

*The unforgettable characters were introduced in *And, Not Only That*. Their story continued in the sequel, *In A Year's Time*. But, *Know This* is the third book in the series and tells a story of devastation, transformation, second chances, and love that won't be denied.*

But, Know This

by Cheryl M. Robinson

Order the complete book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10281.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.

CHERYL M. ROBINSON
BOOK THREE

LOSS

FAITH

grace

**BUT,
KNOW
THIS**

*Devastation, transformation,
second chances,
and love that won't be denied.*

But, Know This

Copyright © 2019 by Cheryl M. Robinson

ISBN: 978-1-64438-029-1

All rights reserved solely by the author. The author guarantees all contents are original and do not infringe upon the legal rights of any other person or work. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2019

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Robinson, Cheryl M.

But, Know This by Cheryl M. Robinson

FICTION / Christian / General | FICTION / African American / Christian |
FICTION / Family Life / General

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019901344

Scripture quotations taken from the King James Version (KJV) - public domain.

Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation.

Scripture quotations taken from The Message Bible.

Credits

He Looked Beyond my Fault and Saw my Need
Dottie Rambo

Author Photograph by NiCole W. Lynch
ColezCreations

Book Cover designed by Doug James
The D. James Group

Chapter One



Jenn and Paul sat in the courtroom holding hands and barely breathing. Their teenage daughter, Lynn, sat stiffly beside her attorney, Jason. They all anxiously awaited the jury's return when Lynn's fate would be announced.

Jenn couldn't pull her eyes away from Lynn. Her daughter had to be nervous and afraid sitting front and center—the object of much curiosity, ridicule and judgment. Perhaps she was protected by naiveté—the universal notion of youth that they are invincible. Jenn could only hope.

At that moment, Jason whispered to his young client. Lynn looked at him and nodded. Otherwise, she remained unnaturally still.

If Jason was nervous about the outcome, he hid it well. His demeanor gave nothing away. Not only was he brilliant, he was a quick thinker and possessed an uncanny ability to retain facts—attributes that served him well as an attorney. Most people were impressed—even intimidated—by his physical stature. Standing at six feet four inches and weighing more than two hundred thirty pounds, his mere presence was quite imposing. Not for the first time, Jenn noticed the bulging biceps restrained by his suit jacket. Based on his size and fitness, one could easily assume that he,

at one time, was a linebacker for a professional football team.

Jenn had been concerned about how the jury would perceive Jason. She needn't have worried. Whereas the prosecuting attorney posed questions in an aggressive and hostile manner at times, Jason used the opposite approach. He was thorough yet composed; and, because of his genuinely kind and compassionate nature, he created an aura of respect that encouraged open and honest communication. His interrogation skills and knowledge of the law could not be overlooked but the assets that distinguished him from other attorneys were his high IQ—he tested off the charts—his quick thinking and excellent recall. No detail was overlooked as he probed deeper in his usual, nonthreatening manner. People tended to trust him and open up to him, including witnesses for the prosecution. Jenn couldn't help but admire him.

To Jenn and Paul, Jason was more than their daughter's attorney. He was one of their closest friends and confidantes. One whom they trusted completely. He and Paul met several years ago when Paul consulted on a legal case. Jason was one of the lead attorneys. The two hit it off and developed a mutual respect when they discovered that they were believers whose faith was very important to them. Over time, Jason and Paul became close friends with shared passions for sports and law. Quite naturally, it was Jason whom Paul phoned months ago when he realized the magnitude of Lynn's legal troubles. A decision that neither he nor Jenn regretted.

Jenn's eyes left Jason and focused again on Lynn who wore the navy skirt and soft pink blouse Jenn had suggested. Tiny pearl earrings decorated her lobes and

could only be seen when her hair was draped behind her ears. Face free of makeup, Lynn looked like a model teenager. Sweet...pretty...innocent. Lacking was the bravado and arrogance she typically displayed.

Today she was subdued; understandably so.

The sound of laughter drew Jenn's attention to the table where the two prosecuting attorneys were seated. Heads bent closely together, they were engaged in an animated conversation, smiles etched on their faces.

How can they laugh at a time like this? My daughter's fate is about to be revealed and they are amused? Are they so confident of the verdict?

