

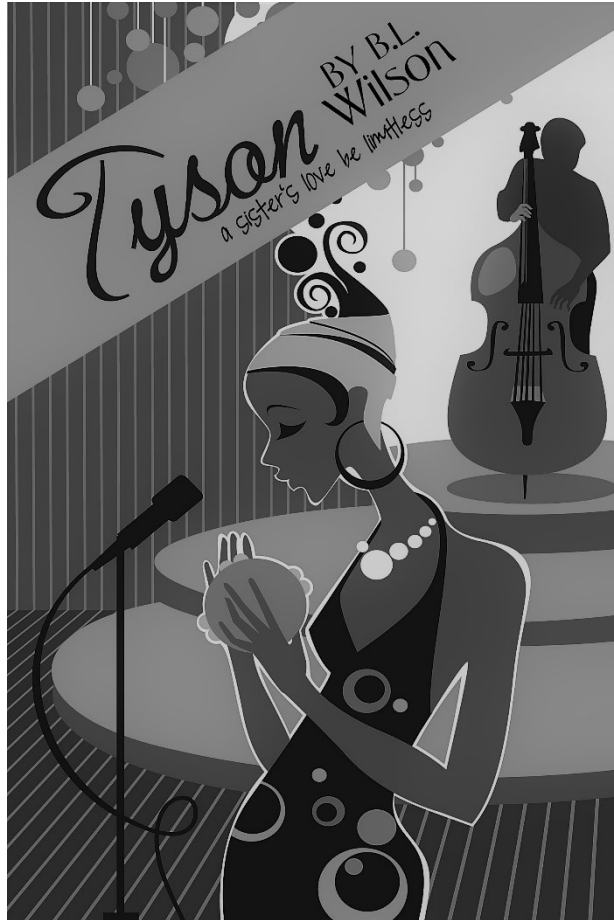
Tyson

BY B.L. Wilson

a sister's love be limitless



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Tyson, a sister's love be limitless
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Chapter One ... Mr. Charlie Gots Bad News

Tyson signal me to go through a red light in a hurry like the devil chasin' us. He wave a hand. I pulls my car over an' park alongside the street. He walk with heavy feets over to lean inside my old car. The car, it be a battered 1923 Ford that seen better days in nine years on this here earth.

"Sorry I ain't goin' with you to Atlantic City today, Girl. I got me some business to take of first." He smile that big dumb grin of his that womens finds pleasin'.

I glarin' at him. "But, Tyson, you says us kin..."

Tyson hold up a big ole hand an' I stops sayin' what I thinkin'. "Jest stays on this here road for 'nother mile, you be over the bridge. Then you gots to be lookin' for the sign say Atlantic City. Follow them road signs, Lea-lee. You'll do jest fine. Call me at the shop when you gits there, okay?" He taps on the roof of my car.

That the signal for me to git on my way. I starts the old car an' then I eyes Tyson in the rearview mirror. I jest sets there, waitin' for the ole car to warm up. I watchin' him turn round to head in the opposite direction. "Humph! I bet I knows his bizness!" I mutters. "She waitin' at the bar he done left, swingin' them legs of hers like she tired of waitin'."

As I drivin', I thinkin' how Tyson womans more like trouble than bizness. I suppose Tyson old nuff to know the difference. I ain't got no right stoppin' a mans from takin' pleasure where he find it. I been known to git pleasure myself now an' then. Seem to me, it been more then than now. Yep, that the second time I goes somewheres without Tyson since us come up North. It last time too, but us git to that later.



The next time I seen Tyson, it a week later. Police stopped by my rooming house to ask me to identify his body. I shoulda known somethin' wrong when I seen that mean-lookin' white mans tryin' to peek through them curtains on the first floor. The white mans say he a detective at the Thirty-Second Precinct. He say how I needs to come downtown with him. Then he say he sorry to tell me my brother dead. When he say that, I thinks, *Why he sorry?* He a white mans. He gots the whole world to stomp in an' own. Ain't nothin' for him to be sorry 'bout. But me, I is 'nother story. I a big ole nigger gal with lots o' troubles an' plenty to be sorrowful 'bout. I doesn't know no nigger folks ain't sorrowful 'bout somethin'. I tells the white mans I gotta git my coat from upstairs in my room.

He frown up when he look at me, then he mutter, "Hurry up, Gal. I ain't got all day to spend with no nigger business."

Police never take his hat off in my boarding house like my mama learn Tyson an' me when us visits inside a body's house. I shrugs, but I doesn't say nothin'; I jest walks up them stairs. Before I gits to my room, I sees Eartha comin' at me.

"Who that white mans downstairs, Leonia? He look like one of them grizzly bears my daddy shoot for stealin' Mister Charlie chickens when us was sharecroppin'. He sure be one evil-lookin' peckerwood. Musta got up on wrong side of bed, if he have a bed." Eartha whisperin', then she gigglin' an' grinnin' at me.

