

**The Colors
Will Change**

Other Novels by Louis N. Jones

Prodigal in the City
Adverse Possession

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Will Change
By
Louis N. Jones**



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I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. C.S. Lewis

Job 8:7 (KJV) Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.

Haggai 2:9 (KJV) The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

For my brothers and sisters in Christ

CHAPTER *one*

Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Tuesday, December 1
6:10 p.m.

This was new to Carline Lissade.

After some instruction, advice, and prompting from friends who were doing it, the thirty-two-year-old single woman cast off all restraint and forged ahead. Against every scruple and moral imperative within her soul and spirit, Carline decided to use her body to earn money.

She scraped together enough *gourdes* to take one of the local *tap-taps*—brightly colored pickup trucks used as makeshift public transportation—from her tin shack in the La Saline slums to downtown Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She headed to the Hotel Malarcher, a flea-pit inn popular with visitors looking for dirt-cheap accommodations and ready opportunities for immediate satisfaction.

The place was, for all intents and purposes, a legitimate hotel functioning as a bordello. Extracurricular activities were supposed to be secret, but anybody walking by with any number of functioning brain cells could tell what was going on. Four teenage girls stood around the hotel and waited for prospective male customers to check in. Some women were ravenous in their approach, openly propositioning, while others looked for a long stare and a smile from a potential customer as a sign that they would have a trick for the night. Most of the ladies, victims of human trafficking, were

from the neighboring Dominican Republic. Carline was the only Haitian woman on the strip, and almost two decades older than most of them.

Carline, with her slim body and smooth, angelic face, with skin the color of raw umber, had been told she was pretty enough to work in the brothels. But Carline preferred to keep all of her earnings and risk the greater dangers of being on the street. Besides, this way, she faced less of a risk that someone she knew would find out what she was doing.

Carline watched the other girls ply their trade and wondered how she had come to this. She grew up in a rural area of Cap-Haïtien, where her mother and father grew sugarcane and maize and sold them at side street markets to make a living. Even though she grew up in relative poverty, it was barely evident to her as a child. Several children near her age lived in the area around her farm, so her days were not deprived of fun and frolic. The school she attended had been established and funded by Roman Catholic missionaries. She enjoyed going to school and learning to read and write in Creole, French, and English. By the time she was fourteen, she was fluent in all three languages. She had at least one good meal per day, except on days when occasional windstorms damaged her family's crops and hurt their income potential.

Her brother, Pierre, was five years older than she, a foot taller and, like many big brothers, he often teased and harassed her. In addition to being tall and muscular, he had dimples on both cheeks, a faint mustache, and an ever-present, slightly furrowed brow even when he smiled, as if he was always looking into sunlight. His hair was short and coarse, and black as charcoal.

Pierre kept an eye on his younger sister whenever their parents were away from the farmhouse. Pierre, who loved his sister dearly, would never refuse or complain. He always served as her protector and confidant, and with his six-foot muscular physique and sharp, intense stare, he could be quite imposing. Pierre never let anyone mess with his sister; all the community kids knew it.

No, she couldn't do it. She couldn't cry. Not here. She couldn't break down, not in front of this hotel. But when she thought about her

brother, it was difficult to keep the tears from falling. It had been two years, but it seemed as if it was yesterday. Her friends told her the pain would fade with time; but for her, it seemed to cling to her like a frightened child. The murder of her brother sent her over the edge. She was stripped of all hope, all faith, and all promise. Though she and Pierre were raised Roman Catholic by extremely devout parents, she felt that God had cursed her. The murderer not only took her brother's life, but hers as well.

