

KENYA D.  
WILLIAMSON

DEPTH OF FOCUS  
THE STANZAS





# DEPTH OF FOCUS

THE STANZAS

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Kenya D. Williamson



When I first wrote  
*Depth of Focus:*  
A *Novel*, I heard a very distinct  
rhythm that drove my brain to great distraction.  
It demanded that I phrase my sentences with a  
precision that superseded  
my inclination  
to be a little more fluid. But, my  
gray's burden could be a blessing depending  
on how you view it.



This book is an adaptation of a script I wrote several years ago. What started off as an expansion of the story transformed into prose then poetry – as I couldn't get the aforementioned rhythm out of my head. Rather than fight it, I embraced it. The stanzas you'll see in the coming pages are as close to what I heard as I can remember. From now on, I'll be writing both versions – novel and stanzas – simultaneously. I hope you enjoy them.

Kenya D. Williamson

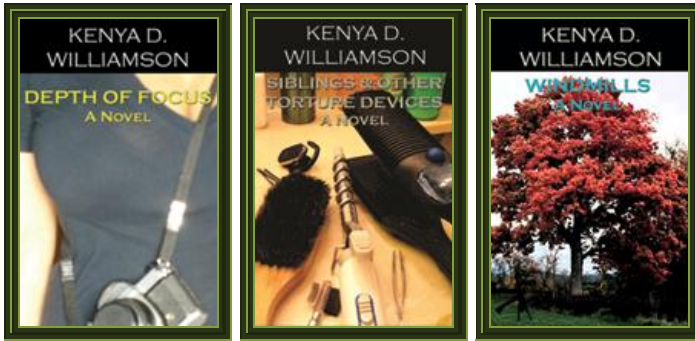
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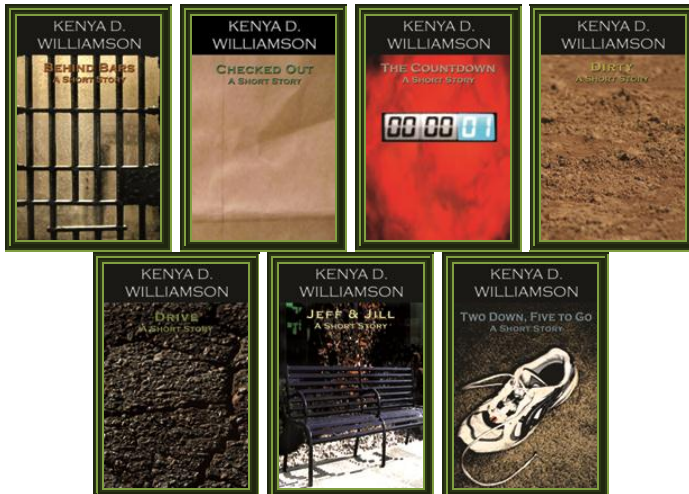
The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

This book is also available in paragraph/prose form. For more information on the author and her other titles, visit [www.kenyadwilliamson.com](http://www.kenyadwilliamson.com).

### Verse Novels:



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*For my mother, Brenda*



# Chapter One

## The Seeds of Hating Chocolate Cake

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Children's  
cheers and giggling vitalized the normally  
quiet  
Tuttle  
dining room. It was the fifteenth —  
Danni's birthday. The balloons  
were  
filled.

Streamers were hung.  
Preschoolers played.  
New friends were made.  
And  
in the backyard, an exuberant game  
of tag was being waged.

Five-year-old Danni got up on her tiptoes —  
sporting the new,  
powder blue dress her mother had insisted she wear.  
She  
stretched for the manual camera  
which was

always  
just out of reach.

On the top of the dresser, its boxy shape beckoned  
to be explored.  
More tantalizing  
than the promise of any  
gift-wrapped  
toy,  
what happened *inside* the metal,  
silver and black contraption intrigued her.  
Black and white portraits and color snapshots —  
often of *them* or from her father's sudden  
travels abroad — had been hidden  
from almost everyone's view.  
Only a few had been framed.  
The rest were quickly destroyed.

“Don't, Danni. You'll break it,”  
Marnie shooed her away. The former homecoming queen's  
premature worry lines and wrinkles, poorly  
hidden under overpriced moisturizer and makeup,  
only made Danni's  
mother appear  
much older than her thirty-one  
years.  
Suspicions of multiple extramarital affairs  
had  
depleted her.  
And ideas more somber than those  
had consumed her waking hours.

