



a drug called

YOU

Miss Candice

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AUTHOR 'S NOTE

Hey Bae's! I just wanted to drop a few lines! As a disclaimer, THIS IS A THEE PART SERIES. READ AT YOUR OWN RISK. □ Also, A Drug Called You takes place in a fictional town I created called Rosebury, MI.

As always, I appreciate you for rocking with me. It took me a minute to write because I tried a few new things. One being writing in third person, which took some time getting used to. I hope you enjoy it! I poured my all into this one, like I poured my all in the ones before it!

Make sure you join my Facebook reading group by clicking [HERE](#).

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One

VIOLET SAT ON THE OLD, RICKETY STAIRS OF HER FRONT PORCH, WATCHING as cars flew by, with her arms crossed over her chest, shaking her head from side to side. Every last one of the exotic foreign cars were headed in the same direction. West. The only thing in that direction was the infamous Clairmont Hill, where the mysterious property was being built. One after another, black cars, with tinted windows, zipped by, leaving dust in their trail. It was the most traffic Rosebury had had in... well, in forever. With the exception of the construction vehicles that had been frequenting the area over the past six months, Mayberry St. was fairly quiet as the rest of the town is.

“I think they’re finished,” stated Violet’s oldest sister, Bleu, gazing up away from the juicy urban romance novel she’d been reading all day, to get a glimpse of what had been holding Violet’s attention for the past fifteen minutes. “Toni says the house is massive. It’s more of an estate, actually. She says it has a west and an east wing. It’s bigger than Peachtree Mall.”

Violet sucked her teeth with skepticism. “How does Toni know anything? No one knows what’s going on behind that wall, Bleu.”

Bleu shrugged with a sigh and her head slightly tilted over to the side. “Well, you know Toni.”

Violet shifted her attention back to the road, leaning back against the stair behind her, resting her elbow there. “I sure do.”

She had every right to be skeptical. There had been so much talk around town about what was being built that she had heard about fifty different stories. Someone said it was an exclusive nightclub being built. Another person said it was a shopping mall, with all of the finest brands inside. Someone said they were building condominiums to draw more people from the city to the small town of Rosebury. Another said it was a car dealership. But the truth was, no one knew. There was a massive black, iron gate outside of the property. Whoever was building whatever it was that was being built didn't want people to know what it was. At least, that's what the people of Rosebury thought. No one knew a thing. The mysteriousness of it all had drove most of the residents mad to the point where their excitement had turned into downright annoyance. Well, for Violet, that was the case. The continuous chatter about the place was driving her insane. Nothing bothered her more than not knowing though.

She needed to know what was being built on what once was her favorite place in town. She had her first kiss and first date there. Violet broke her first, second, third and fourth bone there too, riding down the steep hill at full speed. Clairmont Hill wasn't just dear to Violet neither. The place was a landmark, which was why everyone was so into what all of the construction was about. If it wasn't for the big, obnoxious **No Trespassing** sign plastered on the gate, the towns people would have been made their way inside. Not knowing had given Violet some serious anxiety, so it was no surprise that

she was snappy when she heard yet another unconfirmed rumor.

“Hey Bleu,” said Toni, showing up out of nowhere, approaching the house with her minions, Albany, and Opal. She looked down at Violet with a forced smile. “Violet.”

The tension between Toni and Violet was evident. Neither of them did anything to conceal the distaste they had for one another. Violet didn’t like Toni, and Toni had no interest in doing anything to change that. Because Toni carried herself as the uppity privileged girl that she had always been, Violet couldn’t stand her. Toni walked with her shoulders back and her chin slightly tilted, in a way that said she owned the place, which, in a way, she did. Her father was mayor of Rosebury. Although she was the youngest daughter of Mayor Wellington, her story about the property on Clairmont being an estate still wasn’t credible. Mayor Wellington kept family and business separate, which Toni had complained about on multiple occasions. She was just as in the dark about what was going on as the rest of them.

Violet eyed Toni up and down with pursed lips, refusing to return the greeting. Or lack thereof, at least. Violet’s dislike for Toni isn’t the only reason Toni was short with her. It was Violet’s nonchalant attitude, that most of the time, came off as rude.

“Did you see the paper this morning?” asked Toni, picking Bleu’s novel up from the seat next to her so that she could sit beside her.

“No,” replied Bleu. “Was there something interesting in it?”

“Mmhhh,” hummed Toni, with a confident grin on her face, handing Bleu her book. “I told you it was an estate. There’s an ad in the paper for maids. You should apply.”

With an evil glare, Violet turned her gaze to Toni. “And why should *she* apply?”

Toni looked down at Violet and shrugged her right shoulder. “I just thought it would be a nice gig, considering she has Heaven to care for and all.”

“My job at Pops helps me take care of Heaven just fine,” Bleu added, clearly offended.

Sometimes, Bleu was soft spoken. A little too soft spoken, which is why Violet always felt the need to speak up for her, despite her being two years younger. But whenever anyone tried to insinuate that Bleu needed any kind of help taking care of her three-year-old daughter, Heaven, Violet’s help wasn’t needed. Bleu took taking care of Heaven seriously. As a single mother in a small town, she felt she had a point to prove. She refused to be what she knew people were whispering about.

Rosebury, MI is a small town where everybody knew everybody. Which would be expected out of a town where only around 1,500 people resided. It’s the one thing both Violet and Bleu both hated about staying in a small town. Your business was never really your business. You’d think that after staying in Rosebury their whole lives, it would be something they were used to. Wrong. While Bleu adjusted and dealt with the whispers, Violet couldn’t stand it. The difference between Bleu and Violet was that Bleu had fully accepted it. She knew

she'd forever be the talk of the town when she decided to leave four years ago.

She wanted to spread her wings and soar. Rosebury was suffocating, and Bleu wanted out. Which, their father forbade. He didn't want his oldest daughter roaming the streets of Detroit alone. Especially not after growing up and being in Rosebury for twenty-one years. But, Bleu had a point to prove. She was going to go to Detroit to make a better life for herself. Which, she did not. Bleu was back home after two months, pregnant. Once her boyfriend, Darnell disappeared on her, she was on the phone with her mother, begging to come back home. If it wasn't for mother being sick, her father would have never allowed her to come back.

"I didn't mean anything by it, Bleu," lightly apologized Toni, as if she hadn't mentioned the job with malicious intent.

The sweet smile on her face masked her true feelings. Toni did mean something by it. Although she and Bleu were cordial enough to be called friends, Toni was a bit envious of her. Which, for someone like Toni, was outlandish. She came from money. Bleu didn't. She didn't want for a thing. Bleu had to work hard to make sure the lights and water stayed on. What Toni envied about Bleu was how fearless she was. Toni wanted to leave Rosebury. She thought about it on a daily. But she hadn't mustered up the courage to do so. In Rosebury, she was someone. She was important. She was who all of the women wanted to be friends with, and all of the men wanted to bed. She was afraid that if she did leave Rosebury and relocated to some big city, she'd be small. She'd blend in and there would be nothing special about her small-town girl personality. She wouldn't be who she is in Rosebury in

overpopulated places like Detroit or New York. She envied Bleu because Bleu didn't care. She took that leap. She did what Toni couldn't. And because of that, whenever an opportunity presented itself, Toni made sure to belittle Bleu in some sort of way.

Bleu pulled her lips into her mouth and nodded before going back to reading. She had just started the book yesterday, and she was almost finished already.

"I'm applying," said Albany with a shrug. "It's the highest paying job Rosebury has ever seen."

"Is it? How much are they paying?" asked Violet with a cocked brow.

At the mention of money, Violet's interest was piqued. Unlike Bleu, Violet wasn't working and hadn't been for a few weeks now. She worked at Pauly's Café for seven years before Mr. Paul passed away leaving the café to his eldest son, Paul Jr. Paul Jr. couldn't wait to get Violet out of there. He had it out for the feisty young girl for years. But because his father had a soft spot in his heart for her, he could never do anything about it. Mr. Paul wasn't in the dirt but a few days before Paul Jr. finally gave Violet the boot he felt she's always needed.

Violet was great at her job. Everyone in town knew who she was and looked forward to her sweet, deep dimpled smile whenever they came in for the pie of the day. Paul Jr. didn't like her because unlike the other black employees at the café, she had no interest in kissing his ass. Paul Jr. felt disrespected every time he worked with her. Violet didn't kiss his ass because just like her, he was an employee. So what he was the son of the owner? She didn't have to listen to him.

That drove Paul Jr crazy. Violet knew that the minute Mr. Paul's health started to deteriorate that her time spent at the café would come to an end. She was sad about it, being that Pauly's Café was her first and only job, but she refused to change who she was just to keep a job. She didn't even bother fighting for it the day Paul Jr. called her into what used to be Mr. Paul's office.

“\$15 an hour,” said Albany with a smile. “Full time, and under the table too.”

Violet squinted with skepticism. “That much money? Under the table and full-time. I don't know about that.”

Opal sucked her teeth, shaking her head. “Vi, you've always been a worrywart. We're applying.”

Violet felt like her suspicion was justifiable. There were new people in town, hiring maids, at an outrageous salary, under the table. It didn't sound right. Violet did have a tendency to question things that just sounded too good to be true, but again, she felt like it was justifiable in this situation. She couldn't understand why she was the only one suspicious about it.

“It's just too good to be true,” said Violet, shifting uncomfortable, with her full lips twisted up. “What kind of work is it?”

Toni shrugged. “You know, typical maid work. Dusting, cleaning, maybe cooking. You know...”

“Something ain't right about that,” she replied, shaking her head. “Who pays that much money for some housekeeping work?”

“Someone that can afford it. They had an estate built on Clairmont Hill, Violet. I’m sure the \$15 an hour will be nothing to them,” said Toni, before rolling her eyes.

Violet tilted her head to the side a bit with a snort. “Like I said. Something isn’t right about that.”

“Well, I’m applying,” said Opal with a shrug. “You can miss out on over a grand a week if you want to.”

“Welp,” said Violet with a deep sigh. “You gone right on ahead, *girl*. If you don’t end up in the paper, maybe I’ll go down and check it out.”

