

*I Stand Accused*

By Monica Frazier Anderson

"*I Stand Accused* is cleverly written, crisp and witty. It transcends time while simultaneously introducing readers to a refreshing literary voice. Moe Anderson has arrived with a can't miss hit."

Victor McGlothin- *Essence* Bestselling Author

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**Shreveport, Louisiana**  
**2007**

Excerpt

We went to Ren's favorite restaurant, Anthony's Steak and Seafood on Mansfield Road. From my bar stool perch, I surveyed the unusually sparse happy hour crowd. Other than the sistah with the shoulder length dreadlocks eating artichoke hearts at the other end of the bar, there was nothing in there to make me happy.

"Yo, James, you ain't gonna believe who I ran into today at the Horseshoe," Ren said, putting a cigarette between his lips.

I coughed. "Put that up. You know I'm allergic to cigarette smoke."

"Why are you coughing? It's not lit and I can't smoke in here anyway. I'm using it for full effect. Little Mama with the happy to be nappy dreads is feeling me. I need something to counter all the pink I'm wearing." He winked at homegirl and asked, "What ain't you allergic to anyway? You allergic to most flowers, heavy perfume, cat hair, meat and what else?" I coughed again and he reluctantly put the cigarette back in the pack.

"I'm not allergic to meat. I prefer poultry and fish because they're healthier. I am allergic to penicillin and latex. That's all."

"That's all? Hell, that's enough. You almost like 'the boy in the bubble', huh?"

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Ignoring the salesman/comedian, I plopped the last soft shell crab into my mouth.

As always, Ren couldn't leave well enough alone. "Did you say you're allergic to latex? Don't you have to wear gloves at work sometimes?"

"Yeah, I wear vinyl or specially coated ones for latex sensitive individuals."

"Aw, they got condoms like that. I tried them for this girl with problems like you, but they didn't feel right." I glared at him until he changed the subject. "So, guess who I saw at the casino."

"I don't know. Mary Kay."

Ren's smile faded. He actually looked offended. "Man, that ain't funny. You know she passed away. Don't hate the player. You're welcome to come on board at anytime. I'll teach you everything I know."

"Thanks, but no thanks. I'm not a salesman like you. I'm fine with my job." I gestured for the bartender to bring another Cabernet for me and Crown Royal for Ren.

"Okay, who did you see at the crap table?"

"Sooty Mae Jenkins."

My heart stopped. It froze the same way it did every time Sooty Mae smiled at me during the two years we dated in high school. I had yet to find a woman who had the same affect on me.

I must have gone into a daze because Ren shook me. "You alright, G? Snap, I didn't know it was still like that. All I did was mention her name and you got sprung."

I tried to play it off. "Nah, man, hearing her name made me think about my family back in Jefferson."

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“Unh huh. Save that for somebody who don’t know you like I do. We both know Sooty Mae was the love of your life.”

Ironically, Angie Stone’s song, *Coulda Been You*, started playing.

I couldn’t deny the charge I was accused of. “So how is she?” I cracked my knuckles, a nervous habit I couldn’t seem to drop.

“Finer than a mofo. Like J-Lo dipped in chocolate.” We both chuckled. “She’s big time now, brother. Got her own business in Baton Rouge.”

“She lives in Louisiana? I didn’t know that. We lost track of each other after high school. I’m glad she’s doing well.”

“Well, if you wanna holla at her...”

“No,” I cut him off. “I’m not trying to holla at her. That’s in the past. We’re adults now with new lives. That was puppy love. A lot has happened since then.” My voice faded. I gulped my drink and stared at the wall.

Ren snorted and removed a business card from the pocket of his blazer. I wanted that card like Moses wanted the Ten Commandments.

“I’m your boy so I’m gone give you this card even though I never was crazy about that woman. But, it has been a long time, and people do change. Oh yeah, she goes by Tracy Jenkins now, CEO of T. Jenkins and Associates.” Ren waved the card in front of my nose like a fan. “She’s attending a conference. She’ll be here until Sunday and she would very much like for you to holla. She’s at Harrah’s. The number is on the back.” He put the card on the bar next to my empty glass.

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I extracted a few bills from my wallet to pay our tab. I laid down the money and picked up the card, nonchalantly tucking it in my wallet as if I were doing Ren a favor by taking it off his hands.

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Jefferson, Texas 1991

After the ambulance left, I shoed everybody into the house. Our nosey neighbor, Miss Viola couldn't keep a respectful distance like the other neighbors. It was obvious Mama's time had come. Ms. Viola still had to high step her big behind over Mama's elephant ears--the only green thing brave enough to grow in our yard--and ask a bunch of questions I couldn't answer.

