

Midtown Lovers

by

Austin Mitchell

Chapter One

Grant had made a date with Gena. They lived in the village of Jackson, about five miles north of Spanish Town. She worked with the Sinclairs as their assistant in the medium-sized grocery they operated at their home. She was a young woman going on thirty. She was a well proportioned girl and was a few inches shorter than him, Grant thought. She had a five year old daughter living with her mother in rural Trelawny.

Grant is a twenty seven year old man. He is tall, and athletic looking. Some women consider him handsome.

Grant could remember Sadie Jobson. She was a woman in her late twenties when he was just finishing up high school. She had always told him that she liked him. She lived with her boyfriend, Cliff, who worked in Kingston. It was she who had taught him everything he needed to know about a woman. He regretted when she moved with her man to live in Kingston. He had gone to see her a few times but she told him that most of the people in the yard were friends or relatives of her boyfriend. Grant didn't know if she was telling him the truth or maybe she just wanted to get rid of him. So the relationship had ended, but he didn't mind.

Women, older than him had often wondered at his skill in bed. They said that he was performing way ahead of his age. He had simply laughed and told them that he had read a lot of books about sex. But word soon got out about him, but although some of the women loved him for his virility, they also pointed out that they had needs. Gradually his relations broke up as some of the women were too demanding. Some of them wanted money and other gifts like cell phones and household appliances before they continued the relationship.

He was therefore glad when Gena came to work for the Sinclairs. He found her to be not too demanding, although he didn't

know if that would soon change. Sometimes he wondered if that had been the reason why Sadie had run him away.

He lived at his mother, Miss Dina's house. She is away in the United States, working as a nurse. She sends him food and clothing on a regular basis and also things to sell. The profits from the sale of these goods are shared between them.

"I don't want Miss Lena to know that I'm talking to you, Grant."

Most of the people in the village knew him and his reputation with women. This was especially so after what happened between him and Sadie.

He had been the man who had made Lewis turn out his woman, Dahlia. While Lewis was on the farm work program he used to sleep with her most nights. Her teenage daughter had squealed to Lewis about the men her mother was having while he was away. Grant knew that he wasn't the only man going to Dahlia as there were other men too.

"I'll climb the mango tree and drop into the yard. Listen for me knocking on your door tonight. I'll knock three times, wait for two seconds, then I'll knock two more times.

This was the first time he was going to sleep with her at her house. All the other times she had managed to slip away from the house unnoticed to be in his arms. Jasper had in fact left the house keys with her, saying that he was going to play dominoes with friends. Gena knew that he was going to sleep with some woman and would only be back before his employers woke up.

"Come about eleven o'clock. Come after Jasper has gone to bed, he's too fast."

She had already told him that she had heard him say that he wasn't going out tonight.

He knew Jasper, the Sinclairs' caretaker, as a very loud individual. He knew that he had been the man who had taken Leta away from Brim, a local barber. Rumor had it, that she had a child for him, although he had denied it. He wasn't sure if he hadn't been one of the men going to Dahlia.

“I know that guy, Jasper. I don’t trust him. Has he ever tried anything with you?”

“Are you mad? I would box him down. He doesn’t have enough money to deal with me.”

Grant laughed.

“I don’t like that guy. He has a very big mouth.”

“He has too many women, you mean. I’ve seen all kinds of women coming there to him.”

Grant wondered. Jasper was a tall, slim built man in his middle thirties. Rumor had it that he was from Portland, but had run away. Again, rumor had it that he had to be on the dodge because of the amount of women looking for him for child maintenance. Grant didn’t rightly know the amount of children the man had fathered. Frankly, it was none of his business so he left it at that.

So that night Grant climbed the mango tree at ten o’clock. It had started raining after he left Gena and the tree was slippery. He made sure that he wore rubber sole shoes. He looked over the wall. Gena was sitting beside Jasper but he couldn’t hear what they were talking about. He didn’t want to stay in the tree less Jasper saw him. He took his time to climb back down the tree. He would try again later that night.

