't go anywhere while I'm gone."

"I was thinking about running up the street to get some fried chicken," Harriett teased.

"I'll do that for you," Parker responded, knowing his mother was attempting to soften the tense mood.

"I don't think so," Chi muttered under her breath as they exited the room. "Her cholesterol level is high enough as it is."

"That was a joke," he said. "Are you always this serious?"

Standing a few feet down from Harriett's door, Chi leaned back against the wall, ignoring his question. "Look, Mr. Ryan, I can appreciate your attempt to comfort your mother, but I think as her doctor, I know what's best for her." She looked at him pointedly, hoping to hide the way his sexy grin was affecting her. "And jumping into her bed, moving her injured hip, isn't. I would appreciate it if you would..."

Parker had just brazenly placed the palm of his right hand against the wall next to her shoulder, halting her words. Chi looked from his eyes to his hand then back to his eyes. The laugh lines around his eyes deepened, enhancing the warm, enticing stare. Thick, black brows winged soft brown eyes. Their brown coloring reminded her of warm toffee running over the sides of vanilla ice cream. His pupils were slightly dilated, making his gaze even more penetrating. As the toffee stare moved from her lips back to her eyes, a warm tingle bubbled inside her. The corners of his lips tipped higher, widening his lazy grin. He had the straightest, whitest teeth. The black, silky hairs of his facial stubble showed the shadow of a beard on his pecan complexion. It

added a rugged, appealing, and dangerously alluring feature. He smelled of musk cologne and manliness. She liked that.

"...follow my instructions without question," Chi finished. She was slightly surprised that it took so long to complete the sentence.

"I'll do whatever you want. As long as I can..." Parker stopped, enjoying her attempt to remain in control, "enjoy it."

His flirtation wasn't working. She obviously wanted to entice him by playing the aloof, serious type. He had experience with this kind of woman. He could handle it. Yet, her slight change in disposition when he put his arm up looked more like an annoyance rather than attraction. But when he flashed his knee-weakening smile, she softened a little.

He liked having her caught off guard. It softened her features and enhanced her attractiveness. His profession required him to know people and how to get a positive response from them. Professional women, such as this one, required a strong approach. Her defiant look and stance when they first entered the hall had relaxed when he placed his hand next to her shoulder, and her authoritative air had lessened.

Now he only saw... How could he describe it? A sensual, delectable, and gorgeous woman. He liked the way she wore her hair. It was short, cropped in the back, and a little longer on the sides and top. Several black strands formed a bang that flattered her forehead. Her eyes were slightly slanted and the color of sienna. Her medium brown complexion was flawless except for a beauty mark about an inch to the right of her full, plum-colored, kissable lips. He almost touched that mole.

"I don't..." Chi had to clear her throat, her voice sounding too husky even to her. She had to stop this. "I don't think your wife would appreciate you leering at me this way." She moved to the right since his arm blocked any movement to her left. She was leaving. This wasn't appropriate behavior for either of them.

Then he touched her, halting her. At first, she wasn't looking at his face because his touch drew attention to the hand on her shoulder. When she did look into his eyes to tell him to remove his hand, the change she saw kept her from speaking or moving. The warmth in his eyes had been doused, leaving a cold, hard look there.

She considered asking him if he needed medical assistance. He looked to be in great pain. She watched him struggle to mask a look she couldn't quite define. Something was wrong with Parker, and she needed to assure herself that he wasn't ill.

Parker had managed not to think about Cynthia since walking into the hospital, but Chi's statement about a wife brought back those haunting memories of Cynthia

dying in his arms. Thinking about Cynthia while he stood there lusting after Dr. Chi Addams made him feel dirty.

Then he looked at the wall above Chi's head. The pale blue wall revealed no clues to the senseless destruction of a life. That destruction had torn down the support walls and comforting internal structure that used to hold his life together. Now he felt alone and crushed.

Why me? Parker's question to himself still went unanswered.

He hung his head dejectedly as he stared at her name badge. Looking back into her face, he said, "Dr. Addams, there is no wife, and never will be."

There was pain in that low muttered statement, a wound that no bandage or medicine could heal. "Oh," was all Chi managed to say. Something bad had happened to him. If she interpreted his statement correctly, it involved a woman.

As close as they stood, it would have been easy to reach out and wrap her arms around him and tell him it would get better. But that wasn't proper, professional behavior, nor did she know if it would ever get better. Whatever *it* was.

Parker, looking back at her name badge, said questioningly, "Chi?" Then he touched her name badge, lightly tracing the 'C' in her name. The pressure from his finger touching the badge pressed the metal latch of the plastic badge against her breast. She had never noticed how low on her chest she wore the badge until the backs of his fingers touched the top of the material covering her right breast. His touch was feather-light yet heavy with arousal. She glanced around to see if anyone had witnessed his blatant and stirring touch. This shouldn't be happening, but somehow, she didn't want it to stop.

Because of his sad look, she convinced herself it was therapeutic for Parker if she remained silent until he was able to regain his composure. Shouting at him and walking away would not help the situation, she concluded. If he wanted to trace a damn letter, let him. It wouldn't kill her. Besides, she already had one Ryan family member to worry about. Upsetting Parker Ryan could bring an unnecessary worry to his mother. After he finished tracing that one letter, she would unceremoniously move away and go back to check on patients.

Parker's whispered question sounded as though he was aching. "Chi? Is that a nickname?"

Her heart wanted to console him, but she didn't know the source of his pain. His question came from nowhere, and she assumed he was trying to rid his thoughts of the awful memory that held him hostage.

