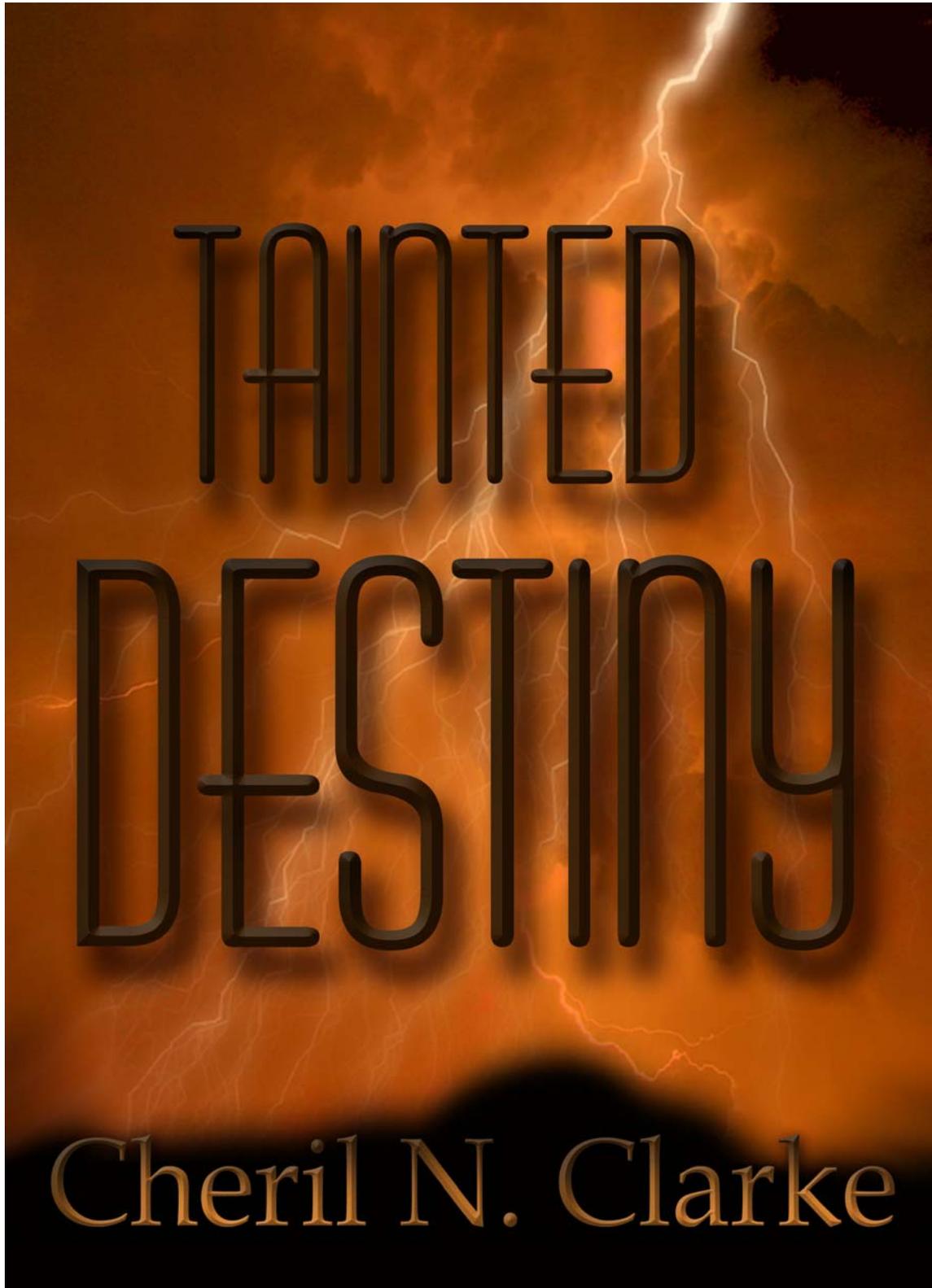


Tainted Destiny by Cheril N. Clarke



Chapter 1

A passenger of the wind, she floated in and out of my life as she pleased without regard to how it affected me. But foolishly I exercised a level of patience and persistence that I never knew possible to chase something I thought was fate, love...destiny. I loved her hard, and with everything I had. Now that I look back I think I may have even been obsessed with her. Something about this woman was magnetic, pulling me toward her even when her actions should have pushed me away. With golden skin, blue-gray eyes, neat dreadlocks, a beautiful body, and a smile to die for; without embellishment, that was Jessie—a symbol of perfection. My attraction to her was swift, definite, and of an intensity I'd never experienced. There were times with her that felt as though our souls mingled with each other though our bodies didn't. I knew her...or so I thought, but I was wrong. I didn't know anything. I was being led by my misguided heart down a lonely road of misfortune.

I remember the day Jessie and I met on the subway just as clearly as if it had happened the day before. An incredible nervousness swept over me as I struggled to muster the courage to approach her. She was wearing tight fitting black leather pants, high-heels and a tan corset top, but it was a rainbow pendent on her necklace that made me take a chance on assuming she was lesbian or at least bisexual. After a few glances back and forth I walked over to her, holding a flyer for a gay pride event, hoping to

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use it as a conversation starter. It worked. She fell for my corny pick-up line and gave me her contact information. I was elated.

Though she was elusive, Jessie and I did eventually settle down, initially in New York and then to Miami where we relocated after she had accepted a promotion and raise from the firm for which she was working.

Going to Miami was a big deal for me because I had painful memories from my childhood there. My parents died when my sister, Khedara and I were young, and shortly after, we were split up and bounced around from foster home to foster home as seemingly unwanted twin girls. I didn't want to go back there, but not as badly as I wanted to be with Jessie, so I went and never once dug up anything from my past. I didn't even visit my parents' gravesite, which I now kind of regret. I just tried to forge a life with Jessie and focus on the present and future.

