



Checkered Fences



Alma Hudson



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Checkered Fences is not only a novel of remarkable insight, but a tribute to our world's changing social and political climate.

Author Alma Hudson writes with extraordinary vision and clarity, bringing racial issues to the forefront with delicate

balance and thoughtful compassion.

It's the late 1970s in California; a time of racial turbulence, but change is in the air and Diane Jones, an African-American 18-year old honors student will come face to face with those changes. Diane takes a job as a nanny to a prestigious white family, Jerry and Ann Shaw, before entering college. She quickly becomes a respected friend and member of their blended family, paying special attention to their eight-year old son, Chad, Ann's son from a previous marriage.

Their eldest son, David returns home for the summer and an immediate attraction sparks between Diane and David. They began a secretive love affair. Can Diane's proud, traditional family accept a white man as Diane's love interest and will the Shaw's value her as their son's potential partner? As their love affair blossoms, they decide to make their relationship public.

This story of an interracial love during the turbulent 70s deftly explores the ugly racism that propelled our nation's conscious to change toward a more diversified culture. Written with sophisticated realism, Hudson's novel stands out as a literary piece of significance during our present-day political climate.

About the Author:

Alma Hudson works in legal management. She possesses an Associate's and Bachelor of Arts Degree and lives with her two children and husband, Eugene in Lancaster, California. *Checkered Fences* is her first novel.

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Dedicated to my husband, Charles Eugene, my appreciation for his encouragement, love and unwavering support. Thanks to my mother, Mattie, for her strong ethical values and loving support. Thanks to my father, Lawrence, who has passed on, for being lovingly strict. Last but not least, to my many sisters and brothers for their ongoing love and support.

CHAPTER 1

Besides my father, and male cousins, one of the strongest male figures in my life was my brother, Gil. From the age of eight, he started cooking for himself. He never understood why his sisters had to wait on him. He learned quickly and stayed on the honor role. I had just turned sixteen years old and he was fourteen. I was the second oldest child, and he was the fourth oldest child of five. We spent a lot of time together and had a weekly basketball date, playing one-on-one. No matter how many times he beat me, I was always going to get him on the next game.

On one such day in the early summer, I was out in the backyard playing basketball with my brother, Gil, when I heard my Daddy yelling my name, as usual.

“Diane!” He yelled.

Now when my Daddy yelled, that meant to stop everything and come running. I promptly dropped the basketball, after I made my two point shot, and instructed my brother not to go anywhere, saying that I would be right back. My brother raised his brow in a doubtful look. I ran into the house to find out what my father wanted.

There in the living room sat three young men. I stood in the living room with my hair parted down the middle in two pigtails. Since we lived in the desert, I had dust on me from head to toe from

playing basketball in the dirt. I stood waiting for my father to finish his conversation.

I heard Daddy say to the young men, “Yes, she’s a good cook and house cleaner. She also knows how to sew. Diane, these are some of the guys I work with. I need for you to bring us something to drink.” He said.

I looked at my father and asked, “What do you want me to make? Coffee, tea, or Kool-Aid?”

My Daddy looked at the three men and asked each of them what it was they wanted to drink.

“Coffee,” said one. “Tea,” said another and “Kool-Aid,” said the third.

“I’ll have some coffee,” my father replied.

“Okay.” I said as I went into the kitchen to prepare the drinks. I then asked Daddy, “Where’s Moms?”

“She’s working late,” my Daddy replied.

Later, I came out with the drinks and laid them on the coffee table. “Is there anything else you need?” I asked of my father, waiting to leave.

“Wait.” My daddy ordered. “I want you to tell them how good you’re doing in school. You know my daughter is an honor roll student,” he said to the young men.

I stood, not saying a word, looking at the floor. One of the young men looked at me strangely and asked, “How old are you?”

“Sixteen.” I replied.

“Have you ever dated?” Asked another young man.

“No.” I replied. Looking at my father, I asked, “Can I go now?”

“Okay,” he replied.

I happily and swiftly left the room, hoping that my brother was still waiting, I ran to the backyard.

“What took you so long?” My brother asked.

“Our Daddy,” I replied. “He’s trying to marry me off again.”

“He just won’t give up, will he?” My brother replied.

“You know that’s how he met our mother,” I said to my brother.

“Really?” My brother replied.

“Yes, Daddy is a War World II Veteran. That’s how he was able to get our house. Daddy took a month’s vacation and went to his hometown in Ringgold, Louisiana, looking for a wife. He asked around town for a wife and told everyone he was looking for a virgin. He was shown several young girls. When he saw our mother picking cotton in the fields, he said now that’s the one.