Eartha Coleman an' me been sniffin' round each other like two bitch dogs in heat for the last six months. Us ain't never done nothin', but I sure havin' fun thinkin' on it. Her, Sybil, an' me works at Miller Laundry on Hunnred an' Twenty-Fifth Street. Eartha the one tell me 'bout the room for rent next door to her. When I come to look, I likes that rooming house. It mostly red brick with beige stone round windows, doors, an' roof. The roof look like it gots grey shingles an' set 'bout three stories up from the ground. 'Nother floor underground. The rooming house only five blocks from Miller Laundry. House gots plenty heat when winter come, an' I gots a window to open for them hot summers in the city when they ain't no air. Tyson live seven blocks over an' one block down on West Hunnred an' Twenty-Second Street an' Seventh Avenue.

On Friday nights, us been known to play cards in the front parlor of the house till the cows comes home Saturday mornin'. Anyways, I tell Eartha how I gots to go with the police downtown somewheres an' I be back in a while.

Eartha eyes gits big as a scared rabbit in a trap when she heared Mister Charlie be the police an' I goin' downtown with him. "You ain't done nothin', is you, Lea?" she say, lookin' at me.

"Ain't 'bout me, Eartha." I shrugs, but I don't tell her nothin' else. I doesn't believe my brother dead like police say.

Eartha raise her eyebrow like she wantin' to ask me what it 'bout, but she don't say nothin'. She jest look at me.

That police git impatient waitin' for me in the parlor room. He poke his head round the corner an' yell, "Come on, Gal. I ain't got all day. Let's go. Huh?" He lookin' up at me standin' on them stairs with my coat in my hand. He pull up his jacket sleeve to stare at his watch and say, "I'm gonna be late if we don't leave right now!" Then he take four long strides that put him at the door. He be outside on the sidewalk before I knows it.

I move down them steps like greased lightnin', pushin' my arm through the sleeve of my coat so fast, I mostly busts a seam. I heared the thread pop, but when I looks, I doesn't see no hole yet. It my favorite Sunday-goin'-to-church coat. I surely glad it okay. I loves them seven mother o' pearl buttons down the front of my coat. Them buttons feels good to my fingers an' they looks pretty too.

I outside faster than I kin spell it. The door on the passenger side of the police car unlocked, so I git inside. Police surely be in a mighty hurry 'cause he pull off without waitin' till I close the door. When he stop at the next red light, I feels his eyes on me.

“You married, Gal? Or got yourself a boyfriend?” police say, lookin’ me up an’ down when he asked them question, then he stare at my titties for a time.

Mister Charlie don’t never change, do he? It don’t matter whether he livin’ down south or up north, he still the same bad mans. The police with the sour face lookin’ like he wanna ball me in this here car. All I gots to do is be winkin’ an’ openin’ my legs. He don’t care that I goin’ to see if my brother be dead. He jest wanna put his root stick down there. I shoulda catch the train to the place where Tyson be, ‘ceptin’ I doesn’t know where the place at. I pretends I doesn’t know what he wantin’, so I finds sumptin’ catch my eye outta the window. I heard him sigh.

At the next red light, police say, “How old was your brother?”

“Tyson be thirty next birthday,” I say. I still lookin’ outta the window.

“What did he used to do for living, Gal?”

“He be a butcher for Mr. Schwartz.” I wonderin’ why he gabbin’ like Tyson dead. My brother ain’t dead. Them police git they niggers mixed up all time. If Tyson be dead, how come I ain’t feelin’ nothin’ in my belly? Tyson an’ me gots a special connection. Leastways, that what my mother say when us little. She say when she spank Tyson, I cry. If Mama spank me, Tyson actin’ like he in pain in the same place she hittin’ on me. When us come to Harlem, seem like us connection git lost, but I knows it comin’ back.

“How long he worked there?” The police writ down what I say in a little book he keep on the seat.

I wants the police to shut up with all them questions, but I doesn’t say that. I needs me some quiet so I kin think on what to do next. I twists up my face, thinkin’ ‘bout the answer. “He been workin’ for Mr. Schwartz mostly five years.”

I ‘members when Tyson git the job in Mister Schwartz’s butcher shop. Us walkin’ round Harlem, studyin’ all them tall buildings. Tyson say he can’t believe he here up north away from Daddy. He only gots two dimes in his pocket, but he happy as a sunny day. Us walks round, lookin’ at more tall buildings. That when he seen a sign in the store window of a small shop. It say “Butcher Wanted.” Tyson grins ‘cause he know if it got anything to do with cuttin’ up animals, he done it. He knowed how to gut an’ slice cow, pig, lamb, goat, chicken, duck, goose, bear, deer, raccoon, turtle, an’ snake. He try his hand at ‘gator one time, but he say it too tough. He save the skin to make belts an’ a wallet.