Fear and anger coursed through Jenn's body and she tightened her grip around Paul's hand. He responded by squeezing hers causing her to look at him. His forehead glistened with perspiration though his hand was almost cold. With his free hand, he loosened his tie. He attempted to reassure her with a smile but it didn't work. When she looked into the beautiful brown eyes that were so familiar, she saw something akin to fear.

Paul was worried and she was petrified. Never had they considered it in the realm of possibility that they would find themselves in a courtroom because of a crime allegedly committed by their daughter.

Allegedly.

Jenn bit her lips to keep the tears at bay as she recalled the disturbing events leading to this moment.

The past year had been a living hell...one in which they were forced to accept not one but many unimaginable realities. Lynn's diary revealing her drug use and sexual promiscuity...the disturbing revelations about Lynn's antagonistic and lewd behaviors...the

incident at summer soccer camp where one of Lynn's teammates almost died...Lynn's assault on the policeman who conducted an investigation into the camp incident...Lynn's twisted betrayal of her sister, Ruth...Lynn's constant display of anger and disrespect...their family's public humiliation...their struggle to survive the actions that ripped them apart.

Before leaving home that morning Paul prayed, reminding them of God's faithfulness. Jenn had been comforted then; however, now that the moment of reckoning was upon them, anxiety was threatening to overtake her. She looked at Paul again, noticing his closed eyes and bowed head. She saw his lips moving and knew that, once again, her husband was praying for his daughter, his wife, his family.

She wanted to pray too, but felt frozen, incapable of communicating a clear thought or expressing her desires. Unexpectedly, a scripture from Romans popped into her head. **In the same way, the Spirit helps in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.**

Thank you, Holy Spirit. Please intercede on my family's behalf. We need a miracle.

She and Paul were surrounded by family and a number of friends whose presence was both a blessing and a curse. If Lynn was found not guilty, Jenn would like nothing better than to fall into their embraces and celebrate the victory with them. But if their worst nightmare came true—if Lynn was determined to be guilty—Jenn did not want to face anyone. Forced to deal with others' sympathies, apologies, and pity would be unbearable. She doubted she would have the strength to stand much less cope with their emotions.

No, she didn't want to be on the receiving end of condolences no matter how well-intentioned.

Conspicuously absent from the courtroom was Lynn's twin sister, Ruth. Paul's parents weren't in attendance either. When Lynn falsely accused Ruth, Jenn and Paul had no choice but to send Ruth to live with Paul's parents in Florida. Though painful, the decision had not been difficult. During this unending nightmare of confusion, shock, turmoil, destruction and pain, Jenn had been sure of one thing: Ruth's survival depended on being separated from her twin.

To ask—or expect—Ruth to sit through this trial in support of her sister was unthinkable.

Both daughters were fighting for their lives but in very different ways. Ruth was deeply hurt by Lynn's accusations and betrayal. The bond that was so uniquely theirs, severed. Regardless of the verdict, their family would remain fractured indefinitely, perhaps permanently.

Jenn's thoughts were interrupted by a buzz in the courtroom. The all familiar heart palpitations began again—this time at an alarming rate—making it difficult for her to breathe. She fidgeted, crossing and uncrossing her trembling legs. Looking to her left, she recognized Sabrina and her mother—the cause of the buzz—as they reclaimed their seats on the opposite side of the room.

Sabrina was Lynn's teammate—the alleged victim—who became suddenly and gravely ill at soccer team camp last summer. Suspicions and accusations were directed at Lynn who had boasted of her intention to harm Sabrina. Suspicions and accusations led to questions and a police investigation. The investigation led to a charge of attempted murder. The charge had

been changed, however, to aggravated assault due to lack of evidence. Fortunately for Lynn, much of the evidence related to the attempted murder charge was based on hearsay. Thank God! Still, aggravated assault was no laughing matter.

Perhaps it would have been a different story if the police had gotten hold of Lynn's diary. But they hadn't and they never would. Jenn and Paul made certain of that.

Did they do the right thing? Jenn debated this question with herself every day. The diary contained graphic and indisputable revelations—in Lynn's own words—describing her sexual exploits and intentions towards Sabrina. As evidence, it would have guaranteed a conviction and sealed Lynn's fate.

On the one hand, Jenn felt as if they had no choice in destroying the diary. On the other hand, she feared that—because of their dishonesty—they were destined for hell.