Albany laughed, but Violet was serious. They could take it as a joke all they wanted to. Violet had watched enough movies and read enough horror stories to know that something just wasn’t right about all of that. Violet had been full of skepticism since the big black privacy gate was put up on the first day of construction. Now that she’s learned that the place was an estate and that they were hiring maids, the wheels in her mind were working overtime. Her mind first went to sex trafficking. Posting a help wanted ad in the paper, in a small town full of naïve women would be the perfect ploy. And the hefty salary too? That type of money was rare in Rosebury. That would be the easiest way to lure innocent women to the estate. Violet just knew that if she showed up at that place, ready to work, she’d be shipped off somewhere, against her will and then she’d never see her sister and niece ever again.

And who were the owners? Probably some sick ass white men, with sick fetishes. Or maybe they were into organ harvesting. Black organs were the most valuable, and as odd as it may seem, Rosebury had an African American population

of 51%. Violet just didn't know. The thoughts roaming wild in her mind made her squeamish.

"I think we should apply too, Vi," said Bleu before pinching her bottom lip with her top teeth. "The money is really good."

Violet pointed with a squint. "You see? You're doing exactly what those sick ass white men want. Being persuaded by money. Think Bleu!" She pointed at her temple. "Think about it! I don't think it's a good idea."

Opal threw her head back, laughing, her wild dreadlocks falling over her shoulders. "Violet! Oh my God! You're nuts!"

"No," she paused and rolled her eyes. "You're nuts! If you think you're about to go up there and dust for fifteen dollars an hour. You're a fool, actually. You're going to get up there and never come back down again."

Everyone on the porch thought it was funny. Everyone but Violet and Bleu at least. Bleu knew her sister was dead ass serious. She gave Violet a look, with her head cocked to the side.

"You need to take a chill pill, Vi," said Toni. "You know," she sang. "I can hook you up with a little something-something."

"Shut the fuck up," snapped Violet, waving her off, before turning her attention back to the dusty road in front of her.

She didn't care about them judging her or thinking that she was overreacting. Overreacting and overthinking has kept

her alive for twenty-three years. She wasn't going to change anything about that now. Not because some big timers moved into town and were offering up a lot of cash. Violet would just have to see if the Claire's at Peachtree was hiring yet. She hated what had happened with Paul Jr. at Pauly's. She was comfortable there. She missed her job, but did she miss it enough to go running back? Hell no. Violet was far too prideful for that. Besides, after she cursed Paul Jr out the way that she did, she was no longer allowed within ten feet of the place. She was sick about it but what was done, was already done and there was no going back from that.

Some nights, she'd lie in bed, awake, mind wandering like crazy and she'd question rather she should have done things differently or not. If she had a better attitude, she'd still be working at Pauly's making \$5.50 an hour, plus tips. That \$5.50 might not seem like much to some, but in Rosebury it was just enough to get by. And now that she didn't have Pauly's she and her family were barely getting by. They needed a two-income household. Without the extra's Violet brought in, Bleu was forced to work overtime, whenever it was available, which it rarely ever was.

Thankfully, their father Patrick worked hard and paid the house off when their other sister, Ruby, was a little girl. If it wasn't for that, they would have been on the streets long ago. The money they made together was just enough to keep the utilities on and the taxes paid. Now, since Violet wasn't working, Bleu was scrapping up as much as she could. Ruby was too young to work. She had to focus on graduating high school next year, so there was only so much she could do help. She was good at arching eyebrows, but that only paid

around \$5 per person, and she rarely had any customers. They were practically struggling. Because of such, Violet knew that despite how paranoid she was about the job opening, she needed to apply. Violet hated watching her sister struggle. If there was one thing, or person that would push her out of her comfort zone, it was Bleu.

Bleu had taken care of her during the hardest point in her life. When their mother, Gloria, passed away from cervical cancer two years ago, Bleu was the rock. Not only for Violet, but for Patrick, and especially Ruby too. She was forced to be strong because the rock was no longer with them. Bleu wasn't afforded the opportunity to grieve. Not when Gloria died, and certainly not when their father died six months after.

Patrick died from a broken heart. According to the autopsy it was a heart attack, but ask any one of his daughters, and they'd tell you he died from a broken heart. Gloria was his rib. His best friend. The one and only woman he ever loved. So losing her after having her for over twenty years was sheer devastation for Patrick. He just couldn't handle it.

“Hey Vi. Wassup?”

Violet looked away from the road, her thoughts disturbed by her good friend, Samuel. She smiled at him and sighed, wishing the stress of not having a job would stop beating her down.

“Hey Sam.” She paused and looked at Sam's little brother, Gary. “Hey Gary. I like your new hat.”

Gary bashfully smile, and shied away, hiding behind Sam.

“Gar, Violet spoke to you. Say hi,” said Sam, turning around, placing his hand on his brother’s shoulder.

“Hi Violet,” spoke Gary, with his head down, wearing the same bashful smile as before. Violet was the only person he’d do that with. Gary didn’t speak to anyone. At all. It wouldn’t matter if Samuel told him to speak, he wouldn’t. Unless that person was Violet. Gary’s autism interfered with his ability to communicate with people.

Violet chuckled a little and shook her head. Right after, Sam sat next to her and asked her how her day had been going. It was as if Sam hadn’t seen anybody else sitting on the porch. When it came to Violet, he had tunnel vision. It’s always been that way, and the women of Rosebury hated it. Toni especially.

“Hey Sam! I know Violet isn’t the only one you see sitting on this porch now.”

But Violet was the only one he saw. Yeah, the porch might have been crowded and there might have been a lot of chatter going on around him, but Violet stood out in a way that made him only see her. Since kids it’s been that way. When Sam first laid eyes on the pretty little girl with wild curly locks, he was smitten. It didn’t matter that they were kids. Even then, Sam knew that the crush he had on her would last forever. What he didn’t know was that their friendship would last forever too. He was in love with her. Infatuated even. He wanted nothing more than to take the next step with her. He had loved her since they were kids. But Violet could be intimidating and at times Sam would be a stuttering fool. Whenever he’d muster up enough courage to ask her out on a date, at least. He could sit and chat with her for hours, but

when his true feelings came to surface and he wanted to tell her how he felt, his big hands would get clammy and he'd stutter, and stammer over his words, embarrassing himself. So in an effort to not look like a fool, he chose not to tell her how he felt, even if it was torture.

“Wassup Toni?” said Sam with a deep dimpled smile and a head nod. “Bleu. Opal. Albany. Y'all doing alright today?”

“Yeah, we're alright,” said Toni, with her hands on her slim waist. “How are you doing? I haven't seen you in a while.”

Violet rolled her eyes and lightly chuckled at how pathetic Toni was. She always wanted the attention on her. Especially when it came to Sam because his attention was something she rarely ever got. Being that Sam was the best thing Rosebury had to offer, his lack of interest in her drove Toni crazy. Samuel was who every straight girl in Rosebury wanted, and who all the men envied. His charismatic personality meshed well with his extremely handsome looks. With the skin tone of a milk chocolate Hershey's bar, and the smile of a movie star, Sam was the total package. Not to mention, he was a true gentleman. Plus, the way he cared for Gary was admirable too.

“I've been good. I was out of—”

“Oh look! Look! Someone's coming,” shouted Toni, cutting Sam off midsentence. “Come on Opal. Let's stop them!”

Sam grunted and ran his hand down the back of his neck. Toni placed her hand on Sam's shoulder as she and Opal

rushed down the creaking stairs, sprinting towards the middle of the street.

Violet shook her head and chuckled in disgust as she crossed her arms over her chest. From the corner of his eye, Sam got a glimpse of the fullness of her c-cup breasts. Sighing, he looked away and shook his head, running his tongue over his thick bottom lip. It wasn't that Sam was a creep. Violet was just that damn enticing. He knew all there was to know about her. He knew her parents, her cousins, what her favorite food was, what she hated... everything there was to know. Except for the intimate things. He wanted to know what took her there. He wanted to know what made Violet's toes curl. Were her kisses sweet? Did she even like to tongue kiss at all? Was she a passionate lover? Was she as aggressive in bed as she is outside of it?

"Look at them," said Violet, shaking her head, her untamed golden tresses moving wildly about her head. "They act like they've never seen new people before. Sad."

Bleu sighed and smiled a little. "It's not that they're acting like they've never seen people before, sister. It's the mystery of it all. It's the luxuriousness too. Tell me," said Bleu with a pause before getting up and standing on the top step looking down at them. "Vi, when's the last time you've seen five, six, Mercedes Benz's riding down Mayberry St. Hell, tell me the last time you've seen one Mercedes Benz in Rosebury, period."

Violet couldn't. The only time she's seen anything with the Benz logo on it was on TV, or the internet.

"You can't right? People that drive Mercedes Benz's don't come here," stated Bleu, with her hand on her slim hip,

before Violet could respond.

“You’re right about that,” said Violet. “So, why are they here? What do they want with us?”

“That’s what everyone would like to know,” said Sam with a furrowed brow, looking towards the truck with everything but admiration in his gaze.

Everyone was curious about the same thing. Except, Toni was the only one to take the initiative to search for the answers she was looking for. She had always been bold and fearless when it came to putting her nose in other peoples business. She always felt the need to know about everything concerning Rosebury. Although she wanted to explore the world, there was no denying that Toni loved her town. It’s because of that, that no one was surprised at her decision to stop traffic.

Once the Mercedes Benz truck came to a halt, Toni sashayed towards the driver side to give an introduction. Although she strutted with confidence, she was nervous. When the car stopped, her heart rate picked up and she felt a tinge of regret. But she had come too far to turn back now. Plus, if she backed down, she’d look like a punk, and she couldn’t have that. Not as the Queen of Rosebury she couldn’t.

“Hey!” said Toni with a big smile on her face, pleased at what stared back at her.

He was fine. No, let’s rephrase that. He was *fione*. And not Rosebury fine neither. Rosebury’s fine was safe. This type of fine was not. He was the type of fine that wasn’t good for you. The type of fine that you knew came with baggage but didn’t care because he... was... just... that... fine! He was

nothing like Toni had ever seen, with his good grade of hair, and his thick, long Hebrew beard. Not only did he look good, he smelled good too. The scent that hit her nostrils when he rolled the window down was intoxicating. It was a scent that she wouldn't mind smelling all day every day, all of the time.

“Wassup?” he spoke back, eyeing her up and down with a half-smile planted on his face. When he licked his juicy pink lips, her knees buckled a little.

“You're new around here right? You own the house on Clairmont Hill. Welcome to Rosebury! We're so happy to have some new faces around here.” She looked around the truck and noticed that his face was the only smiling face inside. The man in the passenger seat wore a flat expression, and the woman sitting in the back wore a frown. A frown that only women who felt threatened by other women wore. It was evident that the mad chick in the back had something going on with the driver. Toni couldn't put a finger on what exactly, since she was sitting in the backseat, and not the passenger. She chalked it up as to them just messing around, so her flirting commenced, not that it would have stopped if she had been sitting in the passenger seat anyhow.

