



Praise for Leaving a Charmed Life

In writing her stunning memoir, *Leaving a Charmed Life*, Kadian has fully stepped onto the path her soul intended and shows us all how to heal not only our current life but generations back—and forward.

—**Ainslie MacLeod**, author of *The Instruction*
and *The Old Soul's Guidebook*

Not all that glitters is gold. *Leaving a Charmed Life* is a must-read book that offers courage to face your own traumas and patterns. Kadian portrays how early childhood love, encouragement, and support can help to remedy what happened behind closed doors.

—**Keith Shepherd**, Jamaican artist and dub poet

Kadian Grant's memoir is a touching and insightful account of her journey of self-discovery and survival. Through her raw and honest prose, Grant invites readers into her innermost thoughts and emotions, sharing a part of herself that is both vulnerable and empowering. Her memoir is a testament to the power of self-discovery and exploration and is sure to captivate readers with its heartfelt and relatable story.

—Suzie Housley, **Midwest Book Review**

Kadian Grant bravely bares all as she details her inner journey towards forgiveness and endeavors to break patterns of abuse that span generations. *Leaving a Charmed Life* begs the question: what would you be willing to risk to pursue your own happiness?

—**Christine Herbert**, author of *The Color of the Elephant*

Kadian Grant has a way with words. While we expect that from an author, this is extremely impressive in a freshman effort where her soul is so very open. [...] This is a quick read. This is a deep read. It is not an easy read, but a s'hero's quest should not be. The darkness is real. The work Ms. Grant does is real and the battle we know is uphill and ongoing. When the goal is achieving authentic happiness, is that effort possible? Spoiler alert—the answer is YES! The “why” you know. The “how”, you need to know. [...] Fellow warriors, those of us who have battled some of the same demons, or have those they love who may be locked in that battle now, will have a great opportunity to give a gift of importance.

—**Sherri Rase**, reviewer for *Out in Jersey* magazine and [Q]onStage

leaving a
**CHARMED
LIFE**

A TRUE STORY
OF CHOOSING
AUTHENTIC
HAPPINESS

KADIAN GRANT



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This work depicts actual events in the life of the author as truthfully as recollection permits. While all persons within are actual individuals, some names have been changed to respect their privacy.

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To my three beautiful children, Kamilah, Khaleel, and Kyra. You are my greatest inspiration. I am in love with all of you.

Mama, my first embodied horizon, I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE

Remembering Authentic Happiness

I remember sensing something greater than myself as a four-year-old living in Jamaica. It happened on one of our family outings to the beach, my favorite activity as a child. We only went about three times a year and my excitement always kept me up the night before.

Even though I lived in the impoverished neighborhood of Waterhouse, my step-grandfather, whom we called Papa, owned an automobile. He had a 1961 Austin Cambridge that he painted blue from its original gray color. We were the only family in the neighborhood with a car in the sixties and early seventies. Papa on occasion was like the neighborhood's Uber driver, except he didn't charge anyone. He drove many families to the hospital or clinic for the arrival of their newborn or if someone fell ill or to help in any way possible.

His Austin Cambridge seated five passengers comfortably, but our outings consisted of my grandparents, two uncles, an aunt, my twin brothers, and myself. With so many people going, my brothers and I had to sit on someone's lap since we were the youngest. Most often, I had to sit in the rear middle spot because Adrian and Brian had to be apart from each other or else they'd fight the whole journey.

Grandma did not go on this trip, so my older uncle sat in the front passenger seat, and I got to sit on his lap. I rolled the window down all by myself, feeling grown up doing so. When we drove through the gate, the dogs bolted after the Austin, wanting so desperately to come on our outing. Adrian and Brian spun around and cheered on the dogs, “Come on!” and “Run, run, run.” I laughed aloud, observing the drama from the left side mirror (Jamaica is a right-hand drive country). The dogs followed until they were tired, then we waved goodbye to them, and Adrian and Brian faced forward once again.