What parent wouldn't do all within his or her power to prevent their child from going to prison? But Jenn couldn't help but wonder if God was pleased with their decision. They had tampered with evidence which was a crime. They chose to keep incriminating information from the police and their attorney—another crime. They took matters into their own hands relinquishing their complete trust in God. And what message did they send to Lynn who had yet to acknowledge the seriousness of her actions or apologize? Did their decision encourage the monster inside of their daughter? Would Lynn ever recognize or appreciate their sacrifice of love? Would God forgive them?

Looking at Sabrina and her mother, Jenn could only feel compassion. Jenn suspected that their lives had

been irrevocably and permanently changed, too. But, they had done nothing wrong. None of this was their fault. Fortunately, Sabrina had fully recovered from her physical ordeal though it had taken several months. Early on, the doctors weren't holding out much hope but she proved them wrong. However, she continued to suffer as she had no choice but to deal with the emotional ordeal of the trial.

And, an ordeal it was.

"All rise!"

Jenn, startled out of her reverie by the bailiff's booming voice, managed to stand with Paul's assistance.

"You may be seated," Judge Monroe stated after sitting. "Bailiff, please escort the jury in."

Jenn stared at the jurors as they were ushered in, single file. Their faces passive and unreadable. They looked at neither the defense nor prosecuting attorneys.

"Have you reached a verdict?" the judge asked the foreman.

"Yes, Your Honor."

"What is your verdict?"

"On the charge of aggravated assault, we find the defendant not guilty."

Chapter Two



Jason

Two weeks after the trial ended, Paul was about to tee off on the ninth hole when he felt his phone vibrate. It had been months since he had swung a golf club or even showed his face at the club. Now that the trial was behind them, he was beginning to resume his normal pre-calamity activities. He knew that his family had been the talk of the town and, even after the verdict was rendered, there were conversations and speculations about Lynn's innocence.

Some of their associates from the club—people he once referred to as friends—had taken a strong stance by shunning them as if he and Jenn were somehow responsible for Lynn's actions. Others offered their full support but their words lacked conviction. And, still others—like the trio he was playing with—had said nothing. It was as if they wanted to pick up where they had left off pretending that the past year hadn't occurred.

But for Paul everything had changed. His world had been redefined.

Checking his phone, he saw the text message from Jason. It read, *Call me.*

Thirty minutes later, Paul sat in his car and pushed the speed dial button for Jason's phone number.

"Hey man," Jason said.

"Hi. I just got off the course and called as soon as I could. What's up?" Paul asked.

"I want to talk with you, Jenn and Lynn and was hoping I could drop by later."

Paul wiped the perspiration from his face. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, I just need to update you all on a few things."

"Okay. Why don't you come over for dinner? Around five? I'll text you after speaking with Jenn."

"Works for me. I'll wait to hear from you," Jason said before disconnecting.

"Do you know what he wants to talk about?" Jenn asked Paul as she walked from the refrigerator to the pantry, gathering ingredients for the meal.

"No, only that he wants to update us. That's all I know but he assured me that nothing was wrong. I'll call Lynn down to tell her and she can help you with dinner."

"We can tell her about the meeting but I would rather prepare dinner alone. It's just easier for me," Jenn said, hoping Paul understood.

Paul understood completely. The healing process would be a gradual one. He pushed the intercom button and waited for Lynn's answer before speaking.

"Come down, Lynn. Your mom and I need to talk to you."

Lynn's sigh was audible but she said, "Okay."

Standing before her parents, she grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl and took a huge bite. She looked from her mother to her father waiting for one of them to speak. Out of habit she appealed to Paul.

"What's up, Dad?"

"Jason called earlier. He wants to talk with us as a family so we invited him to dinner."

"Oka-a-a-ay. What does he want to talk about?" Lynn asked, her stomach tightening at the mention of Jason's name.

"He didn't say, specifically. Only that he has updates he needs to share with us," Paul said. "He'll be here around five."

Lynn shrugged her shoulders to show her indifference. "Anything else?" she asked.

"No," Paul said.

He watched as Lynn hastily left the room, taking the stairs two at a time, as if being in the same room with them was torturous. She didn't even offer to help with dinner, he thought.

Lynn was nervous. She lay across her bed willing the unruly butterflies to leave her stomach. They didn't.

