

## **Prologue**

### ***“The Way We Were”***

#### **Girlfriends**

MIAMI DADE COLLEGE—MIAMI, FLORIDA

*1989*

She really did love her best friends, but less than twenty years ago she slept with her best friend’s man and got pregnant.

Magnolia Butler, Rebe Palo, and Darla Humphrey were the epitome of BFF’s way before the term BFF ever came into popularity. In fact, they were so tight and so meant to be, they were all born in 1969, Magnolia and Darla on January 1, and Rebe on February 14.

Magnolia and Darla were juniors at Miami Dade College in Miami, Florida, and Rebe was a sophomore, since she graduated from high school a year late. They no longer lived in dorms. Magnolia and Darla were roommates in a small two-bedroom apartment down the street from campus. Rebe lived less than a mile away in a rented house with her high school sweetheart, Trent. They had a three-year-old girl together named Trinity, yet still managed to maneuver through the rigors of college life, even though their relationship was rocky.

Magnolia and Darla were not only childless, which was just how each of them wanted it to be, but they were still virgins. Magnolia, who was Trinity's godmother, just hadn't made the right connection with any of the guys she'd met so far. Not enough to share her body with anyway. So she decided to wait. Darla made a serious connection and was saving herself for marriage. She was dating a fellow student who was a starting pitcher on the college's baseball team named Aaron Clark, and Darla and Aaron were set to be married the summer after they graduated. They'd both agreed to wait, postpone consummating their relationship, just to make sure the night was extra special. Aaron had been around the block a few times, but Darla, who was raised with Christian values by conservative parents, witnessed every girl in her family get pregnant by the time they were sixteen. She wanted to be different. Not only did she want it, but her parents required it. "Save yourself for marriage. A man wants a virtuous woman. Sex is not recreational. Sex is between a husband and a wife. No man will want you if you're sullied. Not as a wife anyway. Sex before marriage is a sin." And Darla believed it. It was important to her to honor those puritanical values in the name of her mother, who passed away in a car accident while driving to pick Darla up when Darla was a high school freshman. Darla's father vowed to never remarry. Darla had witnessed a true-love example, up front and in living color. And she wanted the same. But fate, as crazy as it can be, had other plans.

Magnolia was the child of a mistress to a married man. She never met her father. Her mother had been his chick-on-the-side before getting pregnant. When she broke the news to him, he simply stopped seeing her. One night when Magnolia was a baby, her mother went out to have a final conversation with her married lover, leaving Magnolia

alone. She didn't come back. She had suffered a nervous breakdown in a hotel room where they'd met to talk, and when he left, Magnolia's mother flipped out and tried to kill herself by jumping off a fifth-floor balcony. The next morning, when Magnolia's grandparents found out, they rushed to baby Magnolia and took her in, ending up being the only mother and father she'd ever know. Her mother had been a drifter since then. And Magnolia made no bones about telling everyone she could care less about her mom. Nothing else mattered other than making sure she never turned out to be like June Butler.

Born in Maui, Rebe Palo, half-black and half-Hawaiian, and her family moved to Ocala, Florida, when she was four. She grew up in a not so nice neighborhood, where her older brother was in and out of what his mother called gangs. Her mom and dad divorced when she was seven. Her dad ran off, being a rolling stone enjoying his newfound freedom, so Rebe and her brother were raised by her black mother who was so overbearing and bossy, she could have turned the tide on Donald Trump and fired him. Rebe dealt with watching her temperamental mother always preaching what she never practiced, so much so that her mother charmed her way into becoming pastor at a small Baptist church by the time Rebe was twelve. Five years later, Rebe got pregnant, but by then, her whole life had changed. By then, Rebe and her brother would be victims, and her life would never be the same.

By Magnolia and Darla's graduation day nearly two years in the future, it would turn out that Rebe and her baby's daddy broke up after she accused him of being an addict, and he spread rumors that she was not only crazy, but so moody he'd almost have to rape her to get her to have sex with him.

Darla and Aaron would end up taking a spring-break cruise to the Bahamas to elope before their senior year just so they could finally have sex.

And Magnolia would date a hot Italian guy her senior year named Gabe Pastore. That is until she'd catch him cheating on her in the backseat of his car at a drive-in movie. Magnolia had followed him. She always was the snoop.

During that year, one of them would end up pregnant.

And would have an abortion.

Yet her BFF's would never know about it.

Or maybe they would.

And the father was either Rebe's man, Trent, who'd die from a drug overdose four years later; Darla's man, Aaron, who'd have a fatal heart attack in 2004; or Magnolia's ex, Gabe, who ended up marrying a well-known porn actress in Hollywood.

One of them was the father of an innocent baby that never ever had a chance at this thing called life.

A life that has a funny way of paying people back.

Payback that in an instant would flip these best friends' worlds from a six, to a nine, by the time they were forty, coming to a literal head all in the name of sex.