“Yeah,” said the driver, running his hand over the top of his jet black, wavy hair. He eyed Toni up and down again and licked his lips, as if he wanted to eat her up. “We do.”

Toni extended her hand and smiled. “Oh okay. I'm Toni and these two...these are my friends, Opal and Albany.”

“Trouble,” he replied, shaking her hand, holding onto it for a little too long.

The name Trouble suited him well. Toni wondered how much trouble a man with the name Trouble got into. He had the bad boy look going on and the tattoos on his exposed arms were a clear indication of the bad boy lifestyle too. Bad boys didn't come to Rosebury, let alone stay there. So, not only was Toni curious about Trouble, but she was interested in him too.



“Pull off,” said Prodigy, as he looked down at his iPhone, replying to an email.

“You serious, bro?” asked Trouble, Prodigy’s little brother. “Right now?”

Instead of responding to him, Prodigy said nothing, which was actually a response in its own way. He didn’t have to say another word for Trouble to know that he was, in fact, serious. Trouble shouldn’t have stopped to begin with but since he couldn’t run the three young women down, he was forced to. If Prodigy had been behind the wheel he wouldn’t have cared about them blocking the road. He would have revved the engine up and kept going. If they were hit, that would have been on them. Besides, they would have moved eventually... right?

Trouble sighed and scratched the back of his neck. “It was nice meeting you ladies. We have to get going—”

“Aw! Already!?! We just met!” said Toni, leaning on the door, looking into the car with a smile on her face.

“Didn’t he just tell you to pull off?” asked Yvette, squinting at her boyfriend of seven years, with fire behind her eyes. “Pull off!”

She had had enough of the blatant flirting going on in her face. For the sake of keeping a low profile, she let it slide

but she just knew that she'd be snapping at any given moment if Trouble didn't pull the hell off!

Trouble sighed, shook his head, and sped off, missing Toni's pedicured toes by an inch.

"A nigga was just trying to be neighborly," mumbled Trouble, as he gripped the steering wheel to his matte black truck.

"Yeah, okay. Stop playing with me, Brenden!" yelled Yvette, pointing her pointy stiletto nail in his face. "Don't get fucked up out here with that friendly shit! I'm not putting up with that shit in weak ass Rosebury!"

Trouble and Yvette had gone through enough in the last seven years to last them a lifetime. The couple was the epitome of toxic, but neither of them could let the other one go. Once upon a time, it was love that kept Yvette running back to Trouble. Now, it was comfort and the lavish lifestyle he could provide. She still loved him. Of course she did. Otherwise, she wouldn't be bothered by his blatant flirtatiousness. Most of her discomfort came from feeling threatened. She didn't want to risk losing Trouble to someone else, not that that's ever been the case before. But there was something about Rosebury that made her uneasy. It was new. The women were innocent, and naïve. Two things that drew Trouble to Yvette years ago.

"You wylin' over nothing," said Trouble, before glancing over at his big brother, Prodigy. "My fault, bro. She was just in the middle of the fuckin' street. Feel me?"

Prodigy finished his email and then wrapped his hand around his phone, rubbing on his chin in a perplexed fashion.

“How would that conversation had gone if I wasn’t sitting here?” questioned Prodigy, with his brown eyes fixated on the side of Trouble’s face.

He watched as his brothers shoulders slightly raised with a sigh. “You know how it would have gone, bro.”

“I don’t.”

“Exactly. You were a little too happy go fucking lucky for me. He probably would have ran his mouth, Prodigy. He probably would have invited her behind the gates. Anything for some new pussy.”

Prodigy sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Yo...”

Yvette was doing too much, as usual. And Trouble was sick of it. What he hated most about her popping off all wild like was the way it made him look in front of Prodigy, like he didn’t have control over his situation.

Trouble glanced over his shoulder, twisting a little, with a scowl on his face, pissed. “Sit yo ass back, Evie. Before I put you on the first thing smoking out this bitch.”

Yvette crossed her arms over her chest and sat back, with one leg crossed over the other one, bouncing it with attitude. There was so much more that she wanted to say, but for the sake of respecting Prodigy, she chose to bite her tongue. But, when they got to the house, she was letting Trouble know exactly how she felt.

Trouble glanced at Prodigy and let out a sigh. “Like I was saying, I wouldn’t have told shorty shit. I know my position bro. Evie don’t know shit about loyalty.”

Yvette laughed but said nothing, steady bouncing her leg... now more than before. She was itching to go off on Trouble. She didn't know anything about loyalty? How? She considered herself extremely loyal. She thought that since she put up with Trouble and his deceitful ways for nearly a decade, that classified her as loyal. She knew things about Trouble and Prodigy that most people didn't, and she kept her mouth shut. Isn't that loyalty? Trouble talking out of the side of his head pissed Yvette off. Meanwhile, he was the one that couldn't be loyal to her to save his life. He kept his dick in something new. He had some nerve saying that she didn't know what it was. She couldn't wait to chew him out about it. To make sure she didn't forget, she pulled her iPhone 11 from her Birkin and hit the notepad. She texted away, making note of everything to bring up during their argument later. *He has me so fucked up*, thought Yvette, her brow furrowed with fury.

"I trust that you do. Otherwise, you wouldn't be in the position that you're in," said Prodigy, steady tugging on his beard. "Keep the friendly shit at a minimum, bro. You know what I'm trying to accomplish here. I don't need anything getting in the way of that."

Prodigy trusted Trouble with his life and it wasn't only because he was his brother neither. The both of them had a clear understanding of loyalty and they had shown it to one another their entire lives. Prodigy more than Trouble, but that was expected, considering the fact that Prodigy raised and took care of Trouble. Like most young black boys in the ghetto, they were raised up on survival, rather than love. Between the two of them, love always came third. On the top of the list was surviving and right after that came loyalty. It

was the way they had been wired for as long as they could remember. Being brought up in the foster care system toughened their skin. Luckily for them, they were always together. And because they were always together, they took care of one another. Although the foster parents were legally their guardians, Prodigy was the *true* guardian. Being the oldest by three years made that a given.

“Understood,” replied Trouble with a nod.

Prodigy wouldn't have to tell him a second time. Yvette could laugh or make snide remarks all she wanted, his loyalty to Prodigy was solid. Trouble didn't owe Yvette that. She hadn't earned it. Not the way Prodigy did. She wasn't in the trenches with him. She didn't struggle and go hungry with him. She didn't have to protect him from beatings from money hungry, heartless foster parents. Prodigy did that for him. Prodigy earned his loyalty. They had been through it all together. The darkest moments in time that would have broken him, didn't because he had his brother with him. When their mother dropped them off at the police station, with tears pouring from her eyes, and snot dripping from her nose, Prodigy told him to hold his head up. He promised him that eventually everything would be alright. And he made good on that promise too. Although it took nearly fifteen years to get the ball rolling, everything was alright and neither of them had gone hungry since.



The last day they saw their mother smile was on the day of Prodigy's 8th birthday. Even with a smile on her face,

Prodigy could sense that something wasn't right. It had nothing to do with not being celebrated neither. Birthdays were treated like regular days. He would be lucky if he even got a happy birthday from his mother. But this birthday was different from the rest and that to Prodigy meant that something wasn't right. She woke him up with cake, a happy birthday song, and a gift. She was happy. In fact, that day was the only time Prodigy had truly seen his mother smile. Usually, she'd be scowling, or wearing a flat, emotionless expression. But on this day? This day, she was happy. She played music from the boombox, and even ordered pizza. They danced around the balloon filled living room, without a care in the world, finally happy. Finally, there was joy in their otherwise joyless home. And although Prodigy was having the time of his life, he felt like something was wrong. His smile was feeble. And at times, his excitement would subside, and he'd ask his mother what was wrong. She'd rub the top of his curly head, with a smile and say, 'Nothing Calvetti. Have fun! Happy birthday!'. Her full lips would turn up, into a big, bright smile, but her eyes held sadness that an eight-year-old shouldn't had been able to recognize. Clarissa knew her son was wise beyond his years, and she knew that unlike most eight-year-old's, he'd be able to see right through her lies, so she didn't keep eye contact for long. She avoided it because she knew that if she looked into his eyes too long, he'd see the truth.

The next morning, Clarissa woke her kids up and told them it was time to go. She didn't tell them to shower or brush their teeth. As soon as they woke up, they put their worn Payless shoes on, and were out of the door, with crust in their eyes. That morning was nothing like the morning before. The

joy had been sucked right out of the Germaine household. Trouble, only five years old, asked where they were going fifty times. Clarissa sat there, hands gripping the steering wheel to her rusted 1980 Buick station wagon, with WJLB's morning show on full blast, tears rolling down her rosy cheeks.

Once they got to their destination, both children were confused. Clarissa jumped out of the car, snatched the back door open and with shaky hands, unhooked their seatbelts, tears running from her eyes like waterfalls. Prodigy was quiet. Trouble wasn't. He cried too, asking questions that Clarissa didn't bother to answer. She reached over Prodigy, grabbed Trouble out, and hurriedly put him down on the sidewalk. Prodigy sat there, quiet, with dipped brows and teary eyes. He couldn't understand why things couldn't be like they were the day before. He wanted things to go back to that, but he knew, deep down that that would be the last time he spent a happy moment with his mother. He knew because on the day after his birthday, she cried more than he'd ever saw her cry before. With a trembling bottom lip, Clarissa called out to Prodigy, telling him to get out. When he didn't move a muscle, she reached for him, and he flinched away from her touch. He slid out of the backseat with a deep scowl and tight lips.

Prodigy stood next to Trouble, draped his arm over his shoulder, and pulled him closer as Clarissa kissed him on his forehead. Prodigy knew that wherever he and Trouble were going, she wasn't. The car was still running, and it was in the middle of the parking lot with the doors open.

"I love... I love you Brenden. Okay," said Clarissa, cupping Trouble's small face.

“I love you mommy,” cried Trouble with sniffles, completely oblivious to what was occurring.

When Clarissa stood in front of Prodigy, he looked up at her with flaring nostrils, and the same teary eyes as before. As bad as he wanted to cry, he didn’t. He was so determined not to cry, that he refused to blink. His eyes were stinging, and his vision was foggy, but he fought through.

