

The Blue of Love

Larry Marshall Sams

*"Is it blue like the sky,
And does it really reach that high,
What color is love?"*

Terry Callier, from the title song of his album "What Color Is Love"

I'd noted Dwight Arnold was registered for graduate credit in Advanced Grammar and Effective Writing, and here he came after my intro to the course on the first day. About nine years ago, Dwight, a highly focused and motivated young man, had aced two honors world-literature courses I taught. After he graduated about '97, I hadn't seen him till today.

He'd had a successful seven years in the Superior Basketball League, the most highly regarded professional league in the nation. Six four, two-twenty, he perfected a jump hook he could release anytime in the air—he used his brains, so he could compete with players four and five inches taller than he.

When his team lost in the playoffs, he'd moved back to Lunsá Chito: retired, because of his right knee. Three months had turned Lunsá Chito tongues into paddles batting his name around.

"Dr. Stewart!" he launched over a hearty handshake; "I believe you still have some knowledge and some skill to impart to me."

"Maybe. But you've been around the world and back, whereas I've basically held fast, as mobile as a hundred fifty pound rock."

"But sometimes I just lolled in a hotel room and slid onto a basketball court, whereas your mind has always been journeying outward and inward." Glowing eyes and a tiny smirk announced his estimation of us.

"You may have gone gimpy in the knee, but you haven't lost any wit speed a-tall."

He chortled and nudged my arm: "Lawdy, lawdy, you broke me down good!" A few beats after his snorts ebbed off, he became pensive. "You've heard what you've heard": part question, part observation, part resignation.

"Perhaps every second or third house in my section of town boasts raging tongues, propelling your name—not by itself—up and down the street."

He exhaled a long, quick, conclusive sigh. "Raring in your section and mine." He shook his head, extended the shaking-with emphasis. "A person deludes himself that in 2005 people might get out of the way and let two people love."

"You hardly fit the norm around here. And certainly you knew the Klan tried to rally in front of the courthouse within the past six or seven years. It wasn't that long ago that racist murderers just up the road dropped the young man's body into the river. The state of Yualalakchi has ever been in a rage about the smallest hint of the intermingling of black and white. So your. . . linking up with a prize daughter of one of the most socially prominent white families in Lunsá Chito. . ."

The muscle in his right jaw throbbed a couple of times, and his face became absolutely rigid. "I know most of these fools—black and white—are against two people being in love. But we are! and we're going to stay that way."

"You must have attuned to the obvious: besides the difference in skin colors, you're both still married to others and have children! People would be gigantic fools not to be batting around this set up."

"I love Jennifer, and those fools will have to kill me to keep me away from her."

As far as I could gauge, everybody in town—excluding two—accepted as a given that the two had no chance: would be castigated apart, or beat up, or, worst of all, even killed. Relatives and friends rode each without intermission.

At the start, according to them, Dwight and Jennifer had decided to allow other people's mouths a free run on the subject, since the two had spouses and children directly affected and a large number of townspeople—whose opinions mattered to Dwight and Jennifer—indirectly touched. But even at the start of others' knowledge, the core of their relationship was already as solid as diamond.

Dwight, soon after moving back to Lunsá Chito, volunteered to speak to or assist at a summer basketball clinic for 10-14 year old boys. The Junior Auxiliary had sunk some money into the clinic, and fate placed Jennifer there to observe for the Auxiliary on Dwight's first day. Jennifer told my wife Clara and me, "The first thing that struck me was that he brought no attitude, even after his career. The second was that he treated all boys' questions as important and gave thoughtful answers. That is, to both black and white boys. And last—or maybe first—" she slyly paused and snickered: "was the way he moved, even favoring the knee, when he demonstrated plays and shots. I told myself that was for me."

Each drove to Raleigh, north of Memphis, after a couple of days, where they rendezvoused at a theater in the Mall. To us Dwight declared: "I didn't want to betray my wife. I didn't want to bring confusion and shame to my child or stir up racial turmoil. Who with a brain and heart would make choices in Lunsá Chito I've made? I had to. I made the choices to bring me Jennifer." Side by side in the flickering light of *The Interpreter*, 140 miles from their lives in Lunsá Chito, they spoke only a few words during the movie.