“Now, you just turn the ring  
until everything  
you see  
looks  
clear.”

In the habit of ignoring his wife's cautioning,  
Daniel held the camera to  
the eye of his elder child.  
Danni's small hands  
gripped it  
hungrily.  
If nothing else came from his marriage,  
Daniel knew he had a child who was like him —  
almost as good as a son,  
he thought,  
but not  
quite.

He was already  
following in  
his father's footsteps.  
The late nights, the disappearances, the  
lies, the denials.  
Even though he wanted to protect his children from  
hardship,  
deep down, he feared that he couldn't.  
He wasn't willing to stay  
faithful. And he was afraid  
to admit his transgressions.

Every time he looked into  
his  
little girls' eyes, he saw tiny reminders  
of the conduct he'd hated.  
He  
saw their trust and adoration.  
But, he knew he was repaying it with  
kindness that only softened  
betrayal.

By the  
age of eleven,  
Daniel had almost grown numb to the sounds

of  
his mother's crying.  
But, the sight of her cascading tears always drove him  
to fury. He blamed *her* for  
staying in a  
dead-end relationship. He both hated and loved his  
father and saw him as a tragic, misunderstood  
figure.

The similarities in their behavior  
hadn't escaped Daniel's notice.  
And  
as he considered  
the effects of  
what he planned to do  
next,  
the  
unwitting child nuzzled between his arms  
abruptly fidgeted.

Danni's  
new garment's tags  
were  
once again chafing her neck.  
The  
spreading rash on her nape testified while  
her father sympathetically steadied his heavy Pentax K1000.  
Tomboyish, Danni  
wasn't a dress girl. But, she was  
very  
interested in trying to make her mother  
happy.

Shifting the camera an inch,  
Danni framed a much more affable subject.  
Marnie's  
younger sister was much beloved, but equally  
exhausted.

More  
 emotionally  
 stable  
 at a mere twenty-eight,  
 Jackie hid  
 well-earned resentment beneath  
 layers of often called-upon familial duty.

Jackie was more like a mother to Marnie's children  
 than an aunt.  
 But, her  
 uncertainty of what might happen without her active  
 supervision would never allow her to say no —  
 no matter what  
 time, day or night.  
 When the phone rang,  
 safeguarding her nieces from trauma became  
 Jackie's number one priority.

But, mostly she wanted  
 Danni and Grace to know and love their mother.  
 She wanted them to know her soul and not the shell —  
 the woman  
 Marnie  
*used* to be who was still clawing for freedom.

Moving on, Danni  
 focused on three-year-old Grace.  
 Tattling, the cherub-faced toddler  
 cried out  
 wanting  
 equal time with their father.  
 Jealously objecting to her high chair's  
 oppressive restrictions, she tried to climb  
 out, but was quickly returned to her seat.  
 "Then, you push the button," Daniel instructed.

Framing her traitorous sibling  
 out of the photo, Danni complied,  
 releasing the shutter. Candy-coated, grateful lips greeted  
 Daniel's cheek, kissing him, as he reset  
 his camera on the dresser  
 and turned to face his firstborn.  
 Thrilled by their shared affection and secret,  
 Danni ran back into the dining room — scarcely bothered  
 by the guests she'd seen in passing,  
 but  
 hardly knew.

She wrapped her arms around her mother's leg.  
 "All right, you guys.  
 I need you to be good," Marnie requested.  
 "In a minute, it'll be  
 cake time for the birthday girl!"  
 The children cheered.  
 Inching  
 closer,  
 neighborhood kids eagerly  
 snatched  
 paper plates and plastic utensils from the table.

Watching her festive display  
 being  
 reduced to disarray,  
 Marnie forced a strained smile, agitated.  
 "One at a time,"  
 she gently guided.

Scanning the living room, shaking,  
 Marnie grew angrier by the second.  
 With her  
 husband  
 nowhere in sight, she began  
 balling her fists. He was ruining the party — both  
 for *her*

and  
 for Danni – was all the mother of two  
 envisaged as  
 Jackie returned bearing treats.  
 “So, who wants ice cream cake?”  
 Jackie teased as more cries of approval  
 welcomed her and her thawing confection.