“Cal...Vetti... I love you, my precious boy. I’m... mommy is sorry okay?” cried Clarissa, before taking a step closer to him. In response, Prodigy took a step back, making sure to keep Trouble close.

“Please forgive me. I just.. I can’t,” said Clarissa, before turning away.

She ran back to the car, slammed the back door shut, got inside and sped away.

Prodigy didn’t blink until she was out of the parking lot, allowing the tears sitting at the rims of his eyes to fall.



After dropping Yvette off, Prodigy and Trouble headed to a meeting on the outskirts of Rosebury. The rest of the ride there was spent in silence, just the way Prodigy preferred. Trouble was busy in his own thoughts, texting back and forth with Yvette. She was bugging and he was trying to diffuse the situation. He invited her to the compound to have fun, not to argue the whole time she was there.

Prodigy’s phone went off, and he checked the messages. It was his financial advisor, Peter, asking if he needed another run down.

Me (2:11PM): I'm good.

Prodigy didn't need anything repeated to him. Every piece of information given to him was embedded into his mental. Whenever he was given information of significance, he studied it thoroughly, refusing to be unprepared in any situation.

Prodigy got out of the car, and Trouble followed suit. With every step Prodigy and Trouble made, gravel crumbled under their Gucci loafers. They might have been from the east side of Detroit, but when it came down to business, they dressed to impress. They had to. People took one look at them and passed judgment. White people especially. Both Prodigy and Trouble were tall and ripped like professional ball players, with thick beards and tattooed melanated skin. Of course judgment was passed. It was expected. But, Prodigy had a strong belief in the saying that presentation is everything. He rarely, if ever, was seen out handling business in anything other than a tailored designer suit.

“Quiet as fuck around this bitch,” said Trouble, as he uncomfortably adjusted the collar to his navy-blue suit coat.

Unlike Prodigy, he mostly dressed casually. He could get away with it because Prodigy was the businessman. He was not. He was his associate. His right hand man. The only person Prodigy trusted with his life. The quietness of Rosebury was something that they would have to adjust to. They were used to hearing the hustle and bustle of city life. They grew up hearing gunshots, loud music, laughter, women arguing... the whole nine. The sound of the hood. They had long left the ghetto, but the noise never stopped. Out in

Rosebury, the quiet was thick. As different as it was, Prodigy had been enjoying it. He appreciated the sound of birds chirping, and the crickets, cricking at night. The quiet and calmness of Rosebury is what pursued him to purchase the twenty acres of land at the top of Clairmont Hill. After months, on top of months of studying the town, visiting, and staying at its only motel, Prodigy decided that Rosebury would be perfect for him. He was in a secluded area, with the nearest neighbor being about two miles down the road. The trees surrounding the property made living in seclusion a breeze. Adding a big, steel gate, and fencing around the property was just added for an extra layer of privacy. He knew that without it, the townspeople would pry, which he was right.

“You think they got some chili fries in this bitch?” asked Trouble, rubbing his stomach. “On my momma I’m starvin’.”

Prodigy glanced over at Trouble and said, “Shit, bruh, I highly doubt it. We’ll grab something from that lil’ deli off Sugar Creek Lane when we finish.”

Trouble sighed and nodded. “Aight, bro.”

Prodigy pulled the door open and the smell of bacon filled his nostrils, making him a tad bit nauseous. He hadn’t eaten beef or pork in over a decade, so every time he smelled it being cooked, he had the urge to throw up. He pinched the bridge of his nose, and took a deep breath, waiting for the feeling to pass. Once it did, he cleared his throat, and treaded towards the back of the plain restaurant where Mr. O’Donnell said he’d be.

“I don’t want shit out of here no fuckin’ way. The deli sound good as fuck right about now,” whispered Trouble, with a frown on his face. “This bitch bold as fuck. You peep shorty pouring buddy coffee? Feigned out, my baby—”

“Chill,” said Prodigy, interrupting him. “Business hat on, Troub.”

Trouble knew that ignorance wasn’t welcome when business was being handled. Prodigy didn’t ask for much. Just professionalism that Trouble had a hard time turning on without a little reminder from Prodigy.

The older white man, with salt and pepper colored, long hair stood up as Prodigy and his small entourage approached. Just like the other five people in the diner, he stared with skepticism. He was curious about what this young black man and his friend could possibly want with him and his diner, and the patrons were both curious and put off by having three black people in their restaurant. On the outskirts of Rosebury sat Littleburg, an even smaller town with absolutely nothing to offer. Littleburg had a population around five hundred. The only thing Littleburg had going for itself was the diner they were in and it wasn’t because the food here was good neither.

“Mr. Calvetti Germaine?” questioned Mr. O’Donnell with furrowed brows.

Prodigy nodded and extended his hand. “Yes. Good afternoon, Mr. O’Donnell.”

Mr. O’Donnell looked down at Prodigy’s lingering hand, took a deep breath and shook it. Mr. O’Donnell’s disinterest in blacks was obvious but Prodigy didn’t give a

damn. As a man with poise and intense self-control, he chose not to respond the way Mr. O'Donnell and the judgmental white folks in the diner expected him to. Mr. O'Donnell shook his hand, showing him the respect Prodigy demanded; that was the only thing that mattered. Had Mr. O'Donnell been disrespectful, the meeting would have gone completely left.

Mr. O'Donnell extended his hand to Trouble. "And you are?"

"Brenden Germaine. Calvetti's brother and business partner," Trouble said introducing himself before they shook hands and took a seat in the small booth. There was barely any room for Trouble and Prodigy to comfortably sit beside each other. Trouble might have been the reckless one of the duo, but he knew how to turn it on and off. With a degree in Business, he was far from ignorant.

"To what do I owe this pleasure," Mr. O'Donnell asked before spitting his chewing tobacco into the ashtray in front of him.

Prodigy looked into Mr. O'Donnell's eyes. "This is a fine diner you have here," he lied, looking around the rather empty establishment, taking notice to the stained walls, and the deteriorating ceiling.

"It ain't much, but it's mine," said Mr. O'Donnell, picking up on Prodigy's light insult. "And it ain't for sale."

Prodigy clenched his jaw muscle before giving Mr. O'Donnell a half smile. "Business is slow. I'm willing to make you an offer you won't be able to refuse."

"It ain't for sale—"

“How does \$50,000 sound? Tell me, Mr. O’Donnell, when’s the last time you made \$50,000? If ever.”

Mr. O’Donnell’s eyebrows slightly raised, stunned at the dollar amount Prodigy was willing to pay for what he considered a piece of crap. The diner had never made \$50,000. Hell, Mr. O’Donnell hadn’t put much of anything into the restaurant since it opened back in the last 1950’s. Although it wasn’t much to him, it had sentimental value. Sentimental value that couldn’t be compensated by any amount of money.

Mr. O’Donnell crossed his arms over his chest and gave Prodigy a smug look. “It ain’t for sale.”

“\$60,000.”

Trouble cleared his throat and ran his hand on the top of his head; a subtle way of reminding Prodigy about the price point Peter set in place. Peter didn’t think Prodigy should pay a penny over twenty thousand, but Prodigy had a vision and it was hard for him to see reason when his mind was set on something.

Prodigy shifted in his seat, uncomfortable with Mr. O’Donnell’s rejection. The diner wasn’t worth \$10,000, let alone \$60,000. But what Prodigy visioned for the property was worth far more, which was why he was willing to pay well over what it was worth.

“It. Ain’t. For. Sale,” said Mr. O’Donnell, adjusting the bottom of his worn, dingy white button up shirt.

He could use the money. \$60,000 could get him out of Littleburg and someplace down south, by the water. He didn’t need much. Just a little shack, to grow old in. But he didn’t

want to sell Hank's. His father had worked hard to purchase the land to have it built when he was just a boy. It had been passed down to him and he wanted to pass it down to his own son, although, at sixty years old, he had no children.

Prodigy squinted with a smirk, perplexed. He didn't like to be told no. In fact, he hated it, especially if he was trying to play fair. Prodigy didn't take rejection lightly. He despised it. At least he had the common decency to ask Mr. O'Donnell for his business. He could have simply taken it. But thing is, Prodigy was trying to do right in Rosebury. He was trying to start anew, but unfortunately, Mr. O'Donnell was making it hard for Prodigy to make good on that commitment.

Prodigy nodded, stood up and adjusted the buttoned sleeves on his shirt "Understood. You have a great day Mr. O'Donnell."

Mr. O'Donnell cracked his jar of chewing tobacco open and placed a piece at his gums before nodding and telling Prodigy to do the same. As he sat back, watching the young men walk out of the restaurant, regret crept upon him and he started to feel like rejecting Prodigy might have been the biggest mistake he'd ever made in his life. Which... indeed, it was.



"You haven't said a word since you returned from the meeting. How did it go?" asked Aspen, sliding her soft hands down Prodigy's chest.

Prodigy was sitting in the master suite of his new home, in the dark, at the glass floor to ceiling windows. It was the biggest, grandest room of the estate, of course it was his. It was fit for a King, and a king he was. He had been stationed there since he left Hank's Diner, eyes on the darkness of the garden out back. He was in his thoughts, combing his beard, pondering on the next move he'd make. He wanted that property. He needed it. And he was being forced into an uncomfortable, but familiar, place to get it.

Prodigy grabbed Aspen's hand and kissed her fingertips, before reaching around and pulling her on his lap. She giggled and swiped a piece of her loose, long weave behind her ear.

"Well... How'd it go?" She pressed on, running her hand over the top of Prodigy's waves.

What Aspen was to Prodigy couldn't be classified. She wasn't his girlfriend because she hadn't been given that title. But she was special enough to be able to call Prodigy's estate, home because well... he wanted her there and he couldn't have her thousands of miles away in Florida. As special as Aspen was, she wasn't special enough to be the only one. Prodigy's taste for women was too potent to settle down with just one.

"It went," replied Prodigy, telling her nothing at all, running his fingertips over the ampleness of her round, breasts.

He never shared his business with women. Aspen had not a clue of what Prodigy did for a living. All she knew was that he was very wealthy, and that he had no problem giving her any and everything her heart desired. For most, that would

be enough, but as they grew closer and her love grew stronger for him, Aspen wanted to know more. She needed to know more. Except, Prodigy wouldn't let her in. As a matter of fact, Aspen didn't know much of anything about Prodigy, besides the obvious things. He didn't share details about his past. The only thing Prodigy shared with her was his body and his time.

