

Preconceived Notions

Phyllis Hyman appeared on stage. Her very presence spoke volumes; her beauty was enough in itself. The small crowd waited expectantly, their faces flushed with excitement. And then it came. At first a flutter, maybe a sigh, but suddenly a melody full of soft whispers and strong husky undertones was faintly heard. The first note sent shivers down every spine. It was as if the audience was hypnotized. She made love to them as she whispered, crooned, touched and caressed them with her voice. Rich, deep, throaty, velvety to the ear, her voice was a web of brown sugar and honey molasses.

She sang of the pain and heartbreak every woman feels with the loss of her man. A deep sorrow emanated from her voice. Every woman present identified with the emotions her song evoked, every man present wanted to comfort and assure her that he would be the one whose love would never fade or die. There wasn't a man amidst the crowd who could have resisted her, and Phyllis knew it. Her hips were well rounded as she sat on the stool. The long sleeved, silver-sequined dress had a deep "V" neckline which cupped and emphasized her large breasts. A shapely leg protruded from a thigh-high slit in her dress.

Her skin was light cocoa brown, her nose finely chiseled, and her cheek bones strong and prominent. Her lips were full and sensuous. Glittering highlights showed in her thick shoulder-length black hair, which was crimped and parted on the far right side. Phyllis Hyman could only be defined as beautiful. As she hit a deep note, she gripped the microphone with both hands and dipped her upper body toward the floor. Her hair fell forward to frame the right side of her face, only to fall back into place as she lifted upright again. She was graceful as her body swayed softly from side to side. Her right hand gripped the microphone as her left hand rose slowly above her head. With her fingers pointing straight out, her hand wavered slowly from left to right, only to ball into a slow fist as a new wave of emotions hit her. And all the while, the melody continued to flow from her body.

Her head was thrown back now. Her neck craned to accompany the strong notes which she belted out. As she dipped backwards on her seat, she kicked her leg out and arched her body in unison. The audience was in sync with her every move. Slowly, an inch at a time, she circled on the stool, making eye contact and giving everyone a full view of herself. She eased off the stool and placed the microphone in its stand. With her feet spaced wide apart, she stood tall in her matching silver three-inch heels, putting her curvaceous body on full display. The men strained to get a better look.

She lifted her hands to the audience, as if pushing them away. With her eyes closed and her head turned to the side, she started moving her hands in slow circular motions as her body rocked to the rhythm of her song.

The crowd was mesmerized as her entire body swayed sensuously with the music. Phyllis Hyman was a woman who knew how to captivate her audience. She cradled the microphone between her hands and crooned into it. As the tempo slowed, they knew she was nearing the end of her song and the crowd groaned with regret. Her voice fluttered and wavered on the last note, stretching it for as long as possible. The people, not wanting the song to end, spurred her on.

Holding the note for as long as she could, Phyllis finally released it to a whisper. The song ended and the crowd sighed audibly, tension leaving their bodies. So entranced and enamored were they that they needed a few seconds to gather their thoughts. And then they erupted into a round of applause, showing their appreciation by giving her a standing ovation.

For many in the crowd, tickets had been hard to come by. But Phyllis had captivated them with her performance. The money spent had been well worth it.



One man in the crowd had another reason for coming. He had come to even an old score and to reclaim what was rightfully his. As the cheers and rounds of applause for Phyllis Hyman subsided, the man spotted the person he was looking for and deftly made his move across the crowded floor . . .



The day Imagany Jenkins met Elliott, she was on her way to see Caprice McKnight, her lifelong friend who was studying to become a gynecologist at Meharry Medical College. Imagany smiled as she recalled some of the scrapes the two of them had gotten into as children growing up on the south side of Chicago. Who would have guessed that some twenty years later they would still be best of friends?

Imagany parked her car in the visitor's parking lot and headed for Meharry's co-ed dormitory. Passing through the double doors, she went straight to the visitor's counter. All guests were required to sign in while the receptionist called to inform the person that a visitor was waiting in the lobby.

Two students were sitting behind the counter. Sheena Dixon talked on the phone while Kerby Menard studied from a medical book.

"Can you ring Caprice McKnight in room 402?" Imagany asked her.

"Sure," Sheena replied.

Imagany walked to a nearby bulletin board, well aware of the appreciative look that the guy was giving her. He was cute, she thought, but he wasn't her type.

She was studying the flyers pinned to the board when she heard the entrance doors open and close. She watched as a tall man walked through the door and headed toward the counter. The guy behind rose from his chair and the two greeted each other by placing fists together.