On the way, Papa stopped by the roadside vendors to buy mangoes, guinep, and coconut water to “wash off our hearts” (a Jamaican saying indicating one of the many health benefits of the coconut). We all piled out of the car to snack and socialize. After our bellies were full, I crawled back onto my uncle’s lap, and we were on our way. We soon came upon the familiar forest of trees that would guide us to Hellshire Beach. I loved watching their gigantic leaves sway back and forth at the hand of the wind. I perked up at the sudden flash of turquoise that jutted from beyond the branches. Then, more flashes of turquoise appeared, and it seemed a game of peek-a-boo was on its way. I took delight in the ambient sound of the wind, its own unique tone carried by the ruffled leaves.

Wisps of the salted sea teased my nostrils, and I inhaled its freshness. I could hardly contain myself when the crisp, cool breeze separated the branches and unveiled the limpid blue sea. And it seemed our game had ended. The breeze caressed my face, scattered my plaits, and massaged my scalp. I was becoming drowsy, so I put my left arm on the door of the car to catch my falling head. I took slow deep breaths, falling in and out of consciousness, and melted in the serenity.

I stuck my hand out of the window, opening and closing my fingers, pretending to squeeze the breeze, then release it. Moments later, all molecular structure around me vanished, and I floated in its fluid space. I smiled from ear to ear, enjoying this experience,

until my uncle's tactile tickle jerked me back to our present time, and I landed back on his lap.

“Why are you smiling?” he asked.

I giggled and said, “Cause I'm happy!”

That unfamiliar presence stayed with me as we approached Hellshire. When we arrived, I ran onto the beach, still smiling because this presence continued vibrating within me and around me. I spun around until I fell onto the white sand. A light so bright demanded my attention, and I gazed upon its vastness. Beyond the glistening water, I saw a horizon with an uncontested beauty that froze me. I felt enticed and entranced. I gave in to the horizon's allurements and somehow knew my life was also limitless. At four years old, I felt that a greater purpose than Waterhouse, Jamaica, awaited me.

I stood up and looked around. Everything seemed anointed with a blinding luster. The sand, seawater, fish, rocks, all of it imbued with the horizon's beauty. I twirled as fast as I could, hoping to disappear into its bigness and traverse the continuum, when I heard “Charm, Charm, Charm” in the distance. The calling of my name jolted me out of blissfulness and steadied me in the sand. I saw my twin brothers running towards me with a gleefulness that expanded my heart. They were having their own bliss, but I knew it was only a modicum of what I had felt.

This day at the beach left an indelible imprint on my human consciousness and a yearning for authentic happiness for decades to come. I never had that experience again in Papa's car. After that day, I cried whenever I couldn't sit by the window going to the beach. No one knew the real reason why I cried because I couldn't put words to the experience for them to understand. My family thought I was just behaving like a spoiled child. But I had shared in something grand, and the life that had beckoned me on that day was now antagonizing me. I thought it was the magic of sitting by the open window that brought it forth.

On my journey as an adult to reclaim my authentic happiness, I recalled this soul-opening moment. If I had retrieved it more often from childhood to adolescence, I might not have settled so easily for external happiness or a small existence. This beach-breeze memory waned over time. It was not long before I re-tuned to my existing reality. But throughout my life, I had special people as embodied horizons who stood in its place as reminders. They planted seeds within me of who I really was and would assist in correcting my course if I were thrown off.



CHAPTER TWO

Love Was My Beginning

My life story began with me jumping into Ms. Brown's birth canal in 1966 when she was seventeen years old and concealing myself in her womb. Ms. Brown was disappointed about being pregnant because my father was already residing in the United States, and she was afraid he wouldn't own the pregnancy. Also, she was in her last year of high school and wanted to graduate then go on to nursing school. That was the future she wanted for herself.

She was still having her menstrual cycle, but Grandma took Ms. Brown to the doctor when she saw her breasts growing. The doctor confirmed my mother was with child. Grandma wanted Ms. Brown to have an abortion because she was unsure of my father's involvement since he was no longer in the country. Even though Ms. Brown wasn't ready to be a mother, she did not want to terminate the pregnancy. When Grandma took her back to the doctor to inquire about an abortion, it was too late. Her test results showed she was already four months along.