Carline was alone; all alone. Pierre was shot and killed two years before under mysterious circumstances. No one ever confessed. Her father had been killed seventeen years before when violence broke out during a political protest shortly before Jean-Bertrand Aristide's first term as president. Her mother died of *gwo chalé*, or malaria, just a few months after her father's death. She felt that God had stripped her of everything precious in her life, and she blamed Him for making her an orphan at fourteen. She could find no answer to the question pondered by countless generations of men and women who had suffered loss. *If God is good and if He cares, why did He let this happen to me?*

Carline knew the risks of selling her body. She was well aware that she could become one of the country's many AIDS victims. She realized the risks of being beat up or murdered by a client. She knew it was a sin by anyone remotely professing any type of faith in God. But that didn't matter now. What mattered was her survival. She had scraped out a living doing odd jobs here and there, but it wasn't enough. She considered aligning herself with one of the *chiméras*, the local street gangs, knowing they would take care of her. She thought about getting involved in drug trafficking. But those options frightened her, and she had seen how so many people who chose these lifestyles had died quick, often violent, deaths. Even getting a legitimate job was tough. Jobs were so scarce that whenever a Haitian managed to get one, he or she would hold onto it for dear life.

The men in Cap-Haïtien and La Saline told her she had a nice body and a face that was easy on the eyes. She figured if God had blessed her with anything, it was her looks. She might as well use

them. Yes, it was sinful. And the thought of lying in a bed, completely naked and vulnerable, with a complete stranger, was like staring at the face of the devil. But it was better than dying somewhere on the street, her body lying unidentified and unclaimed in a morgue. And for poor people in Haiti, there weren't a lot of choices.

A taxi pulled up to the curb near the hotel. A white man sat in the front seat, and three more sat in the back. The girls outside the hotel immediately fixed their eyes on them. A rich *blan*, or foreigner, could pay them enough to keep them eating for an entire month.

The eldest man got out of the cab and stared directly at Carline. Carline didn't know what to do, so she just stared back. He pulled an overnight bag out of the backseat and slung it over his shoulder. He winked at Carline. Carline continued to stare.

The other girls tried to flirt with him, but the man paid them no attention. He walked inside the hotel, gazing at Carline along the way. Although the lighter-skinned Dominican girls were the flavor of choice for many Haitian men, the foreigner wanted a darker-skinned Haitian, one he knew was from here and more likely to speak Haitian Creole. Of course, he was completely unaware that malevolent spiritual forces influenced his every step, informed his thoughts, and ushered him far outside the realm of morality. He knew his actions were wrong. But his decision to press forward would have made a perfect case study of the mentality that resulted in that old Stax Records song, "(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right."

Once he disappeared inside, Carline figured it might be a good idea to follow. Just before she went in, she noticed the other three men getting out of the cab and heading over to the other girls.

With peeling paint, rotting floors, tattered furniture, and the faint but pervasive odors of Rhum Barbancourt and sewage, the hotel could have passed for a dump. A no-name bar was open on the other side of the lobby. Carline looked at the two women chatting with the bartender. Their short, almost fluorescent dresses and over-applied makeup gave them away. They were prostitutes as well.

While the man booked his room at the front desk, Carline examined him more thoroughly from afar. To her, he looked like one of those high-powered business executives she had seen in American periodicals. His graying blond hair was thinning. He was neatly groomed, his khakis sharply pressed, his sneakers almost flawlessly white, his white polo shirt tucked inside his pants with almost military precision. He exuded an air of confidence that suggested he was no stranger to Haiti, or to winking at Haitian girls, for that matter.

After concluding his business, he turned to find Carline sitting in a wicker chair in the lobby. She was wooden, stiff, and obviously tense. He glanced down at Carline's feet, adorned in well-worn flip-flops. Her feet were clean, although the man noted that she could use a pedicure. He looked her over. Her legs were well shaped in a pair of blue jeans, and her torso was clad in a spaghetti strap tank top with red, green, and yellow patterns. Her eyes revealed sadness and pain. But then again, he had never met a Haitian prostitute who didn't look that way.

The man greeted her in French.

Carline responded in English. "Hello."

"You speak good English?"

"Yes," Carline said.

The man nodded. That was a relief. Other than *alo* and the occasional French phrase, he knew very little French. Trying to have a conversation in *Kreyòl* was definitely out of the question.

"My name's Frank," he said in English, telling the truth about his first name.

"I am Josephine," Carline said, lying about hers.

"I'm American, and I'm in this country to meet with a few businessmen," Frank told her. "They don't know much English, and I am not very good at Creole. I was wondering if you would accompany me to the meeting and translate for me."

The question threw Carline off her game. Wasn't it customary for a rich man to buy a girl a few drinks and then take her up to his room? This was too strange, and Carline almost refused.