Aspen bit her bottom lip and threw her head back when he wrapped his strong arms around her waist, pulling her closer before putting his lips where his hands once were. "I missed you," she purred, before biting her bottom lip again.

She did. Prodigy was her whole life. Sadly, he was the most important thing in life to her. Aspen didn't have a job or any hobbies. When he was away, she'd take a dip in the pool, but that was pretty much it. She didn't have anything else going for herself. Sometimes, she'd catch up with old friends, but she hadn't made any plans to take trips or to visit them. Prodigy was everything to and for her.

"Did you?" asked Prodigy before wrapping his big hand around Aspen's neck. He ran his tongue over his bottom lip a bit and pulled her closer, by her neck.

Aspen moaned, grabbing Prodigy by his wrist. "Yes... Yes daddy. I missed you so much."

Her moans were much like a whimper because she had missed him just that much. Calvetti was like a magnetic force. And when he wasn't around it was torturous, similar to an addict without its fix, and Aspen had been going through withdraws.

She took his hand from around her neck and began to kiss his fingers and then the palms of his hand. With a frown

of sheer satisfaction on her caramel complected face, she began to slither down his tall frame, right up until she was positioned where she was comfortable the most. Between his legs. She gripped the waistband of his shorts and began to tug them down right before the sound of the bedroom door creaking disrupted her.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did I interrupt?” asked Yara, her heels beating against the marble floors.

She knew she had interrupted, but instead of walking in the opposite direction of Prodigy and Aspen, she was heading straight for them.

Aspen sucked her teeth and rolled her eyes. “You saw me come in here, Yara. Babe... I’ve been meaning to talk to you about Yara and her—”

“Stop whining. You haven’t even gotten the dick out of his shorts yet. I didn’t interrupt a damn thing. Did I, baby?”

Prodigy gripped Aspen’s chin and told her to stand. She listened and pouted just a bit. Just enough for Prodigy to notice, but not nearly enough for Yara to. She refused to let her see her sweat in any type of fashion. Especially not when it came to Prodigy—the man they were sharing. As stated previously, Prodigy’s hunger for women was an intense one. One wasn’t enough. There was a point in time where Prodigy had multiple, but over the past couple of years, his hunger had been satisfied with just two. Aspen and Yara. Both very beautiful girls from the different sides of the country. Both beautiful...but in very different ways. The contrast between the two of them was so far off that some would assume that Prodigy didn’t have a preference. Which, he didn’t. He was

attracted to the beauty of a woman. So, to him, it didn't matter that Aspen was plus sized. Nor did it matter that Yara was dark skin. They were different, indeed, but beautiful, nonetheless.

In response to Yara's question, Prodigy flicked his wrist, signaling for her to come. Aspen stood where she was, refusing to back away from him. She was pissed because she knew Yara had purposely come into the room to disrupt them. They were constantly fighting for Prodigy's attention. Neither of them wanted to share. This arrangement was made because they *had* to share. If they wanted Prodigy's time. If they wanted a piece of him. Neither of them wanted a *piece* though. They wanted *all* of him but because Prodigy wasn't a one woman's man, they compromised. A piece of him was better than having none of him at all. Their situation wasn't a situation built on polygamy. It was a situation built on desperation, and selfishness.

Yara stood in front of Prodigy, and he raised up from his seat. She looked up at him, with a heavy beating heart. He was always so damn intimidating. It didn't matter that Yara had known and loved him for years, he still had the same effect on her that he had on her the first day that he swept her off her feet. She was with another man, but the minute Prodigy walked into the room, she was his. They hadn't said a single word to one another, but she was ready to risk it all. And she did. Yara was engaged to one of Detroit's biggest drug dealers when she found herself fucking Prodigy in the bathroom of the restaurant they were in that very night. It was something about the way he looked at her that made her want to do forbidden things.

She had been doing forbidden things with and for Prodigy ever since. Yara knew in her heart that she made the right decision leaving her fiancé for Prodigy. It isn't like that situation was peaches and cream. She was in a similar situation then too, except her fiancé, Marko was cheating behind her back. Prodigy gave her a choice. He kept it one hundred percent real with her and never left her in the dark about who he was. He was transparent. Some would say that he was brutally transparent but Yara appreciated the honesty, because he was giving her something that no other man ever had. The truth.

“I haven't seen you all day,” she whined.

She accepted his lifestyle choices, but did that mean she liked it? Of course not. She accepted it because although she wasn't the only one, she was one. It took some getting used to, and on some days she struggled. Some days like today, when she wanted him all to herself. Without Aspen. Just the two of them, in love, cuddled up... you know, a regular relationship. But there was nothing normal about being with Prodigy. Hell, there was nothing normal about him.

“I haven't seen him all day neither...” mumbled Aspen. “But... I was here first. So....”

Aspen respected the way things were, so she couldn't understand why Yara wouldn't. Yara had been doing a lot of disrespectful shit lately and Aspen was over it. She wanted to lay hands on her on several occasions because of it too. But Prodigy wasn't having it. He wanted peace. All of the time, around the clock.

Dealing with two women had its perks, but at the same time, they are women. Prodigy was smart enough to know that everything wouldn't be perfect all of the time. He'd prefer it that way. But he was dealing with two women who loved him with their whole hearts. Of course there was jealousy and cattiness. Which he had the perfect remedy for. Every situation was handled differently. And tonight, he was going to handle things on an entirely different level than he had ever handled issues on before.

"Sit down," said Prodigy, stepping aside so that Yara could have a seat where he once sat.

She glanced over her shoulder at Aspen with a smirk, thinking that victory was hers. Yara thought that because she was slimmer than Aspen was, that Prodigy was more attracted to her. She was wrong. Physically, Prodigy was attracted to them both equally. On some days, he'd be more attracted to Yara, and on some days, like today, he'd be more attracted to Aspen and that attraction had absolutely nothing to do with physical appearance but everything to do with behavior. Neither of them understood him well enough to pick up on that, and he had absolutely no desire to share that little secret with them.

Prodigy stood in front of Aspen, and in once swift movement, picked her up and backed her up against the floor-to-ceiling windows. Aspen wrapped her bare legs around his waist and her arms around his neck, with a gasp.

Yara started to stand, but Prodigy stopped her.

"Don't move. Sit yo' ass right there," he commanded, with flaring nostrils before turning his attention back to a

panting Aspen.

Aspen kept her legs wrapped around his waist, while Prodigy lowered his basketball shorts, letting them pool around his ankles on the floor. He bent down a little and gravitated his hips. Just as he expected, Aspen wasn't wearing any panties. Easy access pussy. On demand pussy. Uncomplicated pussy. The type of pussy that Prodigy appreciated it. Aspen yelped, in pleasure as she dug her nails into his shoulders... just the way he liked it. Prodigy gritted his teeth, with tight lips and fucked Aspen, with no mercy, up against the window, creating smears that the housekeeper would have to clean tomorrow.

To get a better view, Prodigy gripped Aspen's ass cheeks and picked her up, away from the window. He carried all two-hundred-and-sixty pounds of her, with ease, over to the couch sitting directly next to where Yara was seated. He had to make sure her eyes were on him, as he wanted his message to be delivered with clarity. Prodigy didn't care about the tears in Yara's eyes. Nor did he care about her trembling, pursed bottom lip. She wanted his attention—he was giving it to her. She knew, just like Aspen knew, that he didn't do mess. Yara felt that she had the upper hand in the situation. She felt that, since she was the first, that she was above Aspen in some sort of way. She was wrong. And Prodigy wanted to show her that. Telling her wouldn't have the same effect as showing her would. Oh no. He wanted her to feel it. He wanted her to humble herself.

A woman like Yara... beautiful... modelesque... slim... wouldn't be able to humble herself without a little push. Prodigy wanted her to know that they were on the same

level. Prodigy needed Yara to understand that he didn't play favorites. Neither of them held a place in his heart though. They were around for one reason. To serve him pussy whenever, and however he wanted.

Three

“Ruby... did you use the last of my body spray?” asked Violet, with her hand on her hip frowning at her little sister.

Ruby was the youngest of the three. At seventeen, she was a spoiled know it all with little to no respect for the people around her. She had selfish tendencies that drove her big sisters insane.

“Why’d you ask me? I bet you didn’t ask Bleu,” said Ruby, offended, flickering through the channels on their outdated 32-inch TV.

“Because I know you did it!” yelled Violet, lugging the empty bottle of Japanese Cherry Blossom by Body Fantasies at Ruby, hitting her in the back of the head with it. “Stop touching my shit, Ruby! Fuck!”

Violet was livid. That was her last bit of body mist. She had the small bottle of cheap perfume for months. She’d gotten a four-piece set from Rite-Aid almost a year ago and had been using little by little to make it last. She only used one or two spritzes a day. And since she was on her last bottle, she had been really careful not to use much especially since she didn’t have a steady income anymore. All she had left was enough for her interview today, and Ruby had selfishly took it upon herself to use it all. Of course Ruby did it. Every time

she was called out on doing something she wasn't supposed to do, she put her defenses up and tried to turn it around on someone else. In the past, when they were all kids, she'd get away with it, since she was the youngest out of the bunch. Their parents spoiled Ruby rotten, which ended up making living with her in her teenage years, hell.

“Ow! I know you didn't just hit me in the head with that!” yelled Ruby, at the top of her lungs like a mad woman. She quickly jumped up from the couch and marched the short distance to Violet.

This was an everyday thing between Ruby and Violet. They argued and fought most of the week, stressing Bleu completely out, as if she hadn't already had enough on her plate. Neither of the girls cared to admit it, but they were alike in many ways that made them bump heads on plenty occasions. Just like Violet, Ruby was headstrong, and feisty. Although a lot of their fights were caused by her, she never backed down or apologized for anything she's done. She was horrible at taking accountability for her selfish actions.

“What are you two doing now!?” yelled Bleu, coming out of her room in her bra and panties, rushing over to break the fight up.

“Stop it Violet! Get off of her!”

Violet was sitting on top of Ruby, hitting her in the face, while Ruby held onto a fistful of her fresh bun, yanking her head to the side. The two were having an all-out brawl, as if they weren't blood related. Which, again, was the norm. Later on tonight, Violet would be helping Ruby with her Calculus homework like nothing even happened. That was the

way things were in the McClain household. They fought and argued, but at the end of the day the love they had for each other always overpowered that. Their bond was thick, and they were deeply devoted to one another because ultimately, all they had were each other.