It wasn’t until twelve o’clock before he tried again. He was sure that Jasper had gone to bed and Gena to her room. He hoped that she was awake and waiting for his coded signal.

She had told him where to find a small ladder. Once he dropped into the yard he found the ladder and set it up against the wall. It would do nicely as he could use it to climb the wall when he was leaving and drop down into the tree.

He made his way up to Gena’s door and knocked three times, then two more times as they had agreed. There was no sound and he began to wonder if she was sleeping so soundly not to hear him knocking.

He was moving away from the door when it was jerked open and a man shouted.

“Thief! Thief!”

It was definitely Jasper's voice.

Not waiting to hear any more, Grant sprinted for the ladder and was in the tree and on the ground in a second.

He sprinted for his house, which was half a kilometer away, not sure if Jasper was running after him. When he reached, he saw that there was no sign of pursuit.

There was a big rumor the next day that somebody had tried to break into the Sinclair's house by climbing the mango tree and jumping down into their yard. All the branches hanging over the wall were cut down.

Grant didn't see Gena again that week, but he heard that Miss Lena had fired her. He heard that she had been accused of inviting her lover into the house.

One day the next week he saw Jasper. The man stretched out his hand to him.

"I want fifty thousand dollars from you, Grant or else I'm going to Miss Lena."

"I don't owe you anything, Jasper and you can go to hell."

"When they lock you up, you'll be singing a different tune."

"You won't get any money out of me. You don't have anything on me, guy."

"We'll see, Grant, we'll see."

Grant hissed his teeth and walked away.

He received a call from Gena the next day that she wanted to see him. They agreed to meet at his house.

"So you stole Miss Lena's money and Jasper found out. You know I don't believe you."

They were at his house. Outside it was drizzling slightly. They were sitting on chairs on the verandah.

She was wearing a jeans skirt, a tank top and slippers. Grant was wearing a jeans pants, a t-shirt and slippers too.

"You believe that I was sleeping with him because I like him."

She was crying.

“He’s a blackmailer. He wants money from me or else he’s going to Miss Lena,” Grant told her.

“He’s trying to blackmail you and yet you don’t believe me.”

“Okay, you know what was happening, so why didn’t you warn me? You told me when to come and at the same time you were having sex with Jasper.”

“He forced himself on me.”

She was still crying.

Grant didn’t feel sorry for her. He felt she had been sleeping with Jasper all along. He was still disturbed by the fact that she had invited him to sleep with her, but she went to sleep with Jasper. Jasper could have chopped him that night. He could even have killed him.

A new girl came to replace Gena. Her name was Avrill. Grant heard that she was from St. Thomas, a parish in eastern part of the island. He saw her going in the direction of the pharmacy, but Jasper was always with her. She was very shapely he thought and looked younger than Gena, although they were probably the same height. Her breasts seemed to be very firm. He was sure that Jasper was checking her. After those two first weeks he didn’t see him with her again. He thought he knew why. He had heard that she was a Christian.

He saw her coming from the pharmacy one day and decided to approach her.

She was wearing a long pleated blue skirt and a long sleeve white blouse and slippers.

“Hi, I know your name, you’re Avrill.

She laughed.

“And you’re Grant, Gena’s former boyfriend.”

“My name is Grant, but I’m not Gena’s former boyfriend.”

“That’s what I heard.”

“From, Jasper?”

“He isn’t the only one who knew that you were friends.”

“All I know is that Gena used to work where you are now working. I talked to her a few times, but we were never lovers.”

“You’ll have to excuse me, but I have to go now,” she said and left.

Grant tried to see her again, but she hardly came out. He went to the shop, but there were always other customers there. Most of the times he simply bought what he had come for and left.

One Wednesday afternoon, he saw her in the small restaurant in the village square eating and he joined her.

She was eating fried chicken and potato chips.

“Mind if I join you?”

He had bought rice and peas and country style chicken.

“Go ahead.”

