

SEARCHING FOR *Sula*

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All characters in this book are fictitious,  
and any resemblance to actual persons,  
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**to Mom & Dad -  
thanks for supporting my (writing) habit**



## *Chapter One - My Journey*

I try my best not to follow everyone's rules, especially my own. Rules are for people who are disciplined and like decency and order. I tried that. I constantly draw up guidelines for myself, which I seldom stick to. When I was much younger I was a rebel. If someone said go right, I would purposely go left – just to see if I was missing anything. Now that I'm quickly approaching thirty, I'm realizing that order keeps me sane. I made a list of things that I wanted to do before 30. Oh well, the list needs to be revisited because my broke behind didn't have the money to do most of the stuff on that list. What was I thinking? Speaking of approaching 30, I've noticed that my body is also changing and not for the better.

I've gotten a little more exhausted when crossing the street, a little more winded when walking up only a single flight of stairs, and I'm more likely to bed down by 9 p.m., rather than 4 a.m. like I did when I was in college. As I approach my third decade on earth, the bitter truth is it's time to grow up, give back to society in some charitable way, and by God, find a faithful husband and settle down.

Yes sports fans, this is what it's boiled down to. The missing piece of the puzzle to complete the package called Sula Tyler. My mother named me after the lead character in Toni Morrison's book "Sula". She said it was quite befitting for me once I hit my teens. As I said, I grew up reserved then I became wild in my teens, which made me a mysterious young lady to her. Most of this resonated in my art.

I'm a non-starving artist who perfected my craft at Texas A&M where I majored in Art History. Well, not quite "perfected", I'm talented...I guess. Honestly, I suck. I have created several pieces that remain in storage because I'm too afraid to display anything, let alone ask people to buy it. I'm sure I will someday. I just need some new inspiration. After a few months of floundering after graduating from Texas, I went back to get my Master's in Arts & Sciences. After school, I had the pleasure of working for a fine art gallery in New Orleans.

Being surrounded with so many paintings from a wide array of artists like Charles Bibbs, Salvador Dali, and Monet was equivalent to Christmas in July. Art allowed me to runaway and it took me to the tiny piece of the artist's world that they so generously recreated on canvas. It was my dream job until I moved to Portland, Oregon.

I worked hard for a magazine publisher as an assistant editor, and was promoted to senior editor just after six months of being hired by the company. After two and a half years of loyal service, they laid my ass off. There was no inclination of a merger, and no clue that I wasn't needed anymore. The joys of capitalism.

After feeling like I had been used by corporate America, I up and headed for D.C. I thought it would be a great place to settle in for business purposes. The clientele could

range from a college student to a Senator. By the time I moved across country to D.C., I had no idea that the area was also overflowing with successful men. Too bad, because I moved to D.C. to be closer to my boo. It was love at its finest. After only a few years in D.C., I've permanently given up trying to figure out the male species.

Take Lawrence. He's a cool guy with equal attributes, but he cringes at the mere thought of commitment. He's sweet, but simple-minded at times. I often take second when it comes to a boxing match starring fighters I've never heard of before, college games and any other sporting event from football to cribbage. Cribbage? Really? Don't get me wrong, I love to watch a good game of football and basketball occasionally, but enough becomes enough after a while.

Not Lawrence.

If he could, he'd have a remote that was programmed to ESPN, CSN, and HTS glued to his right hand and his left hand would be shoved down the front of his pants. I wasn't really sure why I put up with it and suppose that's why we became an off again more than an on again kind of couple. His actions often made me evaluate what our love affair was, or even if it *was* love.

Today was Thursday and after his ritual night of hanging with the fellas, he often stopped by for a night cap. When Lawrence walked in my apartment, he was looking and smelling as good as usual. He was about three inches taller than me at six feet, had a fantastic toasted brown complexion, with boyish eyes that danced, and the warmest smile. He had a basketball player's physique and was well put together "down there." He gave me a kiss and came on inside.

“Hey sweetie,” he said and took a seat on the couch. He held his hand up to beckon me over and smiled. Just like a lovesick woman, I trotted right on over and took my rightful place on his lap. He massaged my shoulder with one hand and got right to the point.

“How long we been together now?” he asked.

“Almost two years. You know that. It was your suggestion that I move here to be closer to you.”

