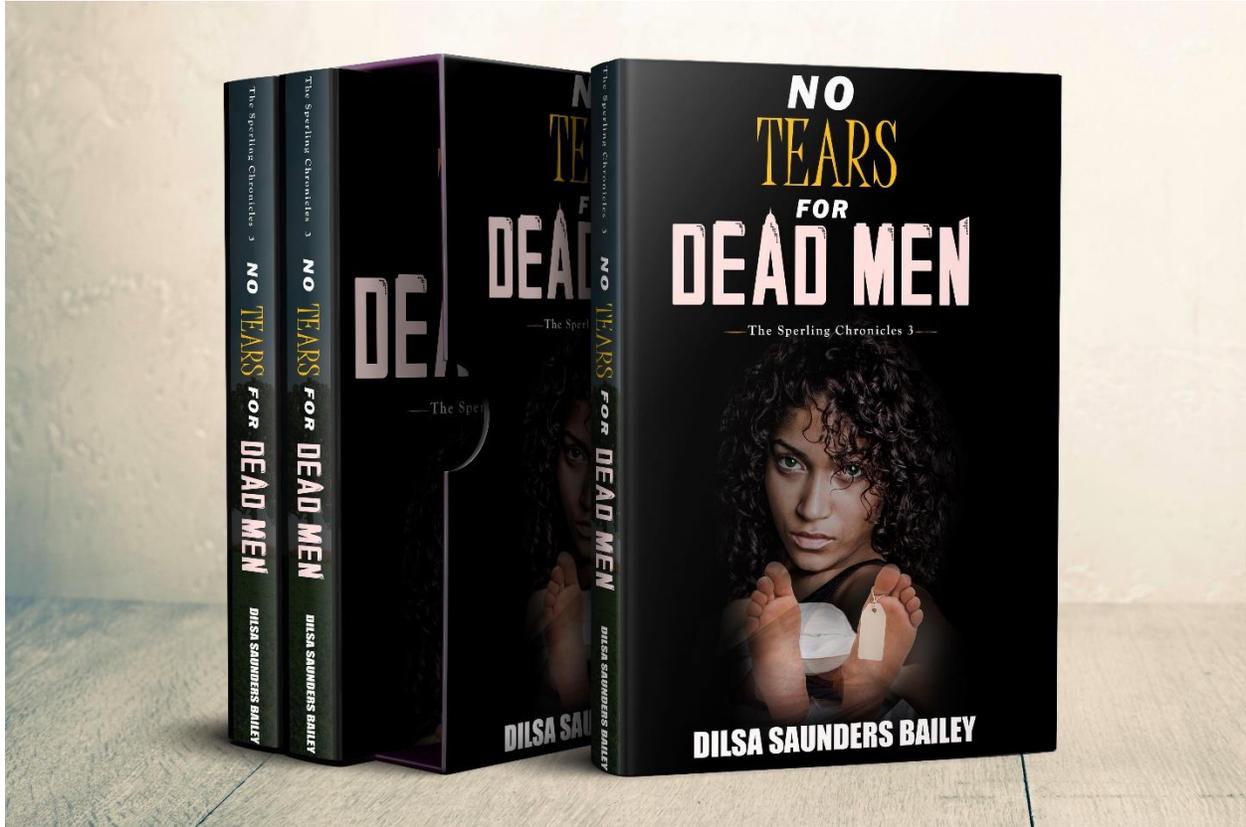


KALI'S CONTEMPLATION



By

Dilsa Saunders Bailey

THE DRIVEWAY WAS still the same. Kali heard the gravel popping as she drove up the slight incline. The sounds reminded her of the last day she had lived there. That infamous day that she tried not to think about, tried to hide from herself. But, it hadn't worked. After all these years, she would still awake from dreaming about the blood-splattered walls, and the gaping, gushing hole in the middle of her mother's chest. She had covered it with a pillow and tried to apply pressure. But,

her mother was already gone. So was her father. His head was a mess. A shotgun will do that to you.

She sat in the car and looked around for a while. The swing set was gone. The crepe myrtle trees were bigger. To her surprise, the house looked almost exactly the same. She wondered who lived there now. Somebody was maintaining it. The white trim glistened in the morning sun. Putting her hand on the door latch of her car, she took in a deep breath. Her new therapist had recommended this trip hoping it would help put those dreams to rest, though Kali didn't agree. How can you put a scene like that to rest -- ever?

Kali went to the front door and rang the doorbell. There were a few cobwebs around it, so she realized it wasn't used often. Whoever lived here, and their visitors, most likely used the door by the garage. She took a step back, thinking of going around to that side door when she heard movement inside. The door swung open and a tall, brown woman broke into a wide smile and then grabbed her. Kali almost fell into the door over the stoop. The woman hugged her tightly, rocking her.

"Kalina, oh my God, Kalina. It's really you. It's really you. You don't know how many times I pictured you walking up to this door. Oh, thank God. You finally came home. You finally came home," the woman said and then let her go.

Kali stood there staring at her, then past her. The place was even smaller than she had remembered.

"You don't know who I am, do you?" the woman asked, stepping back and waving Kali toward the small living room.

Kali shook her head, but followed her into the living room. She stood in front of the sofa, but not before turning and taking in a full view of the room. She

remembered stumping her knee against a coffee table that used to be there and a large color television set that her dad was so proud of used to be here, she thought as she looked toward the space. Now there was a big screen television on the wall and only a sofa and a loveseat. Her father's recliner that had helped to cramp the room was gone.

