

THE *Love*
ENTHUSIAST

A Novel

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PROLOGUE

Amina's Love Burden

You know what they say about an idle mind? Well, sitting in the lobby of the therapist's office gave me too much time to think, and I swear, the devil was having his way with me. I scrolled through my phone, stared out the window of the high-rise office, adjusted my dress for the hundredth time, and pushed back the cuticles of my already perfectly manicured nails.

What the hell am I doing here, I silently repeated.

I had gone through my insurance's directory and gotten recommendations from one of my closest friends. Although I initially wanted a woman therapist, Dr. Leon Blackwell came highly recommended and had managed to squeeze me in at the last minute. As I stood up to flee the premises, the door creaked open.

"Mrs. Thompkins?" he greeted.

I turned around to face the voice that beckoned to me, and I froze. It was too late to turn back now.

I plastered on a smile and stared at the tall, handsome stranger before me. His hair was almost completely gray, and I imagined I might add a few more grays to his head before he was done with me.

After a moment, he cleared his throat. “Umm, excuse me, Mrs. Thompkins. Are you okay?”

I nodded and adjusted my dress ... again. I awkwardly added, “I think so Dr. Blackwell, but hey, that’s why I’m here to see you.”

We both laughed before he motioned for me to follow him.

I followed him to the small room in the back. He opened the door, and I glanced around. I immediately spotted *the chair* in the middle of the room. It was the armless chaise that I’d seen many therapists use on television. The one you laid on to bare the deepest, darkest parts of your soul. The place where you shared things that would make your daddy roll over in his grave. I quickly scanned the rest of the room and zeroed in on a desk and a standalone chair in the corner.

“Feel free to have a seat,” he said and made his way over to his chair opposite the chair I was supposed to use to surrender my thoughts over the course of the next hour.

I pointed to the chair in the corner. “Can I use that one instead?”

“Sure, if that’s what you’d like.”

“Do you mind if I move it?”

“Actually, I got it.” He walked over, effortlessly lifted the chair, and put it in front of *the chair*.

“Thank you, Dr. Blackwell.” I sat and crossed my legs.

He did the same.

“So, what would you like to know?” I asked.

He flipped the pages of his notebook and put on his glasses. “Whatever you would like to discuss.”

I scratched my head. “Well, I’m not quite sure how to answer that. Honestly, I’m not sure how I even feel about therapy. My ex-husband surely *was not* a fan.”

He nodded and rubbed his chiseled jawline. “Mm-hmm, I see. So, am I your first?”

“Something like that.”

He furrowed his brow before he nodded again and jotted something in his notepad. He uncrossed his legs, removed his glasses, and leaned forward as he studied me. “Hmm. Well, something obviously brought you here today. I’ll tell you what. Since this is our first session, why don’t you share whatever you’re comfortable with.”

Normally a stare that intense would’ve made me uncomfortable, but his eyes were kind. They reminded me of my daddy, and I immediately felt my walls begin to crumble. This was *my* moment. I needed this. I didn’t need to be concerned with what my ex-husband or anyone else thought. This is why I was paying Dr. Leon the big bucks.

I took a deep breath before I began to spill my guts.

“So, some would say I have it all: a career I love, three beautiful daughters, several grandchildren, the freedom to live as I please. Even with all of that though, my life is a mess

and I feel it's because of love. I feel like I'm losing in love ... in every area of my life."

"What makes you say that?"

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. "Well, Dr. Blackwell, I'm not your average fifty-three-year-old woman. I'm what these young kids would call *off the chain*. For years I tried to be the good girl and live up to my mom's and sister's expectations, but now I've become the rebel when it comes to my love life. Personally, I think whoever said growing older is supposed to make you wiser lied when it comes to love and relationships. I thought I had it all figured out at one point. At my age, I thought it would've gotten easier, but for me, it's been quite the opposite. I've done it all ... a monogamous marriage, open relationships, swinging, you name it. I've probably done it."

He leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs again before putting his glasses back on. He wrote something in his notepad and said, "Well, when it comes to matters of the heart, I would like to think age doesn't always play a factor. We may grow and change in what we want, but love isn't usually cut and dry. Tell me this: would you consider yourself a polygamist?"

"Hmm, I wouldn't label myself anything. I just enjoy variety. A little flirting here, every now and then some sex there. Monogamy can get boring at times. You know? I just realized early on that it was a lot to ask for any person, particularly a man, to be with only one woman for the rest of their life. Wouldn't you agree?"

He paused as he contemplated what I'd just said. "I can't say that I agree completely. While it isn't easy for *men or women* to remain exclusive, it is quite possible."

I uncrossed my legs and recrossed them in the other direction. I looked at his finger, and there was no ring. *He probably doesn't have a clue.*

He followed my eyes. Before I could speak again, he continued. "And, to answer your question, yes, I've been married before. My *ex-wife* was the one who cheated. Several times, as a matter of fact."

My eyes widened at his admission. I opened my mouth to speak, but the only words I could find were "Oh. Okay."

"Yes, but back to you. You said earlier that you think your life is a mess because of love. What makes you say that?"

"Personally, I think I might be addicted to being in love. My drug of choice is love. I *love* love. At least I used to before my life started falling apart. The problem is, I'm horrible at it. I can't seem to get it right."

"Well, you're not alone. If it were easy, everyone would be in love."

I took a few deep breaths and shifted uncomfortably in my chair as I tried to avoid the emotions bubbling to the surface. "Yes, true, but now my past is haunting me."

He furrowed his brow. "Hmm ... okay. Is that why you said your life is a mess? Because of your past?"

"Most definitely. My life was much simpler until several months ago. Years ago, I left my husband because of an affair.

But now, I realize I'm still in love with my ex-husband, who I believe is the love of my life. I want him back, but now I may have also lost him too ... for good this time. My sister and I are barely speaking, *and* someone is trying to destroy me. Things have just been ... really messed up lately. The sad thing is, I've caused a lot of this on myself. I've hurt people without even realizing it."

Tears rimmed my eyes and Dr. Blackwell handed me a tissue.

"Well, coming to see me today is the first step. We're going to get through this. We'll take it one session at a time until we figure it out."

I nodded, dried my eyes, and straightened in the chair. "That sounds like a plan. But, since you're going to have to get all up in my business, let me properly introduce myself."

"Okay."

"To my children, I'm simply Iya. To my friends, I'm Amina. To the music world, I'm Amina 'Badass.' My name is Amina Thompkins, and I'm a Love Enthusiast."