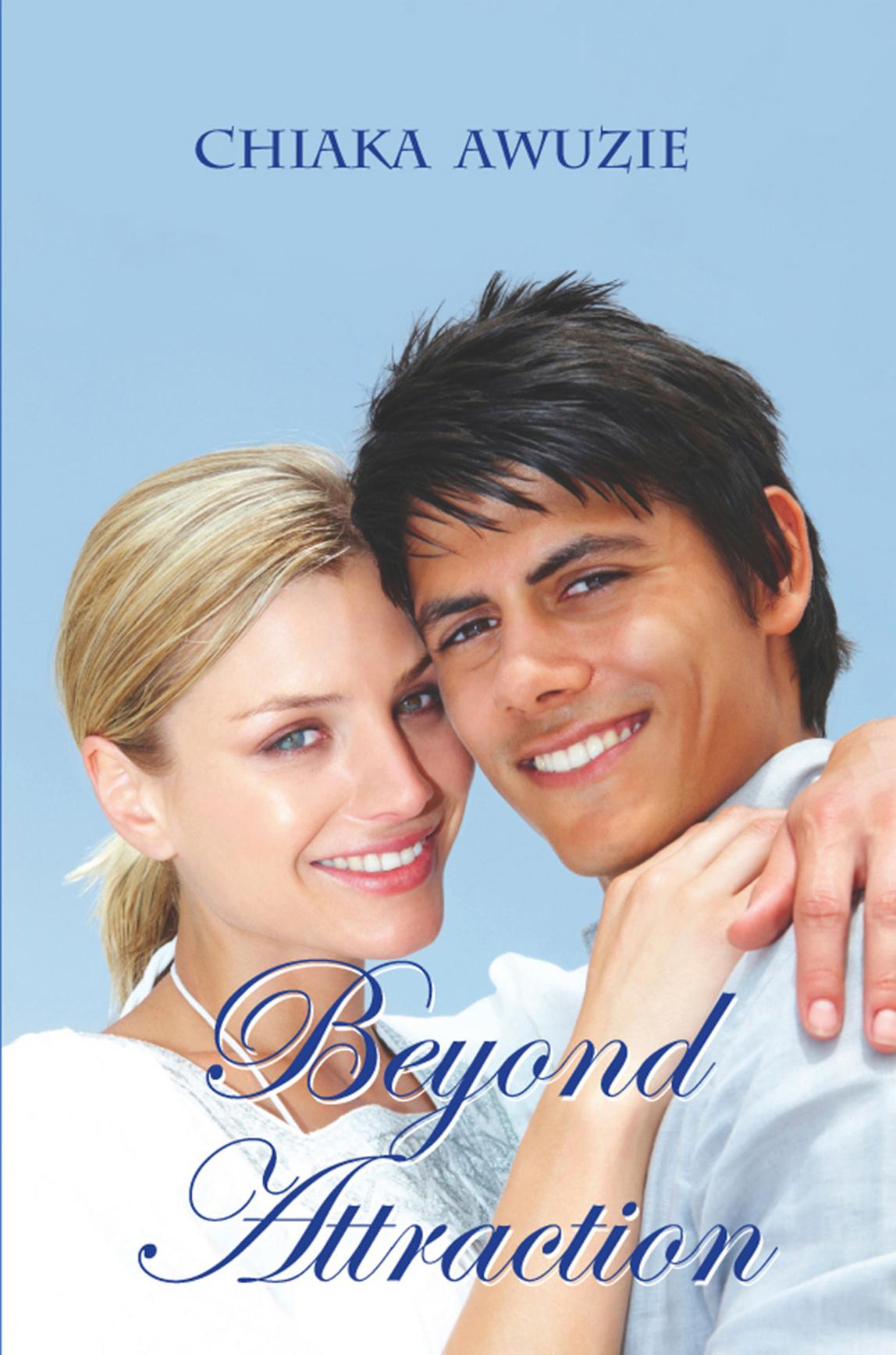


CHIAKA AWUZIE

A romantic couple embracing against a light blue background. The woman has blonde hair and is wearing a white top. The man has dark hair and is wearing a light blue shirt. They are both smiling warmly at the camera. The man's hand is resting on the woman's shoulder, and her hand is resting on his chest.