That is, until she saw the fifty dollars in US currency dangling from Frank's right hand. That was enough money to keep her off the streets for a week.

"This is for you to come with me now." Frank handed the money to Carline. "There's another fifty in it for you a bit later."

Carline took the money. As strange as all this sounded, she could not turn down fifty dollars, with the potential to earn another fifty. She hoped and prayed that she would not regret it.

One hour later, Carline and Frank were inside a taxi headed somewhere on the north side of Port-au-Prince. Frank asked the taxi driver who dropped him off at the hotel to return to pick him up. The driver showed amazing skill at ducking and dodging the potholes, broken vehicles, stray animals, debris, and crowds of merchants on the roadways. Carline tried to figure out where the taxi was going, but since she had never been on this side of Port-au-Prince, she quickly lost her bearings. She sensed it was a mistake to allow this strange man to take her away from her familiar surroundings. If there was a rule book for hookers, this had to be a serious violation.

On the way to wherever they were going, the taxi got caught behind a slow-moving, bright red, and overloaded sugarcane truck. Carline, sitting behind the driver in the rear seat next to Frank, craned her neck to see the truck more clearly.

Looking at the truck caused Carline to slip back into her memories for a moment. The truck was the spitting image of her father's old truck, which had broken down when she was thirteen. Although that made it more difficult to get their crops to market, Carline's father and mother always managed. At times they even set up shop right outside their home.

After her mother became sick, Carline left school to tend to her and the household chores. She washed clothes, cleaned, cooked, and occasionally helped harvest the sugarcane, a job she hated. The backbreaking chore of chopping rows of sugarcane, pulling off the leaves and gathering the cane into bundles, often in the hot sun, made her muscles sore on many a day. When their parents died, her

brother decided it would be better to earn money doing odd jobs in town. Since Carline could not work the fields by herself, they eventually languished.

But as much as she despised working in the cane fields, looking at the cane truck in front of the taxi made her yearn for those old, precious times. How she would give anything to wield that heavy machete again, to see her family again!

Once the cane truck had turned off the road, the taxi continued into a residential area where the crowds and merchant activity had decreased significantly. The homes were stately and middle class, and appeared to be a calmer and safer section of the city. But the fear of unfamiliarity was with her; it didn't help that every time she looked at Frank, he was staring at her with a salacious, almost sinister, look.

The taxi turned into a concrete driveway and pulled to a stop in front of a white stucco mansion surrounded by palm trees. Carline had never seen a more beautiful home. Well-manicured flowers framed the driveway, which led to a huge patio adorned with four sets of outdoor furniture. The two-story house featured a covered ground-floor portico secured by iron gates. Carline was sure that the house was wider than her family's entire sugarcane field.

Frank handed the taxi driver twenty US dollars. "*Tann*," he said. Carline knew he had told the taxi driver to wait.

The taxi driver nodded. That calmed Carline's fears a bit. Whatever happened, at least the taxi driver was out there to help or summon the police if need be.

Frank got out of the taxi and motioned for Carline to follow him. Carline took a deep breath and looked around, then got out of the taxi. She trudged about five paces behind Frank until they arrived at the east portico gate. Frank peered inside and waved at someone.

Several seconds later, a dark-skinned woman, who Carline guessed was the housekeeper, opened the gate and allowed them inside. Carline almost gasped when she stepped into the living room. For a moment, Carline forgot her fears and marveled at the huge and colorful nineteenth-century Impressionist paintings, the

oak and mahogany-paneled walls, and a staggering amount of brass fixtures and accessories.

Frank leaned close to her and whispered, "I need you to tell me everything they say, and I want you to tell them everything I say. Understand?"

Carline nodded yes, slightly offended. All he had to say was translate for him. She wasn't exactly stupid.

Two light-skinned Haitian men emerged from the corridor on the far side of the living room. They stood directly in front of Frank. "*Alo. Kouman ou ye?*" one of them said in Creole.

Frank turned to Carline.

"He is asking who you are," Carline said.

"Oh, I am Mr. Wiley," Frank answered. He motioned to Carline. "This is . . ." He paused, forgetting her name. "I'm sorry. What was your name?"