If there was one person who got under her skin it was Jason.

What did he want now?

He had done his job and done it well but he was not one of her favorite people. When he was no more than her father's friend, he was cool. But as her attorney, she was forced into a relationship with him that made her uneasy. She didn't like being forced to do things.

Because he challenged her, he irritated her. Even angered her. He was one of few who didn't tolerate her *nonsense* as he often referred to her behavior. Nor did he readily accept her explanations as fact, quickly pointing out inconsistencies and contradictions. He was smart—very smart—and checked her on everything. She had used every ploy she could think of to sway his views but none worked. Though she would not admit it, she respected and feared Jason at the same time.

She recalled the last day of the trial as they awaited the jury's return. Jason sat beside her focused on his phone. She'd noticed the opposing attorneys and how relaxed they appeared as if they were sure of the outcome. Looking at them caused her anxiety to rise to a level she had not previously experienced. She felt as if she was going to vomit right there in the courtroom.

Unable to squelch her fear, she had uncharacteristically sought comfort from Jason by placing her hand in his and clasping it tightly. Her own hand was clammy and trembling. She was embarrassed by her weakness but couldn't help herself. He stopped what he was doing and looked at her. She'll never forget what he said.

"No matter how this turns out, you're going to be okay. You must believe that."

She'd searched his eyes for doubt or fear or worry...anything to indicate that he was only offering false assurance. There was nothing to betray his words.

"Do you believe that?" he had asked.

She had nodded not because she believed the words but because of what was conveyed in his eyes. Knowledge...strength...certainty. He had no doubt that

what he said was true and she wondered how he could possibly know—so absolutely—that her life would not be ruined. But, she hadn't questioned him; she'd merely accepted what he'd said.

When she heard the "not guilty" verdict, she hugged him and cried. Her delight and appreciation were genuine but tainted. She was relieved that the trial was over and euphoric about the jury's decision but, at the same time, angry that she had been forced to endure such a humiliating ordeal. The price she had paid was astronomical. Her life would never be the same. *No Ruth, no friends, no soccer.*

Before the verdict, she dared not look at those in attendance. Then, overjoyed with the jury's decision, she scanned the courtroom. Her parents were locked in an embrace.

Touching.

Several people surrounded them offering hugs and tender pats on their backs. She saw tears streaming down her mother's face. Her uncles gave Lynn a thumbs up and her grandparents blew a kiss in her direction. She wanted to appear cool—as if the verdict was expected and she had not been scared to death—but, in spite of herself, she couldn't erase the huge smile plastered on her face. The tears that had escaped her eyes surprised even her.

Not everyone was happy with the verdict, however. The policemen who had questioned her glanced in her direction with disbelief on their faces. With a smile still plastered on her face, Lynn thought, *"Better luck next time, jerks."*

Sabrina and her mother made a hasty exit and refused to engage in conversation.

Leaving so quickly? Good riddance, tramp.

The lead prosecutor approached Jason and said something that Lynn couldn't hear before he left the room with purposeful strides. Jason had merely nodded.

"Bye bye!" she whispered to the lead prosecutor's retreating back.

When her parents approached her and Jason, Lynn permitted herself to be embraced and forced herself to say the appropriate things.

Only later, in private, did she allow her true feelings to be expressed. "Now I can get on with my life. To hell with all of you!"

And that's exactly what she intended to do she reminded herself.

The doorbell rang announcing Jason's arrival. First things first. She had a dinner to endure.

Earlier Jenn had pulled one of Jason's favorite dishes from the freezer, a meaty lasagna, and made a salad. They were informally seated at the kitchen table and, though no one mentioned Ruth, her absence screamed loudly.

Lynn, attempting to camouflage her nerves, engaged in small talk. It didn't help her nerves that Jason appeared to be in no hurry to share his news. After he completed a second helping, Lynn obediently cleared the plates while Jenn made coffee and sliced apple pie.

"I heard from the prosecuting attorney earlier today," Jason said, accepting a cup of coffee from Jenn. "After speaking with Sabrina and her mother, they have decided not to appeal the jury's verdict."

"That's great news," Paul said. "I was worried."

The transformation in his appearance was immediate. He no longer looked as if he were carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"Thank God," Jenn said, lifting her hands reverently and looking upward.

"So that means this whole crazy mess is over?" asked Lynn.