“I wondered what happened to you all these weeks I haven’t seen you.”

“Haven’t you seen me in the shop?”

“I don’t mean there. That’s hardly seeing you.”

“You have so many women. Why would you want to see me?”

“Because you’re the most beautiful girl in this village.”

“Am I? Please don’t flatter me.”

“You should become used to it by now. How about going for a drink with me on Friday?”

“I’m a Christian, Mister Grant. I’m not used to drinking hard liquor. It’s strictly against my religion.”

“Grant is my Christian name, my surname is Harper. I wouldn’t invite you out to drink hard liquor. It’s just some soft drinks we would have.”

They continued eating.

“What would your friends say if they saw you out drinking soft drinks?”

“They would laugh, but I don’t mind. I hardly drink strong liquor, anyway. So, are you game?”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t go out with you.”

“You have a boyfriend?”

“If it’s any of your business, no.”

They had finished eating now.

Grant wanted to ask her if she was sexually active, but decided to wait for another time.

Grant and Avrill met constantly over the next few weeks and became friends. He wanted her to go to bed with him, but she refused.

He learned that although she had some good grades in some of her subjects, she had found it hard to pick up any meaningful job. She told him that it was because she didn't have Mathematics or English. She also told him that she wanted to be a pharmacist so she would soon have to start studying again. He learned that she had been a Christian for six years now and was twenty four years of age.

She was actually from Dalvyey. Her surname was Thames. Her mother and father were still alive. She was the middle child in a family of three girls. One of her sisters was married and living in Ocho Rios. The other one worked in a jewelry store in Downtown, Kingston. Her father was an overseer at a farm in Yallahs while her mother worked in a haberdashery in Morant Bay.

“Okay, so you're not a virgin, so what are you afraid of?”

They were sitting on one of the concrete benches in the park in the village.

“I've made up my mind that the next man I go to bed with has to be my husband. Grant, any man who wants this girl's body has to be prepared to marry her first.”

“Suppose no man is prepared to do that? What will you do, remain a single woman?”

“Why not, if God wants it that way, then so be it.”

The next month Grant's mother came out for a visit and met Avrill. She thought that she was a lovely girl and encouraged him to marry her. She told him that it was time he settled down.

Grant didn't know if he agreed with her. Several of his classmates were still unmarried. The last time he checked, the only ones who were married were those who lived abroad.

Grant told Avrill what his mother had told him. She laughed and said.

“I sincerely hope that’s not a proposal because I couldn’t marry you.”

Grant became serious. They were sitting on a bench in the local park one evening.

“I thought you were in love with me?”

“Before you marry a woman, Grant, think of how you are going to maintain her. You’re not even working. I’m not making that much money where I am. Listen, I’m still young. I don’t want to tie up myself with any man. The next thing you’ll be asking is for me to have children with you.”

“Why do people get married?”

“There are a lot of things to consider before getting married. I want to have my career before I think about marrying any man.”

Grant felt that his mother wasn’t serious about him marrying Avrill.

He told her that if they got married, she had to come and live with him.

She had refused, telling him that she didn’t want to live under

his mother’s roof. She also said that she could never marry an unemployed man. He countered that he was in business with his mother. She would send out goods for him to sell at the house. He would also take some of the goods to sell in major towns. He drove a 2010 Toyota Townace minivan. They would share the profits. She told him that she could never call what he was doing, work.

Grant thought about what she said. He knew he could get a job as he was a trained chef with over five years experience. The last

place he had worked was at Dickson’s Restaurant in Old Harbour. He had only left when his mother proposed the scheme to him. He would talk to his mother and then give Josh Dickson a call. Once he got a job he would rent a room.

Something still troubled him. It was Avrill’s continued refusal to sleep with him until they were married.

There was Jasper, he would spread it all over the village that he had never slept with Avriil. He knew that the man was watching her like a hawk. He would invite Avriil to spend time at the house with him.