We experienced a short period of domestic calm before drama entered our relationship. Surprise, temptation, fear, ecstasy, a near death encounter, insecurity, jealousy, infidelity, turmoil and pain—you name it, we experienced it until the point of my becoming emotionally bankrupt. Our dysfunctional relationship didn't work. We sold our condo. She moved out and I relocated to the familiarity of New York, ready to move on.

I sat staring out a taxicab window and tried to relax as it sped through the wet streets. The hurried people on sidewalks and the unparalleled hustling and bustling to get to one's destination was a comforting scene. It's funny how a noisy, filthy, and crowded place like Manhattan could be so welcoming. There was only one thing from my life with Jessie that would resume and that was my taking a position at WSOL, a radio station at which I used to work. As my cab driver maneuvered through the busy streets, my mind wandered back in time. A sigh escaped me as I remembered what I'd been through over the last couple of years, but I shook my head to free myself from my own thoughts. It worked. I rode the rest of the way with a clear mind.

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After the cabbie dropped me off, I stopped for a bagel with cream cheese and glanced at the *Daily News* but decided against buying it. *The news is always depressing*, I thought. I took my breakfast and quickly headed into the radio station. My co-worker and old friend, Devonte' Parks was on the air in the middle of his morning show. I waved at him when passing his booth and he gave me a broad smile.

I said hello and talked with a few other people before filling out forms and doing a urine test, the same way I'd done the first time I was hired. My prior employment there didn't exempt me from their background checks. Since I didn't actually have to do any work, it was basically a free day for me. The engineer working with Devonte' hated the morning shift and was grateful to take the afternoon or even midnight shift if I wanted my old time slot. I definitely wanted it back so I could work with Devonte' and be a team the way we used to be.

After he wrapped up his show, we had a late lunch at Wendy's, and I told him the entire story of how things ended with Jessie, starting with my attraction to another woman.

Devonte' took the last bite of his chicken sandwich and drank his soda. "Well I don't want to rehash everything. You're about to start a new life. This time around you'd better listen to me when I tell you to leave a woman alone."