Jason hesitated before responding. "In one sense, it does," he said, looking at her.

"What does that mean? In one sense? And why are you looking at me like that?" Lynn asked, with an edge of anger in her voice. "And, why didn't you tell us this when you first arrived?"

Jason continued to stare at Lynn. Her behavior disturbed him. In his opinion, she was a troubled young woman and he wasn't sure how much of her behavior was by choice or as a result of her diagnosis. If he were a betting man, he would wager that her manipulative and cunning ways had nothing to do with the personality disorder. That her outbursts and disrespect for authority, contrary to what some believed, were simply expressions of who she was. There was nothing wrong with Lynn other than being selfish and self-centered—one who wanted to control her world and have it respond to her only on her terms. The more time he'd spent with her, the more convinced he'd become.

He'd be the first to admit, however, that he was not an expert when it came to abnormal psychology or mental health issues. From time to time, he referred to the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), regarded as the psychological bible. Because he didn't want to rely solely on his interpretation of the information cited in

the manual, he also consulted with reputable therapists and relied on them for testing, detailed reports, diagnoses and clarification. The information often proved helpful in better understanding a client he was representing. Lynn was a prime example.

Interestingly enough, the professionals he'd consulted about Lynn were in disagreement as to what—if any—disorder existed. Unsettled by the opposing views, Jason's instincts would not let him rest. He tended to reduce situations to the bottom line and the bottom line for Lynn, in his opinion, was simple. Mental disorder or not, if she didn't change, he envisioned her future with severe and devastating consequences.

"Lynn, I need you to listen to me. I need you all to listen to me," Jason said, looking directly at Paul and Jenn before settling his eyes again on Lynn. "Throughout this trial, there were two issues for me. Conflicting issues. As your attorney, I did what I had to do to help you but, at the same time, I was concerned about your family.

"The jury found you not guilty for two reasons. One, Sabrina was discredited because of her previous drug use and abuse of pain medication. Two, the testimony given by your teammates was inconsistent. Bottom line, we created enough reasonable doubt to work to our advantage. But, even with that, I think we owe the jury's decision to God's grace. The jury could have gone either way. You following me so far?"

"Yes," Lynn said, "I get it. Are you done now?"

"No, I'm not. My point is this: just because the jury rendered a not guilty verdict doesn't mean you're innocent," Jason said.

He saw her eyes widen as she understood the implication of his words.

"I don't have to listen to this," Lynn said, abruptly standing.

"No, you don't but you will. I'm not finished. Sit down," Jason said, eyes blazing, posture rigid, voice raised but controlled.

Lynn, startled and confused by Jason's anger, stood still. Deep down, she was afraid but of what? She glanced at her parents but their expressions were unreadable.

When she looked at Jason, she almost gasped. Never in her dealings with him, had she seen such intensity...such anger. She sat but not before releasing an exaggerated sigh of displeasure.

Jason continued. "You know what you did and didn't do and you know your true intentions. A number of people were hurt—badly hurt—by your actions, including your sister and your parents. They will suffer for a long time. Does that even matter to you? Have you considered what they've been through because of you? You can't go through life treating people any way you want, Lynn. You may think you're in control, but you're not. Remember this: life has a way of humbling you. What goes around comes around.

"What you should do is fall on your ungrateful knees and thank God for His grace. You deserved to pay for what you did. You deserved to go to prison. You deserved to suffer as you've caused others to suffer. That's what you deserved. And, because I've seen the pain you've caused firsthand I, for one, am somewhat disappointed that you didn't get what you deserved. But if you don't change, mark my words, you're going to get exactly what's coming to you."

"Why are you lecturing me?" Lynn asked, defiantly.

"Because, believe it or not, I care about you and what happens to you."

"Well, thanks," Lynn said, sarcastically. "Are you done now?"

Jason merely nodded.

Lynn stood and quickly left the room but, for months to come, she was haunted by Jason's words.

Chapter Three



Several Months Later

Lynn

Lynn barely took note of the tall attractive girl dressed in black as she casually strolled by their table if not for the distinctive shoulder bag. The red bag with the unique star was significant; it was her sign. A rather clever one Lynn thought as she glanced again at Kirk, convincingly disguised as a woman, makeup and all.