Just down Austin Peay from the Mall, they ate an early supper at Piccadilly's. Since eleven years of television, including the college years, had placed Dwight in millions of rooms, a couple of basketball fans recognized and spoke to him. Dwight and Jennifer were together for 3 ½ to four hours, they breathed only several hundred words to each other, but anybody hearing the way the two phrased words and

witnessing the stories eyes related would clear that this would not be the two's last meeting. In her car in the parking lot, Jennifer pressed her lips against his cheek and his hand circled her wrist: a promise from both of them.

Both maintained that history supplied weight to their affair, even confirmation. They met in the seventh grade when they transferred to the city's middle school. Jennifer had been a cheerleader their junior and senior years of high school, when Dwight led the region in scoring, was in the top ten in the state. Jennifer also played tennis for the high school, and the school required that an athlete support other teams, so Dwight would be at the matches. Sometimes, they were in study groups together.

Their eyes did not tell stories then. Jennifer remembered: "Black boys were a taboo—an absolute, unthinkable entity. I don't recall knowing then what desire was, but my eyes told me Dwight was the best looking boy in town, black or not." Dwight laughed: "My parents' list of don't's far exceeded the do's. At the top of the list was—to avoid definite pain and perhaps death—don't get involved with a white girl. I never did any more with a white girl beyond shaking hands, until I was a sophomore or junior in college, when a lot of them began to lie in wait for me. And I'm placing emphasis on the correct word."

They rarely saw each other for eleven years: whereas Jennifer attended Duke University, Dwight stayed close to home at Western Yualalakchi, about ten miles from Lunsu Chito. The week after graduation, Jennifer married her home-town boyfriend Matthew Mangrum. Three years ago, Dwight married Yvonne Fulton, who possessed a copy of her family tree testifying that she was a descendant of Fredrick Douglass. Spending all seven of his professional years playing for the Baymen, Dwight met Yvonne at the Regatta Bar in Boston: he went seeking good jazz and found a good wife.

The first assignation in Raleigh, with Dwight's being recognized, highlighted the need for going further underground. They met a couple of times a week in their cars and in motel rooms. When her office thought she showed houses to clients, she sometimes met Dwight. Six weeks after Raleigh, each asked the spouse for a divorce. The next night, Dwight and Jennifer dined together at Sierra's, and although they were put in an alcove out of the other ten to twelve diners' lines of visions, by nine o'clock the next morning, Lunsu Chito tongues heated up the temperature a good deal.

The requests for divorces stunned the spouses.

"Are you out of your ever-loving mind?" yelled Matthew. "We have three children! Haven't I been a good husband? I thought you loved me and you were happy."

"I don't give a fuck whether it's the President of the United States, Denzel Washington, an ex-SBL player, or a homeless person—this town will outcast you for hooking up with a black man—and you know that truism is true.

"Your parents will scorn you. The JAs will purge you from the roll. You'll never sell a house to another client. The court will award custody of the children to me. No other children will be allowed to play with our children. This may be 2005, but Yualalakchi remains Yualalakchi."

Matthew spoke with logic, but he must have been half in shock to go on in this way, because Jennifer announced the words "no turning back" and he from eight years of marriage knew her.

Yvonne hooted, and the sound grated against Dwight's sense of identity. "You goddamn gigantic fool! Ready just in a snap to exchange rich, dark blood for the pale parody. A great black leader's blood is in my veins and your son's veins: powerful blood, historical blood.

"This is the outback of America. People in Lunsu Chito hardly signify to anybody outside the city limits. Jennifer's paternal family is the Staffords. Who in hell are they? What do they mean to American history? Not diddly-squat.

"You claim to like big boobs, and the white girls I knew you sometimes ran with in Boston before we started dating were well endowed. What're you going to do with those little tittles Jennifer's got? I bet hardly anything for you to get a good hold on. You're daring to become an apostate from deep breasts of your own skin color to little ones whose color will ultimately apostatize from you. No matter what you do, Lunsu Chito will never accept the idea of you and Jennifer; therefore, you're setting yourself up, not to mention our son, for massive pain."