Tyson an’ Mr. Schwartz gab for over an’ hour. He say he jest pluck all them words he need right out of the air. Mr. Schwartz don’t stand a ghost of chance not to hire Tyson the way he be smooth with gabbin’. He show Mr. Schwartz how he cut the side of beef hangin’ in the backroom. He gots the job the same day an’ been workin’ there ever since. Mr. Schwartz treat Tyson like his son. Maybe better than his own son ‘cause his son lazy. His son be too lazy to git up early to help his daddy carry meat from the downtown warehouses along Twelfth Avenue near Fourteenth Street. Tyson up before the sun, so he an’ Mr. Schwartz git to them places early. They gits the best meat an’ prices goin’ early. They loads meat in Mr. Schwartz’s old truck. Him an’ Mr. Schwartz come back to Harlem to cut all them meats an’ sell them in the shop. Tyson say Mr. Schwartz thinkin’ ‘bout retirin’. Tyson say the old man thinkin’ ‘bout turnin’ the shop over to him to run.

Tyson don't got much money saved to buy the shop, but he want it bad. He never own nothin', so this be his chance.

"He like being a butcher, Gal?" The police stop what he writ to study me.

I nods. "Yes, Sir, he do."

"Did your brother have enemies? Anybody wanna see him dead?"

I shakes my head. I ain't wanna be thinkin' 'bout all them jealous husbands an' boyfriends Tyson done aggravated over years with his gift of gab. Tyson say he good at jelly-rollin' as he be at gabbin'. I think he tellin' stories till I watch them womens at them rent parties us goes to. Them womens swarm round him like he a honeycomb. Them womens slip papers in his pocket with they address or writ they names inside matchbooks. He say womens follows him home too.

When I asks what he do with them womens followin' him home, Tyson jest laugh. He say, "I invite 'em womens to my room. What you think I does with 'em, Lea-lee?" Then he claimin' how them never wants to leave.

The police sigh an' writ some more in book. "What about you, Gal? What do you do?"

I fiddles with the buttons on my coat before I answers. My fingers loves the smoothness of them pearl buttons. "I works in a laundry."

"Where?"

"Miller's Laundry that be 'bout five blocks from my rooming house."

"How long you been working there, Gal?"

"Bout mostly five years."

The police pull off the road to writ some mo' in little book. He finish writin', then stick his book inside him pocket. He stare at my titties again an' lick him skinny lips. I think he wanna see my titties naked. I tryin' not to look at him face, but he catch my eye. I surprised 'cause the police gots pretty navy blue eyes, but they settin' in a mean face. I looks away, out the window again till the police finally starts the car an' pull onto the road again.



'Nother white mans meet me at the first floor of city morgue. He dressed in a white coat like doctors wear, but I doesn't think he no doctor. He tell me to wait for a minute whilst he an' police who brung me gabs in loud whispers. I not close nuff to hear all the words them sayin', but mans in white coat point to sumpthin' in the file he have in his hand. Police read it, then he frown. 'Nother man standin' with man in white coat. He wear a suit like police, but he gots a hat on low. Hat cover the man's face an' I can't see it. Mean-face police stare at me, then he say sumpthin' to the mans in the hat, then he say sumpthin' to the white coat mans. Police shrug, then I heard him say loud-like. "Whatcha want from me? They're animals! They're used to that shit."

The mans wearin' the coat look 'shamed at what police say, but he don't say nothin'. He walk over to me, then he look down at the papers on a board he gots. He say, "Follow me."

Two mans in suits stay where they be. I thinks mans in the hat be police too. I walks behind the man in the white coat to the elevator. I hates elevators ever since I done rode one with Tyson.

If God want us up and down so fast, he give us wings. I wonderin' if they be stairs to where us goin', but I ain't know the white mans good nuff to ask him nothin'. I steps in, closes my eyes, and holds my breath. The mans in the white coat press a button on metal board. Us rides to the basement, then us gits out. I thinks my belly still be in elevator. The mans make a right turn an' I follows behind him. Us standin' in front of two swingin' doors like I seen in a cowboy movie once. Only them cowboy door ain't gots tiny windows in them like these here doors gots.

The man push the doors an' hold 'em open for me. Once us gits inside, I seen the room filled with stainless steel tables on one side of the room. Them tables is long an' with wood legs. Tables gots deep drains at the feets of 'em. They gots long hoses at head of each table. When I looks round, I thinkin' how this be a mighty nice room since I in love with sparkle of stainless steel. Then I 'members I weren't here for no pleasure or nice marble tables. I here for Tyson. This room gittin' too cold, so I pulls my coat tighter round my neck an' starts rubbin' my hands together. I shakin' a little bit from coldness.

Why it be so cold in this room?

"Follow me," mans in the white coat say, then he walk over to other side of the room.