He was still looking at her name badge. "It's short for Chinzea," she said quietly. "Chinzea." He paused. "I like the sound of that."

Parker stood there remembering Cynthia's smile and laughter. She was so giving and so loving. *Why did she have to die like that? And why did I have to witness it and suffer from the nightmares of it?*

Her initials were 'CT.' Cynthia Thomas. After they married, it would have been Cynthia Ryan. He looked for an 'R' in the letters of the badge.

The badge read: 'Chi T. Addams, MD.'

"Dr. Chinzea Addams," he said softly as he underlined her name with the tip of his right index finger, "take care of my mother."

The internal spark Chi felt from his warm caress caused her to inhale softly. She stood straighter and stared at his strong chin. "Mr. Ryan!" Chi said abruptly, breaking his trance.

"Yes?" He watched Chi stare at his fingers on her badge. Then he noticed the impression of a hardened nipple through the material of the white lab coat.

What the hell am I doing! He thought. "Chi," he croaked, flushed at his own actions. He noticed the self-conscious and flustered look on her face. "I didn't mean to touch you like that."

She managed a few more coherent words. "We were talking about your mother's condition."

He'd forgotten about that. *How long had he been touching this woman?* He wondered. "I won't aggravate her hip or bring her fried chicken," he finally said, looking deeply into her eyes.

"I appreciate that. Now, excuse me. I need to finish my rounds." Chi moved away, heading swiftly down the hall.

Parker stood there, wanting to see her hips sway, but the long, white lab coat she wore prevented it.

Chi, he said to himself. Touching her made him feel...feel better. He wanted to do it again. Chi Addams somehow managed to take away some of his pain.

Chinzea. He liked the musical sound of it when she pronounced her name. He also liked the feel of her, too.

Chi managed to go around the corner and make it to the nurses' station before collapsing against the counter and placing her forehead on her hands as they gripped the counter. Her nerve endings were sizzling from Parker's obtrusive massage in the middle of the hall. She prayed no one else saw it. He had looked as surprised as she had felt from his actions. He hadn't realized what he was doing. If he could make her pulse rate increase and her libido do somersaults unintentionally, imagine what he could do if he really tried. The sensual thought boosted her heart rate.

"Dr. Addams?" A deep, male voice came from behind.

Startled, she stood up straight and turned. "Yes?" Thank God, it was the Orderly!

"A guy named Parker Ryan asked me to give this to you."

It was a note written on hospital stationery. She read it and swallowed hard.

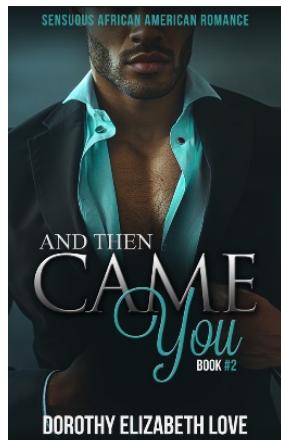
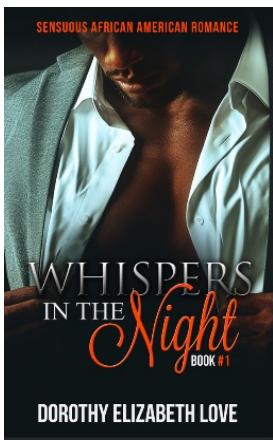
It simply read:

I'M SORRY ABOUT TOUCHING YOU THAT WAY.

I DON'T REGRET IT. I LIKE THE FEEL OF YOU.

The Ryan Family Series

Welcome to the passionate and emotionally charged world of the Ryan family, where love, desire, and personal triumphs collide in a series that will leave you breathless and yearning for more. This captivating trilogy, blending sensuous African American romance with compelling storytelling, follows the intertwined lives of these unforgettable characters, each navigating the tumultuous waters of love, loss, and redemption. The Ryan Family Series will make you cry, make you laugh, make you cheer.



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Parker Ryan has been running from heartbreak—until he meets Dr. Chi Addams. With undeniable chemistry between them, Parker must confront his past if he hopes to heal and embrace love again.

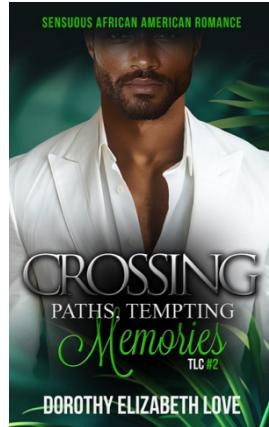
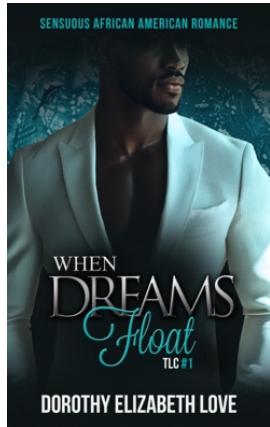
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Reese McCoy thrives on control, but Leila Chamberlain's fierce independence shakes his world. As their passion intensifies, Reese must choose between his business and the woman who has captured his heart.

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Let's Stay in Touch

Hi there!

I just wanted to take a moment to thank you—from the bottom of my heart—for spending your time reading a few pages or possibly one of my books. It means the world to me that you've stepped into this journey with me.

Writing has always been my passion; it's where my heart truly comes alive. Being able to share stories that entertain, stir emotions, and bring joy (and a dose of heat!) to readers is why I do what I do.

I hope you've found moments to smile, sigh, and maybe even blush as you read. Would you be willing to do me the honor of sharing my novels with others who support African American Romance?

With gratitude,



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Book-2 Excerpt

Ryan Family Series