"James, baby, is y'all gone be alright? I see they done took your Mama off in the ambulance."

I didn't have time for her, but I had good home training so I looked her in the eyes and spoke right proper. "Yes ma'am. Mama's water broke and she gone off to have the baby." I needed to go in the house and check on my brothers and sisters, but I waited. Mama would have a fit if one of us walked off while a grown-up was talking.

Even when Mama wasn't talking to me, if I was in the same room, I had to be still like she was God. Sometimes when she was talking to me, she paused so long I thought she was finished, but I learned the hard way to make sure she was done before I took a step in the opposite direction. She didn't tolerate no disrespect from us kids. One day, when I was feeling my oats and made the mistake of walking off while she was talking, she hurled one of Daddy's big ole work boots at me like it was a shot put. If I hadn't turned quick, I would've lost my right eye. She knocked some reverence into me that day for sure.

Little as she was, one day she slapped my brother Keith so hard that he fell and made a hole in the wall just because he didn't want to wash dishes. Mama hung a picture

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of two angels over the hole while Keith washed them dishes. The picture was kind of low, but we didn't say nothing about that.

Ms. Viola peered at me over the top of them skinny glasses with the metal noose on 'em. "I see your daddy pulled up after them ambulance got here. Where he been? It's almost six o'clock. Don't he git off early on Fridays?"

"You'll have to ask him about his schedule, Ms. Viola. He don't get permission from me to come and go so I don't rightly know, ma'am."

She puckered her lips and said, "Hmph. The fruit don't fall far from them tree do it?" Then, she put her hand on her hip and let her backbone slip to the side of her red housedress.

I could tell this conversation was gone be several sentences too long.

"Ma'am?" I asked, trying my best to look interested in whatever she was about to say.

"Your daddy acting like his daddy. He weren't a bit of good neither." She paused to spit a stream of tobacco on the ground near my shoes while I pondered her words. She packed the chew back down between her lip and brown gums with her tongue.

I kept my eyes and feet still because her eyes said she wasn't through yet.

"At least, your daddy don't beat y'all bad as he used to git beat. He was always sporting a black eye or a busted lip like it was a birthmark. I still remember the time your granddaddy beat your grandmammy so bad she didn't stir for two days. If your daddy hadn't run to git help, she probably would've died. Lord, only knows how she stayed with that Negro after that evilness. Anybody woulda took her in. I reckon he got what was coming to him. There weren't one wet eye at his funeral, unh huh, not a one."

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I'd hadn't heard that before. My father never talked about my grandfather other than to say he drowned in the lake when my daddy was sixteen. He never said how.

Ms. Viola was peering at me with her cloudy eyes so I said, "Yes, ma'am." I wasn't asking questions about the past. I had enough to worry about from the present.

She pushed her lips up to her wide nose, said "Hmph" again, and then shuffled her loose pink, hair rollers on back over to her little shotgun house.

When I went inside, my sisters were fixing supper. Crystal was humming real calm like, but Tina, who was four years older than Crystal, was begging and pleading with God to let Mama live. She was making all kinds of promises me and God knew she wasn't gone keep. The rest of the kids was in the den watching TV. I was so riled up I had to go back outdoors.

I sat in the wooden rocking chair on the porch: Mama's chair. The straw seat was molded into the shape of her body like an old pair of shoes. I reckon it comforted me a bit to sit there and look where she looked whenever she had a mind to watch the daylight turn to dusk or hear the leaves whisper to the sky.

Mr. Henderson's little store was across the street. It wasn't much more than a one-room shack, but he had everything a kid needed to get by: candy, soda water, and ice cream. Though he frowned most of the time, underneath the mean face was a nice heart.

A fella'd be hard pressed to turn his lips up with a wife like Mrs. Henderson. There was a big ramp leading to the front door of the store. Mrs. Henderson lost a leg a while back because of the sugar; the ramp was for her wheelchair. She wasn't nice like Mr. Henderson. Even Mama said she was hell on wheels. Mrs. Henderson smiled a lot, but she didn't mean it. She kept her frown stored up in her bitty dark eyes. Folks always

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talking about “if looks could kill.” Me and my brothers think some of the local citizens didn’t really die of “natural causes.” We reckon old lady Henderson looked them to death. ‘Course that’s speculation. Still, I don’t look in her eyes no matter how disrespectful it is.

We all stayed out of her way after she run over my brother Ray Ray’s foot on purpose one day. He had to hop on his good foot for a week. He got real good at jump rope after that.

To learn more about Dr. James Adams and the Adams family go to

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