

# Sugar

*by Jody Zimmerman*

"I've had it up to here with that bastard," Miss Sanefoe numma tree holla.

Der she go agin. Carryin' on inside her closet. Her closet ain' jes a wauk-in, itta sit-in. Dey is big fluffy chairs anna big sofa poinin' terecly at her specel bilt-in vanity. Seem like she spen haf her life in fronna dat big glass wif lite bulbs all 'round it. I ain' nevah seen a body so good at doin' thangs in fronna glass.

"I swear to you Sugar this will be the last weekend I'll ever spend alone."

Like she evah did anyway. Dat woman ain' nevah spen a minit alone, much less a ho weekin. I wanna she thank she alone win she be doin' her bidness in de moanin', makin' me stand der to fine out thangs. Like I don' ahreddy no what I 'spose be doin' all day.

"Shug, hon," she yap, "Get yourself in here and help me with colors. I told you I'm going to Marion Crittenden's for lunch, and she always dresses like a goddamn poppy in full bloom. What am I suppose to wear against that? What about the...?"

"Show em yo stones," I cut in an wauk in.

"Shug, you're right. Nothing too much, but a few diamonds will outdo those tacky colors any day."

She perch in fronna her vanity, be brushin' her heyah. Den she smile up at me wif a mout fulla straight white teef.

"Shug, what would I ever do without you?"

I pick up her peach sik robe off de flo, lookin' siways at her. She might as well bettah git use to doin' wifout me, 'cause if thangs keeps goin' de way dey is, dey gonna be Miss Sanefoe

numma fo real fas. I done seen tree Miss Sanefoes in ten yeahs, 'spec I see tree mo in de nex ten.

"Shug hon, put on that new Madonna disk. What's it called? Bedtime Fun?"

"Bedtime Stories, I done tolt you," I sass back an hang up her robe.

She say "Well whatever. I just love dressing to it. It makes me feel sexy."

She ton siways to git a look at how fah her setta white titties stick out. Dey as big as mine, but a ho lot fimma wif big pink nipples. Missa John pay fo tousan dollahs fo dem tits. 'Spose he done pay a ho lot mo dan dat fo dem.

Lord-a-mercy, Miss Lucy be rollin' ovah in her grave. Me messin wif a sheen dat play loud music. An sang by a necked white woman fo to anudda necked white woman can dress. Times sho is change. I change to. I drop in de disk, push repeat. It play thru to times 'fo she am done dressin'. Miss Sanefoe numma tree don' like wokin' sheens. She don' mess wif no stereo, no CD playa, no ansah sheen, no washin' sheen, no close drya, no micawave, no stove. She cain' cook nuffin'. She do wok her blo drya, her telafone, her intacom an she do drive her big black Cedex Benz automobile all ovah Alanna. Me, I ain' nevah read a setta strucshens. Couldn' read nuffin' 'cep figgas in de papah 'til Missa Billy teach me, goin' on ten yeahs now. Give me a good setta pitchas, I wok any sheen.

"Shug, my coffee's cold," she pout. "Run down and get me a fresh cup. And put a little swig of amaretto in this time. Not too much, just a bit, I don't want all those calories."

"Yes ma'am," I say like its fo real an head on down to de kitchin.

Madonna be sangin' "A little up and down and all around, it's all about survival."

"Amen sista. You got dat right."

Soon as Miss Sanefoe numma tree cain' see me no mo, I strut a move what be my own. I like de way Madonna sang. Make me feel good. I like what she be sayin'. Dem videos of hern