The other side of the room filled with wooden drawers lined up in rows. I notices how all them drawers gots numbers on them. I frowns when I seen all them numbers.

The mans look on the papers he carryin'. He run a finger down a list, then he stops at sumpthin' in the middle of the paper. He nod, then he step over to a drawer with Number 1112. He tug on the handle.

I watchin' him. I prayin' Tyson ain't inside. Jest 'cause I ain't seen Tyson in more than a week don't mean he be dead. He been what I call missin' before.

One time, I ain't heared nothin' from Tyson for three months, but he ain't dead. He jest go live with this one womans. He say he almost got hitched, but at last minute, he say he come to his senses when he realize what he can't do no more if he marry her. He drop womans like a red-hot skillet pan. That how I knowed Tyson ain't dead an' lyin' in that drawer. He out there belly bumpin' with some new womans.

I watchin' the man open the drawer.

I seen the white sheet they uses to cover dead bodies.

I closes my eyes.

I calls on Jesus jest like my mama done learned me.

It gots to be anybody but my brother lyin' in that drawer. Please God, let it be a good for nothin' nigger, not Tyson. I do anythin' you askin', jest don't let it be him, Lord.

The white mans pull back the sheet off the face in the drawer.

I opens my eyes to look.

The man in the drawer all banged up an' bruised like somebody whupped him good an' proper... harder than Daddy used to do us when us be bad. His face all swolled up. It black n' blue an' raw-lookin' like ground-up meat before it cooked. I standin' there starin' at that face. The face look bad, very bad. If Mama alive, she wouldn't know that face belong to her own son. I hardly believe it myself.

“Is that him?” The mans in the white coat ask me.

I doesn't answer him. I studyin' the swolled up face. I prayin' it ain't Tyson, but it hard to tell; the face be so fat, then I seen a light mark behind the right ear. Tyson done had that mark since he born.

“Miss, is that Tyson Gillette?” Mans in the white coat look at me with kindness in his eyes. He ask the question in a soft voice this time.

I still don't answer. I thinkin' if Tyson face look bad, then his body probably look worse. I reaches out to touch Tyson's nose, then his hair 'cause it the only thing not beat to death.

“Didn't you hear him, Gal? Answer the goddamn question!” the sour-faced police yells. He starin' hard at me. His face look like the devil done took over. “Is that nigger your brother or not, Gal?”

The police with hat pulled low on his head don't say nothin'. He lookin' 'way from that body in the drawer like it too bad to see.

I don't know when the police come into room. When me an' the other white mans takes the elevator to the basement, the police ain't with us. The police surely be a mean son of a gun, an' I glad us ain't down home. If I down there, he slap me for not answerin' them questions. If he want me, he force his root stick in me whilst us in police car. I glad I in New York City. He can't do nothin' like that here jest 'cause he police.

Mans in the white coat frown up at the police before he say, “Christ, Frank! Take it easy. She just saw something no sister should have to see.” His eyes lookin' sad when he stare at me. Then he say, “I'm right, aren't I? That's your brother, Tyson Gillette?”

I finds my voice, but it sound weak to my ears. “Yes, Sir, that him.”

“Finally!” the police say loud-like. He writ sumpthin' down in his little book, then he walk over to me. He give me two bits in my hand. He frown when I won't take money, so he stuff it in my coat pocket. “Take a taxi home, Gal. I got a report to file.”

The police don't say he sorry how Tyson look. He don't say what I 'posed to do. He don't tell me how to git home from this here place neither. Instead, he jest cold-haulin' through them two doors. Other police in hat covering his face be right behind him, cold-haulin' too.

I heard 'em run up them stairs like a herd of lightnin'-scared cows. I notices for the first time how it quiet like a graveyard in the basement. Any noise be soundin' loud here. I looks at Tyson face some more. I wonders what I 'posed to do next. I never thinks I see this day comin'. It a bad day when I gots to bury my big brother before my old daddy. “What us gonna do, Tyson? You the oldest. I doesn't know what to do now,” I says, lookin' at his mashed-up face. I forgits somebody in the room with me till I hears the mans clearin' his throat quiet-like.

The man sigh, then look in the direction the police left. “Forgive my colleague, Detective Kelly, Miss Gillette. He forgets his manners sometimes. I'm so sorry about your brother. I'm sorry you had to see him like this.” He put papers under his arm, then he stare at me with kind eyes.

“Thank you, Sir.” I nods in his direction. Puzzlement musta showed on my face because he say more.

“A good mortician can fix your brother's face up like new, Miss Gillette. Nobody need know

what he looked like today.”

“But I knows,” I say, touchin’ Tyson’s hair. “I know how he looked today with his face all swolled up.”

The man sigh, then he fiddle with the papers in his hand. “Sometimes, it’s better to forget what we see and just go on with our lives the best way we can. I can give you the name of a good funeral parlor up in Harlem, Miss Gillette. They do wonders for colored folks like your brother.”