Bleu pried Violet's hair from Ruby's hands and held her arms down. "Violet get up! How are you fighting, and we have somewhere to be in thirty minutes!"

"She used the last of my Japanese Cherry Blossom! Why does she stay touching my stuff, Bleu!? God!" yelled Violet, as she held onto the back of the peeling, brown couch to pull herself up. "I can never have things to myself!"

"Calm down, Vi. You can use some of my spray," offered Bleu.

"I didn't touch her stuff! She's lying on me!" Lied Ruby, getting herself together.

Violet frowned and rolled her eyes. "I don't want to smell like you, Bleu."

Violet turned away and went back into the room she sadly shared with Ruby. The house only had two bedrooms. Before their parents passed away, all three girls were cramped up in what was considered the master bedroom, although it was barely that. The room was small and stuffy. Even with the creaky, uncomfortable bunkbed they slept in, there was barely any space to move around. Bleu and Heaven shared the smallest of the rooms, since they didn't need much space since Heaven was only three and still shared a bed with her mother. Bleu might've had the smallest room, but Violet was certain that she didn't have to suffer the way she was suffering. Every

day, Violet wished she could move out. She was sick of Ruby and her childish, selfish ways. Every day was misery. If she wasn't trying to hog up all of the old fan, she was on the phone late at night, talking loudly, as if Violet wasn't in the bunk above trying to sleep. The worst of it all was how she always used Violet's things. She hated that more than anything because she didn't have much to begin with.

Violet slammed the door to the bedroom and stood at the cluttered dresser, staring at her reflection with tears in her eyes. She had a fresh scratch on her forehead, that stood out prominently against her light skin. She was pissed and would have to change her hairstyle to hide it. Sighing, she undid her messy bun and parted out enough for a thick bang. She loved Rosebury and couldn't see a life outside of it, but she knew she needed to figure out a plan to move out. At twenty-three, she was over sharing rooms, and having childish ass schoolgirl fights. She just wanted her own space and she knew that as long as she stayed home she'd never have that.

Violet closed her eyes and sighed once she was finished putting her top knot bun in. She placed both hands flat on the faded dresser top. Opening her eyes she decided that she was going to take advantage of this opportunity. *I need this job. Vi, keep your attitude in check and a smile on your damn face*, thought Violet to herself before adding a few finishing touches to her sleek, curly edges. She told herself that today would be a good day, despite Ruby annoying her by using all of her spray. She had to walk into the interview with a clear head, because if she didn't, she'd be throwing the job away before the interview even started by frowning the whole time.



“You know, you have to smile, Vi.”

Violet adjusted her pencil skirt and twisted her lips up with discomfort. “You sure have all of the answers, Bleu. This morning it was, *‘you know you have to dress up, Vi’*. Now you’re telling me to smile! I know I have to smile.”

“I’m just saying. You look mean as hell,” said Bleu, frowning at her sister.

“Of course I look mean. It’s hot, B.”

It was oddly, a scorching eighty-five degrees and both young women were walking up the steep Clairmont Hill. *Candy*, Bleu’s ‘trusty’ red 2004 Chevrolet Impala, wasn’t so trusty today. Twenty minutes before their interview at the *‘house being built behind the big gate’*, the car decided not to start. For the last two years, ‘*Candy*’ had gotten Bleu and the family everywhere they needed to go. Yeah, ‘*she*’ started and sometimes cut off when ‘*she*’ wanted to. But for the most part, *she* had been dependable. Bleu had even tried the ‘let’s wait ten minutes’ trick but that did nothing but slow them down even more because ‘*she*’ still wouldn’t start.

Now, they were dripping sweat, walking, trying to get to an interview they were already five minutes late for. By time they made it to Clairmont Manor, they would be at least fifteen minutes late. Violet wanted to turn back, and she would have, if it wasn’t for being without a job for three weeks now.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Both girls looked over their shoulders at the sound of a car approaching. It was Opal, riding up in her burgundy Chevrolet Cavalier. She pulled next to them and rolled the passenger window down.

“Hey! Y’all want a ride?!”

They nodded and quickly got inside. If it wasn’t for the heat, Violet probably would have convinced Bleu to decline. She didn’t let people in. She was guarded and had a deep disinterest in building friendships—especially with anybody that called Toni their best friend.

Before Violet and Bleu could settle in, Opal was speeding off.

“Geez Opal. Slow down!” yelled Bleu, holding on to the door handle, as Opal sped 50 MPH up the steepest part of the hill. “Why are you speeding?! Oh God!”

“Because I’m late. I can’t believe I’m late,” panicked Opal, adjusting the white collar of her buttoned top.

“Why did you stop then?” asked Violet, slightly frowning, eyeing Opal up and down.

“Yeah,” said Bleu, eyeing Opal in a similar fashion. “We didn’t want to slow you down.”

Opal glanced over at Bleu and then briefly looked over her shoulder at Violet. “I shouldn’t have stopped. I should have just let y’all walk and be later than y’all already are so that y’all wouldn’t get the job,” She paused, shaking her head.

“It’s some weird sex trafficking shit, isn’t it? I fucking knew it!” yelled Violet, getting ready to get out of the car. “He’s using you to get us, isn’t he?! I told you Bleu!”

A couple of days ago, the ladies were at their usual hangout spot—Violet’s front porch. Opal and Albany were bragging about how they were hired at Clairmont Manor.

Opal sucked her teeth and hit the locks before Violet could open the door. “No, silly. I told you two, it’s nothing like that...”

“Then, what is the problem, Opal? If there is a problem you need to unlock these doors and let us out,” said Bleu with raised eyebrows, and her hand tucked inside of her old, worn purse. She was holding onto a can of mase that no one even knew she had.

Bleu knew Violet could be a little over the top, but even she was questioning Opal’s actions. Something wasn’t right so she was prepared to use her mase if need be.

“The problem is the owner. Everything else is perfect. But the owner...,” stressed Opal, with an annoyed sigh. “If it wasn’t for the pay I wouldn’t have come back. It could be a pretty toxic work environment if you allow it to control you the way that he tries to...” she paused again and gripped the steer wheel, twisting it just a little with pursed lips. “That man... He is hell.”

“Why didn’t you say anything the other day? Shit, you were happy to be working there. Talking about how it’s the best job you’ve ever worked at,” questioned Violet with a cocked brow.

“That was before I met him. I hadn’t seen him then,” said Opal, shaking her head once she made it to the top of the hill, where the land was flat. She’d made it to the top, but there was still some ways to go, as they drove along the well-

manicured, tree lined, road towards the big black gate. Violet's heart rate picked up with anticipation as they approached. She was excited to finally see what sat behind the walls. When Opal stopped at the gate and leaned out of the window to press a button on a small intercom, Violet nearly lost it. *Okay, who the hell are these people? An intercom!?* She thought to herself, with raised eyebrows. Finally, for the first time since the newcomers had arrived, she felt that excitement that everyone else had been feeling. She understood now.

Opal announced herself, and Violet looked up at the gate, as it slowly opened, with her bottom lip pinched between her teeth. Once the gate was completely opened, her mouth fell open, in sheer astonishment at the beauty before her. The house... it was massive. Could it even be called that? It was more of an estate, and the biggest piece of property Violet had ever laid her eyes on. To call it a house would be an insult. *Clairmont Manor* certainly should have been called *Clairmont Palace*, because to Violet, that's what it was. She had never seen anything as beautifully constructed as *Clairmont Manor* was. She couldn't begin to imagine what the other side of the property looked like. Because there were multiple pieces to this beauty. She wanted to explore the entire grounds of it. The artistry of the 'palace' was breathtaking. It was an architectural masterpiece. From the limestone and brick exterior, to the grand water fountain sitting in the middle of the driveway. The traces of what Clairmont Hill used to be were washed away, and oddly Violet wasn't at all bothered by it. She had always appreciated beauty, and this... this was a masterpiece.

As Opal pulled into the circle driveway, she complained and complained. Meanwhile, the house had Violet in a trance, with her mouth hanging open like a kid at a candy store. She was so fixated on it that she hadn't heard a thing that Opal had said since the gate.

"Vi. Are you ready," questioned Bleu with a little giggle, looking over her shoulder at her sister with furrowed brows and a slight smile on her face.

Violet slurped catching slobber before it could trickle down her bottom lip. She swallowed, and nodded, her curly bang falling into her eyes. She was ready, indeed. She had to see the inside of it. If the outside of the home had her in awe, she just knew the inside was going to take her breath away.

They stepped out of the car, and Violet pulled her lips into her mouth, gawking up at the house.

"How many bedrooms?" Violet asked Opal, scanning every one of the windows, wondering what lied behind them.

"In total? Or in each wing? There are seven in total. Seven bedrooms. Look... I have to go. I'll catch up with you two later," Opal said, as she hurried towards the side of the house. "I'm sure... I'm sure everything will go fine," she tossed over her shoulder, as she practically ran to the back.

Violet and Bleu looked at each other with raised eyebrows.

"You still have your job at Pops. You don't need to be here, B," said Violet, trying to give her sister a way out. She was the one who *needed* the job. Bleu didn't need to be here. But then again, the money was ten times better than what she

was making at Pops. Still, she could easily bow out if things were a little too scary for her.

Bleu interlocked her arm with Violet's and walked away. "I'm not leaving," she said with a sweet smile. "I'm being given an opportunity to give Heaven a better life. I'm here."

Violet smiled and looked up at the massive house with a sigh. Seven bedrooms. She wondered how many bathrooms there were. The wheels in her mind were rolling and she was starting to think in overdrive. She wondered the square footage and made a mental note to look it up on the computer at Rosebury Public Library this weekend. She wished she could find out sooner, but unfortunately she didn't have internet at home, nor on her outdated flip phone. She was lucky to have the prepaid phone she had. There was rarely ever any minutes on it, but she had just enough for emergencies, which happened on rare occasions.

Violet and Bleu ascended the grand staircase to the front door, talking about what they thought working there would be like. The young women joked about getting lost and having too much work. They were trying to make light of the tense situation Opal had made it out to be. Both girls hearts were beating at a rapid rate, afraid of what this boss would be like. Violet was more so worried about having another boss from hell. Bleu was concerned about how flexible he'd be, having Heaven and all. Ms. Gladys across the street kept Heaven whenever Bleu needed her to, which is where she was at this morning. But, Ms. Gladys, at seventy years old, wasn't as dependable as Bleu would need her to be. Sighing, Bleu

decided that she'd stress about that when and if the time ever came.