on MTV be good. Dose purty black sistas EnVok sang real good. Lutha Vandress sang real good. Don' like no hood nigga in my face rappin'. Don' has time for dem hood niggas. My daddy sho dem hood niggas who be de man. My daddy wok hisself from shaycroppin' to foman Big Missa Bill fam bidness. Everybody be callin' my daddy head nigga in charge. He am a real head nigga. Missa Sanefoe trus my daddy wif his fam bidness same he trus a white man. My daddy sho impotent. Momma be droppin' babies, daddy be wokin' feels. All his chillins be wokin' feels. Momma done droppin' babies she go wok wif her momma. Big Momma stay at de Sanefoe house. Den Big Momma die wif de flu an Momma be in charge. I spen eight yeahs wokin' de feels. Choppin' cotton, pikin' peaches, an tenin' 'lasses cane. I sho like dat sweet 'lasses cane. Den my daddy be callin' me Sugar. Den nobody call me nuffin' else. Real name be Cassie Jenkins. Den I be foteen Miss Lucy tell Momma brang me in de big house fo to hep out 'cause Miss Lucy be droppin' babies. My big sista, Janie 'spose to be heppin' Miss Lucy wif her babies. Missa Cleevus Jones done make Janie big. Miss Lucy ditn't see fit keepin' no big nigga gal in de house, even fo to nurse. Den Janie an Missa Cleevus Jones run off to Detroit. I be fifteen yeah ole win Miss Lucy drop her firs chile, dat baby girl what bone ded. Win de birfin' pain took holt real good, Miss Lucy moan like you ain' evah heah. Scayah me so I done pee in de flo. Momma slap me real good and say "Git holt yosef rite now nigga. You goin' see ho lot mo suffrin' in yo life, lessin' I rang yo nek firs iffen dat pee of yorn run ovah on Miss Lucy's rental rug." Docta Marsh tell Momma I is to young is all. Nex ten yeahs Momma an ole Docta Marsh sho me evahthang 'bout droppin' babies. Docta Marsh an Big Missa Bill tink Miss Lucy gonna be droppin' dem babies inna fancy Alanna hopitel. Miss Lucy stubborn like a mule. She say she ded set on havin' her babies in de same house wheyah six genraisans of Sanefoe babies done been bone. She say, she, Lucretia Cates Merriweather Sanefoe, ain' goin' do nuffin' else but

dat. Dat she do. To yeah lattah der come Missa John, den to mo ded, den Miss Katie, den Miss Ellen, den Missa Billy. I care fo all dem babies same as dey my own.

"I'll never be an angel, I'll never be a saint it's true," Madonna say.

Missa Billy always be playin' Madonna, jumpin' 'round like he ain' gotta worry in de worl.

Den I pray "Sweet Jesus take care of my baby up der wif you. I no Billy done got his angel wangs. Tell him Sugar Nanny sin all her luv."

Den, all de sudden like, I feel dat ole lump crawlin' up my troat. Nex thang I no I be standin' in de hall lookin' in dat big glass scawlin' likka baby. I sho do miss my sweet baby Billy. Him in de groun jes tree months. I sho do miss him. Wipe off my sad face wif my kerchef, hed on downstayahs.

Figga deys enuf time fo to mo songs fo Miss Sanefoe numma tree intacom me to git a move on wif her coffee. I head down to de basemen to de sheen. On de way I poke my head out de side doe. Look like it fixin' to stome. Cain' hang no sheets now. Haffa use dat ole drya. Itta sorry ass 'cuse fo sunshine. Still hang out my sheets an linins on de line fo to dry win de wettah be good. Still iron evah one of em to. I like ironin' thangs win my stories be on TV. Miss Sanefoe numma tree say anybody see dose sheets on de line, take us all fo white trash. She shut no, cause dat 'zakly what she be, white trash, plain as day. Po Missa John ain' evah had no good luck wif no woman. I dun tolt him so a hunred times. Missa John tell Miss Sanefoe numma tree Sugar can hang out dose sheets winevah and wheyevah she please, cause he like sleepin' on my fresh press sheets. He say she don' likkit, she can jes take hersef somewheahs else. I wish she wood take her peccawood ass on down de road.

Den de telephone rangs. I pick up in de kitchin.

"Sanefoe resydance, may I hep you?"

"This is Jennifer Miles with AT&T, how are you today ma'am?"

"Jes fine," I say.

"Is this Mrs. Saneford speaking?" Jennifer Miles say.

"No it ain'!" I say.

"Oh, well, uh, is Mr. or Mrs. Saneford in today?" she axsk.

"Missa John be wokin' an Miss Sanefoe be goin' thru her moanin' routeen," I say. Den I axsk, "What you want?"

She say, "I wanted to give the Sanefords an opportunity to experience AT&T's True VoiceSM at no charge."

"You mean dey git to heah Whitney Houston sang on de phone?" I axsk.

She be laughin' now and say, "Well, no ma'am, but they get to make a free ten minute call anywhere within the continental United States and experience the clarity and sharpness of AT&T's True VoiceSM, at no charge."