I studies Tyson battered face a few more seconds. I wonders what Tyson do if he alive an’ that be me lyin’ in the drawer. He probably take the name of the funeral parlor. Then he ask questions later if he wanna know sumpthin’ ‘bout my death.

“Was he your only family, Miss Gillette?” the man in the white coat asks.

He sure be polite when he speak to me. I been livin’ in the Big Apple mostly five years an’ I still ain’t got used to mannerly white mans. The man in the white coat studyin’ me like he waitin’ for a answer, so I thinkin’ hard before I gives him one.

Tyson say Daddy still alive. He went down to Georgia to see Daddy last year. I frowns. No that wrong; Tyson ain’t visitin’ Daddy. He tell me later how he followin’ poontang to Georgia. He be few miles outside Macon when he decide he wanna see how Daddy doin’ since us done run away. It been mostly five years since us leave Oxpath, which be us home. Tyson say he went to Joe’s an’ wait outside ‘cause he know how Daddy love the taste of corn likker. He say it weren’t long before Daddy come outside stumblin’-drunk an’ cussin’.

Tyson say when Daddy first seen him, he git scared an’ back away from him. Daddy think Tyson a ghost or sumpthin’ outta his likker bottle. Tyson say how it take time to calm Daddy, then they talks ‘bout Mama an’ sharecroppin’ life. He say Daddy asked how I doin’ jest like he didn’t try to ball with me. Tyson say he tell Daddy I be jest fine an’ dandy in the city. He say how I gots a good job. He tell Daddy plenty of city mens wanna marry me too.

Daddy grin, then he push his chest out all proud like an’ he say, “Yes, Sir, that my Baby Girl, Leonia.”

Tyson say if Daddy weren’t so drunk, he woulda beat the tar outta him jest to remind him why us run away. He decide not to hit Daddy ‘cause he didn’t wanna start nothin’. He jest shake hands. He leave Daddy standin’ on the dirty street outside Joe’s. Now, I gonna see my daddy when I brings Tyson home to be put in Georgia earth next to Mama.

“No, Tyson my only kin here. My daddy still alive in Bam. I reckon but I ain’t seen him in near five years. Where us live, it a town call Oxpath, Georgia.”

The mans in the white coat give me a sad look. “Oh, I see. Well, I’m sure the funeral director will help you get your brother home, Miss Gillette.” He writ a name on a piece of paper an’ give it to me. “This is the name of the funeral parlor I was telling you about. Tell ‘em Nathaniel Shaw, that’s me, from the city morgue, sent you. Mr. Turner and his people will take care of you real good, Miss Gillette.”

I takes the paper and sticks it in my pocketbook, but I doesn’t take my eyes off Tyson’s big body lyin’ in the drawer. He almost fill up the drawer.

“I need you to sign this release form for the funeral parlor so we can release the body...er, Mr.

Gillette to the funeral parlor, Miss Gillette. If you'll just sign here, please." He point to the empty line at the bottom of the paper.

I signs it an' goes back to starin' at Tyson. I doesn't wanna leave him there cold, alone, an' dead. Look like I ain't gots me no choice in the matter. I watch Nathaniel Shaw cover Tyson face with a sheet an' then push the drawer closed, my heart feelin' heavy as them bales of cotton Tyson an' me picks when us sharecroppin' in Oxpath.

Nathaniel Shaw walk over to me. "It's gonna be all right, Miss Gillette." He pat my arm, then give me a copy of the papers I jest sign. "We'll take care of your brother just like he was a relative. You go see Melvin Turner at the funeral parlor and give him this copy. He'll know what to do. Come on; I'll walk you to the elevator."

I follows him to the elevator. Whilst us waitin', them double doors open. 'Nother white mans dressed in a white coat like Nathaniel Shaw be pushin' a metal bed on wheels. The bed got sumpthin' wrapped up tight on it. He nod at Nathaniel, then he wink at me. He say, "Hey, Nat, looks like it's gonna be a busy night."

Nathaniel shrug. "I hope not," he say, then hold the elevator door for me to git on.

Ridin' the elevator ain't upsettin' me no more 'cause I gots too much I gots to ponder 'bout. When I gits outside, I tries to git a cab, but don't none of them mens drivin' them cabs stop. Guess they ain't used to seein' no nigger womans so far downtown. I looks for a bus stop or train station I favors. I walks seven blocks before I seen a subway I knows where the train be goin'. I pays my nickel an' gits on the train headin' uptown to Harlem. I figures to find Turner Funeral Parlor tonight. If I does, I gonna take them papers Mr. Shaw give me to 'em. If I tell Eartha an' Sybil 'bout Tyson, maybe they helps me. Then I thinks 'bout Atlantic City.