*Beyond  
Attraction*

# BEYOND ATTRACTION

Chiaka Awuzie

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## CHAPTER ONE

SITTING ON HER BED with tears streaming down her cheeks, Carrie could not stop wondering how she found herself in the predicament she was in. How was she to tell her parents? Her father would kill her when he found out. Her father, who was a deacon in the church, was on a missionary trip to Kenya and was not due back for another year. How was she to hide her condition from her mother? If her mother found out, she would call her father immediately. She wrung her hands, paced, sat, got up, and paced again. No position was comfortable. She could not stop wondering how she had allowed herself to stupidly give in to temptation.

Her thoughts roamed back to the day she first saw Jim in her History class. She was attracted to him from the beginning. He had appeared nervous, almost sheepish, the day he asked her out. She was so thrilled, because he was the handsomest guy she had ever seen. His dark features with piercing gray eyes made him more attractive. His prominent high cheekbones and matching dimples were two of his most endearing features. He was her age, seventeen, but a lot taller than she was. He was six feet, three inches tall, towering over her five feet, six inch height. As far as she was concerned, he was the perfect man for her.

“Oh, God!” she exclaimed. “What am I going to do?” She resumed her pacing. “I have to think,” she said. Forcing herself to sit down on the edge of her bed, she bowed her head to her knees; her hands intertwined and held over the back of her head. She shook her head and sighed miserably. Her thoughts were running wild. What was she going to do? She was preparing to go to college in a year, but her dream of becoming a medical doctor

now seemed farfetched. Guilt was eating her up. If she had just exercised self-control, she would not have gotten pregnant. She understood that Jim was raised differently than she had been. He was the only son of Jake and Angie Baker, who proclaimed themselves to be atheists, and obviously spoiled. What was she doing with an atheist's son, anyway? She had no business dating the son of an atheist, considering her background. She was born and raised in an evangelical Christian home.

She remembered when she told her father that she was dating Jim. He had asked her a series of questions, mostly centered on Jim's beliefs. When he learned that his parents were atheists, he had forbidden her to see him. She had eventually managed to convince him that he could trust her judgment. She had even argued that by associating with Jim, she could lead him to Christ. How could Christians lead unbelievers to Christ if they stayed away from them? She had told her father that it would be judgmental of her if she judged Jim based on his family's background.

She remembered her father saying, "Carrie, bad association corrupts good morale." At the time, she had been very upset with her father and had told him that he did not trust her. Her father had given her a calm look and said, "You can hang out with him if you promise that he will not influence you negatively on any level."

Carrie had sworn that she would get Jim saved and that her relationship with him would not affect her relationship with God. That was a year and half ago, and so much had happened since then. Her father had gone to Kenya on a missionary trip a month after their conversation. He was even pleased with how things were between her and Jim before he left for Kenya. Her relationship with Jim was not too close at the time. They basically hung out as friends, so her father was pleased with her.

Jim had started going to church with her after they came back from New York, where they had gone for a special history project. During that time, their relationship had gone through major trials and survived.

Things had really taken a different turn than she expected. What was she to do now? How would she tell Jim and her friend

Mark? Mark would probably want to kill Jim with his bare hands.

“Oh God, how did this happen? I only slept with him once,” she said out loud. *This was not supposed to happen*, she thought. She had hoped no one would find out. She had secretly repented and had sworn to never make the mistake of sleeping with Jim again. *I guess sin has a way of finding people out*, she thought. Like her Bible teacher would often say, “There is nothing hidden under the sun that will not be brought to light.”

*I have really messed up big time*, she thought. *What happens to my future now?* Fresh tears spilled down her cheeks as she contemplated her options. “I had better get up and freshen up before Mom gets back,” she said to herself. Getting up, she walked into the restroom, washed her face, and cleaned up. Stepping out of the restroom, she came face to face with her mom.

“Carrie! I didn’t know you were home. Usually you are in the library at this time.”

Carrie smiled weakly and said, “It’s only 1:00 p.m., Mom. The library opens at 1:30 on Saturdays; besides, I was just on my way out.”

Cynthia Stone took a second look at her daughter and said, “What’s wrong, honey? Your eyes are all puffed up and you look like you have not slept in ages.”

Feigning lightheartedness, Carrie smiled and said, “Mom, I told you I was sleeping; naturally, my eyes would be puffy and red when I wake up.”

“I hope you are right,” her mother said and moved on to the kitchen.