"Sho nuf?" I say.

"Yes ma'am," she say.

"You no, Whitney Houston stay rite heah in Alanna. I sho do thank she gotta purty voice. What y'all pay her fo to sang on TV?"

"Uh, uh, ma'am I'm just a direct marketing representative. I don't know anything about the advertising department," she say.

"Dat sho be a fancy name honey," I say.

"Uh, thank you ma'am. Perhaps I should call back when Mr. and Mrs. Saneford are available?" she say.

I say, "You do dat chile. But ain' no use callin' heah 'till affa seven o'clock if you wan Missa John. He be de one make all de 'cisins anyhow."

"Thank you very much ma'am," she say 'fo she hang up.

Miss Sanefoe numma tree be seein' de lite go off on dis line, an she buzz me right den.

"Sugar? Sugar that wasn't for me was it?"

I ack like I don' heah her.

"Sugar, Sugar are you in there?"

"Yes ma'am?" I buzz back.

"Sugar who was on the phone?"

If she wanna no so dam bad, why don' she git off her lazy white ass an pick it up win it rang? I tell you why. She done tolt me dat it ain' becomin' for de lady of de house to ansah her on phone. Den all I gotta say is why she goin' ansah dat phone evah time it rang in her Cedes Benz. I guess she ain' no miss hi an mitey lady no mo win she be drivin'. Seen thru her firs time Missa John brang her 'roun fo yeahs ago. Tol him so to. What come 'roun go 'roun.

"Jes a dierek markin' presentive from ATT axskin' fo Missa Sanefoe lissen to Whitney Houston sang on de phone," I say.

"What?" she axsk.

"She be wanin' Missa Sanefoe try ATT True Voice fo free," I holla.

"Oh is that all?" she say. "Sugar, hurry up with my coffee. I'm ready for my second cup."

Yeah she be reddy alright. Her bowels wan move an inch 'fo she done wif her moanin' coffee. Huhm, coffee make me pee an crawl outta my skin.

"Yes ma'am, I be der terecly," I say.

Madonna be sangin' in de intacom, "Happiness lies in your own hand. It took me much

too long to understand...." So I no dey be 'nudda ho song 'fo Miss Sanefoe numma tree really be wanin' her coffee. I gitta move on an load up de washin' sheen. Den I po her mo coffee, dabba her licah, den be makin' my way back up.

Nevah thank much 'bout happiness lyin' in my on hans. Spen my ho life wif de Sanefoes. All but de las ten yeahs on dey plantaysion Bell Grove. It be so fah out de way, Sheman ain' fine it fo to bun down. Nevah noed nuffin' else, nevah thank 'bout doin' nuffin' else. I raise dem chillins real good. Sanefoes treat me like famly. Pay me good, treat me good. I goin' res rite long side dem win it be my time. Ain' nevah had no use fo no man. Nevah wan nobody puttin' his thang in me needda. I bees jes fine mysef. Piece a trash stick his thang in me at de cane mill. I be thirteen.

Cracka say, "Nigga gal, I gonna fuck yo black ass real good. You goin' like it so, you be comin' back fo mo."

I slap his face, but he strong. Hit me upside de hed. I fall on de groun, eeyahs rangin'. Den, he pin me down onna pile a cane an stick his thang up my pussy 'till it bleed. Ditn't feel no good to me. I sho ashame, ditn't wan preacha to lay eyes on me on Sunday. I ain' nevah tolt no one 'cep fo Missa Billy a few yeahs back. Lock his white ass in jail iffен he do dat now.

Telephone be rangin'. I git it in Missa John's study.

"Sanefoe resydance, may I ...?"

"Sugar Nanny!"

"Miss Katie, sho is good to heah yo voice! How my little lam doin'?"

"Just fine Sugar. How are things going there? I don't see how you stand it living with that pathetic individual John calls his wife."

"I own no, it ain' all dat bad, I make do."

"Oh Sugar, come live with us in New York. I just know you'll learn to love it. I did."

"Miss Katie chile you no I be a duck outta watah in New Yok. Alanna's to big fo me anyhow."

"Now Sugar you've traveled everywhere with Billy, New York, London, Paris and all that time in St. Barth's. You know how to handle a big city a lot more than you'll admit."