“Oh yeah, it was,” he said looking around at my artwork. “That meant a lot to me that you would do that, baby. Move from Portland to be with little ol’ me. I knew you truly loved me.”

“Yes, I’m glad we kept in contact when you left Portland. I hated to see you go. And it was right when our relationship was getting good,” I admitted.

“But you came shortly after and kept it alive!”

This was sounding like a lead in to an extremely important conversation – the type of conversation that could change our lives forever. I wanted to take in every aspect of this moment. What he wore, how he looked, and his scent. After all, I would be telling this story to our grandchildren and did not want to miss any of the small details. As I sat comfortably on his lap, my eyes darted anxiously around the room. I expected a brass band to come barging into my house along with some tuxedoed man carrying flowers and champagne. I wanted to yell out, “*Yes! Yes! I’ll marry you!*” Instead, I put on my prettiest face and listened intently.

“Sula, I want to ask you something,” he started.

"Yes, baby?" *Here it goes*, I thought. I stroked the back of his neck gently with the tips of my fingers and waited to hear what he was about to ask. I took a deep breath to regulate my fluttering heart and then smiled.

"How would you like it if we dated other people?"

"Oh you've made me so happy!" I blurted without hearing his question fully.

Lawrence smirked and jerked his head slightly back as he brandished a confused expression.

"What?" he asked.

"Wait," I said as my smile dissipated, "um, you didn't ask me to marry you."

He snickered before he said, "Uhhh, no. I didn't."

"Hold up. What did you ask me?"

"Sula, I asked you if we could see other people," he said as he patted my back.

"Get the hell off!" I said as I jumped up from his lap.

"Sula?"

"How would I like it?" I asked, "I wouldn't! When did you decide you wanted to see other people?"

"Well, I just thought that maybe I was smothering you and you may have wanted to see other guys. I don't want to tie you down, you know?"

"Did I ever tell you I wanted to see other guys?"

"No, but..."

"So what are you talking about?" I flopped down on the couch and shook my head in disbelief. It felt as though the walls were closing in on me as his words pecked at my

mind like a nagging headache. Instead of answering my question, he stood in front of me anticipating some type of reaction. So I gave his ass one.

I ran into the bedroom and pulled out a huge suitcase. I began grabbing clothes from the dresser drawers and slammed them inside their new Samsonite home.

“What are you doing?” he asked as he watched my frantic packing.

“What does it look like, fool? I’m packing.”

“I see that, but baby where are you going?”

“*Back* to Texas! Why do you care?”

“Sula, I *do* care about you, but right now I’m just not sure about the two of us.”

“You were sure about us last night when I was riding you and you were yelling my damn name!”

Lawrence threw his head back at the comment and sighed. I ripped open my closet door and began yanking clothes off of the hangers. I almost mowed him over in my anger because he was directly in my path; just standing there watching as if I were starring in a Broadway stage play. This mofo was cutting me off after I had spent nearly two years of *my* precious time? *This* is the pay-off? Give me a break.

“You wanna break up. Why? Why now?” I demanded to know.

He chuckled lightly. Afterward his devilish smirk remained. “It’s not like this was planned or timed.” He grabbed my hand, but I yanked it away. Then I wondered what he thought was so damn funny.

“You think this is some game, Lawrence? You’re playing with people’s emotions now?”

"Of course not, baby."

"Don't call me, baby! I can't believe that after all this time you want to break up?"

"Not break up, just have a little space. You know, take a little break," he rubbed his palms together nervously.

"What the hell does take a little break and have a little space mean? Oh no! I can't believe I trusted you, Lawrence. Oh!" I rubbed my forehead to calm my nerves. I could feel the lump forming in my throat and the urge to shed several tears. I swallowed that slab of rejection and refused to give him the satisfaction. Then I begin to feel like a fool for moving to D.C. "Oh God, how am I gonna trust you again? Well no, not you. *Anyone* again?"

"Sula . . ." he started.

"So, who is she?" I had stopped packing just long enough to hear his response.

"What?" his voice changed as if the notion of him being with someone else was preposterous.

"Never mind. I don't care! I'm outta here. And you? You get out!"

