

Chapter One: Love To Love You

The force of his thrusts pushed her to the edge of the four-post bed. She was lathered as much in satisfaction as she was in sweat, exhilarated and weary – and unable to hold herself atop the mattress against his unrelenting strikes. A different kind of man would have postponed the passion at least long enough to pull up her naked, vulnerable body.

But Solomon Singletary was hardly one to subscribe to conventional thinking or deeds. He always had a point to prove and always was committed to proving it – with actions, not words.

And so, Solomon thrust on . . . and on, until they, as one, careened onto the carpet together, she cushioning his fall from beneath him. So paralyzed in pleasure was she that she never felt the impact of the tumble. Rather, she found humor that they made love clean across the bed and onto the floor, and she found delight that the fall did not disengage them.

Solomon lost neither his connection to her nor his cadence, and stroked her on the carpet just as he had on the sheets – purposefully, unrelentingly, deeply.

“What are you trying to do?” she said. “Make love to me? Or make me love you?”

Solomon did not answer – not with words. He continued to speak the language of passion, rotating his hips forward, as one would a Hula-Hoop. Her shapely, chocolate legs were airborne and his knees were carpet-burned raw, but hardly did he temper his pace.

His answer: He made her love him through making love to her.

She finally spoke the words that slowed Solomon. “OK, OK,” she said. “OK.” She gave in, and that pleased Solomon. She would have said the words earlier – before they tumbled off the bed – but he never allowed her to catch her breath. All she could make were indecipherable sounds.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if I’m pregnant,” she said. “If I wasn’t ovulating, I am now. . . Damn.”

Solomon kissed her on her left shoulder and rolled off her and onto the floor, on his wide, strong back. He looked up toward the dark ceiling illuminated by the single candle on the nightstand, pleased with himself so much that a smile creased his face.

Then he dozed off right there on the floor. She didn’t bother to wake him. Instead, she reached up and pulled the comforter off the bed and over both of them. She nestled her head on his hairy chest, smiled to herself and drifted off to sleep with him, right there on the floor.

That was the last time he saw Michele – and the last time she saw him – and the first time Solomon had The Dream.

It would recur every so often over the next several years. He never could recall how it began, but it ended with Solomon slamming shut a tall steel door and quickly locking out a crying woman who chased him. Once the deadbolt was turned, Solomon wiped his damp brow and let out a sigh of relief – then he turned around and was smashed in the head by someone with a golf club.

At that point in the dream, Solomon would wake up, sweating and checking his head for blood. It was that real. Every time.

“I wish I knew what the hell it meant,” he said to his closest friend, Raymond. He and Ray became tight five years earlier, when they got paired together during a round of golf at Mystery Valley in Lithonia, just east of Atlanta. They had a good time, exchanged numbers and ended up becoming not only golf buddies, but also great friends.

Ray was very much the opposite of Solomon. He was not as tall but just as handsome, and he was charismatic and likeable, just in a different way. Solomon was sort of regal to some, arrogant to most. Ray was more every man. He had a wife of seven years, Cynthia, and a six-year-old son, Ray-Ray. He was stable.

Solomon knew a lot of people, but only liked some and trusted just a few. He really only tolerated most, especially the various women who ran in and out of his life like some nagging virus. “In the end,” he told Ray, “the one person you

can trust is yourself. And even with that, how many times have you lied to yourself?”

Ray figured there was something deep inside Solomon that would bring him to such feelings, and he figured if Solomon wanted him to know, he would have told him. So he never asked. Ray and Solomon coveted each other's friendship and had a certain trust. And they shared most everything with each other.

“I've had this dream at least a dozen times,” Solomon continued. “Why? I can't identify anyone in it. And I don't know why they are after me. It's crazy.”

“Man, it's just a dream. Don't trip on it,” Ray said. “Dreams are crazy. I have the same dream over and over about marrying Beyonce'. You don't see me trippin' on that.”

That was Ray's way – to provide levity when possible, which, for him, was just about all the time. His upbeat disposition seldom changed. If the Falcons lost a football game, he'd show disgust and disappointment for a while, but he'd let it go.

Solomon Singletary was not that way. He was almost solemn at times, even-tempered at others, but quite adept at pulling people close to him. He had a unique ability to be open but remain private. He could be disinterested but still engaging. And those unique qualities made people open up to him, especially women.

“You are so interesting,” Michele told him that last night together. “We have dated for six months. You act like you don’t love me, but I know you do; I can tell by how we make love. Why won’t you say you love me?”

“Come here,” he said, and Michele came over to him, to the edge of her bed. “Don’t get caught up on what I say to you,” he said, “or don’t say. Worry about what I do to you, how I make you feel.”

“Is everything about sex with you?” Michele said.

“See, I wasn’t even talking about sex. I was talking about how you feel inside, when we’re together, when you think of me,” Solomon said. “That’s more important than what I say. Right?”

Before she could answer, he leaned over and kissed her on the lips softly and lovingly.

“What does that kiss say?” he asked.

“It says you want to make love,” Michele said sarcastically. “Some things can get lost in translation. That’s why you should say it. Plus, sometimes it’s just good to hear.”

“Hear this,” Solomon said, and he kissed Michele again. This time, it was not a peck, but a sustained coming together of lips and tongue and saliva. He leaned her back on the bed, and she watched as he pulled his tank top over his head, revealing his expansive chest and broad shoulders.

He smiled at her and she smiled back and the talk of saying "I love you" ceased.

"Whatever happened to that girl?" Ray asked Solomon. "You regret not having her now?"

"Regret? What's that?" Solomon said. "You make a decision and you stick to it. No looking back. But a few years ago, I saw a woman briefly who reminded me of her, and it made me think about calling her."

"You thought about it? Why didn't you call her?" Ray wanted to know.

"Hard to say. Young, dumb. Silly," Solomon answered. "What would have been the point? I got a job here with Coke and wasn't about to do the long distance thing. So what was the point?"

"Well, did you at least breakup on good terms?" Ray asked.

"The last time I saw her, she was on the floor next to her bed, sleeping. I got up and put on my clothes and left. The next day, the movers came and I drove here, to Atlanta."

"Wait," Ray said, standing up. "She didn't know you were moving out of town?"

"Nah," Solomon said, looking off. "Nah."

"How can you just roll out on the girl like that?" Ray said. "That's cold, man. That's cold."