"Mom, I need to use the restroom," Lynn said. "My stomach feels yucky. I won't be long."

They were at a mall on the other side of town, having lunch at a restaurant that, conveniently, offered them an unobstructed view of the shoppers. It had been Lynn's suggestion to dine here after they served breakfast at the women's shelter. Her mother had agreed for one reason and one reason only. Chances were slim they'd run into anyone they knew.

Jenn looked at her daughter with concern. "Are you getting sick?" she asked.

"No. I just need to use the restroom, Mom. It's not a big deal," Lynn responded.

Though Lynn's stomach had been in knots all morning she knew it had nothing to do with an impending illness. She was nervous about today's outing because the stakes were high and the risks great.

Jenn nodded as she watched her seventeen year old daughter rise and walk gracefully in the direction of the public facilities. The admiring glances of onlookers did not escape Jenn's notice. Her daughter was a beautiful girl and accustomed to being the center of attention. Today, her long black hair was pulled into a ponytail and she wore a light-weight purple sweater and stylish jeans which covered her firm, shapely figure as if custom made. Unaffected by acne and with a breathtaking smile, she could easily be a model, Jenn thought. Just like her other daughter, Ruth—Lynn's identical twin.

Lynn noticed the looks, too. Any other day, under different circumstances, she would have welcomed the attention and enjoyed flirting with her admirers. Today, she ignored them. She couldn't take any chances. Not with her mother's ever vigilant eyes following her.

Entering the restroom, she noticed a jacket draped over one of the stall doors and walked into the empty stall next to it. She covered the commode with a liner before sitting. The person occupying the adjacent stall was softly humming a familiar tune, one of Lynn's favorite songs.

"Kirk?" Lynn whispered. The humming stopped.

"Yeah, it's me," Kirk replied, also whispering.

In spite of her computer usage being restricted and closely monitored since her arrest, Lynn had figured out a way during her tutoring sessions to communicate

with Kirk via a chatroom. The communications, though brief and intentionally vague, had successfully led to today's meeting. She and Kirk had been planning for months and realized there were no guarantees that their plan would work.

Today was phase one.

Pleased that things had gone according to plan so far, Lynn released a sigh and with it some of her tension. For a moment, she said nothing. In the confines of the small private toilet, she permitted her true emotions to be revealed. Excitement, anxiety, desperation, along with a certain level of smugness, were reflected on her face.

"Are you sure this is going to work? If it doesn't, I'll kill myself. I can't live like this any more," Lynn said, her voice barely audible.

"Have I let you down before, sweet pea? Trust me. This is foolproof from here on out," Kirk said, continuing to speak in a hushed tone.

Lynn desperately wanted to see Kirk's face to judge for herself whether he was as confident as he sounded. She considered joining him in the stall he occupied but heard a door open and immediately froze.

Was it her mother? It would be just like her mom to follow her into the restroom. For the past year, she couldn't breathe without her mom's permission and that hadn't changed after the trial.

She tried peeking through the door but couldn't see a thing.

Please don't let it be Mom. She'll mess up everything.

Lynn held her breath as she listened attentively. She could hear her heart pounding in her chest but

focused on the other noises. Footsteps...a stall door opening and closing...the rustle of clothing...a steady stream of urine followed by the whooshing sound of the commode being flushed. Then more rustling of clothing, a door opening, footsteps, running water, the air dispenser, fading footsteps.

Finally, all was quiet.

Slowly, Lynn exhaled while grabbing a handful of toilet paper to wipe her clammy hands. She clutched the paper tightly as the reality of the situation hit her. She was in a public restroom; her life reduced to having clandestine meetings in a toilet stall of all places.

But she was determined to see this through because she couldn't take much more of her parents' controlling and meddling ways. Freedom was just days away. Her future was with Kirk. She believed in him and trusted him. He had taught her things that would make her parents cringe. Regardless of the problem, he had a solution and always had her back.

"Hey, you still there?" Kirk whispered.

"Yeah," she responded. Looking down at the floor, she noticed Kirk's stylish shoes and was distracted by her curiosity.

"Who helped you?" she asked.

"Helped me what?" Kirk asked with a scowl of confusion on his face.

"Get dressed. Who did your makeup and hair?"

"Oh—a friend," he said quickly. "We don't have time for that now. Listen. Here's the bus ticket, money and disposable phone," Kirk said as he slid an envelope and small box over to her.