"Miss Katie, go on wif yosef. You gotta fine man who luvs you and dem tree angels to. You got dem fancy New Yok nannies. Ain' no place fo me der. Dats de God's truf. Missa Billy ain' haf no body to care fo him 'cep me."

"Oh Sugar, I miss him so. He was always the sweetest. I keep expecting the phone to ring any minute and here him say 'Hi sis, I bopped into town for some fun. When can I come over to see you and the kids?'"

Miss Katie be cryin'.

"Little lam, hush yo teahs. We goin' see him agin in de Holy Kingdom."

"Oh, Sugar, I wish I had your faith."

Rite den Miss Sanefoe numma tree pick up on de line an she say, "Sugar is that for me?"

"No ma'am. It be Miss Katie fo me."

"Oh, excuse me. Hi Katherine, how are you doing?"

Miss Katie say, "Good, listen I called to talk to Sugar. May we please have our privacy?"

Miss Sanefoe numma tree say, "Well, of course, but not too long. Sugar's helping me get ready for lunch. Now hurry up Sugar, my coffee's cold as ice."

She hang up an Miss Katie say, "See what I mean Sugar. How can you stand being treated like that by that vile bitch?"

"Miss Katie, yo momma slap yo face she heah you tauk like dat."

"Oh Sugar, stop that. You know momma said a few choice words when she took a notion."

"You sho right 'bout dat."

Den we both laf.

"Sugar, you know John and Ellen are going to be in town this weekend. We're having dinner tomorrow night to talk about Billy's estate."

"Yes'm I no. Been 'bout to drive Miss Sanefoe crazy 'cause he ain' takin' her."

"Can you blame him? The only thing she cares about is how much Saneford money she can get her hands on. I can see her drooling over it now. I forbid her to be present when we're discussing Billy's estate. Besides, you know John is seeing someone up here anyway. I met her the last time he was here. She's only twenty six, but she's from a fine New England family. This may be the one we've always hoped for, Sugar."

"Sho nuf, Miss Katie? Lord-a-mercy, I no some bad times 'bout be droppin' on us down heah den."

"No they won't Sugar. John will just offer her enough money to make her go away. Just like all the rest."

"I own no, dissun heah issa hi-strung like dem hoases Big Missa Bill raise fo racin'. Lease little thang an she be inna state."

"Believe me Sugar. She'll forget she ever met John Saneford once she gets hold of a decent settlement."

"Maybe you right, but I own no."

"Sugar, take care. I love you. I've got errands to run. My offer always stands. You let me know and we'll have you up here the next day."

"Dats sweet chile. Tell Missa Steve I say hello an gib dem little ones a hug fo me. Bye bye, baby."

Now I has to go fo mo warm coffee. I go back to de kitchin an put it in de micawave. Den I make my way back up.

I wen to stay wif Missa Billy, Mr. William Roswell Blandford Saneford numma tree—Miss Lucy give all her babies fo names—affa Miss Lucy pass wif de cansa in nineteen eightyfive. Dem fancy doctas in Baltymo' say Miss Lucy done gone in remission. But I no dat ain' so. Miss Lucy no to. She be reddy to lay down an res beside Big Missa Bill. She done raise all her chillins an done all she can in dis heah life. Big Missa Bill kilt ovah wif a hart tack back in seventyeight affa he done bot up neely evah cotton mill dey is. Kilt ovah rite in fronna Miss Lucy while dey be havin' dey breakfass. Miss Lucy holla fo me to come arunnin', Big Missa Bill done gotta a peace a tose stuk in de winpipe. I take one look at Big Missa Bill lyin' on de flo an I no it ain' no tose. He done lef Miss Lucy all dat money, ain' nobody no what to do wif it all. I miss Big Missa Bill. I miss Miss Lucy mo dan I can stan. She be mo likka momma to me dan my own momma. I can smell her right heayah. She always smell like a rose wif dat pafume from France. Missa Billy axsk me why collud fokes smell bad an gib me some Miss Lucy pafume win he jes a little boy. I laf an say collud fokes say white fokes smell likka wet chickin. Den me and Miss Lucy fine Missa Billy in de baf tub wif a chickin. He say he wanna fine out how he smell. I nurse Miss Lucy good. Find out all 'bout dat mofeen. I ain' nevah let Miss Lucy suffa wif no cansa pain. Affa we put Miss Lucy beside Big Missa Bill, dem chillins say dey wan me to stay on at de big house an keep it up fo dem. I say I ain' goin' do it. Miss Lucy done axsk me to look affa Missa Billy 'cause he be specel, an look affa him I is. I say you chillins got all dat money yo daddy and momma done lef you, now you can fine some odda nigga to look affa

dis big ole house. I goin' to Alanna wif Missa Billy.