They met on a Monday. My father took her to church a couple of times. Since she was thirteen years old, he asked our grandmother, Madea, if he could marry our mother. Madea said she would consent only if our mother agreed to marry Daddy. Moms said yes and she married our Daddy that Saturday of the same week. Our mother was thirteen years old and our father was thirty years old. Daddy then brought her to California.

Moms said she married our Daddy because her father died when she was eleven years old. She had to pick cotton six months out of the year so the family could eat. She said Madea was too sickly to work. She spent the other six months catching up with her schoolwork. The family couldn’t get any welfare because there was a grown sister still in the house. Moms’ sister wouldn’t help pay any

of the bills and Madea wouldn't put her out of the house.

Mom was tired of picking cotton and men coming around trying to force themselves on her. She didn't have a father to protect her. So she got engaged to four men, but our father was the first one to marry her. She felt he was well off since he had a car and house in California. You know, Daddy only has a third grade education and Mom has an eighth grade education."

"You're making that story up," my brother laughed, making his three-point jump shot.

"No, it's really true!" I declared. "You can ask our parents or Madea. That's why Daddy keeps trying to marry me off. He thinks I'm an old maid."

"That's game," my brother declared. "Do you want to try again?"

"Try." I said. "You just got lucky. I let you win."

"Luck," my brother said. "Luck had nothing to do with it. Skill is the word, I would use," he replied.

"Well, I'll just have to show you what real skills are next time. I have to get ready to go to work."

"Okay." Gil replied. "I'll be ready to whoop up on you some more next time."

I hurried into the house to get ready for work. I worked at the county library and I needed to get there by six o'clock in the evening. My older sister, Joyce, and I, shared a car. We had to work to make the car and insurance payments. We drove to school together, came home after school together, and cooked dinner. Then we went to work at six o'clock in the evening, she worked at McDonalds until closing. Since the library closed at eight o'clock in the evening, I

dropped her off at work then went to the library to work. I would then leave work and pick her up at nine o'clock in the evening.

At thirteen years old, my father declared he could no longer afford to buy me any clothes. I started working with my mother picking fruit at the local orchard on weekends. I got paid anywhere from five dollars to ten dollars, depending on the amount of fruit I picked. I would then go to the fabric store, buy material at thirty-nine cents a yard, twenty-five cent patterns, and sew myself outfits to wear. My mother and grandmother had taught me how to sew and quilt. I would also bargain shop or go to the thrift store for clothes I needed.

At age thirteen, in the winter months, and at age fourteen years old, I cleaned houses and offices with my mother. I got five dollars for each job. Shortly after the race riots and Martin Luther King's death, neighborhood community centers opened up, and summer youth jobs were offered to low income students. Since my family qualified as low income, I got my first decent job working summers at the local Marine Base as a student worker. I was fifteen years old. I spent my next two summers working at the library on the base. The students with the best GPA were given jobs first, so I always studied hard to get the best GPA.

Heading into my room to get dressed for work, Daddy asked. "Which one do you like?"

"Excuse me?" I said.

"Which one of those boys do you like?" He asked.

"None of them." I replied.

"Well, you need to pick one because it's time for you to get married," he declared.

“I mean no disrespect to you Daddy, but I’m never getting married.” I said.

“How are you going to take care of yourself if you don’t get married?” He asked. “I won’t have any grandchildren born out of wedlock. If you get in the family way, I’ll send you to one of those homes for unwed mothers,” he declared angrily.

“Daddy, I said, it’s the twentieth century now and women can work for a living. Why won’t you understand that I don’t need a man to take care of me? And I’m not having any babies because I’m not getting married.”

“When that erg hits you, you won’t be able to control it and you’ll get in the family way,” he argued.

“When that happens, then I will get married.” I responded.

“Why would a man buy the cow when he can get the milk for free?” Daddy responded. “I want you married now. I keep showing you perfectly fine men to marry and you keep turning them down.”

“I won’t get married and be unhappy like you and Moms!” I yelled. “Why do you keep trying to get rid of me and marry me off to some man I don’t love? Why don’t you want me around anymore?” I cried. “I try hard not to give you any trouble. I’ll do whatever you ask of me, but please don’t marry me off.” I pleaded.

“Don’t you raise your voice to me, girl,” he yelled angrily. “You’ll do what I say. Do you hear me?”

“Okay, Daddy, I’m sorry I yelled at you. Can I get ready to go to work now?”

My daddy just looked at me angrily as I left the room to get dressed for work. I got ready and went to work.