If I knowed Tyson gonna be kilt, I'd snatch him up an' carry him to Atlantic City myself or us git home to Oxpath. Whoever done that beatin' on Tyson, they never finds him in Oxpath. I squeezes my eyes shut, tryin' mighty hard not to think 'bout Tyson bein' dead. He my big brother an' us done everything together far back as I members. Us goes to school together when Daddy let us go. Us learns to read together from Mama when Daddy don't let us go to school. Tyson chase away them nasty peckerwood boys when they wants to ball me. He the only one knows I gots feelin's for womens the way most mens likes womens. My mama don't even know that. What I gonna do now Tyson dead? He the one I gab with when I puzzled. Who gonna listen now?

I watches out the window as them train stations whiz by. City peoples look like them movin' fast, but them ain't. It jest the way the subway train make them look. I recalls when I seen my first subway train. It when Tyson an' me first come to New York City. Us run away from Daddy house when he gits drunk on Saturday nights an' think I his wife.

Daddy been drunk before, but I kin git out his way, but this time ain't the same. This time, Daddy catch me on the side of my head with a bottle. It stun me an' give him time to snatch my dress up an' yank my bloomers down. He on me before I kin move. He git clumsy an' can't git his root stick free from his drawers before Tyson come home from visitin' one of his womens. He git so mad when he seen what Daddy tryin' to do, he beat Daddy with anything he find. He break a chair across Daddy's back. He hit Daddy with Mama favorite flower holder. Then he kick him in

the side to make him git off me. Once Daddy roll off me, it be on. Tyson beat Daddy so hard, I scared he dead. That when us decide it time to see the Big Apple.

Us takes money us earns from pickin' cotton, meat cuttin', an' my washin' work. Us buy bus tickets to New York City. Us finds out later, the train be a faster way to gits to the city, but us doesn't have no extra money for no train, so the bus have to do. Us doesn't know nobody in the city, but Tyson hear it a good place to gits lost. It be far nuff away from Daddy too. I wakes up when us git to New Jersey. I git happy. Us seen all them buildings. Them buildings looks big an' strong like good corn stalks. I ain't never seen nothin' like that in Oxpath.

Tyson jest smile cool-like, then pull his hat down low, pretendin' like he sleepin'. The bus pull into a building that say "bus terminal." The driver say everybody gots to git off. Tyson take his paperbag an' my suitcase from under the seat. It be us mama's suitcase. She use it on her wedding day, but she never use it again. Daddy won't even let Mama go to her mama funeral. He say good riddance to nosy old bitches that doesn't know when to keeps quiet an' mind they own bizness. Tyson an' me loves us granny. Us always glad when she come to visit. It mean Daddy stay away, so he don't have to hear Granny gabbin' 'bout him. He actin' nice long as Granny round. She have five big brothers that tear us daddy ass up if he step out of line with her.

"They gone an' dead jest like Tyson," I mutters whilst I starin' out the window, thinkin' 'bout the first time us seen the Big Apple.

Tyson an' me walks round the place that be named Times Square. I thinks it be wonderful with them shiny signs that light up. Us got signs in Oxpath, but only sign that lit say likker joint open Saturday night. Sign need fixin' most of time 'cause it only half lit. I looks up an' seen one of them signs smokin' a Camel cigarette. When I tells Tyson, he think I gone city crazy 'til he see for hissself. That white mans blowin' smoke out that Camel jest like Daddy do when he gots money for cigarettes.

Us laughs 'bout the big ole white man smokin' that Camel, then us walks round Times Square some more. Tyson say how he gots to be careful. Some them women us seen offerin' to ball with him for money. Us seen some men dress like womens an' they offerin' to ball with him too. Tyson smart. He jest shrug an' pretend he a country bumpkin that don't understand nothin' them offerin'. He know who they is 'cause he tell me. It ain't them dusty butts that worryin' me back then. Them big buildings us seen worries me more.

"Them buildings doesn't look so tall when us on the bus, but they tall up close," I say to Tyson when I looks up an' I grabs Tyson arm. "They so many peoples here, I can't counts them. I scared I gonna git lost with all them peoples an' you never find me."

Tyson pat my hand, then he say, "Us walk nuff for today, Lea-lee." He say us needs a place to stay for the night. He say he heard they be a place called Harlem where all the colored peoples lives in New York City. Us gotta find it before dark.

Us asks the police, but he jest tell us to move along. Us lookin' for nigger face mixed with all them white peoples, but us don't see none. Us keeps walkin' till our feets gits sore, then us seen peoples comin' from a hole in the ground.

Tyson git excited an' he say, "That it!" He point to the peoples.

I think he the one gone city crazy. “I ain’t goin’ into no hole in the ground, Ty. I doesn’t care what you say, I ain’t doin’ it!” I stops dead in my tracks. I stands on the sidewalk starin’ at him with my arms cross my chest.