The morning after Lunsu Chito tongues heated up, Matthew's brother Kenneth and a half-dozen of his cronies in four trucks and cars forced Dwight off the road to a stop. Expecting the worst, Dwight watched as they exited the vehicles and surrounded his. He sighted no weapons, a true surprise.

"Dwight, I haven't got to talk to you since you been back. Good to see you." A warm smile of welcome did seem attached to Kenneth's mouth, he shook hands with Dwight, and the cronies chimed in too. "We known each other since we were kids, and I always liked you. We all here have followed you and admired your basketball career"—the cronies supplied genuine "Yeahs."

"This thing with Jennifer just can't work. Lunsu Chito's not ready for such. So we're here in the spirit of good will to help this along to a suitable end. The way this thing has gone so far so fast, we think it'd be best if you and your wife and child left town right away." The smile had vanished, but the tone remained cordial enough, even desiring to help: "You're putting Jennifer and your own parents in danger."

Although Dwight knew he could retort and probably handle two, maybe three, of them—if they weren't hiding weapons, he chose to maintain peace at that point and thanked them for the comments. Kenneth looked as though he'd accomplished a task that he wasn't sure about in the beginning.

Superior Basketball League players that night began arriving at the Comfort Inn and kept arriving till the next morning. When the contingent was established, the players totaled twenty-seven, three each for the seven threatening Dwight and six for rotation and back up. The twenty-seven came from fifteen different teams; heights rose from 6'6" to 7'2" and weights from 210 to 320.

The players descended on the seven's homes or waited at businesses. Most strategy sessions unfolded as did the one with Kenneth. Promptly at 7:30 AM, the group led by Li Zhang, a seven-footer from China, arranged themselves on the public sidewalk and street in front of Kenneth's house, and began loosening up, dribbling and passing a basketball.

After about ten minutes, Kenneth naturally, though somewhat hesitantly, ventured out to ask about the identities and business of the three large men in front of his house. Li introduced the other two—one black and one white—and himself, including the teams the men played for, and courteously but resolutely declaimed: "We're members of SULEABAN, an acronym for Superior League Ban. As our name indicates, we want to block all bad treatment of past and present players. So if you and your cronies or anybody answerable to you harms Dwight Arnold and his family and Jennifer Mangrum and her family, I and these two men will crush your head with this basketball."

About six feet tall, out of shape, and beer gutted—Kenneth had to look well up at Li's face atop six feet of muscle.

"Did you fully understand what I said?"

Kenneth managed to nod with a weak "Yeah" and suddenly did not appear stable on his feet.

After Li signaled to the white player, the two steadied Kenneth. "If you don't sit down, the woman looking out the window may think you're hurt when you fall."

Kenneth again nodded his grasp of U's point, and the three sat on the curb with their feet comfortably extended into Magnolia Street. Giving Kenneth a bit of time to calm down, Li asked whether Kenneth would like to pass the ball around or play a game. Kenneth was eager, so U paired Kenneth with the 6'10" black man, second in height to Li. "You're out!" yelled Li, as he fired a pass that slapped Kenneth in the stomach. Loose defense allowed Kenneth to throw in several baskets. A couple of hours later, Kenneth had proudly displayed to his children and co-workers the big rosy splotch on his belly and described the points he'd scored against the pros. The pros had followed Kenneth to work, as though to supply a personal escort, and waited outside. Co-workers hurried out to meet the pros and collect autographs.

The circus-like feeling, the excitement that dominated Lunsu Chito for a couple of days submerged the Dwight-Jennifer heat and the SULEABAN threat to the seven men. Lunsu Chito had never experienced anything like this: twenty-seven professional basketball players in town at once. Most Lunsu Chitans dribbled, bounced, passed basketballs—in addition to filling pages with autographs. Children, teens, and adults whenever possible, anywhere the teams could find a goal, would enter into pickup games with the players. Dwight had warned the players about the humid 90-degree temperature, so after everybody outside profusely sweated for twenty to thirty minutes, the players would call time out and talk about fundamentals to the townspeople—while everybody drank liquids.