Saucer-like eyes  
 and greedy hands  
 waited  
 all around the table while their  
 second-in-command  
 hostess  
 led the group in “Happy birthday to you.”

Freeing herself  
 from Danni’s grasp, Marnie left the chorus  
 behind  
 and  
 entered the living room. In his  
 usual hiding spot, Daniel  
 hurriedly tipped back his bourbon.  
 Extinguishing  
 his  
 cigarette, he grabbed his camera and briskly  
 walked past his wife.  
 “Make a wish, Danni,”  
 he encouraged, focusing his lens on  
 a trio.

With a cautious look to her sister,  
 Jackie smiled – sandwiched between  
 Danni and Grace.  
 Facing the living room wall,  
 seething,  
 Marnie  
 spun around furious – in time for her daughter to

blow out her candles  
 and the camera's  
 bright  
 flash.  
 He'd  
 deliberately excluded her again —  
 this time, from future  
 memories — was the only firm conclusion  
 she  
 drew.

Slapping her inconstant lover,  
 Marnie froze, humiliated.  
 The diamond ring she'd turned to hurt him had  
 left a scratch on his face.  
 Remorse quickly  
 overwhelmed her as crimson  
 dripped from his jawline.  
 Braving the disdain of their children and  
 houseguests,  
 Daniel's attacker saw a myriad  
 of frightened eyes  
 before she fled for the stairs.

"I'll be right back," Daniel reassured them.  
 Taking  
 Jackie's offered napkin, he blotted at the blood on  
 his  
 cheek.  
 Calmly setting down his camera, he squeezed the birthday  
 girl's  
 shoulder.  
 A wink later, he was in the hallway.  
 His  
 wife was perched on  
 the middle step.

Daniel had seen  
glimpses of Marnie's  
vulnerability.  
Her emotional meltdowns and irritability had  
been a part of their past.  
But, regardless of how many times  
she went to see  
her psychotherapist,  
when times got tough, she would grow silent  
and then explode like a blast.

It was a moment that Marnie had never wanted in public.  
She'd  
dreamed  
of seeing her husband beg absolution veiled by  
locked  
doors.  
That day, her home  
had many witnesses – with humble mouths,  
but  
big voices. Word of her actions  
would fly like lightning. And all the rumors  
would  
return.

Marnie  
ached to *be* that girl he'd married.  
If he'd known the true depths of her battle, she feared he'd  
never have asked.  
He'd wanted the prom queen who  
graciously handled her problems.  
With a smile, she'd hide darkness.  
And with a kiss, she'd possess.  
But, many years  
of masquerading had left her body  
prostrated. She'd prayed to put her foot down  
lightly.  
Instead, she'd stomped through the floor.

Maybe if she  
 hadn't gotten dirty, Danni suspected, her parents  
 wouldn't be fighting. And everything would be fine.  
 She'd advisedly stayed off the grass,  
 reveling – avoiding stains from roughhousing.  
 But, a playmate had spilled juice on her hem.  
 “I cut the biggest  
 slice for *you*.” Jackie hoped to distract her young niece  
 with a plate close to Danni.

Giving a big kiss, she paused,  
 probing  
 shadowy eyes –  
 bottomless pools, satiated with unresolved questions.  
 “Happy birthday,” Jackie bid her,  
 resuming cake-doling duties.  
 Amid the roar of her fellow  
 children,  
 Danni surveyed her favorite dessert. But,  
 chocolate ice cream  
 roused  
 no appetite.

“No, Grace. Honey, give that to me,”  
 Jackie chided. Removing a plastic  
 knife  
 from sticky, grabbing hands,  
 she promptly replaced it with a  
 far more innocuous spoon.  
 “Your daughter and her friends are  
 all waiting for  
 you to return,” Daniel extended, angling for peace  
 the next  
 hour.

“And what about *you*?”  
 Marnie asked sharply.  
 He alertly indulged her.

Bypassing her contemptuous expression, he hissed, “Nothing could possibly make me happier.” “I’ll alert the media...and your mistress,” Marnie related. Verbally backed into a corner, Daniel faltered, surprised.

