

If That's Not A Sign...

by Niambi Brown Davis

“Whenever you’re ready, let me know. I’ll wait – for as long as it takes.”

The email from Curtis, the man who had been Caroline’s friend and confidant didn’t surprise her – not now, anyway. He had been her late husband’s boyhood friend and in the three years since his passing, Curtis made sure Caroline’s walk was shoveled in winter, the grass cut in summer, and his shoulder made available whenever her tears just wouldn’t stop. He’d been divorced for ten years, and when Caroline’s one attempt to set him up ended in disaster, they laughed about it over a bottle of his favorite Argentine Torrontes.

For some time she’d felt attraction push its way through their friendship but she didn’t want sex (even great sex) to ruin it. Two days after receiving his email, when he was at a conference all the way on the other side of the country, Caroline hiked up her courage, typed “I’m ready” and hit send.

And now a week, (and her many emotional, what-ifs later) here they were, soaked to the skin, laughing and running hand in hand through the sudden cool downpour. When they were still dripping, but finally inside the shelter of his Toyota Tundra, Curtis reached into the space behind his seat for a thick green and blue plaid blanket folded over a covered basket. “So much for our picnic,” he chuckled, tucking her inside its warmth. “But I’ve got another surprise for you.”

“Another? ”

“Oh, yeah.” He nodded, lifting one thick, smooth eyebrow. When he smiled, it was slow and full of promise, heating her far more than the warm cocoon of wool. In the close quarters of the truck’s cab, she reveled in his slow-burn sensuality. Like hidden treasure, it had been out of sight behind the high wall of platonic friendship. Today those bricks would tumble quicker than a televised Las Vegas casino implosion.

“You mean a bigger surprise than you and me, here like this?”

“It’s not a surprise to me, baby” he replied softly, cupping her chin in one large hand. His gaze and his touch sent a sweet shock through her system. “I knew we’d be together – one day. And because you know me well, you know I’m a patient man when it comes to what I want. I was just waiting for you to recognize the inevitable. And look!” he exclaimed, pointing up at the traffic light that had just turned green. “If that’s not a sign, I don’t know what is!”

Laughing with him, Caroline snuggled further into the blanket’s warmth. Even rainy, cool and overcast, the day could not be more beautiful. Halfway down a one-lane country road flanked by live oaks, her curiosity got the best of her.

“Where are we going? Where does this road lead?”

“To you and me, baby,” he answered softly. “To you and me.”

At the end of the lane, she gasped. “It’s beautiful! Is it yours?” The coastal cottage was something out of an *Architectural Digest* fairy tale. Raindrops dripped like jewels on the low-hanging Spanish moss. Upstairs, a light glowed from the dormer window set in the middle of a sloping roof. Near an expanse of lawn and a screened-in porch, a small stream meandered by.

Outside the truck, Curtis wrapped one arm around Caroline and drew her close. “I’m glad you like it, and yes, it is mine. I closed on it just before I left for California. I didn’t tell you

because I wanted to show you. I wanted you to be the first to see it, to celebrate my hideaway with me. Our hideaway,” he added. As if to make his pronouncement official, Curtis’ lips captured hers in a kiss so passionate and possessive that any doubt she might have was melted away by its heat.

Inside she marveled at the masculine, but warm and elegant furnishings done in shades of chocolate, cream and khaki, accented with touches of coral. Under the glow of low lights, it was indeed a cozy hideaway. But what held her attention most was the luxurious white rug spread in front of the fireplace stacked with wood and ready to be lit.

“I’ll bet a nice shower would warm you up,” he murmured, gently peeling the wet wool from her body. “And afterwards you won’t have to lift a finger. I’ll take care of everything.” He gestured to the rug. “We can have our picnic right here.” Caroline’s mind sped ahead to dessert; but before the grand (in more ways than one) finale, there was one small matter to resolve.

“And then what will I wear?”

“There’s a robe waiting for you in my bathroom,” he spoke softly, sliding his fingers up the length of her neck and into the silver-streaked strands identical in color to his own. “I bought it for just for you, for the day you would join me here. It’s been waiting, just as I have. And as far as your other clothes, you won’t need them for a quite while.” Leaning down, he kissed her, leaving on her lips a promise of what would come.

Later, fresh from a shower in the cottage’s guest bathroom, and in his own masculine (and equally as new) version of Caroline’s robe, Curtis built a fire and spread their picnic out on the white rug – broiled shrimp and scallops, fragrant saffron rice, grilled tomatoes and corn, and decadent double fudge brownies. He had just set down two warm pumpkin custard tarts when his

heart stopped and stuttered. He turned. There she was, trailing the scent of jasmine, with a triangle of dewy skin visible between the robe's collar, and a cloud of hair springing around her face in a halo of soft salt and pepper curls.