Missa Billy nevah had no wife. He no aplenny women, but he ain' wantin' dem fo no wife. Missa Billy 'splain to me what Miss Lucy mean when she say specel. He be homosexel. He like odda mens. Take some gittin' use to. Specelly win I fine out wheyah he do put his thang. Den 'fo you no it, it don' bodda me no mo. I acks like it be de mos natrel thang dey is. Missa Billy 'courage me, took me wid him all ovah de place. Make me thank 'bout thangs. He be teachin' me thangs. I sho put up a fuss, 'specelly 'bout readin'. Ditn't need no books 'cep fo de Bible. Don' need to read de Bible 'cause preacha speak de word on Sunday.

"I can't stop thinking of you. The things we use to do. The secret we once shared..." I heah comin' down de hall.

Missa Billy a lot like his momma. I care fo him fo ten yeahs. We always be havin' some good times. When Missa Billy not wokin' his daddy bidness, he be throwin' big parties, las all nite long. He be travelin' all ovah de worl. Mos times, when he goin' be gone mo dan a week, he take me wif him. Chile, some of de thangs I is seen in dis heah worl. He say ain' nobody seen nuffin' like Missa Billy an his Sugar Nanny from Hotlanny.

But I no what I am see. I see Missa Billy suffrin' so much so long an dey ain' no mofeen fo to hep dat pain. Suffrin' 'till his heart done broke. All dose yeahs he be runnin' 'cause he ain' like evahbody else. I tell him homo ain' no diffrent dan collud. Feel de same win you no you ain' like mos fokes. He lissen but it ain' no good. He be drankin' all de time. I say dat ain' no good fo my baby, but he ain' be stoppin'. Dat suffrin' took a bad holt on Missa Billy. Dat 'zakly what let in dat debbish sickness what kilt him. Den, fo yeahs ago, dat debbish sickness what be layin' in de cut take holt Missa Billy real bad. He say he no it gonna be his time soon. I no he right 'cause I done seen the same look befo' in Miss Lucy.

I pray evah nite. "Sweet Jesus why you goin' take my sweet baby? Why you wan take me instead?"

Missa Billy say he wanna spen his last yeahs wheyah de sun shine all de time. Den he move us to his purty house in Sain Bats. Ain' evah seen sheets dry so fas as down der. De sun shine an de win blo all day long. Firs to yeahs der, he do real good. Las to yeahs, he ain' so good. He ain' nuffin' but skin and bones. Mos times wan' eat Sugar good cookin'. Jes eatin' pills an stuff he git in cans. Evahbody he no come down der to see him. Dey eat Sugar cookin'. I no dey be sayin' goodbye.

Den, Mr. Billy wanna come back to de big house fo Christmas. We brang docta on Big Missa Bill jet plane fo to carry Missa Billy home. Dey be raisin' peenuts, soybean an pecans at Bell Grove. My daddy done change em ovah fo he die. Missa Billy go inna coma on Christmas eve. I hol his han de ho nite. Sang songs fo my angel an tell him stories like when he a chile. Firs' crack a lite, I no he be goin'. I holla fo Miss Katie, Miss Ellen, an Missa John. Us stanin' der, prayin' and cryin'. He open his eyes, den jes let go. I seen my sweet baby jes let go. I ain' evah feels so sad.

I wipe my sad face real good an take dat coffee to Miss Sanefoe numma tree 'fo it be gittin' cold agin.

She be puttin' on makeup now. Linin' her eyelids, she ain' missin' a lick whatchin' me comin' wif de coffee. I no she be mad at me fo taukin' to Miss Katie on de fone.

"Oh Shug, you've been crying again. I can see it in your eyes."

Heffer ain' happy lessin she be stickin' her nose in my bidness.

"Shug, I know it's been hard on you, Billy's death and moving in with us, but you're just going to have to start moving on and putting it behind you. Otherwise you'll drive yourself

crazy."