“Should I alert Jackie, too?” she continued. “Now, you’re just being unreasonable...and a selfish fucking bitch,” he countered. “For the first time in months, you’re just mad something’s not about you.” “Get out,” Marnie demanded in a fierce, biting whisper. The pure conviction of her tone and gaze sent chills of fear down Daniel’s spine.

“I’m not going *anywhere*. This is my house,” he objected. “And my *family*.” Chest tightening and pulse quickening, he stepped forward. “Why don’t *you* go? You can spend some more time with your sister.” “I said *leave!*” she shrieked, frenzied. Shoving him backwards, she rose. Scrambling, Daniel caught hold of the banister, stumbling. An inch between his head and a family portrait convinced him to go.

“I’m out of here, just like you wanted.” He  
snatched  
his army green  
jacket.  
Tempted to turn and take his children, he headed straight  
for the door. “Wait!”

“Look  
at what a mess you are, Gracie,”  
Jackie  
playfully scolded. Trying to corral  
the children’s attention, she fruitlessly  
directed all eyes to Grace’s  
chocolate-  
covered  
face.  
“Please don’t do this,” Marnie pleaded.  
Giving chase, she clutched at Daniel’s sleeve. “Let  
go,” he ordered.  
“This isn’t working.”

Wriggling free, he left the cotton cloak, limp in her hand.  
It was a frosty farewell – more than he’d  
originally  
wanted. But, his extrication was fundamental.  
And Marnie had  
given him the  
out.  
“Fine!  
Leave!”  
Marnie screeched, desperate, as Daniel  
stalked out the front  
door.

In his mind, he’d been rehearsing –  
daily  
working up the nerve to tell her  
that he

wanted to go. But, retreat was much simpler.  
 “We don’t need you!” she bawled. “Go back to your  
 whores  
 and your diseases!  
 You’re worse than *nothing!*” she roared.  
 Hurling a vase  
 into the driveway, Marnie missed her moving target.  
 The porcelain  
 crashed,  
 breaking into pieces – scattering wilting  
 dahlias around Daniel’s antsy feet.

“Okay, everybody. It’s game  
 time!” Jackie turned up the stereo and ushered children  
 from the proscenium to  
 the  
 yard.  
 No longer accepting indifference, she physically  
 moved them, when needed.  
 As Daniel started his car,  
 Marnie collapsed to the floor.  
 “*Now,*” Jackie exhorted, hustling  
 Danni outside with the others.

As her brother-in-law  
 drove out of sight,  
 she handed Grace off and joined her sister in the hall.  
 “I’m their mother, not you,” Marnie howled, falsely  
 accusing. “Bring them back inside. They’re mine.”  
 “I *won’t*. Get up!”  
 Jackie  
 helped Marnie to her feet. Sympathetic to her sibling’s  
 delusions, Jackie guided Marnie back  
 to the stairs and to the empty master  
 bedroom.  
 Marnie sobbed as she crawled into her bed,  
 fully-dressed. “I’m sorry, Jackie,”

she confessed. “This time was child’s play,”  
Jackie assured her.

---

As Jackie turned off the dining room light,  
Danni ran to her room upstairs wrapped inside Daniel’s  
green jacket. Unaware of  
her niece’s acquisition, Jackie topped the staircase  
and  
sighed.  
Further catastrophe had been avoided.  
“I’m headin’ out,  
Mar.  
Do you need anything else?”  
Lingering in the doorway, Jackie prepared for a  
brief,  
but instantaneous pardon.

Their  
childhood home had brought back memories, but  
felt  
extraordinarily empty  
without their parents’ blithe presence.  
“I can stay for a few more  
hours,” she proffered.  
Resisting the instinct to stroke her sister’s hair, Jackie  
sat at Marnie’s bedside, reluctant. Striped,  
gypsy tabbies expected her evening arrival.

Without her handouts, the strays  
would  
find food to eat elsewhere. But,  
Jackie  
longed for their affection – and the fleeting comfort they  
gave.  
“Marnie,  
talk to me.” The house was clean.

The girls were both in bed. And the sun was setting.

“Everyone had *lots* of fun,” Jackie exaggerated.

But, dread filled her as she reached for the nightstand lamp.

“Wake up,” she demanded.

“We need to talk before I go.”

But, Jackie’s long-ago idol wouldn’t regain consciousness without assistance. The pain she’d been suffering for years felt ever-present and suffocating.