Chapter Two

“So you’re going to marry Grant?” Jasper asked Avrill as they sat on a bamboo bench in the yard one evening, a week later.

“You’ve asked me that question over and over and I’ve told you, no. I’m not marrying Grant. Does that satisfy you?”

“There is a strong rumor that the rings have been bought and the date set,” he told her.

“Maybe you know more than I do, but I can tell you that I haven’t agreed to marry anybody.”

Jasper laughed and drank some more of his malt beverage.

“That’s not what I heard from Grant. He told me that you’re his woman and was begging him to marry you.”

Avrill burst out laughing. Over the last few months that she had gotten to know Jasper she knew that he was a great liar. He was capable of lying his way out of anything. She remembered when she first met him, he had been after her to go to bed with him.

“I don’t believe that Grant told you anything. You’re just trying to find out what you can about him and me, but I have nothing to tell you more than to mind your own business.”

Jasper burst out laughing and Avrill stamped her feet and walked away.

Grant decided to try his luck and persisted in asking Avrill to go to bed with him. She steadfastly refused. He again reminded her that she wasn’t a virgin and she got angry and stormed away.

They didn’t speak for two weeks. During this time Grant was thinking of looking other women. After all, he reasoned, there were lots of women out there willing to go to bed with him so why waste time with Avrill?

Avrill texted him that she wanted a meeting with him. Grant decided to be cruel and called her. He told her that it didn’t make any sense for them to meet as the affair was going nowhere.

Avrill wore a blue dress and she also had on a long sleeve sweater and slippers. Grant as usual wore jeans, a short sleeve shirt and slippers.

“Is it because I don’t want to go to bed with you?” she asked as they met in the park that evening.

“That’s not the main reason. You don’t want to spend any time with me.”

Avrill laughed.

“Look how many times we’ve met and talked about all kinds of things. I have to work, Grant. What will my employers think if I beg them for time off because I want to see you?”

It was Grant’s turn to laugh.

They agreed to see each other at least an hour each evening. If either of them couldn’t make it, they were to call. Most of the times he tried to convince her to marry him. She always told him that she was not ready.

She would only go to places like gospel shows and concerts with him. Grant didn’t mind as he got to see and talk to her more.

Whenever she came to his house, she would stay on the verandah. She told him that she didn’t want anybody to see her coming out of his house and begin spreading rumors on her. She would only kiss him on his cheeks. She would slap his hand away whenever he tried to touch her breasts. Whenever he tried to caress her legs, she would push his hand away.

Sometimes he became angry with her and told her that nowadays men didn’t marry women they didn’t know anything about. She countered that her second boyfriend had turned his back on her after she became intimate with him. That was why she didn’t trust men.

“Why can’t you believe that everything is okay with me. I believe that everything is okay with you.”

“Do you think I’m too old for you?”

“You’re just a few years older than me. But I heard that you prefer older women.”

Grant laughed and told her that he didn’t know who could have told her that.

Avrill countered by saying that she had gotten it from good sources.

Grant told her that he preferred women near his age.

He and her left the park holding hands.

In June there was a two week long crusade put on by an associate church of Avrill's church. She had actually found a sister church in Jackson to her church in Morant Bay. Grant and Avrill went there every night. Several persons came up and got baptized. Avrill encouraged him to get saved but he told her that he was not yet ready.

June turned into July and Avrill told him that she was still disappointed that he hadn't gotten saved during the crusade. He countered by asking her if all those persons who got baptized during the crusade were still attending church. She told him that as far as she knew none of them had turned back.

Grant could see that she was acting braver now. Most evenings after she finished her work she would come and spend an hour or so with him. He had by this time gotten his chef's job back, but some evenings only worked until five o'clock. Sometimes he would bring home food, but other times he would cook for both of them.

Avrill complimented him on his skills in the kitchen. He told her that his real skills were in the bedroom, which made her burst into laughter. Sometimes, she cooked for both of them at the house. They both agreed that they didn't have anything to worry about as far as food was concerned. Grant told her that he had heard of marriages breaking up because one or both of the parties couldn't cook. That would never happen in their case and they both burst out laughing.