“Oh my!” Caroline gasped, clasping her hands together. “This is a feast! And I see you have pumpkin tarts.” Her eyes twinkled and her lips turned up into a provocative smile. “Have you heard the naughty little rumor about pumpkin pie?”

“No,” he smiled, quickly closing the distance between them. “But from the look on your face, I'll bet you have.”

She poked his broad chest with one finger. “Hush!” she commanded with soft laughter and an affectionate tease. “Anyway, the scent of pumpkin pie is supposed to be a major male turn-on.”

He leaned down, punctuating each sentence with a kiss “Then I've got a double dose – pumpkin pie and you.”

In front of the fire, they faced each other, feeding each other, turning the act of nourishment into the slow, sweet, erotic art of foreplay. When the last of the Piper Heidsieck was done, Curtis pushed their flutes and the remnants of their meal aside. Sliding the robe from Caroline's shoulders, he brushed his lips slowly down the column of her neck. She gasped; when his mouth reached the swell of her breasts, Caroline purred his name.

“Sweet Caroline, are you ready?” he murmured against the wildly beating pulse at the base of her throat.

“I am, she whispered, “so very ready.”

Out of their robes, they fell back onto the rug. He wanted to devour her, but the urge to savor her was even greater. His tongue found her nipples, slowly circling the tips until they peaked and bloomed like the buds of dark roses. Moaning her name softly, he explored the length of her silken body. Her scent was intoxicating. He had wanted her so long, had dreamed of her, imagined the day she would lie naked in his arms but nothing had prepared him for the soul-shattering explosion that touching and tasting her would bring. How could one woman be so very sweet? You're beautiful," he whispered against the soft skin high on the inside of her thigh.

Caroline's back arched. She raised herself halfway off the rug. Her moist, thoroughly kissed lips were half open. Her face glowed, suffused with pleasure and passion. When Caroline grasped him in the softness of her palm, her name exploded from his mouth in a soft hiss. With masterful control, Curtis allowed himself momentary surrender to the sensations that shook his body like a line of explosive charges, each one more powerful than the other. Flexing his hips in one swift powerful motion, Curtis drove deeply inside Caroline's wet warmth. She cried out, instinctively wrapping her long legs around his back, holding him tight, meeting the call of each exquisite stroke with a response of her own. They were one being, one body wrapped together in a frenzied dance of pure pleasure. Near its height, Caroline began to shudder. Curtis slowed; this particular peak he wanted to reach with the woman he loved. When she cried out into the firelit room, he followed, calling her name like an ecstatic prayer.

At 6:30 the next morning Caroline laid spooned to Curtis, the man who was now her friend *and* her lover. The rain had been replaced by the pink and gold rays of a brand new day. She wanted to laugh out loud, remembering what he'd said yesterday when the light turned green. For Caroline, the sunrise was equally as prophetic. Watching dawn come up over the

horizon, she mouthed the words into the early morning silence: “If that’s not a sign, I don’t know what is!”