It clouded her judgment and made it impossible for her to conceive of a future without its dominion. The prescription bottle of sleeping pills, nearly empty beside Marnie, indicated her intention. Jackie’s heart began racing as she shook her. The situation was familiar, but one she’d wish she could forget.

---

“How many did she take?” a no-nonsense, emergency room doctor questioned, shining a light in Marnie’s eyes. He hadn’t slept in over twenty-six hours. And his patient’s

*willful* attempt  
 on her life had revived indignation.  
 He'd seen good people  
 fight for their lives and succumb to violent, tragic death.

"I don't know," Jackie shared, helpless.  
 "But,  
 the bottle was empty when I got there. And she's also  
 on  
 anti-depressants." The hospital room  
 reeked of harsh cleaning supplies  
 and  
 fresh  
 vomit.  
 "Which one? Has she  
 done this before?" Jackie faltered. Fearing the inevitable  
 consequences of disclosure,  
 she  
 admitted the details, knowing they might keep the kids  
 safe.

As if she sensed what would be coming next, Marnie sprang  
 into action.  
 Limbs flailing, she fought with all of her might.  
 They were  
 trying to *save* her, she realized, double-crossed by  
 her fallacious salvation. The drugs hadn't  
 killed her. They'd simply left her  
 weak. Inarticulate and  
 uncoordinated, she hadn't a chance to prevail.

Guttural noises emerged from her throat.  
 "A little help here," the doctor directed.  
 Almost  
 instantly, two nurses pounced. Marnie's entreaties fell  
 on deaf ears. Even in her  
 compromised state,  
 her

strength was surprising. But, at the sight of Danni, horrified,  
she stopped wrestling and  
gave in.

Regret and defeat overwhelmed her as Danni  
backed from the doorway.  
Ashamed and fractured,  
Marnie surrendered to unwelcome rescue.  
“Someone please take Ms. Tuttle to the waiting room.”  
“*Everett,*”  
Jackie corrected  
the doctor. “I’m not leaving you, honey.” Whether Marnie  
understood her or not, she  
wouldn’t go without giving an explanation. “I’m  
right here...*We’re* here.”  
But,  
that was the last thing Marnie cared to consider – public  
failure, her family’s  
suffering,  
having to recover and disappointing  
them  
all.

Escorted by a stern nurse,  
Jackie  
entered the hallway as Danni  
ran  
to where she’d been instructed  
to  
stay.  
“You’ll be a bigger help to  
your sister *later,*” Nurse Thelma  
guaranteed. She had a job to do. And Jackie was  
getting  
in  
the  
way.

Deflated,  
Jackie observed from a safe distance — activated  
charcoal, an IV — all the  
necessary  
tools of resuscitation.  
Sixteen summers before, they had  
been on vacation. The hospital staff  
seemed  
more frantic. But, the procedure appeared  
much  
the  
same.

Rushing to a  
seat,  
Danni  
picked up a magazine. Whenever her father had  
wanted to be left alone, he'd always  
grabbed something to  
read.  
Or he'd lift up his camera. The latter,  
for Danni, wasn't an option. The hospital's resources were  
lean. And she was  
grateful for anything that  
might conceal her  
tracks.

Danni hoped that her father would come soon and visit.  
She knew something was wrong. But,  
she assumed he could fix it.

"I  
hope *you're* not sick, little girl," a voice teased.  
In  
blue jeans  
and a green button-down, the  
man seated across from Danni grinned. He'd been waiting  
for some time, for the most part, unnoticed.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kenya D. Williamson is a verse novel and short fiction author, poet, screenwriter, actress and occasional blogger from Levittown, Pennsylvania. Currently residing in Los Angeles, California, she writes scripts for TV, film and the internet and has acted in dozens of commercials, films and TV shows.

With a passion for writing comedy, drama and suspense, Kenya began her professional writing career as a screenwriter. After many years of performing – in TV shows, movies, plays, musicals, choirs and orchestras – she relished the opportunity to work behind the scenes (and eat a few carbohydrates).

When she's not writing or doing voice-over and on-camera work, she's usually reading, working on her website or rooting for her favorite sports teams and athletes.

For more information on Kenya's writing and acting, visit [www.kenyadwilliamson.com](http://www.kenyadwilliamson.com).

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