Violet pulled her arm from Bleu's and hit the doorbell. They exchanged glances and shrugged, while they waited for someone to answer. Looking down at her watch, Violet saw that she was now twenty minutes late for her interview, and Bleu was rather early for hers. She looked up, rolled her eyes and rubbed her lips together, pissed off. If it wasn't for Bleu's car giving out, they would have been on time and worrying about not getting the job wouldn't even be on her mind. Not only were they late, but Violet had sweat stains on her burgundy button up top that were way too visible to conceal. She looked down at them and growled with anger, her nostrils flaring.

“Relax,” whispered Bleu. “You look fine, Vi.”

Violet gave Bleu a once over and turned her lips up into a frown. “I don't. and neither do you. You look a sweaty mess and—”

“Welcome to Clairmont Manor. You have an interview this morning?” asked the older black woman, answering the door with a smile on her face.

She was dressed in a maid uniform similar to Opal's, except hers had a more formal look to it. Violet could tell that she was in charge in some sort of way. Another thing Violet noticed was that, she wasn't from Rosebury. Both Violet and Bleu noticed that off top. They knew just about every older person in town, and this lady, wearing a nametag that read ‘Ms. Shug’ didn't look familiar one bit. Especially not with the name Ms. Shug.

“Yes, we both have an interview. Mine is at 10:00, my sisters at 10:30,” said Violet, with an uncomfortable, tight smile, crossing her arms over her chest, in an effort to hide the sweat stains.

Ms. Shug looked Violet up and down and opened the towering double, glass doors. “Now, usually, I do the interviews, but today I’m training so you’ll be interviewing with Mister and Mister ain’t as easygoing as I am.” She snorted, shaking her head at Violet. “You’re already late, you don’t want to walk into his office with that... that... spirit. Uncross your arms. You look mad. Put a smile on your face and wipe that sweat from your brow.”

Ms. Shug was something else. Definitely not what Violet expected her to be. She had the aura of a grandmother, but the sass of someone much younger. She was a feisty little thing, barely five feet, with the presence and attitude of someone much bigger.

Violet drew back, slightly offended. “Excuse me, ma’am?”

She was so put off by Ms. Shug’s sharp tongue that she hadn’t even paid attention to the beauty she had been wondering about for months. Her eyes were fixated on Ms. Shug, when they should have been fixated on the double-layer, raindrop crystal chandelier hanging from the towering ceiling of the entryway. Had she been paying attention, the beauty would have surely held her attention, when the gems Ms. Shug was trying to drop on her should have been. So, in away, it was good that her attention was elsewhere.

Ms. Shug looked her up and down again and shook her head. “If you want him to hire you, listen. If you can’t do that, you might as well turn around and go right back down that hill, sweetheart.” She turned her attention to Bleu and gave her smile. “Now this... this is more like it. She don’t even care about her running mascara.” She laughed and pulled a napkin from the pocket on the front her apron. “Here, sweetie. Wipe that off.”

Of course Bleu had it all together. Of course Bleu wasn’t the one with a standoffish ‘spirit’. Bleu always got it right. Bleu glanced at Violet, slightly shrugged, and took the napkin from the feisty old lady before dapping at the inner corners of her brown eyes. Violet licked her dry lips and finally, listened. She uncrossed her arms and put a smile on her face. Ms. Shug looked over her shoulder at her and smiled, finally. Her eyes averted to the sweat stains.

“I see,” she stated, eyeing Violet up and down. With a giggle she continued. “He would have noticed them anyway, chile. There are a few things you should know, if you really, *truly* want this job...”

“I’m listening,” Violet reassured her, paying extra attention to her, instead of the white marble floors she was walking on. They were so shiny that if Violet looked down, she’d be able to see her reflection in them.

She had mistaken Ms. Shug’s help as attitude. All in all, Ms. Shug wanted the girls to get the job. One look at the both of them, and she felt that they would fit in perfectly at Clairmont Manor. It wasn’t because they were both beautiful. It was because they had both come dressed to impress. Despite

the obvious discomfort they were in from the heat, they looked very nice. Violet looked sophisticated and classy in her beige, knee-length pencil skirt, burgundy tucked button up top, and nude flats. Her curly, messy top bun, and bushy bang gave her somewhat of a schoolteacher look. Not to mention, she wore absolutely no makeup. To see someone in their natural state was refreshing for Ms. Shug who was used to women wearing a face full of makeup.

Bleu had a similar look, except, her pencil skirt was just above the knee, and in olive green. She wore a white collared shirt, and three-inch heels. Unlike Violet, Bleu was like a model in high heeled stilettos. Her bushy, curly mane was brushed over to the side, held in place by a few bobby pins. She too had a fresh face, with the exception of just a tad bit of eyeliner, lining her lower lash line and just a little bit of mascara.

“Getting the job is the easy part,” stated Ms. Shug, before motioning for both girls to follow her to the elevator made of glass, sitting a few feet away from the grand staircase in the great foyer. “Too old for stairs, chile,” she said with a giggle. “Any who... getting the job is the easy part now. Well, hell, I don’t know about that anymore. Considering miss missy right here is late.” She cut her eyes at Violet and shook her head. “Mister is in a good mood this morning so you might be okay. Getting the job, like I said, it’s easy. It’s keeping the job that’s going to be a challenge. One thing you should know about Mister is that, he’s a peculiar, particular young man. He’s precise, and requires the same from his staff...”

Bleu swallowed, and held her clutch-purse tighter, worried about this ‘Mister’ guy. She could tell by the way Ms.

Shug described him that having a reliable sitter was necessary. Ruby could keep her after school hours, but the shift was from nine to five. She was worried that she'd be stuck at Pops forever and would never get out of Rosebury.

“*Peculiar...*” repeated Violet, with her head slightly cocked to the side with curiosity. “How so?”

The elevator doors opened, and they stepped on. Violet and Bleu stood behind Ms. Shug. As they ascended, Violet was finally able to appreciate the exquisiteness around her. She was in complete awe. She couldn't believe she was standing on an elevator... inside of a house... on Clairmont Hill. A glass, see-through, elevator at that. This was big time. This was nothing like she could have imagined. She spent many days, weeks, months... wondering what was being built. For days, weeks, months... Violet tried to imagine what sat at the top of the hill. A house crossed her mind. In fact, it was the most practical to Violet. But *this* wasn't a house. This was... mind-blowing. Who needed this much house? Who needed an elevator? How many people lived here? Did Ms. Shug live here? Where was she from? Did she come into town with them? How many bathrooms were there? Kitchens? How many rooms would she be required to clean? The wheels in her mind were working overtime, as they usually are.

“You'll have to see for yourself,” said Ms. Shug as the elevator doors opened.

Violet looked around, drooling over the layout of the home. As they ascended to the third floor, she admired the balcony overlooking the foyer, on the second floor. There wasn't much to see, as the elevator traveled up. Nothing but

long, marble lined hallways, covered with exquisite Persian rugs. She spent most of her short ride on the elevator turned around, gushing over the floor-to-ceiling windows of the back of the house, giving a clear view of the infinity pool and the beautiful woman swimming in it out back.

“This is... this is amazing,” mumbled Violet, with raised eyebrows, and bright eyes.

She had a keen eye for all things beautiful. She appreciated things that most people didn't take a second look at. Like columns, architecture, landscaping, crown molding and all of the detail that came with it.

The elevator dinged, snatching Violet's attention from the pool. When they stepped off, Ms. Shug instructed Bleu to have a seat on the velvet and glass, blue bench sitting a few feet away elevator along the eggshell colored wall. Bleu nodded, thanked her and then gave Violet a sweet smile. Violet gave Bleu a half smile, as she followed behind the older woman who was oddly, a little hard to keep up with.

“You have some fire to you, don't you?” asked Ms. Shug, as they walked down the brightly illuminated hallway, compliments to the ceiling made of glass. Violet wondered if the owner had some obsession with glass because it was all over the place.

“I'm not sure of what you're asking me,” replied Violet, before swiping a curl from her eye.

Ms. Shug looked over her shoulder at Violet with a light giggle. “You know what I'm asking you girl. You ain't like the other little bright-eyed girls in Rosebury. I can see it.”

Ms. Shug was right, but Violet didn't tell her that. Instead, she smiled and walked alongside the woman, wondering how she had picked up on that in such a short period of time. Violet was nothing like the women of Rosebury. On many occasions her father told her that Rosebury was too small for her big personality. But Violet couldn't see herself living anywhere but Rosebury. It was home to her.. where she was most comfortable. Besides, big cities meant too many people. Violet didn't like to be around many people, and she enjoyed the peace and quiet she got when she alone. She didn't have to worry about crowded stores, crowded malls, or waiting too long to be seated at the town's only fancy restaurant, Ponderosa Steakhouse. Things were simple in Rosebury, and Violet considered herself a simple girl, although she was much more than that.

A few seconds later, Violet and Ms. Shug made it to two, towering mahogany double doors.

“Smile,” whispered Ms. Shug before knocking on the door twice.

Violet nodded, and smiled, resting her arms down in front of her, crossed at the wrists, in the daintiest way.

“It's open,” said a voice from behind.

A voice with a tone so commanding that the hairs on the back of Violet's neck stood up and chills ran through her body, creating a thin sheet of goosebumps on her skin. Her eyebrows snapped together, and Ms. Shug reminded her to smile, because the one she had put on was gone.

Violet relaxed her tensed face and smiled, wondering, with a pounding heart, what the face to the person with the

deep voice looked like. Less than a second later, Ms. Shug opened the door.

“Mister. Your 10:00 appointment is here. She had some troubles making it up the hill,” said Ms. Shug with a smile, as she stepped aside so Violet could walk in.

“Ms. Shug,” said ‘Mister’ with raised eyebrows and a slight smirk. “What’d I tell you about calling me Mister?”

Ms. Shug laughed and waved him off. “And what I tell you about trying to correct me every time I say it? We’ve been at this for how many years now?”

Ms. Shug approached ‘Mister’ and glanced over her shoulder at Violet, who’s eyes were glued on this ‘Mister’ guy, wondering how tall he was. He was so big. Not just tall, but he was a little on the thicker side. All muscle, but it looked damn good on him. She rubbed her lips together just stared at him. Not a smile in sight. She was just... in a daze, mesmerized by the beauty in front of her.

