

Lester needed to know whether his mother was alright. She was supposed to have returned home to Saint John's, Antigua, from a recent visit to her youngest son in Philipsburg, Sint Maarten. For the last four weeks, Lester had been without news of either.

He used to love to visit Kenneth on the 13-square-mile Dutch island of 34,000 inhabitants. Sint Maarten had more gaming machines per resident than any other country in the world. Kenneth's sudden wealth, the rumors of money laundering and cocaine trading, all convinced Lester he should stay away from his little brother till he could figure out what was going on.

Mostly, he wanted to gloat over his newfound bliss. Lester wanted his mother to know how right she'd been, Marilyn was a keeper.

Traffic was slow in the suburbs of Washington, DC. The bus sputtered along heaving through a campus the size of a small town toward the old complex, five miles away, where he lived with his

bride. All Lester had ever wanted in life was a good marriage. And being in love was only a plus.

Life was good. Intact families were hard to come by where he came from. No one in his circle of family and friends enjoyed anything resembling a steady relationship. He did what no other man he knew had done; he'd settled down and broken the curse.

Exhausted, and eager to make it back to their one-bedroom love nest, he'd call his mother first and then, cuddle up with the love of his life. After a long day at work, a snuggle helped them relax.

Without as much as a jingle from the keys, Lester opened the door to the cushy living room where the house phone rested, covered in darkness. No waft of a home-cooked meal was coming from the kitchen; there was no sign of life in the sleepy apartment. Maybe Marilyn was stuck at work again. That only meant one thing, he would be the one fixing dinner tonight.

In the stillness of his residence, he picked up the receiver preparing to dial. Coming from the phone, before he could press the first key, he made out the voice of a man. The man's voice had a tone he had never heard before. Piqued, Lester's fingers slipped as he focused, pricked his ears and listened to the stranger's voice.

"Leave him. Come with me instead. I'll take care of you." And then, a woman's. Marilyn's voice, he was sure!

"No, I can't leave him. I just married the man. I can't leave."

Lester breathed in sharply. His stomach twisted and he felt like he was going to throw up. Blood started flooding his brain. His nostrils flared, his chest tightened. Struggling to retain his wits about him, he felt like hollering. A sharp pain shot through his lungs. Listening carefully offered the best defense against a rush to judgment. There was no room for error with what he was fixing to do. After five agonizing minutes, exasperated with the silly

banter, back and forth, "Leave him," "No, I won't," Lester slammed the phone down so hard he broke it. Then he heard a gasp and smelled anguish coming from the bedroom. He'd heard things he wasn't supposed to hear. That much she knew!

In disbelief, Marilyn wanted to cover herself with the blanket, instead she tried to perk up from the California king size where she'd been lying half-naked, curled up against a down pillow. Her eyes widened and she braced for a violent confrontation. Eyes now round with frenzied anticipation, alert and upright, she jolted throwing the duvet to the floor.

Lester stormed into the room. His stout frame, reminiscent of a quarterback's, filled the bedroom door frame and she suddenly cowered like a battered woman, drained of any inclination to engage in a fight she could not win. He watched angrily as his wife shrank into the bed, making herself look smaller than she already was. Seeking

mercy. He hardened his gaze, while she softened hers. Eventually, Lester looked at her and saw her flinch and knew that he was the cause of her fear. Shaking his head, he sat down at the edge of the bed and stared at the wall. He tried to take several breaths to calm himself down. In the heavy silence, a sharp coldness descended into the room.

Lester's baby face, square jaw, large forehead, and burning eyes reminded her of why she loved him. She relaxed. he got up violently. She dropped the bedroom phone to her feet and made herself so small again, even her breasts appeared scrunched; her mouth was agape, she was preparing for an abusive rant from a man she had never meant to anger. She loved him! Menacingly, Lester stepped closer to the bed. Marilyn backed all the way up to the headboard, then let herself slide on the bed where the pillow met the board, lifting her arms as if to defend against a blow. Witnessing the dread he had inspired, Lester froze, then sat down again quietly

at the foot of the bed in a reluctant gesture of appeasement, keeping a stern lock on her lowered gaze. Hurt, vexed, full of rage, at that moment a gulf separated them, threatening to tear asunder a bond she had made fragile. She spoke first.