The second night in town, the players had open scrimmages, and Lunsu Chitans filled the arena at Western Yualalakchi. Although Dwight put on a knee brace and practiced warm-up shots, in the first scrimmage he could not maneuver and keep up with the others. When he took himself to the sideline, the players and townspeople gave him warm applause. The players scrimmaged for an hour, amid the townspeople's cheers; next, the promised event occurred: by ticket numbers, townspeople—three on a team with two players—were invited to the court for short games. Ninety minutes later, many happy Lunsu Chitans left the arena.

Before departing next morning, the players made last calls upon the seven threatening Dwight. Li presented Kenneth with a player's shirt for the St. Louis Arch, Li's team, and the basketball Li'd threatened Kenneth with. "I can get another basketball," Li asserted. "This has been a major economic outlay for the BAN. Don't make us come back: you know we won't be talking next time."

"I know what you mean," responded Kenneth. "I appreciate you didn't kick the shit out of us at the start. I's just trying to help my brother, and the other six were just backing me up."

"You're all right, Kenneth. Don't threaten a League player, but do let adults make their individual decisions."

A white player and a black player, for protection, escorted Jennifer during the two days. The players got involved with the real-estate business and probably aided two sales. After the players showed special interest to the client, the players would let Jennifer make her pitch, but what the players added was talking up features, which particularly appealed to the players, of a house. The result: Jennifer on the first day sold to a black family; to a white family on the second.

For a week after they left, the players heated the interest of town discussion.

Yvonne hated that her marriage was ending, she hated losing Dwight, but most of all she detested being second to a white woman. "You don't know what you're doing," she told Dwight. "You don't appreciate how precious the jewel is that you're throwing away." Before leaving for the airport in Memphis, she spat on the ground, slightly lowered her buttocks as in symbolic defecation, and cursed the Yualalakchi Delta—which she categorized as a "hellhole." Only words addressed to their son Douglass departed her lips as the

three drove to Memphis. She refused to tell Dwight goodbye in the airport. She hugged and kissed Douglass—who was staying with Dwight for an indefinite period, then boarded the plane for Boston.

That afternoon, Jennifer moved in with Dwight. The city's player-exercised tongues shifted back to focus on Dwight and Jennifer, recapturing some of the zeal abroad before the players' arrival: bad enough the new tenor seemed to suggest, that a black man and a white woman could choose to be with one another in Lunsu Chito. But beyond the sufferable that they could cohabit here without marriage. The new tenor hinted that a shift from racial to social had occurred and, also, that a resignation now pervaded the city's zeal, as though the city began to sense that what existed between Dwight and Jennifer was more powerful than anything the city could generate.

Matthew, on Yvonne's example, accepted that he could do nothing to change the direction Dwight and Jennifer's relationship was taking, so he stepped aside. The city, however, was not able to act on what it sensed about the power of the relationship, so for two weeks intensified the heat, partly because the city judged that Dwight and Jennifer flouted the city's view, and that the city, ultimately, should have some influence on the relationship.

Jennifer's eight-year-old daughter Phoebe returned from the first day of school with her lip pouting. "The kids said bad things to me about you and Dwight, and about Douglass living in the same house we do." Apologizing for the effect on Phoebe of what Jennifer had chosen, Jennifer promised her that everything would eventually work out well.

The next day, however, Phoebe sank onto the car seat and started bawling. "They said that we'd all become zebra people and you and Dwight would have zebra babies. Mother, I can't stand it. I can't stand living with Dwight. Not because of him—I like him!—but what everybody is saying." Thus, the city had discovered a different tactic to undermine Dwight and Jennifer.

After discussing the situation with Dwight and Matthew, Jennifer, with Dwight beside her, calmly explained to Phoebe: "I haven't stopped loving your father. I just love Dwight more. He's the man I've got to be with. If being here with us makes you unhappy, you can go live with your father. Dwight and I don't want you to, but if you want to, we'll let you. But understand: you can come back anytime, if you do go." Added Dwight, "In a short time, I'm learning to love you. I really wish you'd stay."