She was all over the house, although she avoided his bedroom. His house had four bedrooms. His mother had insisted that he not rent out any of the rooms. She said that if she and her husband wanted to spend a vacation in Jamaica that was where they would spend it.

He remembered after Lewis had put out Dahlia she had come knocking. He had told her that his mother was due in the island in a weeks time. He told her that she would kick up one hell of a fuss if she came and saw her there. She had cursed him off that day. He had heard that she was living in May Pen with a taxi operator.

July turned into August and they continued dating. After church was over he would take her sightseeing. They would spend a long time in various parks, talking. Sometimes they would return in time for night service.

On Avril's days off she would go with him to the country. Gena lived in Bog Walk, so he always avoided driving in that direction. He got to meet all the members of Avril's immediate family. Her mother commented on how handsome, he looked. She begged him to take good care of her daughter. He assured her that he would.

He could see that she was now in love with him. She told him so. He wasn't sure about what to do. Normally when girls told him that they were in love with him, he would tell them that he loved them too. They would make love and if the affair didn't last, well so be it. Even a few Christian girls and he had been lovers.

But this girl was a different kettle of fish. He sought advice from his longtime friend Tony Notice. Unlike Jasper, Tony was a confidential person and wouldn't go blurting what he had told him all over the village.

"I don't know what to do about this girl, Tony."

Tony and he had been classmates. They were probably the only ones still around. Tony operated a mechanic shop in the village. Like himself, he wasn't married but was living with a woman with whom he had two children.

"Based on what you've told me, this girl wants to get married before she agrees to go to bed with you."

"That's exactly it. I have other women, but this girl has gotten to me. I think about her all the time. I don't know what I would do if she left me."

“Maybe you’re just infatuated with her.”

“It’s more than that. I just can’t stop thinking about her.”

“Tell you what I would do if I were you. I would seek out somebody in her district and ask about her.”

Grant didn’t know why he hadn’t thought of that before. He thanked Tony and they had another beer before he left.

By the next week Grant had met an old man, Billy Watson.

This

was on the outskirts of Morant Bay. He bought him a beer. Billy told him that he knew him as he had seen Thames’ daughter driving in his van.

“She was along with one of my sons. But she left him, he was too wild for her.”

Grant’s interest in the conversation heightened.

“She is a good girl and she comes from a good family.”

Grant bought him another beer before leaving.

He didn’t let Avrill know that he had spoken to the father of one of her former boyfriends.

Towards the end of August he told her that he had a surprise for her. So the last Saturday in the month he took her to a restaurant in Portmore. Avrill was surprised to see a few of Grant’s friends also dining in the restaurant. Towards the end of the meal he took a small box out of his pocket. To Avrill’s astonishment, it was an engagement ring. She was still in shock when he put it on her finger as his friends applauded.

She told him that although they were engaged, they had to put any marriage plans on hold. He told her that he had no problems with her going back to school once they were married. Much to Grant’s annoyance she told him that he was nearing thirty years of age and she was sure that many of his friends were already fathers. He told her that he wasn’t that anxious to have children. He told her that a man had told him about a small side of a house on the outskirts of Jackson. The next day both of them went to see it and Grant decided to rent it after driving a bargain with the owner.

“Grant, what you’re doing is crazy. You’re living in two houses.

Do you think you can afford it?”

“It’s only one rent I’m paying. And if we get married, we’ll want somewhere to live apart from my mother’s house.”

“I haven’t agreed to marry you, Grant.”

“But you will, it’s only a matter of time. Besides, when my mother comes out with that husband of hers, sometimes the place feels crowded.”

They were on the verandah of Grant’s mother’s house.

They sat there talking until Avrill told him that it was time for her to go home.

In December, they went shopping in Kingston one Saturday afternoon. Avrill showed off her engagement ring to her sister, Debs. Grant took them both to a seafood restaurant on the Waterfront.