"Lester, I love you, honey. I said no. Did you hear me say, no?"

"You said no. Why did you have to say it so many times? Why did you have to say it at all?"

"I said no. That is all that matters!"

"Maybe to you. Had he not had our number, you wouldn't have had to say anything at all." "I said no, honey. I don't want anyone other than my husband." "I'm glad I was here just in time to hear this, because now I know you're no good. Not good enough for me anyway. You're not the lady I thought you were." Marilyn reached for him, but he shrugged her off. "Why can't you hear me? What is it I did that was so wrong?" "I think you should go, woman. If you don't know, I got no time to 'splain it to

you. Nothing else to say to you. Leh me lone.”

“Honey, please. I haven’t done anything wrong. I met that guy at work. We became friends. Nothing happened, I swear.”

“Okay, I hear you. All the same, I can’t trust you. I think you get that already.”

“You’re making a mistake honey. Please, don’t...”

“How long has this been going on? He asks you to leave your husband. What made him feel it was okay to even ask you that? Oh, I know. It was you. Your attitude. Please go. Me nah like um.”

No longer in the mood for eating or calling his mother, Lester grabbed the duvet off the floor, then went to the living room to crash on the large sofa. He spent every night shriveled up in the fetal position that week lamenting the time, money and effort he wasted on someone undeserving of his love and commitment. How could he have been so blind and so stupid? She was a

knockout, but he was the one left feeling the pain.

It hadn't been six months since the wedding ceremony. An annulment was still an option. What had gone wrong? What had he done wrong? He had waited so long to find the perfect woman. How could a reserved, family-oriented, so tastefully put together, God-fearing woman with the face of an angel sink so low?

He thought about her. Her body, her lips, her smile and the way she would ride him each night. Lester thought she loved him and never figured she would try and deceive him.

Stepping into the bedroom each morning to retrieve the clothes he needed that day, seeing Marilyn's lascivious body spread bare onto the bed greeting his manhood, inviting a reconciliation felt like salt on a fresh wound. The firmness of her shapely body, the sweet caramel appeal of her skin, the taunting fullness of her perky breasts jogged his memory of better

days, before he knew how low she could go. Knowing was punishment enough. To jump on top of her while she lay, launch a frontal attack to avenge the outrage, take the mound of Venus surrendered for solace, and do with it as he pleased, abuse it, chastise it with all the fury he could corral, pounce on it and then discharge with tremendous animus, and finally, allow calm to return; no, that would be capitulation to evil. An easy way out, undeserved absolution, for the sullied, and unworthy. She needed to suffer and feel the pain she had caused him.

Lester too had courted temptation at work, she wasn't the only one, but he did it only with his eyes and chose to hold his tongue; no words were ever exchanged; no action followed. He would do nothing to precipitate his downfall. Being married to a queen was that important to him. He'd even shut his treacherous eyes when the lure of another woman's flesh got to be too much to bear, until the rush of lust dissipated. By allowing a predator

in the sacred space of their intimacy, by toying with the profane, Marilyn had ruined the magic. Lester no longer imagined himself unique. Marilyn no longer seemed special to him, either. They became ordinary, and in his eyes, she even turned ugly.

His dream of marriage had been stolen. He was a child of the curse. Who did he think he was anyway? How could he forget that he was the child of a family of broken hearts?

The dream of domestic bliss, being best friends with his spouse, having fun, enjoying time together, reveling in the comfort of knowing you have a safe place to fall was not to be for Lester; instead a familiar dysfunction was beckoning like an old wretched low down and dirty friend. Who did he think he was anyway? How could he forget he was the child of his mother, and the grandchild of his grandmother? A long line of godforsaken people who had witnessed thieves steal their joy, along with the heart of a beloved. A child of the

curse. Now, he too was getting acquainted with a thief. That was one thing, but another entirely to aid the thief by relinquishing his possession. Once despair reared its head, hope left. Lester lost his faith. Marilyn wasn't his to stop. Once the robbery occurred, once the incident with Marilyn occurred, he called his mother. He still remembered to worry about her. She'd always been there for him.