Phoebe decided to live with her father. The five-year-old boy Glenn and the three-year-old girl Ashley would not consider going with Phoebe: the two thought they were on a new adventure. Dwight was funny and Douglass adorable. Running with Douglass, wallowing on floor and ground with him, and snuggling with him on the sofa to watch tv—Glenn and Ashley concluded their special charge lay in taking care of him.

So the fall semester started, and in the third week of August came Dwight insisting that he was ready to die to be with Jennifer. From Dwight and Jennifer, I got most of the information included in this narrative, letting me grasp that Lunsu Chito had already received several blasts from the two that as late as the 1960s or even 1970s could perhaps have gotten both of them killed. But a different mood prevailed in 2005: black people about political districting had repeatedly won in the courts, four of five City Council members were black, and a new willingness for the races to work together for the city's well-being seemed to exist. Dwight's leaving and becoming famous as a Lunsu Chitan might also be integral as a consideration in the outcome.

I saw Dwight twice a week during the semester. We invited Dwight and Jennifer to dinner Sunday night at the end of the first week of classes. "You're our second invite," Dwight said: "her parents invited us. Mr. Stafford said he didn't agree with our choices but I was a good man and he wanted his daughter to be happy. But my father wouldn't have any part in our being together. 'Nothing but destruction,' he said. The city is a great force. You add children, families... I've got no words to describe the pressure, and I've been through two league championships."

"The Junior Auxiliary instructed me to take a breather from meetings—the president made clear I wasn't kicked out, but the organization and I required some time apart. Most of my friends—so-called friends—won't speak to me and won't return my calls. One woman told me she secretly envied me, Dwight was a catch anywhere in the world—outside Lunsu Chito, which wouldn't be ready for such a relationship for twenty to fifty years, and she didn't have the guts to rub the city's nose in it as I had. On the business side, I've sold only one house since the players left."

Clara glanced from them to me, a question poised in her face, but she wouldn't speak.

"Mrs. Stewart?"

"I won't ask what a hundred no doubt already have."

Dwight nodded: "Is it worth it?"

"Any second guessing?" Jennifer weighed in. "Any sorrow about ending up with someone of a different race?"

"Back in 1992, '93, when we were juniors and seniors in high school, I missed her because I didn't have a clue. I'm not missing her a second time."

"Aside from the problems of spouses and children, I think you're heroes," I offered. "Social and psychological heroes. Heroes of love. You've been through more and progressed further than I would have thought possible—in Lunsu Chito."

Clara would not let up. "I've never been in a position to ask anybody traveling this road... I don't want to offend, but I want to know."

Dwight quietly urged her: "Ask."

"How much of the relationship is . . . racial?"

Dwight smiled, nodded, and appeared to reflect before he answered. "I don't want to offend—or boast, but there are few ethnic groups represented in America and several in Europe I haven't dated... been with. For me, the racial signifies, but it isn't major."

"Definitely the opposite with me—at the start. I had a couple of serious relationships with men at Duke—white men—but had been intimate only with Matt. When I was around Dwight and first attracted to him at the end of May, his dark skin..."—she tucked down her face, paused in a suggestive manner, and hurried on—"raised my heartbeat. You know what I mean. I emphatically registered that I was crossing, or hurdling, a racial taboo in many parts of the world." She gazed at Dwight: "Now, I look at him and don't register skin first. I see the man I love."

"You know, this is our home, where we were raised. You'd think a person could find happiness and security in his home town. And I know this notch of the world, possesses no monopoly on bias, stupidity, and inhumanity. In many parts of the world, it's all right for a person to love a cat, a horse, a watch from a grandfather, a song, or whatever; but let one human being love another: that is, a native American Indian, a Vietnamese, an Asiatic Indian, a person from England, an Italian, a Moslem from Serbia, and an American southern black man an American southern white woman—and the social reaction would make one believe the lovers were trying to crack the frame of the earth."