That night Debs phoned her.

“Avrill, I’m jealous. He’s so handsome and sexy. Hold on to him. Has he asked you to marry him, yet?”

“Of course, many times. But, I’ve turned him down each time.”

“What! I don’t believe you. You don’t believe he can support you? Is that it or are there other issues?”

“He works as a chef, plus his mother sends out things for him to sell. But, he has other women.”

“Girls are bound to be chasing him, but don’t give him up, Avrill. I’ll come to look for you and we can talk some more,” Debs said before they both ended the call.

On Christmas Eve they went to the grand market in Linstead. Grant was fearful that they would meet up on Gena down there. She had told him that she was going to spend the holidays with her daughter. She had begged him to take her down there. He had told her that he had to look parts for the van as it needed servicing.

Grant bought a few items for himself and some gift items for Avrill too. On the way home, she again expressed her love for him. She told him that she was staying at Miss Lena's house for the holidays so that she could be nearer to him.

Grant wondered if that meant that she was keeping an eye on him. But he reasoned that she had a right as she was now his fiancée. Instead of the endless parties he would have attended over the Christmas holidays with Gena and other women he found himself going to church with Avrill. They attended a few gospel shows and a religious play put on by a Kingston church.

On Valentine's day he ordered a gift basket for her. She also sent him one. They had dinner at a restaurant in Old Harbour.

And so February drifted into March. Grant knew that Avrill was hopelessly in love with him. It was just a matter of time before she agreed to marry him.

In April, much to Grant's surprise Avrill agreed to marry him. She told him that she had spoken to her pastor. He was against the marriage. He wanted both of them to come in for counseling. She warned him that was the only way the pastor would agree to them getting married.

Grant agreed to go with her for counseling. At his first meeting with the parson the man told him that he had only agreed to the marriage because of Avrill's assurance that Grant would soon come into the faith. Grant assured him that he loved Avrill and he wanted to be a Christian. They went to several more counseling sessions. The wedding was set for three month's time in June. Miss Dina, Grant's mother and his sister, Ariella, would be coming.

He and Avrill met several times to plan their wedding. They both agreed on a small wedding to cut down costs. They agreed to invite only their close friends and relatives. They agreed for the wedding to be held at Avrill's church and the reception to take place at his mother's house. They both agreed to meet several more time to further work out details concerning the wedding. Avrill told him that her married sister was proving very helpful.

Jasper confronted Grant some days later.

He was laughing and said.

“So you’re going to marry Avrill? I bet if she knows certain things about you she would call off that wedding.”

“Go to hell, Jasper. What are you trying to do, blackmail me? I can assure you that it’s not going to work.”

Jasper laughed again as Grant brushed past him and went his way.

The argument with Jasper set Grant thinking. Was the man watching him? He still went with one or two girls in the village. He had sworn them into secrecy by giving them money. Unknown to a lot of people he and Gena were still seeing each other. They had made up after the incident at the Sinclair’s house. He would drive his van to her district to see her. He could get away with it because the business he was in required him to go to other towns to sell. He hadn’t told Gena about him and Avrill and wondered if she wouldn’t hear it from Jasper.

Six weeks before the wedding Miss Lena’s husband, Blake, fell off a horse he was riding and died from the blows he received to his head. Avrill and the whole household were devastated at the news. Nevertheless, Blake was buried a month later. To Grant’s consternation Gena came to the funeral. He tried his best to avoid her the whole time she was there. Later that night she called to find out why he had been avoiding her.

“I heard about you and that girl, Avrill. You are getting married to her.”

“Who told you about me and her, Jasper?”

“Does it have to be him? The whole village knows about it.”

Grant digested what she was saying.

“I’m sure it was him who told you everything. Why did you have to talk to him?”

“He’s my friend and former co-worker. If it wasn’t for him I wouldn’t know about you and this Christian girl. So she isn’t sleeping with you, that’s why you are along with me. Well, it’s finished now,” she said and ended the call.

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