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Excerpt

When I'm Ready

Anticipated release: Fall 2012

Carmen Johnson is a relationship columnist with her own syndicated radio show headquartered in Washington, DC. Always one to give great relationship advice, she often falls short on reaping the benefits of her own advice . . . until Pastor Cory Madison comes into her life. Cory, a charismatic preacher with a growing ministry is just what the doctor ordered . . . handsome, charming, and faithful—a combination that has eluded Carmen's pick of men in the past. Just as it appeared wedding bells would be ringing for the power couple, in walks Miles Davidson. Miles is the successful attorney that stole Carmen's heart five years prior only to fade to black after choosing his blossoming career over a future with her. Now faced with losing the love she'd always hoped for or taking another chance on love, Carmen has to make a life changing and everlasting decision . . . but is she ready? Using the setting of the nation's capitol as a backdrop, this formidable tale spins a web of betrayal and redemption about real life situations and outcomes.

Where's My Valentine?

Carmen put on headphones and waited for her producer, Patrick, to cue her back on the air. She quickly took another swig of the hot lemon tea she was nursing and nodded to acknowledge the countdown. 3.2.1

“Hello, DC! This is your girl, Carmen Johnson, coming back at ya with the 411 on relationships. Can I get an Amen? The lines are blowing up and I think I only have time for one or two more calls. Again, the question of the day is, why am I spending Valentine’s Day alone?”

I have Tammy from Hyattsville on the line. Tammy, what’s your story?”

“Hi, Carmen. Are ya there?” Tammy said with a strong Washingtonian accent. Her voice was echoing in the background.

“I hear ya, Tammy, but I need you to turn your radio down, ok? Are you alone this Valentine’s Day weekend?”

“Yes. I broke up with my boyfriend a few weeks ago and I thought we’d be back together by now, but I guess he’s gone for good this time,” Tammy said with a hint of melancholy.

“What happened, Tammy?” Carmen said before taking another sip from her mug.

“Well. I was . . . I guess you could say I was being petty. Me and my boyfriend have been together for five years and we’ve been living together for almost two.

“Ok. Stop right there,” Carmen interrupted. “You’re living with this man unmarried”.

“Well . . . Yes,” Tammy said hesitantly.

“Um-hmm. Continue,” Carmen said in her “sister-girl” tone. Tammy let out a short giggle.

“Well, in the first year of living together, I didn’t bring up marriage because . . . honestly, I was ok with just living together. I saw it as a trial basis to see if we could actually live together and make it work. So he didn’t bring it up, and to be fair, I didn’t either.”

“Uh-huh. So you’re taking some ownership of the situation you eventually found yourself in. That’s good,” Carmen interjected.

“Yes. So a few weeks ago, my cousin got married and we went out of town to his wedding. Some of my peeps were asking me when me and Charles, that’s my ex’s name, were planning to tie the knot because . . . you know . . . that was the expectation since we’ve been together so long.”

“Uh-huh,” Carmen said as she wrote notes on her pad.

“So, because my family at the wedding were asking about when we were going to take the plunge, I brought it up on the drive back home.”

“Hmmm. And what was his reaction?” Carmen said adjusting her glasses on her nose.

“He wanted to know why was it so important what my family had to say about our relationship,” Tammy said.

“Out of curiosity, how long was the drive home?”

“We were coming back in from Philly, so I guess about 2 ½ hours, maybe a little longer.”

“Ok. So how did the conversation end and how did you get where you are today?”

“Well. The conversation didn’t go well at all. We argued almost all the way home, and I really feel as though he wasn’t listening or understanding my point. He just kept focusing on my family and saying how nosey they are, which made me very angry. I reminded him that we were talking about getting married, once upon a time, and that now that we’ve been together for so long, we should really consider where we are going with this relationship.”

“Wow. This is a common mistake we make as women. We set up house and live the life of a married person without the ring, then expect the ring to quickly follow. It’s rare when that works out for us. In most cases it doesn’t, and there are stats to prove it, sweetie,” Carmen offered.

“I know, but I really thought we were on the same page,” Tammy said quietly.

“It’s good that you addressed the subject directly. So tell me how this all lead to you being alone on Valentine’s Day?”

“I didn’t bring it up again until about two weeks ago. We had just gotten back from having dinner with friends in Georgetown and he was watching TV when I asked him if we could talk. I brought up marriage and he was completely on the defensive. He straight out told me he wasn’t ready and he couldn’t explain why or what that meant. I told him I didn’t want to continue living together without a plan and he told me, ‘I gotta do what I gotta do.’ So last week, I moved out.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Tammy. Did he ever tell you why he wasn’t ready or why he thought he may have been ready before when you two were actively talking about it?”