"Mandy." the woman reached out and touched her arm. "Kalina, I am Mandy. Your best friend from when we were little all the way through high school." Mandy's voice faded a little. "You do remember me, don't you? I know you have been through a lot over the years. I wanted to reach out to you, but your husband said you didn't want to hear from us. He asked us to give you your space. He said you would reach out when you were ready. I guess you are ready now," Mandy said with a nervous laugh that suddenly sounded a bit familiar.

"You knew Ashton?" Kali asked, not surprised the woman was Mandy. She did sort of look like her. She was much heavier, but Mandy always had been a little plump, even as a child.

"Yes, of course. He owns this house; well I guess you own it, technically. It's in your name, of course. But, he had everything that belonged to you stored. It's still in storage. He lets me and Rudy stay here to keep it vital, he says. He said an empty house dies fast."

"Did you have the baby?" Kali asked and eased down onto the sofa. The fact that Ashton had a hand in this house knocked the air of her. She had to sit down or fall down. There was no getting away from that man, dead or alive.

"Yes, I had a little girl. She's grown now. She will be graduating from USC-Columbia in a few weeks. And I had a boy. He's in college, too. And you, girl, I hear you have four children. I never imagined you with children. Heck, you didn't either

when we were younger,” Mandy said smiling down at her friend. “How are your children? How are *you*? Ashton’s death was all over the news down here.”

“They are doing well. So am I,” Kali said as she looked toward the stairs.

“Do you want to go up there? If you do, it’s okay. You can look all you want, and if you want, I will get the keys for the storage unit and we can go over there. I did keep a few little items around, just in case you knocked on the door one day.”

Kali took three deep breaths, rose from the sofa and dropped her purse on the table. The steps leading upstairs were only about four feet away in reality, but her eyes thought they were much, much farther. Her mind teased her that she would take too long to reach them, and her heart commanded her, “don’t go.”

Mandy stood at the bottom of the steps watching Kalina make slow deliberate movements, as if she were preparing for something dreadfully important. “Would you like some water or something?”

Kali shook her head no and took the first step away from the sofa. Her first instinct was to sit back down, but she took another step and then another until her hand rested on the bannister. There were only a few steps up to the next landing, nothing like the stairs in the penthouse or the house in Jersey. She could be at the top in a couple of seconds, but she couldn’t move. Perspiration burst from her cells as if someone had just sprayed her with one of those water guns her children played with growing up. She lifted her hand and rubbed the moisture in it on her pants leg. She didn’t want to slip. Then she noticed that her legs felt as if they were wrapped in weights and her knees felt as if they were splintered in place. She tried to lift her foot, but her legs were too constricted to move. Kali took another deep breath.

Mandy's warm hand rested on her lower back in support, "It's okay. You don't have to go up there right now. Take your time. Take all the time you want."

Kali shook her head and then gently pushed Mandy's hand away. She was going up there. Prying her foot from the floor, she lifted it to the bottom step. Her whole body began to shake, and in her mind, she heard the loud boom of the shotgun. Her foot dropped back. She looked at Mandy who didn't seem to be alerted to anything unusual, realizing the sound was more a memory than reality. She took another long, deep breath and lifted her foot again. It still shook with fear, but it moved. Holding onto the bannister, she moved up one step at a time until she was at the top of the landing. A memory of her mother pleading with her father caused her heart to pump loudly in her ears.

"Rudy and I have your parents' room. We didn't keep any of the furniture. It's in storage though, if you want it. Ashton said your mother's vanity was an antique and may be worth a lot of money. But, your bedroom set, that was real quality furniture. My daughter loved it as she grew up in there. It's still there, if you want to see it."

Kali held onto the wall as she made her way down the hall. She had to see it. She had to see her parents' room. That was where her nightmares took place at least once a month, now twice a week after all that had gone down with her husband recently.

Mandy opened the door for her, and then walked in. The bed was different, but it was in the same location where her parents' bed had been and Kali's knees began to buckle. She could see her mother's lifeless, bloody body staring at her. She closed her eyes and opened them again, seeing a lighter colored bedroom set with lavender bedding and with Christian-like pictures on the wall, which almost seemed

funny to Kali. She wondered how much lovemaking took place in this room under the watchful eye of a pious figure suffering and bleeding. It was obvious this family had never suffered any violence or tragedy. If they had had a reminder of someone's suffering, that wouldn't be something they would want to see at night before going to sleep. Kali walked over to the window and looked at the same forest she had seen on her last day there, and all the days before growing up. The trees hadn't been taken down to make room for a subdivision or anything like that. It was as if the place had been stuck in time.

Kali had seen enough and went back down the hall with more control over her legs now; her knees were bending without thought. She opened her bedroom door and smiled slightly. Mandy had been right. Her four-poster bed stood where it always had, along with her vanity, her dressers and her bookshelves. The furniture was well cared for and didn't look old or dated; it just shined as if it was expecting her. Kali walked in and slid her fingers across the top of the vanity and then checked her face in the mirror. It was done, she thought. She had faced her fears, but she wasn't feeling any differently. Maybe, just maybe the nightmare of her parents' murder-suicide would fade. But, what would take its place? The rapes, the murders, the loss of her home, loss of her husband? She had no idea what else she could withstand and she didn't want to know. All she knew was that she could cry no more tears for dead men.

Dilsa Saunders Bailey Books

Fiction

[The Sperling Chronicles 1: Dreams Thrown Away](#)

[The Sperling Chronicles 2: Split Images](#)

[The Sperling Chronicles 3: No Tears for Dead Men](#)

Non-Fiction

[A Comprehensive Guide to Finding the Right Doctor](#)

Available at Amazon and other online retailers.

www.simplydilsa.com

www.twitter.com/simplydilsa

www.facebook.com/dilsasaundersbailey