"What's in the box?" Lynn asked.

"I picked up a couple of other items. You'll know what to do with them. Text me when you're on the bus. Only use the phone number taped to your phone. I'll meet you in Fresno. You good?"

"Yeah, I think so," Lynn responded as she stuffed the items in her purse.

"You'd better get out of here now before your mom comes looking for you. See you Friday, okay?"

"Okay." Then after a moment's hesitation, "Kirk, are you sure about this?"

"I'm positive, sweet pea. Trust me."

Jenn was talking on the phone when Lynn returned to their table. Grateful that her mother was preoccupied, Lynn settled into her seat. Now that she and Kirk had successfully made their connection, she felt much better. The butterflies in her stomach gone.

Hungry, but too excited to eat, she nibbled a cold french fry laden with ketchup as she casually observed others. A guy, seated at a nearby table who looked to be in his late twenties, smiled and winked at her as if they shared a secret. Uncharacteristically, she—who usually welcomed attention from the opposite sex—was unnerved by this man's attention and quickly averted her eyes. The last thing she needed was to make her suspicious mother even more suspicious.

Lynn spotted Kirk as he exited the restroom. She couldn't resist smiling as he walked by their table and entered a lingerie store.

He is going all out with this female thing.

Lynn fought the desire to laugh at his boldness. Instead, she took a bite of her sandwich and washed it down with a sip of lemonade. Again she reminded herself that they had come too far to blow things.

Now that Kirk was gone, Lynn studied her mother who continued to talk on the phone.

Will you miss me, Mom? I sure won't miss you. I've got a life to live and I can't wait. No more playing by your rules...no more pretending...no more trying to live up to your standards.

Lynn, begrudgingly, acknowledged her mother's almost flawless beauty—cobalt blue eyes accented by long dark lashes; skin, supple and blemish free; body, toned and fit. When her mother smiled, her eyes twinkled. Her teeth were perfectly even and white. The only feature that had changed significantly over the years was her hair now intermixed with gray. Instead of aging her, it softened her features.

All of Lynn's friends—former friends—thought her mother was gorgeous. Kirk practically drooled when he'd first seen photos of Jenn.

"Your mom is hot," Kirk had said.

Lynn knew that her mom was admired by many who viewed her as smart, nice, kind, thoughtful...yada yada yada. A pillar of the community she was, Lynn thought with disdain and perhaps a bit of jealousy.

She gets on my nerves. I certainly won't miss her when I leave. Breathing down my back every time I turn around, always questioning, never trusting. I won't miss Dad, either. He hardly even talks to me. He was always on my side but Mom turned him against me. To hell with them both.

Jenn had another quality that irritated Lynn to no end. Her mother possessed an uncanny ability to read Jenn like an open book and, for that reason, there was a disconnect between mother and daughter. Had things been normal—that is, had Lynn's behavior been more normal—her mom's ability to see through her

could have, perhaps, made them closer. But Lynn's behaviors and desires were far from acceptable. Even Lynn acknowledged this about herself with no shame.

Simply put, Lynn resented her mother for many reasons but mostly for knowing her so well.

Moments ago, Lynn was excited about her future. Now she was in a foul mood all because of her perfect mother. The longer she observed the woman sitting across from her, the angrier she became. She didn't want to blow up today but, sometimes, she couldn't help herself.

Calm down. Deep breaths. Think about Kirk.

Jenn said into the phone, "Tell Ruth I love her and will call later."

Lynn watched as her mom dropped the phone in her purse.

"I'm guessing that was Grandma Janice," Lynn said.

"Yes," Jenn said, avoiding Lynn's eyes. "She sends love to you."

"And how is your precious Ruth?" Lynn asked, making no effort to keep the sarcasm out of her voice.

"Your sister is fine but she's not ready to come home."

Lynn was irked. "And that just breaks you up, doesn't it?" she asked, unable to mask her irritation.

Jenn locked eyes with her daughter. "Yes," she admitted. "It hurts a lot. I miss her."

Lynn saw her mother's sadness, disappointment, and pain and they fueled her anger. She said nothing as she witnessed her mother blink away tears and fight for composure. Lynn missed her sister, too, but offered no sympathy. Instead, she unleashed her anger.