Der she go agin. I feel like takin' dat cuppa coffee upside her head.

"You know I loved Billy as much as anybody, but I certainly didn't understand why he was the way he was. I mean how could any man pass these up for another man?" She lafs an shake her titties up and down in de glass.

"I mean, after all Shug, if Billy hadn't been queer, he'd be alive today," she say an lines de odda eye.

I cain' stan de site of dat white bitch. Make me sick. If I ain' raise Missa John up from a little baby, I cut her throat open dis minute. Shudda been her stedda Missa Billy. Good Lord don' wan her doe. Maybe de debbil do.

She say, "Well you lived with Billy for ten years, didn't you? How do you think he got AIDS? And how did you put up with all those fags running around all the time?"

I say straight to her face what I wanna kick in wif my foot, "Ma'am, now don' you be goin' on sayin bad thangs 'bout Missa Billy, heayah! Ain' evah been a betta sole set foot in dis heah worl 'cep Jesus Chris hisself dan Missa Billy. You no it to. An him de only one of de ho Sanefoe clan evah been a little bit nice to you. De Good Lord no it to. Good Lord seen fit to take Missa Billy 'cause he needed him a specel angel. Yo betta don' let Missa John an Miss Katherine heah you badmouttin' dey baby brodah."

"Oh, I'm sorry Shug. Billy was always nice to me. I didn't mean anything by it. It's just that, he could have been more careful and, well...well, nevermind."

She go back to puttin' on makeup and Madonna be sangin' "I will always have you inside of me even though you're gone."

Dat wheyah dey all be, inside my hart, inside my head, all dose people done mean so

much to me. Dey's angels now, up der walkin' 'roun on streets of gold. Momma, Daddy, Miss Lucy, Big Missa Bill, Billy. Wanna if de good Lord make all his angels de same collah?

"Shug, you won't tell John about this will you? You know what a state he gets in over Billy."

She try an wom her way outta dis. Don' matta if I do tell Missa John, she jes lie an say she nevah say nuffin' an dat....

"Well, I don't care if you do tell that adulterer," she holla and give me de ebil eye like you don' no in dat glass.

"Don't you think I know that he's seeing someone else and that he'll be screwing her all weekend long in New York?"

Heah she go. She winen up inna fit now. She slam down her makeup brush on de vanity, sin bottles, tubes an brushes flyin' all ovah de place. I no I be mad if she git makeup on dat cahpet. Cain' git out no makeup stain from no white cahpet. She be cryin' now. She jes tryin' an make me feel sorry fo her. Dat be de day.

"Why am I not good enough for him? I try so hard. I take care of myself and make myself beautiful for him. I'm a good wife for him. I put up with his snot nosed family. I gave up my career for him. What else can I do?"

She be cryin' real bad now, teahs straimin' down, breaffin' hard to. Mascaha, eyelinah done run down all ovah her face an drip down black dots on her titties.

She see in de glass de mess she be an cry mo, cain' catch no breaf. Den, she turn 'roun, look straight in my eyes.

"Oh Shug, what am I going to do? It's all such a mess. I have loved him so. Why can't he love me?"

She lean ovah an grab her nees, cryin', panin' likka dog, even drool runnin' out dem red lips. Ain' dat a pittiful site, mo dan I can stan. She ain' nuffin' but a po little girl. 'Minds me of little Miss Katie throwin' a fit win Missa John and Missa Billy gang up on her an be playin' a mean trick. Good Lord no I cain' stan nobody suffrin', even a mean en. I grabba towel, wauk ovah an lay my hans on her back.

"Good Lord-a-mercy," I say. "You done got yosef in a bad state. Now look heah Missus, it goin' be alright. Ain' no man wuth all dat cryin' an carryin' on, even if he be a Sanefoe."

Den I squat down. My fiffy-tree yeah old nees pop real bad. I take her face in my hans an be wipin' away teahs. She be cryin' an shakin' wif de hiccups. I wipe off dem black streaks from her face and titties. Den I sit down aside her an take her in my arms, start a rockin' her like I rock all my babies.

Madonna be sangin', "When my world seems to crumble all around. And foolish people try to bring me down. I just think of your smiling face. I'm flying."

Hiccups be jes little sobs now. I be hummin' wif Madonna wif my purty church voice.