"There's no flood coming," I began, "but a rise in the water is discernible. An article in Parade two years ago told about an increase in interracial marriages in America. Of course, Lunsu Chito and Yualalakchi operate at times as though they don't belong to the country."

"Maybe Dwight and Jennifer's still being together in this place, after what they've been through, hints at the change."

"That would mean," said Jennifer, "that Dwight and I must keep the water flowing through Lunsu Chito."

"I do believe," Dwight finished, "that two cultures can definitely enrich a relationship. "

As far as I know, after the players departed, no one again threatened Dwight or Jennifer; children stopped making malicious comments to Phoebe and Glenn. Parents, tacit or not, evidently decided that cultivating a racist lifestyle in homes and siccing their children on the children of an interracial couple was not a mature, proper solution. And residual fear of a basketball upside the head might have figured in the decision.

Water, obviously, possesses extraordinary power, sometimes surging straight downhill and sometimes executing wondrous turns.

Jennifer's father and mother invited two of Mr. Stafford's clients and a black city councilman, along with wives, to lunch at Sierra's—full to the walls with Lunsu Chitans. Mr. Stafford greeted the three couples at the door, as the couples arrived, and ushered them to the table, where Dwight sat between Jennifer and Mrs. Stafford. If client or wife hesitated about sitting down, Mr. Stafford intoned, "I readily grasp why you may suddenly have lost your appetite, but if you don't regain it at once, you and I and anybody else I can influence will never do business again." When the black councilman shied a step back, Mr. Stafford spoke to him, "I will do what I can to help you get re-elected, such as having you come to my home to speak to whites about getting their votes, or speaking on your behalf at a rally." All sat down, and the eyes of other Lunsu Chitans often shifted to the table.

Of course, intelligence and wit brimmed over in Dwight and Jennifer, and Dwight could recount experiences different from what most Lunsu Chitans had experienced: the two could be charming table companions. With the right circumstances and a little time, the two would force others to consider values lying beneath skins, providing that others owned the capacity to explore beneath skin.

The wondrous turn occurred on a downtown street. Coming from ice cream were Dwight, Jennifer, Glenn, Ashley, and Douglass. Matt and Phoebe were going to ice cream, on the same side of the street. Whereas Phoebe periodically visited Dwight's house, she now slowed down, looked up at Matt. But Matt would not accept her dilemma, took her hand, and led her straight to the group. After he embraced Jennifer, Glenn, and Ashley—he touched Douglass' shoulder and spoke to him, then stood and extended his hand to Dwight.

A shudder of feeling pierced Dwight's mind as he registered Matt's act, gripped his heart and held on, settled into his stomach, and oozed to his feet—like a plaintive orgasm radiating away yet lingering. Tears hung in his throat, so he gazed up the street, marking time to attempt controlling what he felt. During the semester, he wrote in an essay:

A man can triumph over another man by wishing the man well with what the second man has taken from the first. If fate had driven me to take someone else's possession, had prepared me to die to win the possession, I cannot conceive that I would ever be willing to give the possession back. Yet a type of man can exist, loving a possession so much that he would want the possession to gain what she wanted, even if she did not want him.

I always accepted that the team at the end with most points won. I now conceive that a team with less talent and fewer skills than the other team may play harder than the other team, lose the contest, but still gain a victory.

Dwight accepted that Matt was the victor, because Dwight had nothing of comparable value to give Matt. Making sure the children heard, Dwight told Matt, "I've got no jewel to give you as precious as the one you've bequeathed me. But maybe I can come close. I promise you to the extent I'm fortunate enough to participate in raising your children, I will try to guide Glenn and Ashley—and Phoebe when she visits, if she wants—toward becoming like you, the person you are here."

Lunsa Chito could not win a skirmish. Dwight and Jennifer did not outflank the city so much as penetrate its wall, boring right through the substance—the individual citizen—the city featured the strongest point. Since the city was a legal social entity, not a human being, the city held on, although obviously weakened. The city could say: Look at this foolish white man wishing a black man well with the foolish man's white wife. This may be very humane behavior, even highly Christian behavior, but we don't have to accept that this is the way behavior in our city should go.