"Yeah, yeah."

"Don't 'yeah yeah' me. Anyway, where are you living now?"

"I'm in Brooklyn—Bed-Stuy. I didn't want to go back to Harlem. Actually I'll probably buy an apartment after I get settled in with work. I signed a six-month lease with a month-to-month option afterward."

"How the hell did you find a lease like that?" Devonte' asked.

"The lady needed the money and was willing to be flexible. I paid four months rent up front."

"Oh."

I drank a little water before speaking again. "Are you still in Crown Heights?"

"Nope, I bought a co-op in New Jersey."

"Jersey?"

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“Yeah, but it’s just on the other side of the George Washington bridge in Ft. Lee. It’s cheaper to buy over there. Plus I wanted a change from Brooklyn.”

“Apparently so. That’s a big change.”

“The commute isn’t bad. It’s cool, you know?”

“Yeah.”

A few seconds of silence passed before he looked at his watch. “Man, I’m tired. Listen, it’s good to have you back. I missed your ass while you were gone.”

“I missed you too, Devonte’.”

“All right, enough of that.” He stood up. “Let’s call it a day. We’ll have plenty of time to catch up. Right now I need to go to sleep.”

Following his lead, I too got up. “Okay. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

We went our separate ways, and I continued to soak up the city that I’d so badly missed, but I missed Jessie more.

Things were still fresh in my mind despite my wishing they would go away. They came with force and were frequent and strong, especially at night. I wondered what Jessie was doing, how she was feeling, and who she was with. I knew I shouldn’t care, but I did. I never loved anyone the way that I loved Jessie, and I wondered why, since I never totally had all of her. I didn’t know it then, but through my soul searching I began to wonder if I ever loved her at all. I started to believe that it was the possibilities of what I *thought* I could have with her that I loved so much it ached. For whatever reason, when I saw her, I saw a representation of heaven, nirvana—paradise on Earth—but it was an illusion. Jessie was a mirage. It wasn’t her fault. It was the power of my own mind and the desires of my own soul that made me stay with her and go through what I did. My revelation didn’t make me hurt any less though.

In an effort to speed up the process of getting over her, I buried many feelings. All I had to occupy my mind was work and a couple of new friends who lived in my neighborhood, but it was

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difficult to keep my mind from wandering to her. I could still hear her voice in my head thinking she was in a room with me. I could remember the scent of her and remember the softness of her touch. The first time we made love our souls conceived a link that to this day I feel hasn't been fully broken. In my mind, I lost my lover and my friend. But I'd also lost something else. I lost my idol, my model of perfection. To break my obsession with Jessie I needed to redesign my mind, reprogram my feelings, renege on what my heart told my mind all of those nights before we moved to Miami when I craved her like a stray animal desperately searching for sustenance. I needed to sever the link.

Excerpt from Chapter 14

I pulled Devonte' aside. "Hey, I'm bailing out of here, man."

"Where are you trying to rush off to?"

"Home."

"Why? Do you have some girl laid up waiting for you?"

"Not exactly." I cleared my throat. "I mean yes, but I wouldn't say it quite like that. She's not just some girl."

"A new one, Sadira?"

"No." I took sip from my glass. "Tricia."

His facial expression soured. "I thought you two broke up. She called me yesterday, but I didn't get a chance to call her back. What's going on?"

I didn't know if I should tell him her business or not. "She's going through some stuff right now. She's hurt, but it's *not* my fault. I'm just trying to pick up the pieces."

"What the hell you mean she's hurt? Damn it, now I feel bad for not calling her back sooner. Tell me what's going on, Sadira."

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“Calm down, Devonte’. She’s not physically hurt, but she found out that some chick she was seeing is actually married to a man. Tricia thought she forgot something at the girl’s house and went back to get it, and he answered the door.”

His eyes narrowed. “Did that motherfucker touch my cousin? Because if he did, I swear to God I’ll...”