Carrie’s heart sank. She had to find Jim and tell him. It had been nine weeks since she missed her period. She was hoping that it was not true, but the pregnancy test strip had confirmed her fears. Hurriedly, she packed her books in her backpack, said goodbye to her mother, and walked out the door. Once outside the house, she punched Jim’s number on her cell phone. As soon as Jim was on the line, she said abruptly, “Meet me in the public library close to my house.” Before Jim could respond, she hung

up. She was extremely anxious. How was Jim going to react to the news and what was going to be his suggestion?

When she got to the library, Jim was already in front of the building, waiting for her. As soon as he saw her, he got up and walked to her. “Carrie, you sounded so abrupt and disturbed that I had to drive down here immediately. What is the matter?” Jim said, holding her left hand.

Releasing her hand slowly from his, she paced for a brief moment, halted in front of him, then looked up at him and sighed.

“What is the matter, Carrie? You can tell me,” he said and reached for her hands again.

Her eyes misted and a single teardrop slid down her left cheek. With her eyes searching his face and without mincing words, she said, “I am pregnant.”

Jim dropped her hands swiftly and shrank away as if he had been dealt a blow. Recovering from the news, a few seconds later, he said, “How could you let this happen? Are you sure you are pregnant? It is impossible. We slept together only once, right?” Jim said as if trying to convince Carrie.

Carrie eyed him murderously and said, “What do you mean how could I let this happen? The last time I checked, it takes two to conceive.”

Jim was immediately repentant. “I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just that it is hard to believe. What are we going to do now? Neither of us has a job and we cannot get married now. How about my future?” He ran his hands through his hair, and in a low, almost inaudible voice, he said, “My father will disown me if he learns about your pregnancy. You know how difficult it was for him to accept our relationship in the first place. How am I going to tell him?”

“How about me? My father will kill me if he finds out,” Carrie said.

“I am sorry, Carrie, it’s just that I did not expect this.” He held her and kissed her brow and said, “We will figure out something.” Releasing her slowly, he walked to his car, deep in thought.

“Oh! Carrie,” he spoke aloud several times, “how could you let this happen?” His thoughts went back to the day he first saw her. He could have sworn that he saw an angel. He first saw her in his History class and remembered staring at her, as did all the other boys in his class. Her blond hair framed her beautiful face. Her blue eyes were like the deep ocean. Her countenance was that of humility and charisma. He could not take his eyes off her. She had looked at him and smiled, obviously oblivious to the effect she was having on him and the other boys. From that moment on, he was determined to ask her out, but did not want to make a fool of himself. He was aware that he was considered the most popular guy in school and he wanted to maintain his cool when he approached her.

Jim remembered finally mustering the courage to ask Carrie out in the summer of 1980. Walking up to Carrie with his palms sweating, he had thought, *Will she say yes or will she say no and humiliate me?* She always seems so composed, almost intimidating. Either way, he concluded, he was going to ask her out. *One never knows until he tries*, he thought. Walking boldly up to Carrie and not letting any of his inner thoughts show, he dipped his hands into his pockets and said, “Hello, beautiful. Would you terribly mind company at this time?”

Carrie had looked up at him, smiled calmly, and responded, “I would truly appreciate company at this time.”

Jim had assessed her expression. Was she serious or just being sarcastic? Was that excitement that he saw on her face? *Don't overrate yourself, man*, he had chided himself. Encouraged by Carrie's open expression, he had sat next to her and wondered how to begin. Looking down briefly and back to Carrie's face, he struck up a minor conversation that centered on school, weather, and home. Eventually, he took a deep breath and thought, *It's now or never*. He began a little timidly, “Carrie, if what I am going to say next offends you in any way, please let me know and I will apologize and back off.”

Surprised and curious at the same time, Carrie had managed to respond on a light note by saying, “Fire on, mister! My feelings are not often easily hurt.”

Jim remembered looking at Carrie intently, as if to determine the truth in her words. Then his expression became serious. “Carrie,” he said, “I have always liked and admired you and I was just wondering if you would not mind hanging out with me sometime.” *That came out lamely*, he thought. *She must think I am a coward, and those blue eyes are piercing right at my face like she can see through me. She is still so composed. How does she do it?* While still replaying his words in his mind, he heard her voice.

“Jim, are you asking me to be just a friend to you or your girlfriend?” He remembered Carrie asking in confusion.