"I can't say that I blame Ruth. You and Dad are like watchdogs. You treat me like a prisoner. She's better off in Florida with Grandma and Grandpa."

Jenn measured her words as she stared at the arrogant and self-centered girl who sat across from her. Her daughter.

"Have you considered that you're the reason she doesn't want to come home?"

"There you go again blaming me for everything. It's all my fault, right?"

Yes! Jenn wanted to scream.

Instead she said, "I don't blame you for everything but, at some point, you need to acknowledge how your actions affected Ruth when you accused her of poisoning Sabrina. You hurt her deeply."

"Aww. Poor little Ruth," Lynn said, sarcastically. "She'll get over it."

"I pray she will," Jenn said. "I pray we all will heal."

"Well, don't waste your time praying for me. I don't need your prayers."

You need prayer more than anyone I know, you sick child.

"I think you do. I will always pray for you. I believe we all need prayer," Jenn said as she paid the bill using the kiosk on their table. "Let's go. I don't want you to be late for your counseling appointment." *And, I certainly don't want to have yet another argument with you,* she thought as she gathered her things and walked briskly in the direction of the parking deck. *Not today.*

That night, Lynn's thoughts were consumed with her escape plan. Two more days and she'd be free. No

more accusations or rules. No one to answer to but herself. No more stupid counseling sessions. Freedom! She and Kirk would be able to do their own thing.

She couldn't wait to get away. After all, there was not a dang thing for her here. It was all gone. Even this very room that she once loved felt like a prison. At one time, it was a space that brought her comfort, security, and happiness. Now it represented confinement, loneliness and emptiness. She refused to look at Ruth's empty bed. Things were just different now. *C'est la vie*.

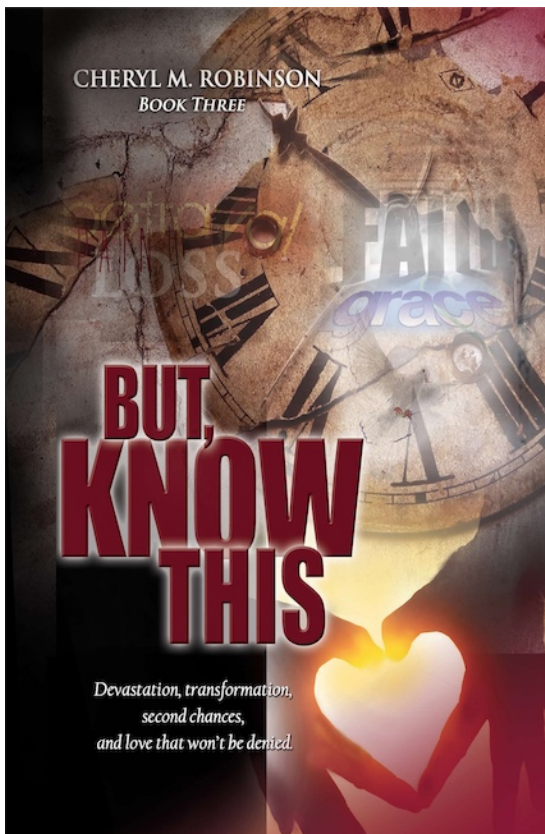
Kirk was her only true friend. He understood her. Some time ago, he professed his love for her promising that he'd always be there for her and would do anything she asked. The memory made her smile. These days thoughts of him—and their plan—were the only reasons to smile.

Kirk had proven his loyalty over and over including earlier today. She shook her head in amazement as she recalled his clever disguise. He was unrecognizable as a female. And, he appeared very comfortable in his attire and makeup, even in his walk and mannerisms. The way he casually strolled with the shoulder bag slung over his shoulder was beyond convincing; it appeared natural.

Kirk, you're the best she thought, suppressing a giggle.

But there was something nagging her, too. It was probably no big deal but someone had to have helped him with his wardrobe, makeup and hair. There's no way he could have done it all himself.

She drifted off to sleep wondering about the identity of the person who helped Kirk and whether this person knew about their plan.



*The unforgettable characters were introduced in *And, Not Only That*. Their story continued in the sequel, *In A Year's Time*. But, *Know This* is the third book in the series and tells a story of devastation, transformation, second chances, and love that won't be denied.*

But, Know This

by Cheryl M. Robinson

Order the complete book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10281.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.