Carline hesitated. She almost forgot it herself. "Josephine," she finally answered.

"Josephine is here to translate for me."

Carline rattled off the sentence in Creole.

The two men looked at Carline for a long, uncomfortable moment before they turned their attention back to Frank. "Come and have a pot of tea. Let's talk," one of them said in Creole.

Carline translated the words for Frank, and the two of them followed the men into a small parlor adjacent to the living room. Carline watched as the housekeeper brought out the tea in a sterling silver tea service so impeccably polished she could see her reflection in it from across the room. Once they sat down and the housekeeper had served them, the meeting began.

The conversation began pleasantly enough. Frank described his T-shirt business in South Florida and mentioned his factory in Port-au-Prince that employed over fifty Haitian men and women. He talked of his shipping channels and discussed the factory's security. He rattled off exact statistics about sales and profit and loss as if he had committed them to memory. Carline became enthralled by all the high-level business talk, and began to feel less tense about the uneasy looks she received upon meeting the Haitian businessmen.

Fifteen minutes into the thirty-minute meeting, the men started to talk in vague and sometimes coded terms. It became less clear to Carline what the conversation was about. It wasn't until one of the men unintentionally uttered the word *lanéj* that it all came into focus. The natural definition of the word *lanéj*, meaning *snow*, made little sense in the context of their conversation. But Carline knew of its secondary definition, which fit perfectly given the increasingly clandestine nature of the meeting. Horrified that this was not a normal business transaction, she knew she had made a terrible, and perhaps fatal, mistake.

She was sitting in the presence of major drug traffickers, and that she had just become an unwitting facilitator of a transaction to ship a ton of raw Colombian cocaine through Haiti to South Florida.

Carline was mortified. How could she allow herself to be caught up in the middle of a major drug deal? Her naïveté led her to believe that this preppy-looking American man could be involved in nothing more than the desire to get laid.

On the way back to the hotel, Carline tried to keep a straight face, as if she had no clue what the meeting was about. She even smiled whenever Frank looked back at her, trying to disguise that her heart was beating like an Army drum cadence.

Returning to the hotel, Carline and Frank walked into Room 402—as musty as an old mattress left for days in summer rain. Frank walked over to the windows, closed the dusty curtains, and sat on the lone double bed facing Carline, who stood just a foot away from the door.

“Take all your clothes off,” he ordered.

Carline tensed, and her heart began to race. This was it, the moment she dreaded most. As an adult, she had never been naked in the presence of any man. She grabbed the bottom of her tank top with both hands, preparing to pull it up over her head. However, the last remaining shreds of faith and decency left in her would not allow her to go any further.

Carline shook her head and sighed. "I'm sorry, but I cannot go to bed with you." She turned, opened the door, and left as quickly as she could, not bothering to look back at Frank's stunned reaction.

She walked down the corridor and headed for the east stairwell. Suddenly she wondered why she was being so sanctimonious. After all, she had just facilitated the addictions of possibly thousands of people. What was thirty more minutes in the company of this devil, along with earning another fifty dollars? She turned around and headed back to the door of Room 402, intending to let him use her any way he wanted and hoping he would get it over with quickly, without too much pain and embarrassment.

Just as suddenly, her sense of decency returned; the voice of the Holy Spirit urged her not to violate herself with this man. She stood in the corridor, close to Frank's door, vacillating between two voices, the holy and the unholy, fighting between what she should do and what she was attempting to do.

Suddenly, she heard Frank's voice through the paper-thin wood door, talking to someone on his cell phone.

"Josephine is coming down to the lobby where you are. Follow her. Do it someplace quiet. Make sure there is no trace."

Carline reeled away from the door in shock. She had seen three menacing American men sitting in the lobby when she came up with Frank, but assumed they were there to pick up prostitutes. They got out of the cab with Frank earlier. She realized that they worked for him, and they intended to kill her.

She heard the doorknob to Frank's room turn.