“No. He just said he wasn’t ready and he pretty much shut down after that,” said Tammy a little choked up.

“What do you want right now, Tammy?”

“I want my man back!”

“Are you willing to wait until he’s ready.”

"I don't know what that even means . . . when I'm ready," Tammy said in a huff.

Carmen sat back in her chair for a moment as she heard Tammy continue to lament about her situation. Hearing Tammy pour out her heart took Carmen back to the dilemma she was in two years ago with Miles Davidson, a man she once considered her soul-mate and the love of her life. Sadly, their relationship ended under similar circumstances, and now she has a second chance at love with Cory Madison, her pastor and boyfriend of nine months. She smiled knowing he would be waiting for her after she signed off the air.

"Well, in short order, although you had been talking about marriage before you moved in together, it doesn't sound as though living together was part of the overall marriage plan," Carmen said interrupting Tammy's tirade. "If you moved in to save for a scheduled wedding, that *might* qualify as being part of a marriage plan. Instead, it sounds as though you were both test driving this thing and perhaps one or both of you decided that you were comfortable with the current status of the relationship."

"Well, all I know is I love him and I want to get married," Tammy said with determination.

"I hear ya, girly. Here's my advice to you. When *you're* ready, invite him over for dinner . . . I know you know his favorites by now, right?"

"Yea, I know what he likes and how he likes it," Tammy said giggling.

"Great! Have him come over and after dinner, have a pressure free conversation with him, not about marriage but about what's important to you right now in the relationship. It sounds as though you want him back and you want to work through this impasse. Am I right?" Carmen said cuing Patrick for the time left in the segment.

"You're dead on," Tammy said with renewed confidence.

“Ok. So without judgment and with an ear to listen, listen to what he has to say about all of this. It sounds as though the conversations the two of you have been having have ended with his reaction as opposed to hearing what he has to say about the situation. Many times, men are not as forthcoming in verbalizing their feelings in love relationships, particularly if they feel threatened or pressured. I think the two of you may be surprised with the outcome of that conversation. You may walk away with a better understanding of his feelings and perhaps it will bring you closer together. There is also the chance that it will not end the way you would like for it to end. You have to be prepared for that possibility, too. If it doesn't work out, throw this experience in your bag of experiences and grow from it. Ok, Tammy?”

“Ok. That sounds cool.”

“And one other thing,” Carmen said coming in closer to the mic.

“What's that?”

“If you get back together, don't move back in. Shacking up can be a prescription for disaster in any relationship. Statistics confirm it and honestly he seemed to be on course to marriage until you moved in together.”

“I see what you're saying,” Tammy said.

“And were you practicing celibacy?”

“Um no,” Tammy said shyly.

“It may seem difficult, but it's possible as long as you're convicted about living for Christ,” Carmen adjusting her glass.

“Yes, Ma'am,” Tammy giggled.

“Great! Keep me posted on how things work out for you. Give me a call, email or post it on my blog.” Carmen saw the wrap up signal from Patrick. “Ok. Tammy's my last caller, folks. I'll be back with my final thoughts.”

Carmen took off the headphones as someone handed her a note—*Running late with a ministry meeting. Will call when I get out. Cory*

Carmen smiled as she bawled up the note and shot it into the trash can.

“Great topic today. Phones stayed lit for the duration of the show,” Patrick said into the microphone of the soundroom across from Carmen.

“Love is always a great topic for discussion”, Carmen said while writing notes on her tablet. “Valentine’s Day only makes it even more eventful. Big plans tonight?”

“Sherrie and I are going to do what we usually do, sit in front of the TV with popcorn watching a chick flick,” Patrick said with a grin.

“Now isn’t that adorable!” Carmen said taking a last swig of her now lukewarm tea. “Enjoy!”

“Yea, right . . . Ok and you’re on in 5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1.”

“Well thank you for your calls tonight, and thanks for inviting me into your heart on this cold, but beautiful Valentine’s Day night. We heard from a lot of you—married and single—who are spending your lover’s holiday alone. Psalm 37:4 says, *delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart*. Stay encouraged, and stay open to the possibilities of love. Wherever it finds you, be ready to receive it, and when you have it, make the best of it because it doesn’t promise to be with you always. It does promise to be as fulfilling as you’ll make it, so do it up! I’ll be back next weekend to take your love calls. Have a great V-Day and be safe out there.”

After saying goodnight to everyone, Carmen gathered her things and was about to put on her coat when her friend, Sheila Banks, walked into the studio.

“Hey, girly! Great show. What’s up for tonight?”