Ms. Brown finally mustered up enough courage to go to the telephone company to relay the news to my father. He agreed that he was the father but wanted to know why she waited so long to tell him. She explained that her cycle hadn't stopped, therefore it

hadn't crossed her mind. She also conveyed her mother's concern about the baby's financial future. My father told my mother to ask Grandma to call him.

Grandma and my father had a lengthy talk, and he assured her of his duty as a father. The conversation seemed to calm Grandma as she was no longer quarrelsome about the situation. Ms. Brown had to give up the future she envisioned for herself to stay home. A pregnant girl was not allowed to continue on in school in Jamaica.

In the early stage of Ms. Brown's third trimester, my father came through on the promise he made to Grandma on the phone. He shipped a crib, pram, baby formula, lots of clothes, toys, and everything he thought I would need. No one had ever seen a crib like the one my father sent, and I was the first child to have a pram in the neighborhood. Ms. Brown once told me, "Everyone envied you, and you weren't even born yet." My father provided for my birth and all of Ms. Brown's needs. He sent lots of pretty dresses when he heard he had a daughter. Grandma felt more secure about my financial future and trusted that my father would stick around.

Ms. Brown slept in Mama's bed closest to the wall her entire pregnancy. Mama was my great-grandmother. Ms. Brown lived with her for most of her childhood into adolescence. Ms. Brown would say, "Mama meant the world to me. She was more of a mother to me because I spent more time with her than my own. She was always there for me." Unlike Grandma, Mama wasn't upset about Ms. Brown's situation. She viewed it as something that had already happened, and everyone just needed to accept it. Ms. Brown said Mama was immediately overprotective. "She didn't want me to leave the house. She monitored my eating. She spoke to you constantly." Mama's love for me went beyond the grandparent syndrome of over-loving the grandchildren. I was hers before I was born.

One night, in January 1967, Ms. Brown opened her eyes to see something large and black on the ceiling. When the bat flinched,

she screamed and jumped over Mama to escape, but Ms. Brown's foot got caught in the sheet, and she landed hard on her belly. She was overcome by her fear of flying animals and hadn't noticed the terrible pain she was in or the water trickling down her leg. Unable to stand and breathing heavily, Ms. Brown crawled to the next room on her hands and knees and sat behind the curtain that separated the rooms.

Mama rushed past Ms. Brown into the kitchen, grabbed the broom, and re-entered the bedroom, like a boxer entering the ring of a prize fight. Ms. Brown said, "I knew that bat wasn't going to survive when I saw the determination on Mama's face to get it away from her unborn grandchild." The curtain closing was the boxing bell ringing, and Mama and the bat entered the fray. Mama was immediately on the attack and the bat on the defense. Every time Mama swung, the bat dodged the broom, flitted around her head, and pitched on an adjacent wall. In desperation, Mama flung the broom in the bat's direction and missed. "You better get out of here," she warned. Mama picked up the broom and swung again but missed once more. "You're not welcome here!" She missed again and again, and it seemed the bat was just toying with her.

Mama went from trying to time the bat's landing to swinging in a frenzy. With every swing she yelled a different word, "You're... not... staying... in... here... with... my... great... gran..." Then the bat took a hit and landed on the bed. "You little wretch," shouted Mama in victory, but the bat swiftly recovered and pitched onto the wall. Mama's determination to protect unborn-me outmatched the bat's stamina.

This tussling went on for about fifteen minutes. Finally, Mama swung as hard as she could, and with what seemed like her last breath, struck the bat, and it fell on the tiled floor. Standing over the bat was a woman who would protect me at all costs. Mama quickly placed the broom on top of it, and yelled out to Ms. Brown, but she didn't respond.

Mama exited the room and glanced down at my mother sitting in a pool of clear water. "Are you all right?" she asked, panting.

Ms. Brown followed Mama's eyes to her crotch and sobbed with embarrassment, "I peed on myself."