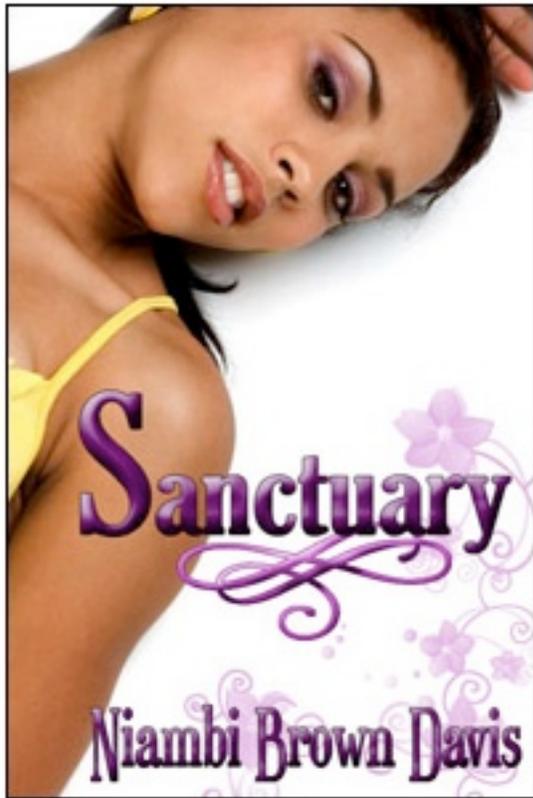
About the Author

Niambi was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and raised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. She and her family lived for many years in Washington, DC and for three and a half years, made the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago their home. *From Dusk to Dawn*, her first full-length novel, and *Love’s Redemption*, a digital novella, were both published in 2008. In 2010 her novella *Sabor a Mi* was published, followed by *Sanctuary* in 2011. She is editor of *Travel and Enjoy*, an online travel magazine. Niambi indulges her passion for travel and sailing by serving as publicist for Black Boaters Summit and as a member of the National Association of Black Travel Writers. She has written for *Travel Lady Magazine*, the *Queen Anne’s County Record Observer* and for Dorchester Publication’s confession magazines. Aside from travel and writing, Niambi is an avid reader of historical fiction, and deeply involved in tracing the history of both branches of her family tree. Her day job is running the business of Sand and Silk, Niambi’s own line of handcrafted bath and body products.

Niambi loves to hear from her readers. She can be contacted at

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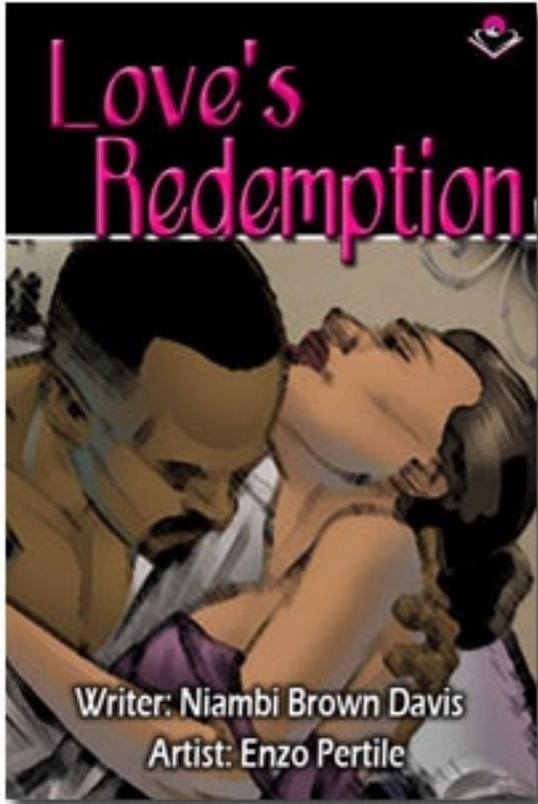


Sanctuary

How many people find the love of their lives in a sex club? For lavender-grower Lily Lomax and New York Times best-selling author Tony Marchand, lust at first sight turns into so much more. After a literary conference in Miami and a weekend at Sanctuary, her Virginia country farm, their love blooms into something beautiful. Then out of nowhere, Tony's agent gives him the worse news an author can hear. At the same time, an unexpected opportunity puts Sanctuary on the map. Can their love survive when one star is on the rise and the other about to crash and burn? Will harsh words, heartbreak and a midnight visit from an old love tear them apart? Or will they come together on a night

filled with friendship, love, and a hint of danger from an old idea that just won't die?

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Love's Redemption

(Romance Graphic Novel)

Anita Webber just passed her bar exams. In celebration, she is vacationing in the Virgin Islands, a trip that is a gift from her aunt. There she finally meets the man of her dreams—suave, handsome, successful entrepreneur, Jeffrey Cole. The six foot hunk treats her tenderly and makes love to her passionately in the warm tropical nights. But after suffering one heartbreak, Anita vows to go slow with this new man in her life. Feeling as if his heart is in a vice, Jeffrey struggles to overcome Anita's emotional reticence, even though he fears that the secrets he's keeping from her could not only devastate her but endanger her beloved aunt.

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What's in a Name Contest

Help Lily and Tony name their book!

Author Niambi Brown Davis has written herself into a corner, and she needs your help. Her novella, *Sanctuary*, is the story of lavender-grower, Lily Lomax, and New York Times best-selling author Tony Marchand. Their lust at first sight turns into so much more. Can their love survive when one star is on the rise and the other about to crash and burn? But here's the problem—and your challenge—at the end of the book Tony tells his publisher his next book will be written with Lily.

Now Niambi needs a name for their book and she's turning to her loyal readers for suggestions. So, tell us what should Tony and Lily call their book?

Complete details are available at www.arrowpub.com/whatsInANameContest.html. The contest begins **August 22, 2011** and all entries must be received no later than midnight **November 30, 2011** with winners to be announced on December 30, 2011.