Tyson study me a minute, then he grin that big, ole woman-chasin’ grin that show pretty teeth. “You scared, Lea-lee?” he say. “You jest a big ole country girl scared to try sumpthin’ new. You jest like Daddy with sharecroppin’. He scared of new ideas too! That why he still poor an’ ain’t got nothin’ neither.” He take a deep breath, then he say, “Smell that air, Girl. It be city air. It don’t smell nothin’ like country air. I likes it ‘cause it new an’ different.”

I takes a deep breath, then I lets it out. “It surely do smell different ‘cause it stink,” I says. “Smell like too many peoples livin’ all jammed up tight in one place.” Tyson so happy ‘bout tryin’ sumpthin’ new, so I don’t let on what I be ponderin’ ‘bout.

Tyson hold out a hand and grin at me. “Come on, Country Girl. Us go down in that hole an’ see what it feel like.”

I scared to go in the hole, but Tyson gonna be right there to watch after me, so I grabs his hand. I stays right close to him when us walks down them wood steps for the first time. I looks at peoples when us walkin’ down them steps. They looks like it ain’t nothin’ to be under the earth. Don’t nobody look scared like me. I ponders why not. It ain’t natural bein’ under no earth less you dead. I hears a noise that take my breath away, it so loud. It be rumblin’ too.

It sounds like big old thunder, but it ain’t no such thing as no thunder under the earth. Maybe us done sumpthin’ wrong to make God mad. He wreckin’ havoc on us like it say in the Bible. I yank on Tyson’s hand. All my tuggin’ finally make him stop walkin’. I hide behind Tyson’s back when he stop walkin’, then I peeks out. Everybody I seen look fine. Them doesn’t stop for no noise. Them ain’t actin’ scared neither.

I looks to the left an’ sumpthin’ comin’ up out the yonder darkness. It be movin’ fast. I seen peoples lookin’ up when the sound git louder. Peoples be movin’ round near us. Some of them gits up from them wood benches to stand near the edge of cement platform us standin’ on. I covers my ears, the noise be so loud. It sound like a screechin’ dog when it be hurtin’, only louder.

I yells at Tyson to leave outta there, but he can’t hear me ‘cause whatever makin’ noise gittin’ closer an’ louder. I seen a train racin’ into the station. It look like it goin’ too fast to stop. I jest knowed us gonna see bodies flyin’ round after the train hit wall an’ explode. I wants to run outta there, but Tyson grab my arm an’ hold me steady.

“No, wait, Lea. I wants to see this,” Tyson say, all excited.

I seen Tyson hypnotized by noise, the train an’ all the peoples jest like a snake when the snake charmer blow his horn at a carnival. That when I realize he fallin’ in love with New York City. It don’t matter what I wants to do. If I wants to leave the city, he ain’t gonna agree with me, no matter what I says.

The train, it stop before it reach the end of the platform. Peoples jest spill out every door them kin, whilst other peoples rush to git inside them same doors. It look like a mess to me. I ain’t seen how people knows which direction them comin’ or goin’. A man poke his head outta the window of the train jest before the train fixin’ to take off. He gots an’ engineer cap on. He lookin’ right

then left before the train move down them tracks, then he brung his head back inside the train window. The train take off after that. It move so fast into the darkness, I thinks I dreamt I seen it 'cept I heard the rumble an' squeal of another train on the other side of the tracks goin' the other way.

Tyson look like he gonna die if he don't ride the thing. I doesn't wanna cause him no sorrow, so I agrees to ride it too. I jest watchin' Tyson whilst he standin' in line to git change for us paper money. It cost a nickel to ride the train. Tyson gits a pocketful of nickels like he think us gonna ride them trains twenty times.

I doesn't say nothin', but I knows I ain't ridin' nothin' move that fast, make loud rumblin' noise, an' live underground no twenty times. It don't seem like doin' that be worth no hard-earned money, but Tyson say it cost a nickel.

He put a nickel in a slot, then pushes sumpthin' he say called a turnstile. He move inside the area where the train be comin', but I still outside, starin' at him. Tyson motion me to follow him, then he point. "Come on, Lea. Jest stick that nickel in this here slot an' push. I wait for you."

I do what he say, an' soon, I standin' next to him. Us walks over to the edge of the platform, but I too scared to stand there. I steps back next to a pole that look like it holdin' up the ceiling. I thinkin' hard 'bout grabbin' that pole an' stayin' right where I is.

Tyson want to see everything up close, so he stand on the edge till police come up an' tell him to step back or he be blown onto the train tracks. He motion me to stand with him. I scared, but I do it 'cause he say it okay. That when I sees headlights rushin' towards us. The train roar into the station. It movin' so fast, I feels the breeze it make when it pass us. I smiles 'cause the breeze from the train feel good. I think Tyson right when us git swept into the train along with all them other peoples. Maybe the Big Apple ain't so bad. It gots underground thunder, fast trains, an' a breeze to cool you off when it git too hot.