“Thanks. Well, I was planning to catch up with Cory after the show, but he’s delayed. What’s cooking with you?”

“Girl, I wish something was cooking with me,” Sheila said helping Carmen with her coat. “I should have called into your show tonight.”

“Why? What’s up with you and Gary?”

“We’re good . . . I guess. He’s hanging out with his boys tonight. I’ll see him tomorrow.”

“Really . . . ok,” Carmen said in an attempt to remain neutral as they walked down the hall to the parking lot.

“You don’t think that’s weird?” Sheila said baiting her.

“It doesn’t matter what I think, now does it,” Carmen said playfully raising an eyebrow.

“Well, you know what I mean. He’s not into the ‘lovey-dovey Valentine’s Day bull-crap’, as he calls it. It’s just another Friday and he’s hanging with the boys.”

“Ok . . . that’s cool . . . as long as you’re cool with it.”

“Well, I’m not totally, but you know. What can I say?”

“Whatever you feel you should say . . . but for now, just say yes to a chili smoke from Ben’s Chili Bowl. I’m starving!” Carmen said getting into her car. Sheila giggled and jumped into the passenger seat.

Back at her apartment, Carmen gazed out at the spectacular, panoramic water-view of the Potomac River from her National Harbor condo. The private boats had started their romantic sojourn towards Virginia and other points in Washington, DC and Maryland. She made a mental note to treat her BFF, Katrina Holmes, to a water taxi ride over to Old Town Alexandria when she arrived from New York in a few weeks. Katrina insisted on flying down to help unpack the mess of boxes that littered the sparsely furnished 12th floor abode. Carmen sighed heavily at the thought of unpacking what was thrown together in haste. Although the decision to move back home to Washington, DC was thoughtfully calculated, her packing was not.

Carmen was elated when she received the call from Howard University to host their new Saturday night radio talk show, Good Love. Although

the original idea behind the show was to discuss relationships in general, Carmen wowed the producers when she brought in the spin on Christian dating.

“Kind of a Saturday night bible study on relationships,” she said proudly.

Carmen didn’t think they were interested until she received the call three weeks later from the producer and was asked if she could be back in DC within a month. Carmen loved living in New York and working for the NY Times as a relationship columnist, but saw the radio show as a career opportunity that could not be missed.

Aside from being overjoyed with the idea of being back in her hometown with family and friends, she was especially happy about cultivating her relationship with her new beau, Cory Madison. She had known Cory since he was a minister at her family’s church, Agape AME. When his father fell ill and stepped down as pastor, Cory took up the mantel and has been serving as pastor for the past three years. Whenever she was home, Carmen would attend Sunday service with her Mom, and enjoyed Cory’s sermons. About a year ago, Cory started to inquiry about Carmen to her mother.

“He asked about me?” Carmen said incredulously.

“Sure! I was waiting for your Dad to bring the car around and we were talking and he asked about you,” Carmen’s Mom said with enthusiasm.

“Well, that’s not unusual, Mom. He’s asking because he’s our pastor, I’m sure.”

“He reads your column, too.”

“Really!”

“That’s what he said. I think he’s impressed by the scriptural foundation of your articles. I told him that came from me,” Carmen’s Mom said proudly.

“Right,” Carmen said laughing into the phone. “Well, maybe I can talk to him about it while I’m home for the holidays in a few weeks.”

“I think he’d like that,” Carmen’s Mom said grinning ear-to-ear.

Her conversation with Cory in the church parking lot turned into dinner a week later. He was very impressed with her views on relationships and her passion in ensuring God’s message was released to anyone who would hear it. She was doubly impressed with his conviction and dedication to service and living in purpose. After a few months, Carmen found herself in a full blown relationship with her pastor, and was loving every minute of it. Now that she was living in DC, she anticipated their relationship growing stronger. She hadn’t really dated since the break up with Miles, and the physical distance between she and Cory helped her to pace and better appreciate her relationship with him. Cory was different from any other man she dated, and she was certain their relationship was meant to be.

As she lifted the screaming teakettle from the heating element, Carmen checked her cell phone to see if Cory had sent a text message on his status. She had hoped they would have an early start on their weekend, but knew Cory had to be attentive to church business when duty called. She thought about sprucing up her apartment a little before he came over, but decided on second thought to wait for Katrina’s help.

Carmen was just about to go back to her bedroom when she heard the doorbell.

“Finally,” she yelled and headed for the door. Without looking through the peephole, she flung open the door ready to throw herself into Cory’s arms, but lost her balance suddenly.

“Hey, Lady,” Miles said holding a bottle of White Merlot in one hand and a box of Valentine candy in the other.

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When I’m. Ready

will be in stores Fall 2012.