I closed the suitcase, clothes spilling out from its sides, and hauled it out of the bedroom with Lawrence bearing down on my heels. He stood in front of me to stop my tirade.

"It's not you, Sula, you're great. It's me. I want to be everything I can be for you. And I don't feel like I am right now."

"You're right, you're not. Goodbye, Lawrence," I put on my coat and held the door open for him and myself.

Lawrence was supposed to be my soul mate and somewhere in our relationship, I had become content. I noticed no differences. Everything appeared fine. It was as if I was reliving being laid off from the magazine all over again. The element of surprise always yields confusion and feelings of inadequacy. I sincerely hoped he wasn't throwing away all of the good times we shared just to have a roll in the sack with some woman.

"You're not going to Texas. Where are you going? Will you tell me that?"

"I need to find myself, Lawrence. I got so wrapped up into you that I got lost. Goodbye."

Lawrence shuffled slowly toward the door and waited for a few seconds. He appeared to be in deep thought as the tension hung heavily in the air. After several seconds, he doubled back and tried to give me a kiss on the cheek. I looked away instead. I just could not look into his eyes anymore, because there housed his lies and deceit. He wanted some response to his affection, but there was none to be offered. Once he realized that, he left. The sound of the door closing behind him sounded like the lid of a coffin and my heart was trapped inside. In one movement, I collapsed to the floor and wept.

After my meltdown and poor attempt to put the pieces of my heart back together, I hopped in my car and sped to the airport. I safely eluded police after running several red lights and driving 80 miles per hour. As the tears streamed down my cheeks, I refused to be the poor little desperate rejected girl who couldn't keep a man. I looked good and considered myself to be a good catch for any decent self-respecting male. The truth was, it *wasn't* me, it was him, just like he suggested. On my journey to wherever, I would have

another good cry, a session of reflection, then pick myself up, dust myself off and move what they call, the hell on.

When I arrived at National Airport, I looked at all of the ticketing agents and the airlines they were representing. Jamaica? No, my name wasn't Stella. Bahamas? Not far enough. Vegas? I needed to get *out* of the country. Aruba? Hell no, too many people go there and never make it back.

Then I spotted this adorable little girl who looked to be about five years old. She had the fattest cheeks I'd seen on a child and thinly twisted locks that covered her back. Her mother wore a dark brick red oversized shawl that draped her head and body. As she turned to call her child, the scarf fell from her head to reveal her thin locks pulled neatly into a bun. The youngster looked in my direction, waved and ran over to her mother. Before they boarded their flight, the youngster turned again and stared in my direction, and then disappeared around the corner.

I strolled up to the counter and stood boldly in front of the ticket agent.

"Yes, I'd like to go to Africa," I demanded of the agent.

"Do you have a flight number or an e-ticket?" she asked.

"No, sorry."

"You *do* realize the cost for a flight to Africa without prior booking, correct?"

I glared at her and ignored her question. She clicked the keys on her monitor for a moment and then clicked some more. I wiped away more tears as I waited for the price my account would be liable for. She handed me a tissue from behind her station and gave an empathetic smile.

“Well, you’re in luck. There has been a cancellation. They relinquished the round trip flight, safari tour package, meals and hotel stay. It’s for two weeks, but the flight is Thursday of next week. Is that fine?”

I nodded and sniffed.

“Okay,” she typed some more. “That will be \$4,843.” She looked up at me with a fearful expression. I guess she supposed I would bawl louder once I heard the price and retreat with my head hanging low. Instead, I slammed my platinum card down on the counter.

“Charge it.”

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While I was in the doctor’s office getting all of the necessary vaccinations for my departure, I considered the many rules of the dating game. Although Lawrence didn’t admit he had cheated, what else could it have been? We never argued, we spent time apart and plenty of time together, the sex was great...what could it have been? Now all of a sudden he needs space? To me, space translated into break up. It had to be another woman.

After being dumped by Lawrence, I felt like I was back at square one and upset with myself. The time I wasted with Lawrence could’ve been given to someone who was serious about having a future with me. I needed some time to reflect and I suppose I needed to draft some new guidelines. Assuredly, these guidelines would yet again not be followed by me. Why do I constantly do that? That will be one of the questions I will have to ask myself when I’m on vacation in about a week.

Anyway, I am on my way to East Africa.