She ran to the east stairwell and bounded down the stairs to the first floor, as fast as her legs would carry her, nearly tripping over her flip-flops. When she arrived at the first-floor landing, there were two doors: one leading to the lobby, and the other leading to a former kitchen used as a storage area and dumping place for unused items. Not wanting to encounter Frank's men in the lobby, she opened the door to the storage area, hoping to find an exit. The dark room was filled with chairs, tables, and old appliances. When she allowed the door to shut, the room became almost pitch-black,

even with windows. She turned around to leave the storage room when she heard English-speaking voices near the first-floor landing.

“She might have come down this way!”

“Search that storage room!”

Carline gasped and ducked behind the first thing she saw: an old upright freezer. She hunkered down as far as she could behind it and tried to quiet her rapid breathing.

She heard the door to the storage room open.

For the first time in two years, she prayed to Jesus, silently, yet urgently.

Frank came down to the lobby and confronted one of his men guarding the front door. “Where is she, Wheeler?”

“We didn’t find her yet.” Wheeler was tall, beefy, with a thin blond haircut. He would have looked right at home in a cop’s uniform.

“Why not? The hotel is only so big.”

“I got Sy and Jim searching the stairwells,” Wheeler said. “She’ll turn up. The desk clerk said that the front door is the only way out of here, so she’ll have to come through here eventually.”

“Yeah, unless she managed to borrow someone’s cell phone and call the police.”

“It’ll be half an hour by the time they show up. By that time, we’ll have her.” Wheeler dared not look his boss directly in the eye when he asked this question, but he could not resist. “Why did you get her involved, anyway?”

Frank shook his head. “I needed someone to translate what those bastards were saying. I couldn’t trust their people. I figured I’d kill two birds with one stone. Get the translation done. Get laid. Afterward, she’d turn up missing. Nobody’s going to miss a whore in Haiti.”

“With all due respect, you have a lot to learn about this business,” Wheeler explained. “You exposed us needlessly. You took that girl to the private home of one of the biggest drug traffickers in Haiti.”

“That’s why she has to die,” Frank said.

“Let’s hope she does,” Wheeler said.

Carline remained dead still as the lights came on in the storage room. She heard footsteps and someone sliding chairs and tables.

“Please, God,” she prayed inwardly, certain that if God didn’t answer her prayers, she was going to die.

The footsteps and pushing of chairs and tables continued. Then suddenly, the noise stopped, followed by the man uttering a curse word. Several seconds later, the lights switched off, and the door closed.

Carline couldn’t relax yet. She wasn’t sure if the man was bluffing. The thugs might be right outside the door, keeping watch. They could be anywhere. Carline decided not to move. She had no idea that the man had just seen two brown rats in the room and had abruptly ended his search.

So Carline remained behind that freezer, wide-awake and vigilant, and scared out of her wits, until the sun rose at five the next morning.

When enough sunlight streamed through the windows so that Carline could see around the room, she quietly stood up. Still not sure if her pursuers were nearby, she gradually slipped from behind the freezer and tiptoed to the door. She could hear no noise outside. In fact, the entire hotel seemed quiet for three hours. Unbeknownst to her, the hotel bar had closed and all of its patrons either retired to their rooms or went elsewhere.

Carline grabbed a butcher knife from a nearby table and, taking a deep breath, gradually opened the door and peeked outside. She saw no signs of activity.

Carline emerged from the room and headed for the stairs, watching the lobby door intently. When she reached the stairs, she ran up to the second floor, down the corridor, and to the west staircase, holding the knife so that the edge of the blade was turned away from her. When she reached the first floor, she noticed a door leading to the outside—locked.

Carline used the butcher knife to force the latch open from the space between the doorjamb and the lock—a simple doorknob cylindrical lock keyed on both sides. She once saw her father do this for a storekeeper friend who lost his key. Within ten minutes, she had disengaged the lock. Carline flung the door open, dropped the knife, and ran as far away from the building as she could get. By the time she stopped, she was at Rue MacKandal and Delmas 19, five city blocks away.

She sat on a curb to rest. At this time of the morning, few people were around. She buried her head in her hands and resisted the urge to cry. Instead, she prayed.

“Father, thank you for answering my prayer. Thank you for sparing my life.”