Dwight and Jennifer sensed victory. The two, therefore, toned down the inflexibility of their dealings with Lunsa Chito. The city still observed them, but the accusation, glare, disgust, hatred, and refusal-to-accept-on-any-terms vanished from the looks. When requests began arriving for Dwight to speak to school classes and civic organizations, he always went, never broaching the subject of Jennifer and him. Sales increased for Jennifer. When a couple of friends who months ago had dropped her made contact, she did not reject the people or employ sarcasm against them, although she mentally ticked them off as undependable.

The two for two months had attended church together, alternating Sunday to Sunday between Dwight's mainly black Catholic mission church and Jennifer's all-white Methodist church. That the players arrived so soon after the relationship became public no doubt released some of the tension that might have existed at the churches; still, church members remained human—early on sending expressions of dislike and menace; and, lately, gawking and staring.

The two during the first weeks of September really gained the churches' sympathy. Both churches took in evacuees from Hurricane Katrina. Dwight and Jennifer, together, made the largest donations to both churches; they volunteered to help the evacuees. Jennifer came when work allowed, but Dwight, when not in class, spent most of the day at one church or the other. First Methodist came to be happy to see him arrive. Children, teens, and some men that had watched him play on the Gulf Coast and in New Orleans yelled on his approach and swarmed around him, badgered him until he with them went outside and shot HORSE or played a game.

The last week of September, *The Lunsa Chito Chronicle* printed the notice that Dwight's divorce was final, and a couple of days after, the notice for Jennifer's appeared. The notices deflected the city's attack about their living together while possessing other spouses but turned a negative focus back on the two, so that tongues wagged and built up a small amount of heat, way below previous high levels. The city waited to see what would happen next.

Dwight and Jennifer continued the toned-down approach. Judging that the city basically accepted them as a black-white couple, the two did not want to jeopardize, by any behavior the city would use as fuel to heat tongues, the distance the two had gained. The two did not rush into marriage, they were careful not to become pregnant, they did not gloat about their near-victory. Dwight attended classes as a full-time student working toward an MBA, and Jennifer went to work.

October and November flowed along and finally lowered the humid Delta 90's to some bearable temperatures outside air conditioning. When December 14th came, Dwight and Jennifer, already having cleared their intent with Dwight's priest, kept an appointment with the preacher at First Methodist, unsure about how they would be received. "I've spent my life in this congregation," Jennifer commenced. "Dwight and I want to be married in a church; we want to be married in two months on Valentine's Day in this church." The preacher appeared ready to respond, but Jennifer judged that she might as well get all details out in short order. "We want both you and Dwight's priest to be in charge of the ceremony. We fully expect a lot of blacks will be here; other ethnic groups—such as Orientals, Asiatic Indians, and Hispanics—will probably appear, so various religious views will be represented. I'm not sure what the congregation will think of this. . . ."

The preacher used Jennifer's trailing off to respond, "You will have what you want."

Jennifer did not comprehend: "What?"

Repeating himself, the preacher added, "The Methodist denomination will not shut you out, and this congregation wants you here—and if they hadn't and you wanted me to marry you, I would go wherever you wanted to perform the ceremony."

Heretofore, Dwight and Jennifer had rarely shared their deepest feelings outside each other. After an astonished silence, Jennifer let go heaving sobs, as though the preacher's agreement resolved four months of conflict and tension. She, radiant, turned to Dwight, held him, and kissed him passionately—tears and tongues moistening the kiss.

Thus, miscegenation triumphed in one of the most racist cities in one of the most racist states in the country. I earlier applied the word unyielding to them. Dwight said to us, "When we went public in the middle of July, we were unassailable. We told ourselves we were merged and nothing would separate us." "We anticipated the struggle and pain we'd bring ourselves and, most particularly, our children and families," continued Jennifer. "We wound ourselves together and held on as tightly as humanly possible." "We experienced periodic ecstasy along the way—with fear and doubt always returning, but out here in calm water, love can explore the bliss love deserves." "And skin color does not directly matter." "Love consumes what it wants to, what it must to be itself."