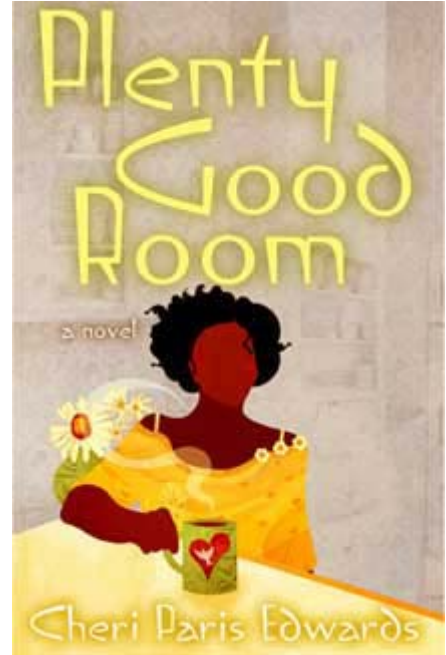


Plenty Good Room

by Cheri Paris Edwards



1.

Runaway

The girl looked worriedly up into the dark sky when she heard the first roar of rolling thunder. The thick humidity weighing down the night air foretold the coming storm, and with one hand she reached under the old baseball cap she wore, and wiped beads of moisture from her forehead. With a frown, she impatiently looked again at the traffic light, waiting for it to change so she could cross the busy street.

"Hey there, girl, what you know good?" a gravelly male voice said from behind her. The man seemed to have appeared from nowhere, and when the girl felt his feathery-light touch on her elbow, she turned to look at him. His shadowed features seemed ominous to her. Her surprise swiftly changed to fear once she saw the red-rimmed, faded brown eyes of the old white man. With a gasp, her mouth fell open, and she shuddered at his wide grin with its many dark gaps where his teeth should have been.

Truly scared now, the girl quickly pulled in her elbow, and in her haste to escape the gray-haired man, she began to step into the crosswalk, with no thought of the oncoming traffic. Right at that very moment, as if in answer to her need to cross the busy intersection, the red Walk light changed to green and she took off across the street. Without one glance backward, she began to run, darting in and out of the crowds of people walking down the avenue. She ran faster and faster.

Suddenly a huge fork of lightning split the dark sky directly in front of her, and the steamy night was lit brightly for a moment. Then, seconds later, an explosively loud clap of thunder shook the ground, followed by low rumblings in the distance, which only added to her alarm. The smell of the imminent spring rain wafted into her nostrils. Sensing that the downpour would begin at any moment, she instinctively began to look for shelter.

Ahead, the girl spied a small alleyway, and with a quick, furtive glance over her shoulder to assure herself that she wasn't being followed, she disappeared into the darkness of the alley. She gathered several pieces of heavy, stiff cardboard scattered around a large metal trash bin in the alleyway, along with some thick plastic and a large corrugated box. Quickly she built herself a makeshift shelter in an area behind the garbage container.

Moments later, in response to the howling wind, she huddled in the corner of the box and tucked her head between her knees. The rain started to pummel her shelter. Her small body was paralyzed with fear, at least until another loud thunderclap caused her to jump involuntarily. When the heavy rain finally began to drip into her

cardboard coverings, she could be brave no longer. Tears began to fall one by one from her eyes, and she sobbed from fear and frustration.

The girl's thoughts wandered back to the home she'd left behind, and to what he had tried to do to her before she ran away tonight, and suddenly her tears flowed even more profusely—only now she cried from anger, too. Forgetting about the storm, the girl harshly wiped her wet eyes and her runny nose, and as she rubbed her damp hands on her pant legs, she vowed aloud, "I don't care what I have to go through—I will never go back there again! *Never!*"

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