After assessing the situation, Mama said, "That's not pee, your water broke." Mama watched her vigilantly and prayed through the night until it was time to go to the hospital.

I obviously survived the bat saga and entered this world the following night, unharmed, in my birth land of Kingston, Jamaica. When Ms. Brown returned from the hospital, Mama whisked me away from her arms and took me into the house. She didn't want anyone's "jealous" eyes on me. She didn't want anyone to touch me. It would be months before she allowed anyone to take me out of the yard. Mama's protection of me never waned.

My godmother, Aunt Steph, named me Kadian. She traveled often and was out of the country for my grand entrance. But when Aunt Steph returned home from her travels, she gifted me with a book and kept calling me her *lucky charm*. She visited me often and would shout from the gate, "Where is my charm?" Or if someone was holding me, she'd say "Give me my lucky charm!"

Everyone started calling me Charm after that. Kadian was now one aspect of who I was, but nonetheless, the greater aspect. And my family used Aunt Steph's dotting words to create Charm, my other aspect.

Ms. Brown left abruptly for the United States when I was five and a half months old. I remained in the care of her side of the family, living with Mama, my grandparents, and their three children. Mama became my full-time caregiver, while Grandma tended to her bar and grill business six days a week. This home was dysfunctional, chaotic, and often violent.

A few months after Ms. Brown arrived in America, she was with child again. My parents decided it would be best if she gave birth in Jamaica, then rejoined my father to continue building the life they wanted for all of us. It would've been difficult to do that with a newborn. Ms. Brown returned to Jamaica during her third

trimester, where the doctors informed her that she was having twins. My brothers, Adrian and Brian, were born in November 1968. When my father visited three months later, my parents were married, and he stayed awhile to spend time with us and his other four children from a previous marriage. My mother returned abroad when Adrian and Brian were about six months old.

My father continued providing financial assistance to Grandma. He also sent money monthly to finish the construction on her home. It was one of the better homes in our area after completion. Every year my parents shipped barrels filled with necessities like food and clothing, plus other things. I had jewelry, loads of dresses with matching shoes, and toys. I even had a doll that crawled when you pushed a certain button.

In the evenings, my family would bathe me, put me in one of my fancy dresses, and place me on the verandah like I was on display. People used to say that I looked like a doll. I wasn't allowed to run around barefooted like everyone else. Our neighbors weren't allowed to play with me and my brothers or to touch us. My cousin once said to me, "Even though we lived in the same house, I was poor, but you weren't. I was treated like the help, and you were treated like a prized doll."

My brothers and I were left in Mama's care during the day while my grandparents, uncles, and aunt were gone. Mama was everything to me and one of my early embodied horizons. Mama had an irresistible smile and an infectious laugh. She was committed to her religion and quoted biblical scriptures often. She wore long dresses only, spoke softly, and never swore. Her role in my life was indispensable.

Every morning Mama smudged the house of all bad energies with prayers. She made us get on our knees to give thanks to God for our rising, then she prayed hard and long. She told us how powerful God was and that He can change our situation instantly. All we had to do was ask.

After prayer, my brothers and I were given a teaspoon of cod liver oil, followed by breakfast. Sometimes, Mama prepared two or

three separate dishes because we each wanted something different to eat. I always wanted rice porridge, and my brothers wanted corn meal. After breakfast, our world became magical. Mama watched us from her favorite chair in the back of the house while we climbed the trees in the yard, chased the chicks and chickens, laid our heads on the dogs in the sun, and ate from the fruit trees, whatever was in season—mango, guinep, cherry, sweetsop—except the ackee tree. We wouldn't eat straight from the ackee tree because *that* fruit needed careful preparation.

We had ackee and saltfish often during ackee season. Mama only picked ackee pods that had already opened naturally because if they are forced open, the hypoglycin levels are too high, and eating them will be fatal. I was taught that this toxin gets released upon the ripe ackee opening itself, which is the indicator for safe consumption. Even if the ackee pod only opens a little, that's enough to release the poison. A pod consists of three fruits inside, but on rare occasions, a pod will surprise you with four fruits.