“I am asking you to be my girlfriend if that’s okay with you. I would really appreciate it if you would say yes.” He had watched her swallow hard and concluded that the answer would be no. But before he could talk himself out of his predicament, he saw her lips move. If it was a “No,” he did not want to hear it. He was distracted by his own thoughts; however, he said, “What did you say?”

“I said, I would be glad to be your girlfriend,” Carrie had said, he recalled.

He was so excited he could have started dancing right there, but he managed to keep still and said, “Thanks, Carrie, for saying yes.”

Carrie had simply responded, “You are welcome.”

They sat there for a while longer, getting acquainted with each other. They eventually parted ways. Jim remembered thinking, *That wasn’t so bad. I don’t know why I was losing sleep over this. I didn’t expect her to say yes. It’s a miracle. I can’t wait to talk to her again.* He had a crush on her the moment he saw her. He knew that all the boys in his class admired Carrie and would love to date her but none of them had been able to approach her. In fact, they told him that she would outright say no to him if he were to ask her out. He could not wait to make them jealous. The only person he had seen her talk to on several occasions was the football player, the team’s quarterback, Mark. *Who is that guy, anyway?* he remembered thinking. He had thought that he was her boyfriend.

The sweet memories disappeared as quickly as they came. He was back to the present. Not sure how to handle the news of Carrie's pregnancy, he told her he would figure out something, but what, he was not sure. With his mind preoccupied, he hugged her quickly and left.

When Jim left, Carrie walked into the library but her current situation weighed heavily on her mind. How was she to break the news to her mother? She had to tell her but before telling her, she would wait to hear from Jim, since he said that he would figure out something. Staring blankly at a page in her book, her mind drifted to the day Jim asked her to be his girlfriend. Thinking back, she remembered seeing him as spoiled. His six feet height, arrogance, and charisma had drawn her to him in the first place. His naturally dark skin and expressive gray eyes did not help the situation; neither did his nicely chiseled high cheek bones. She had been aware of his upbringing as an atheist, the son of one of the wealthiest construction company owners in town, Jake Baker. She had learned his mother's name later. Angie Baker, from Jim's description, seemed like the perfect mother, the kind of mother anyone would wish for. When she had realized that he was an atheist, her first instinct had been to avoid any contact with him. However, she had managed to convince herself that the only way to win him over to Christ was to remain friends with him. Sighing, she cupped her cheeks in her palms. She obviously had overrated herself, thinking that she could resist any temptation. She remembered how her heart had skipped beats when she realized that she and Jim were becoming close. She remembered how she had managed to conceal her emotions when she was close to him. She had often willed him to speak to her or at least become her friend. Sighing deeply again, she thought, *I guess I got more than I bargained for.*

Her thoughts went back to her reaction when he had first asked her out. She remembered how she managed to maintain her composure in his presence but once at home, she had jumped up and down on her bed and exclaimed, "Yes! Yes!"

Cynthia Stone, her mother, had looked at her in wonder and asked, “Carrie, why are you so excited? You are normally so composed; it’s interesting to see you this way.”

“Oh! Mom, life is so good. You cannot possibly believe my good fortune,” Carrie had responded.

Cynthia had smiled and said, “I hope your good fortune extends to me.”

Carrie remembered laughing and saying, “Mom, you cannot be serious.”

Both of them had looked at each other and burst into laughter. As she traveled down memory lane, her eyes misted again, and she sniffled and pinched her eyes with two fingers.

Being brought up in a Christian home, the second of four children, Carrie had learned the principles of living holy and fashioned her life to living by example. However, when Jim asked her to be his girlfriend, all thoughts of holiness had vanished. She remembered saying to herself, “This is the opportunity of a lifetime. If I refuse, he will go for another girl.”

Their relationship had progressed as they shared so much, laughing, studying and lunching together. They were the envy of all the other students in their class. In the fall of 1980, Mrs. Kruger, their History teacher, had assigned them a project. The assignment required that the students form groups of two or three and travel to different cities outside Jacksonville, Florida. After their travels, they were to return and relay their experiences to the class.

Jim chose New York, and his partner was Carrie. He chose New York because his Aunt Victoria, his mom’s older sister, lived there. At the bus stop, Jim and Carrie stopped several times to look at the directions given to him by his aunt. He was smart and good with directions, so it was not long before he was able to figure out where they were headed. Besides, he had visited New York with his parents in the past.

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