Tyson an' me gits off the train at Hunnred an' Twenty-Fifth Street an' Lenox Avenue. He heard 'bout the YWCA an' how them takes in nigger womens, so us lookin' for one. This city sure big nuff to have one he say whilst us walkin'. He done heard 'bout the YMCA that be ten blocks from where us gits off. I don't know how Tyson do it, but he an' 'nother mans on the train gits to gabbin' when the man say Tyson look familiar.

Them start talkin' 'bout where them come from. Them gabbin' 'bout this an' that. It turn out the man live in Macon, Georgia. By the time us gits off the train, Tyson gots the idea where to find him an' me jobs an' a place to stay for the night. Us ain't got a lot of money, jest thirty dollar between us, but us figures it last us good if us careful.

Us walk ten blocks like it ain't nothin'. Us used to walkin' country miles an' ten blocks ain't no country mile, but then country ain't got nothin' like the city gots with it tall buildings an' lots of niggers. I ain't seen this many niggers all livin' together nowhere else. The little town us live in gots lots of niggers an' so do Macon, but us scattered all over the land in Oxpath, so us doesn't look like much numbers. I makes Tyson stop so I kin count all them niggers I seen. When I gits past a thousand, I stops 'cause it hurt my head tryin' to remember them last numbers. It look like colored peoples own some of the shops us passes because they behind the counter where the

moneybox be at. Back home in Oxpath, nigger peoples doesn't own much of nothin', except maybe some farmland. Mr. Charlie own everything. What he don't own, he try to steal. I heard tell of some niggers ownin' barbershops, a bank, an' a general store in Atlanta, but that real far from Oxpath.

"This here place surely different from Oxpath," I says to Tyson. Us watch them womens in they pretty clothes walkin' down the street. Each one of them womens gets a sassy walk, like they knows they looks good. Even the mens gets pretty suits an' good hair. Us seen them strut down the street in they fine clothes. Everybody us seen, seem like them know where them goin' even the rag mens an' the watermelon mens sellin' they things on the road where us walkin'. Boy look like he be 'bout eight offer to shine Tyson shoes when us stops for red light. Tyson grin, but he tell boy next time, then he flip him a nickel. The boy catch that coin. He grin at Tyson an' take off runnin' down the street.

When us gits to the YMCA on Hunnred an' Thirty-Fifth Street, the room clerk tell Tyson they gots one room available for five dollars a week. He say there's a YWCA round corner where I kin gits me a room for the same price. Tyson frown. He say he don't like the idea us not sleepin' under the same roof. Us been doin' that since us little in Georgia.

The clerk grinnin' when he heared us from Georgia. He ask what part Georgia us from. Tyson say little town outside Macon name Oxpath. When Tyson say that, the clerk stick his hand out an' say how he from Macon. Then he motion Tyson to lean over the registration desk. He whisper that he know a couple of places with rooms for rent. He say they real cheap only them doesn't rent after five o'clock 'cause they office closed.

Tyson pull out Granddaddy pocket watch.

I seen it read six o'clock.

Tyson sigh an' look at me. "What us gonna do?" he mumble to hisself.

Clerk scratch his head whilst he think on us situation. "Pay for them rooms tonight for you an' your sister. Go see my friend tomorrow morning. Here his card."

Tyson take the card. He shake the clerk hand. "I be Tyson Gillette. This here be my baby sister. Her named Leonia Gillette. Us jest git here today."

"My name is Prince Jackson," the clerk say, then he say he call the YWCA an' tell the clerk to hold a room for me.

Tyson say okay.

Us walks two blocks to the YWCA where they holdin' a room for me, jest like Prince Jackson say they would. Tyson pay for my room. Then he hand me my suitcase an' he hug me. He remind me how us leavin' eight o'clock in the morning to see 'bout them other rooms. He stands at the parlor door 'cause that as far as mens allowed. He watches me take them stairs to my room on the second floor. That my first night sleepin' alone in the big city.

If I knowed then that Tyson be kilt in this city five years later, I'd a' snatch his hand an' us run home to Oxpath, Georgia. I not care what Daddy tried on me, jest as long as Tyson not dead. I look through the window of the subway train.

"Tyson dead. I makin' buryin' arrangements, but I doesn't know how," I mutters.

He an' Daddy bury Mama eight years ago. I frownin' 'cause that ain't true neither. Daddy be too drunk to care 'bout buryin' Mama, so Tyson do it. Tyson say I too young to help. He say that what mens do...heavy liftin', makin' babies, arrangin' funerals, an' payin' for weddings. I 'members arguin' that I almost tall as him an' he only three years older than me. Tyson, he jest shrug an' say three years is three years. I twenty-seven, so I guess that be old nuff to bury Tyson.