My brothers and I often fought for Mama's attention. Adrian and Brian competed in soccer on the verandah, while Mama cheered them on. I sat between her legs and read my books to her. Mama never dressed me up. She let me wear shorts and sneakers.

Mama was always on edge when my aunt and uncles returned home in the evening. Our idyllic manifestation temporarily vanished along with Mama's smile as an uncharming world imposed itself between us until dawn rose again—a dysfunctional reality that functioned on bickering and violence.

My brothers and I lived amongst beings who did not revere the lives of humans or animals, and we saw this through the violence that occurred. For instance, my older uncle's rage on the family was perplexing. He would beat on his younger brother and sister, chase them with a machete, or kick them like a soccer ball. If my grandparents were home and they tried to intervene, he would beat on them too. My uncle didn't hit me or my brothers because he feared my father. He knew my father had friends who kept a watchful eye and would let him know if

anything was happening to us, and it would only take a phone call to end it all.

Mama hated for us to witness the daily violence so she would usher us to the back of the house, sit on her favorite chair, and hide us underneath her long frock to protect us. To drown out the profanity and other terrible things that were said, she would sing her favorite hymn, “Blessed Assurance,” and belt out the chorus “This is my story, this is my song.” Then she’d whisper to us, “Jesus will always protect you.” It seems Mama was trying to convey that this would not be our life.

Along with the violence, the occupants of the house weren’t very educated—therefore they did not honor education or envision bigger lives for themselves. I could tell because they blended into their environment well. There weren’t talks of being anywhere else even though they had family abroad. They bought into their small existence. They had lost familiarity with their horizon. Mama knew living in Waterhouse with my family was a meager existence and she did not want that for me. She unknowingly worked every day for me to not forget my horizon. One example was to empower me through books.

Every day I had to read out loud while she combed my hair. When I couldn’t pronounce a word, she’d tell me to sound it out instead of telling me. Which was frustrating because I couldn’t understand why she wouldn’t just say it. I found out later that Mama couldn’t read.

I loved books because of Aunt Steph. She always brought me one or two when she returned from her travels. I loved how they felt, and I loved to look at the words on the pages. She brought books I couldn’t read yet, but insisted that I learn. She would read to me and teach me new words whenever she visited. One Christmas, she took me to downtown Kingston to buy my Christmas gift. I remember getting on an escalator to a tiny bookstore on the top floor. She let me pick any book I wanted. Aunt Steph never bought me toys, jewelry, or clothing.

Aunt Steph was another one of my early embodied horizons.

She not only named the greater aspect of me, she tried to help Kadian remain dominant by planting stories of other places and experiences within. They were seeds of a greater existence to germinate on my earthly journey that would whisper to me when I needed to be reminded of who I really was at the core. She too understood that my life was bigger than where I landed.

Mama also empowered me with love and support. She often told me how smart I was. When I wrote a letter to my parents at four years old, Mama took me on the bus across town to the post office. I don't recall much about the trip, but I remember how I felt when Mama picked me up to hand my letter to the letter carrier with my not-so-straight handwriting on the envelope. The letter carrier asked if I wrote the letter myself, and I nodded yes. When I turned and looked at Mama, I saw how proud she was of me. I was her world, and she was mine.

Most of my family members I lived with in Jamaica were not embodied horizons for me, except Mama and Aunt Steph. My early childhood in Jamaica mostly had a negative effect, even though Mama tried her best to shield me from witnessing the many violent indiscretions. An aggression was growing inside of me and sometimes erupted in my own angry outbursts. Mama couldn't contain the change from happening, for I couldn't un-see or drown out what I heard in that home.

After that beach-breeze memory, I began sensing a duality that existed within me, my greater aspect nudging me out of the slumber I was beginning to yield to. A reminder to turn away from a life that was not destined to be mine. Reminding me that I wasn't Charm. Mama's teachings were in line with my greater aspect. Mama spoiled me but also disciplined me. Sometimes with a glance or stare, at times with her proffered wisdom. I could tell she didn't want me to lose who I was at the core.