After she was fully rested, she stood up and pulled the fifty-dollar bill out of her pocket. After admiring it, she shoved it back into her pocket and started walking up Rue MacKandal, hoping to find another hotel where she could clean up and get some sleep before she headed home to La Saline. She could feel safe there, as Frank did not know her real name and had no idea where she lived.

Frank and his henchmen, Sy and Jim, were totally dumfounded. The back door of the hotel had been jimmed open from the inside, and they knew that Carline had escaped. Sy, Jim, and Frank blamed each other; their argument got so loud that they had to step outside. Sy caught most of the heat; he searched the storage room and was spooked by the rats.

Wheeler approached them from the hotel lobby. “I think I got a make on her.”

Frank, Sy, and Jim stopped arguing and gave Wheeler their rapt attention.

“I talked to one of the other hookers,” Wheeler told them. “She said that Josephine was new to the game, and that she lives in La Saline. All we have to do is go to La Saline and find her.”

Frank scoffed at the idea. “Are you kidding? Do you know anything about La Saline?”

Wheeler shook his head.

“Well, I wouldn’t go there with anything less than a platoon,” Frank said. “That place is one of the worst slums in this city. If we go in there with our white faces hunting for one of their residents, we might as well forget about catching that plane back to Miami. That place makes Overtown¹ look like the Bahamas.”

“So, what do we do?” Wheeler said, sounding frustrated.

“The girl’s got fifty dollars in her pocket, so she may be halfway to the Dominican Republic by now, for all we know,” Sy said.

“No,” Frank said. “She’s somewhere nearby. I feel it. Let’s plan to stick around another couple of days. We’ll find her.”

It was 6:30 a.m. when Carline approached a guesthouse on Rue MacKandal. The house had been a former hotel reopened by Christian missionaries as a guesthouse. Carline knocked gently on the door. A stout, white woman who looked to be in her late fifties answered the door, still wearing slippers and a robe.

“Hello. May I help you?” the woman said in Creole.

“Hi. I’m looking for a room,” Carline responded.

“I’m sorry, but our rooms are only booked by appointment, and the manager is not in yet,” the woman responded.

Carline nodded, and turned to leave. The woman watched Carline for a moment, noting how desperate and tired she seemed. There were always people knocking on the door asking for rooms, and she had to turn some of them away. But Carline was different. Something about her invited compassion. Moreover, she knew that although she had not technically refused Carline a room, the chances that Carline would return during business hours were slim to none. The woman decided to ask her more questions.

“What’s your name, dear?” the woman asked, before Carline had gotten beyond earshot.

Carline turned. “Josephine,” she said.

“Where do you live, Josephine?”

“La Saline.”

“La Saline is not that far away. Why do you need a room?”

¹ Overtown, Florida, is an impoverished Miami neighborhood.

"I've been up all night, and I need some rest. I cannot go home like I am now." Carline pulled the fifty-dollar bill from her pocket. "I can pay."

"That's not the issue, honey." The woman opened the door wider. "Come on in."

Carline walked into a room filled with chairs, bookshelves, and a small receptionist desk. The décor was plain, the furniture worn but clean and sturdy. It was definitely a better environment than the whore hotel from which she had just escaped.

The woman ushered Carline into a living room area. "I'm Mamie. I own the place."

Mamie sat Carline down and began to ask probing questions. When she had finished, Mamie knew about Carline's history, her parents, her brother, her decision to move in with a friend in La Saline after her brother's death, and her decision to become a prostitute. Carline also told Mamie about the drug deal and about Frank's attempts to kill her.

"So, then, these men are out looking for you?" Mamie asked.

"Yes," Carline answered.

"Are you sure no one followed you here?"

"Yes. I was running. No one was following me."

"Well, don't worry. You're safe here. You just have to stay inside for a few days. And you cannot go back to La Saline, at least not right away." Normally, it would be Mamie's knee-jerk reaction to call the police, but she knew it was likely that the traffickers had at least two corrupt cops on their payroll and would know about the call before the phone was settled back on the hook.

Mamie took Carline to the second floor and showed her to a room with three neatly made beds, a fan, and little else. Carline lay on one of the beds. Feeling safe and secure, Carline drifted off to sleep.