The man was not aware of Imagany as she stood off to the side, but she was very much aware of him. He was dressed in faded denim jeans with a white sweat shirt that had Chicago Bulls written in red across the back. Studying his physique as he leaned over the counter, she definitely liked what she saw. The girl behind the counter gestured to her.

As she drew closer, Imagany eyed the man's rear and thighs. She appreciated how nicely built he was, but wondered if his facial features matched his overall image. As she moved closer, she saw that he was even taller than she first thought. He was a good six-four. She walked up to the counter trying to get a better look, when Mr. Chicago Bulls himself, turned in her direction. She looked into his face feeling as though someone had knocked the wind out of her. In slow motion Imagany thought, "*Somebody, please! Hold my hand! Does this man look good or what?*" She knew she was staring rudely and could only imagine how odd she must appear. The only thought registering in her brain was how fine the man truly, truly was.

He was ruggedly handsome. His skin was a dusky paper-bag brown. His jawline was covered with a light stubble, just the way she liked it. He had broad shoulders, a wide chest, and muscles that wouldn't quit. Imagany stared at him like a hungry dog eyeing a morsel of food. The only thing missing was saliva dripping from her mouth. His jeans fit him so well that she had to force herself to banish the thoughts that were suddenly running through her mind. The man even had eyes she could get lost in. Staring at him in a daze, she was powerless to stop the stupid kool-aid grin that spread across her face. Somewhere in the recesses of her mind, Imagany thought she heard someone clearing their throat.

"Your friend in 402 says for you to come on up," Sheena said sarcastically. Out of jealousy she wanted to tell Imagany to close her mouth before a bug flew in it. She, too, had been eyeing the man. She had even gotten off the telephone to give him her undivided attention. Sheena had to repeat her words three times and was about to get catty.

Unconsciously, Imagany reached over the counter to take the pass from the girl's hand. But her eyes never left the man's face. She didn't know why she was acting so foolishly. It was not like her to get excited about a man in this manner. She was used to men getting excited about her. She took a deep breath and mentally tried to gather her wits. She realized her hand had been groping in the air when Mr. Chicago Bulls took the pass out of the other girl's hand and placed it in hers.

"Thank you," Imagany told him in a voice that surprisingly sounded clear even to her own ears. The man had completely taken her by surprise! Imagany was embarrassed by her silliness and tried hard not to let it show.

She knew that she was acting like a typical love-struck kid and wondered where her cool demeanor had disappeared to.

“You’re welcome,” the man replied with a twist to his lips. He had watched her approach out of the corner of his eye. The way she walked, how could he not? When he turned to get a full look at her, his only thought to himself was that God must have been smiling when He created her. She was gorgeous and the effect she had on him was swift. He stared into her brown eyes and finally realized what people meant when they said that the eyes were windows to the soul. He had to physically restrain himself from caressing the cleft in her chin. Placing the pass in her hand was only a means to keep himself from boldly touching her.

The smile on her face was catching as he extended his hand to shake hers.

Mechanically, Imagany placed her hand in his. His skin was as warm as his handshake was firm. As his hand closed over hers, the calluses on his palm caressed her skin. Big hands and long fingers. *My goodness! Every woman knows what they say about men like this!* Imagany felt her knees go weak.

“Hi, I’m Elliott Renfroe,” the man said in a deeply amused voice.

Nothing could have snapped Imagany out of her trance-like state. Nothing except hearing the amusement in his voice. Imagany felt even more ridiculous as she tried to pull herself together. Because she was embarrassed, she suddenly decided to wipe the smile off the man’s face. Snatching her hand from his before she melted, Imagany inclined her head in his direction. In a voice full of cutting sarcasm she said, “Good for you.”

Instead of telling him her own name as he expected, she stepped to the side and walked past him to the bank of elevators down the hall. Imagany snickered to herself as she imagined the surprised looks that must be on all their faces. She didn’t dare look back. The man probably had women throwing themselves at his feet all day long. She berated herself for drooling over him in the first place.

Inside the elevator, Imagany’s hand was still warm where his had caressed hers. She flexed her fingers, enjoying the tingling sensations that lingered. She admitted to herself that she would have liked to have gotten to know him better. That face, that voice, that body, those hands! *Whatta man!* As Imagany stepped off the elevator, she shook her head regretfully and tried to console herself with the thought that Elliott Renfroe was probably just another conceited, brainless hunk.