When I was about five years old, my brothers found a book of matches. They took turns trying to strike a match. After several

missed tries, Brian handed it to me and told me to do it. This felt wrong immediately. I did not want to do what my brothers asked, but I took the book of matches anyway.

I stood there for a few seconds, for a higher consciousness with a message of greater capacity seemed to want to reveal itself to me. Striking the match was in opposition to who I was. A more powerful, not-so-connected me seemed in control. Those moments most often occur in seconds, and it can be difficult to choose your authentic self in a split second unless you are practiced at noticing. My five-year-old self was not practiced at noticing!

Then I heard Adrian say, "Do it, Charm! Do it now!"

Adrian's shouting brought me back to the present time. Without thinking, I struck the match and threw it on the bed. The match burned through the bedspread, then the sheets, and when I saw the mattress on fire, I grabbed my brothers and ran to Mama, who was in the back of the yard picking the open ackee pods to prepare for our lunch.

"Fire, fire!" yelled my brothers. "Come quick, Mama! Fire! Fire!" I don't recall saying anything. I remember being frightened by what I had just done.

Mama entered through the back door and screamed upon seeing the room aflame. She ran next door for help. People in our community didn't have landlines in their homes so they couldn't call the fire brigade. Your firefighters were your neighbors. One neighbor screwed a hose to the outdoor pipe and sped toward the room's window. Another neighbor filled buckets with water and passed each one to the other helpers to douse the mattress and curtains from the room's entrance.

Mama sat us down on the front verandah and asked angrily, "Who did this?"

Adrian and Brian both pointed at me, saying, "Charm."

I hugged my knees and cried.

Adrian and Brian were enjoying the excitement. They kept wanting to go inside the house to see what was happening. Two women neighbors picked them up and held them tightly at their

hips to prevent the boys from getting in the way. I cried every time Mama looked at me with disappointment and shook her head. I felt ashamed. The neighbors saved the day. No one was hurt, and the news traveled to my grandmother's bar and grill. When I saw Papa's car coming towards the house and my grandmother with him, I knew I was in big trouble.

I got a whooping from Grandma and was sent to bed early. Adrian and Brian were not punished. Everyone felt I should have been responsible enough not to listen to them. My parents had to send money to replace everything in the room.

That night Mama asked, "Charm, why did you do it?"

"Adrian and Brian told me to, Mama," I said with remorse.

"Did it feel right to you?"

"No, Mama." I looked down at my feet, feeling ashamed. What my grandmother said next stuck with me.

"When something doesn't feel right to you, don't do it!" She looked at me sternly, disappointed with my choice.

I understood exactly what she meant. I had noticed a greater awareness before striking the match, yet I chose to listen to my brothers. That decision almost burned the room down. I got into trouble and made Mama disappointed in me. I didn't always adhere to her words growing up, but I remembered them.

My brothers and I were a pod on Mama's own ackee tree, a family tree that consisted mostly of forcibly opened pods that were poisonous to their environment. She tried to keep us in our pod to preserve our innocence, give us a sense of safety, and not expose us to the world too soon. Or else we would become individuals contributing unmindfully to this world, and our life's journey could deem fatal to our well-being.

Soon after the fire, my parents visited us. There was great excitement in the house. When they arrived, my brothers darted towards the rental car with open arms to greet them, but I stayed with Mama, hanging onto her thighs. She tried to nudge me

forward, but I wouldn't budge. My family had shown us pictures of Ms. Brown, saying, "This is Fay. This is your mother." I knew who she was. I just wasn't sure about the mother part.

My parents picked up Adrian and Brian, kissed them, and swung them around. But I still couldn't move. I saw the disappointment on my mother's face when I didn't do the same. Neither she nor my father tried to coax me from Mama's side. They just left me where I was. My brothers called them "Mommy" and "Daddy," but I didn't call them anything. They felt like strangers to me. I didn't know how to feel about them. I remained very quiet during their visit.