“No! I said she wasn’t physically hurt. It’s just her feelings.”

“And what about you? What is she doing at your place if y’all broke up?”

“I ran into her at a bar last night and told her to leave with me. We didn’t sleep together or anything like that, man. I care about her and didn’t want her to be alone.”

He looked as though he were trying to figure out if I was lying.

“Trust me. I’ve always had her best interest at heart, Devonte’. You know that.”

“I know. I know. Let’s go.”

“Where?”

“To your place.”

I didn’t question him. Instead I got up and followed him out of the radio station.

On the train, he said that he knew if it were truly only her heart that was broken she’d be fine in time, but he wanted to see for himself that nothing was physically wrong with her. I assured him she was okay and told him that I thought I was ready for her, but now the timing seemed to be all messed up.

“I didn’t even know she was seeing anyone after you.”

“I don’t know what to tell you. Neither did I.”

Before he could say more, I saw Olivia’s familiar face at the other end of the train. *Shit*. I tried not to make eye contact with her, but she saw me and walked over.

“Sadira, hi.”

“Go away, Olivia.”

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Devonte' looked her up and down. He knew of her, but not what she looked like. She said nothing to him and proceeded to talk to me. Trying to ignore her didn't work. Then the train slowed to a stop in the tunnel. *Oh this is just great. Just freaking great!*

Aggravated, Devonte' glared at her before speaking. "Get the hell out of here!" he said loudly enough for other passengers to hear. He was generally an intimidating guy standing at 6'2" and 220 pounds of muscle.

"And who are you?" she asked. She rolled her eyes, dismissing him.

I saw him exhale to restrain himself.

"Olivia, enough of this shit. Go away, god damn it, just go *away*." I told her.

Olivia put her hand on my shoulder and my tolerance for her immediately went to zero. I turned around quickly and pushed her. "Look you crazy bitch, I told your ass there is no us. Do not call me. Do not think of me. I can't stand you. Back up, and don't touch me again unless you want a real problem!"

Why do I always end up causing a scene with her?

"Sadira!" She yelled.

"What?"

"Why are you doing this? That bitch you were with last night doesn't want you. *I* love you."

What? I hadn't a clue as to what she was talking about. The train was moving again and wasn't far away from where Devonte' and I needed to get off.

"I know you hear me talking to you, Sadira."

I ignored her. I was sick of her. A bunch of people were staring at us and whispering. By then I was too angry to be embarrassed. I could feel beads of sweat rolling down my back and building on my forehead. This kind of drama was the last thing I needed Devonte' to witness. *That bitch you were with...* was she in the bar or was she hiding outside of my apartment? How did she know I was with someone or was she bluffing?

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“Do you think I’m scared of him?” she asked motioning toward Devonte’. “I’m not afraid of him. You’re really going to regret what you did to me.” She tried to rush me, but she bumped into Devonte’ and he held her back.

“The *only* reason you’re not on the floor is because you’re a woman.” He held her wrist. “But I will shake you until your unborn kids come out with a speech impediment if you don’t knock this shit off!” There was a thick vein bulging in his neck.

The train finally made it into the station. We got off, with everyone staring at us. Things were happening too fast. Devonte’ let Olivia go and we walked off the train, but that didn’t get rid of her. She ran out just before the doors closed and took a swing at me. Quickly, I ducked and missed it. She lost her balance and fell on the platform.

“Stay the hell away from me, Olivia!”

She didn’t get off the floor; she just stared at us.

“Come on, Devonte’.” I was so annoyed.

He was fuming. “Sadira, you better fix that fucking problem. It took all of my strength not to smack that girl. Fix it!” He sounded more like a scolding father than a friend.

“I will. I will.”

We walked up the stairs of the subway station. It wasn’t until we exited the turnstiles that I realized we weren’t even at the stop closest to my apartment. *Whatever*. We went above ground and hailed a cab home. A feeling of worry started to surface as we rode the short distance. Olivia was obviously psychotic. She was following me—she was stalking me!