My mother brought more dresses, shoes, and pretty barrettes for me. I hated them. She even brought me a red perfume bottle identical to the one she had. I didn't like the smell. It was too strong and made me sneeze. I still don't wear perfume because it irritates my senses. She hated that I ran around, climbed trees, and got dirty with my brothers. Every day my family styled my hair and now dressed me up twice a day to please Ms. Brown. I wasn't allowed to run around with Adrian and Brian, so I sat on the verandah with Mama. Ms. Brown said I should act like a little girl. I could tell she wanted a prissy daughter, but I was a tomboy.

My parents focused most of their attention on Adrian and Brian. My father was impressed and in awe of his twin sons, and my mother was disappointed in her only daughter. I think Mama noticed because she gave me more attention than usual. She knew I was feeling left out. My parents took us to the beach more than once and on other fun-filled outings. I warmed up a little towards them during their brief visit but still stood close to Mama.

When my grandparents took me and my brothers to the airport to see my parents off, my brothers and I cried uncontrollably. Even though I didn't feel close to my parents, it had been special having them around. Their presence made the house feel unified. The violence occurred significantly less because everyone was on their best behavior due to my father. Also, my father took us everywhere

with him, and it felt like we were a real family. Our sadness at their departure lingered long after they left.

As last words of comfort, my father said to us, “You’ll be coming to the United States soon.”

Grandma locked away my perfume bottle, and no one cared about my hair or dressed me up twice a day anymore. I ran around with Adrian and Brian as usual. My days were magical again.

A year later, in October 1973, my brothers and I were told again that we were going to live with our parents in the United States. My brothers were excited, but I felt sad. I didn’t want to go. I didn’t want to leave Mama.

Mama was melancholy the day before we left for America. She cried on and off throughout the day. I couldn’t understand why Mama was sad. At first, tears lined her cheeks, followed by quiet whimpers and sniffles whenever she looked at me and my brothers. Then, surprisingly, her tears cascaded onto the kitchen floor like Dunn’s River Falls into the limpid blue water of the Caribbean Sea.

I ran to her and threw my arms around her waist.

“Mama, don’t cry. We’ll come back to see you tomorrow,” I said, trying to comfort her. My six-year-old self didn’t understand that I’d be living two thousand miles away with a sea between us.

“Mama, we’re going on that big plane to America.”

“I know, baby, it’s just that I’m going to miss you so much.” That night, I didn’t sleep in my regular bed with my aunt. Mama picked me up and laid me in bed with her, Adrian, and Brian. I nestled between Brian and Mama. She hugged the three of us as if she wanted the night to last forever. Then she began to sing:

“My Bonnie lies over the ocean. My Bonnie lies over the sea. My Bonnies lie over the ocean. Will you bring back my Bonnies to me?”

I drifted off to sleep feeling the love that emanated from her voice and her heart. I was in our enchanted world again. I woke up

in the middle of the night by Brian's accidental kicks in my lower back as he slept. I pushed his feet towards the wall away from me and heard Mama still singing that Bonnie song.

"Mama, who is Bonnie?" I asked.

"You are. Adrian is, and so is Brian."

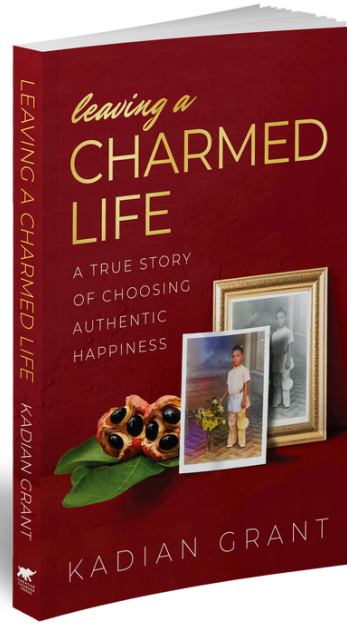
"Oh," I replied. I could feel how much she loved us.

That night formed a unique covering of Love on my consciousness that would comfort me when I needed it on my life journey in America. Love was my beginning.

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