He was fine. The type of fine that commanded the attention of everyone in the room. He wasn’t just fine though. He was alluring. He was invigorating. His presence wasn’t only commanding because of his mouth salivating looks neither. Mister wasn’t the type of man that could blend in with people in a room. Oh God no. When he entered a room you didn’t just see him... you smelled him. You felt him. The feeling of him was more intense than anything else about him. It was the poise and the demeanor of his stance. With his hands stuffed into the front pockets of his black dress pants, and the sharpness of his white polo style top, he didn’t just command attention. He demanded it. He required it.

Violet wasn't only taken back by how good he looked. She couldn't believe a black man owned the luxurious Clairmont Manor, at the top of Clairmont Hill. Not only was he black, but he was young. And he was fine. And he was... a fucking boss in every sense of the word. At least that's what Violet thought, gazing up at him in a daze, wanting to get closer to him. Curious about how big his hands were. Curious about how big his...

"Violet McClain," he greeted, as he stepped from behind the desk he was standing at, with an extended hand.

Violet's eyes averted to his lingering hand, and she swallowed. His hand was bigger than both of her petite hands put together. And when their hands met, she was surprised at how soft they were. As they always are, the wheels in her mind began to run rampant. She wondered what he did for a living. She wondered who he had to be and what he had to do to get the money to afford this... this castle of a home.

"Prodigy," he said, introducing himself to her.

"Hi. It's a pleasure to meet you. Look, I'm sorry I'm late I—"

"Own it," he interrupted before pulling his hand away, and stuffing them both back into his pockets, eyes locked on hers.

Ms. Shug smiled and walked out of the office, her eyes lingering on Violet a little on her way out.

Violet's eyebrows snapped together in confusion.

"Excuse me?" she asked.

“Have a seat, Ms. McClain. You’ve already wasted...” he looked down at his Rolex watch for the time. “Twenty minutes of my time. Don’t waste any more of it by giving me useless excuses for your tardiness. You have about ten minutes to impress me.”

Violet drew back, with a snappy reply locked and loaded. But then she remembered: she didn’t have a job and her snappy attitude was the cause of losing the last one. She had never been one to back down from a heated conversation full of sarcasm and insults, but she felt like she deserved the attitude Prodigy was giving her.

Violet pulled her full lips into her mouth and finally took a seat at his desk, expecting him to sit at his, but he didn’t. Instead, he pushed his desk back a little and pulled a chair up, placing it directly in front of her. He was so close to her that his knees brushed up against hers when he sat down. As if he wasn’t already close enough, he leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, gazing into her eyes, as if he was trying to get a glimpse of her soul.

“Am I too close?” he questioned, slightly mesmerized by her honey brown eyes.

Before Violet walked into his office, Prodigy was ready to cancel the interview. In fact, he had plans of canceling it the moment Ms. Shug brought her in. But when he turned around and took in the classic beauty before him, he decided to take another route. He wanted to hear what she had to say.

He was too close. He was in her personal space, but she didn’t mind because she wanted this. From the moment she laid her eyes on him, she wanted it. She wanted to get a

closer look at him. Prodigy's face was masterfully crafted; some of God's finest work. His bone structure was perfection, and his lips were... they were a beautiful shade of pale pink... full... and succulent. His eyes were a deep, dark shade of dark brown. So dark that if they weren't staring into each other's eyes, she'd mistake them for black.

"No, you're not too close."

Violet couldn't quite understand why but she wanted him closer than he was. She wanted a closer look. She wanted him so close that she'd be able to count each one of his eyelashes, individually. She was caught off guard by this attraction for a man she didn't even know. It was *him*. It was his aura... the allure of him. It was quite captivating, honestly.

"Tell me about yourself," he began, studying her as she was studying him.

"I'm twenty-three. I stay—"

"I read your application. I would like to know things that aren't listed, Violet," he interrupted.

"I was getting to that, but like before, you interrupted me," she shot back, eyebrow cocked, attitude slowly arising, ready to walk out of the door.

Screw this. I don't have to be disrespected by anyone, thought Violet. She had the urge to cross her arms over her chest, but she knew that wasn't interview-acceptable. Pauly's was her first and only job and she didn't even have to interview for that. So this was new to her. Bleu prepped her for it the night before, telling her what good interview etiquette

was and such. Most of Bleu's teaching had gone completely out of the window, though.

Prodigy motioned for her to continue, before sitting back against the chair. Violet slightly frowned, disappointed about the distance.

"My apologies," he apologized. "You may continue."

I was going to continue regardless. I don't need your permission to speak. Violet could see what Opal was complaining about. She could tell that he was a lot to deal with and she hadn't even been hired yet.

Although he told her she could continue, Violet was stumped, and speechless. She didn't know what to tell him that wasn't already on her application.

"Could you," she paused and cleared her throat. "Could you repeat the question?"

"I didn't ask a question. I told you to tell me something about yourself. *Impress me,*" he stressed, before looking down at his watch again.

She looked around the room and bit down on her bottom lip, trying to think of something to say, that wasn't stated on her application.

"Um... I've stayed in Rosebury my whole life."

Prodigy's brows dipped. "Why? Why limit yourself to a few miles when there is a big world out there for you to explore?"

Violet shrugged. "I don't know. I'm comfortable here, I guess. It's home. I have absolutely no desire to be anywhere

else.”

He leaned forward, and Violet sighed, swallowing, slightly inhaling the intoxicating scent of a fragrance she had never smelled before. This scent was fancy. It smelled expensive, like it didn't belong on the shelves of stores where you could buy dinner, clothes, *and* household items.

“Because of comfort... are you afraid of change? Of being uncomfortable?”

This interview wasn't going anything like what Bleu said interviews were like. Prodigy hadn't asked about her work experience. He didn't ask about transportation. Nor did he ask her what she felt she could bring to the company. He was asking personal questions and Violet was confused.

“I'm sorry. Is this a job interview or...?”

“Yes, it is a job interview,” he stated, before lowering his eyes from hers, to the sweat stains at her armpits. “Please... Answer the question.”

Because she noticed him noticed them, she crossed her arms over her chest and looked away in embarrassment. “I'm not afraid of anything but being poor and homeless. So, are you going to give me the job, or not?”

She was embarrassed, so her defenses were up, and she wanted to leave the interview. She didn't like to be in vulnerable situations. Violet knew that her reckless decision to be snappy with him could very well cost her the job she needed but now was too late for regrets. She'd said the first thing that came to mind, and that's gotten her in trouble more

times than she could count. She just hoped and prayed that this wasn't another one of those times.

Prodigy smirked and ran the tip of his tongue over his bottom lip, wondering how he'd respond to that. He wasn't expecting that from her. Not from a young innocent girl from Rosebury. Or was she innocent at all? Prodigy's eyes washed over Violet, taking notice to the slight frown in her brow and realized that there was more to Violet than he thought. She wasn't quiet. She wasn't a good girl. She was far from innocent. She had fire. She had personality. She was deemed interesting to him. And she had indeed impressed him.

But not enough. Violet would be complicated and with a life full of complications, he didn't need to add anymore complication to it. She was a spitfire. She'd challenge him. She'd disobey him. And he couldn't have that. He needed structure. He needed obedience. He needed control. All of which he wouldn't get from her.

Prodigy tugged on his beard, slowly washing his eyes over her in a fashion similar to the water rolling down her body during her morning shower. His eyes, however, lingered on her slightly parted lips. They were both full, but small... with a permanent pucker. Prodigy wondered what it'd be like to kiss her. His eyes then traveled further north, until they were stuck on her honey toned irises he wouldn't mind staring into all day, and all night. Violet was... she was strikingly beautiful. Mesmerizing even. She belonged in magazines. Why was she here? In Rosebury? Rosebury wasn't special enough for a woman like her. At least, that's the way Prodigy felt about her.

Watching him, watch her, made Violet's hands go clammy and her heart rate to intensify. *What is he staring at?* Violet wondered. Crossing her arms tighter over her chest, she tried to, again, hide what he had already noticed. Prodigy made her feel self-conscious, like there was something on her face that he was staring at. The way he stared at her, as if he was studying something... it made her nervous.

“If you were truly afraid of being poor and homeless, you would have taken this interview more seriously,” said Prodigy, clearing his throat, blinking away the trance her beauty shockingly had him in. He pushed back on the chair to stand and said, “Ms. Shug showed you the way in, you can show yourself out.”

Violet drew back, deeply offended by his rejection. Not only was she offended, but she was caught off guard too. Sure, she had gotten snappy. Yeah, she was late. But the way he looked at her. The way he stared, as if he could see straight through her... The intimacy and the desire behind his gaze... it told her that this interview would go in her favor. She could feel the attraction he had for her radiating from his body, oozing from his pores.

But he said no.

He rejected her. And rejection didn't sit well with Violet. It never had. She wasn't used to it. So, when he told her to show herself out, it stung. Literally. Like being pricked with a hundred needles.

“You have a good day, Mr. Prodigy,” Said Violet, aggressively pushing the chair back and standing. Looking

him up and down, with a deep scowl on her face, she retracted that well wish. “On second thought. Don’t.”

Prodigy, tugging on his beard, watched her hips move as fiercely as her attitude was, as she marched out of his office, making sure to slam both double doors behind her.

Four

“What happened? Why didn’t you give her the job? I told you why she was late,” asked Ms. Shug with a frown, as she tidied around Prodigy’s office, purposely taking her sweet time.

“Her not getting the job had nothing to do with her being late, but everything to do with her attitude,” replied Prodigy, slightly turning left and right in his swivel chair.

An hour had passed since his interview with Violet and she was still on his mind. He’d interviewed her sister and had given her the job and everything, but his mind kept going back to Violet. Prodigy was having a hard-enough time getting her off his mind as is, so it didn’t help that Ms. Shug was prying, asking questions about why he didn’t hire her.

“You probably did what you always do,” mumbled Ms. Shug, grabbing the half-empty trash bag from the trashcan next to Prodigy’s desk.

“What do I always do, Ms. Shug,” asked Prodigy with a smirk, curious to see what she’d say.

“Picked with her. You looked at her sweat stains, didn’t you, boy?” she asked, with a side eye, causing Prodigy’s smirk to turn into a full-blown grin. He didn’t answer her question, but then again, he didn’t have to. The grin gave Ms. Shug the answer she knew he wouldn’t give.

Prodigy had definitely glanced at Violet's sweat stains on purpose. Everything was a test for him, and he was testing her. She replied with an attitude, like he knew she would. Once she mentioned how she stayed in Rosebury because she was comfortable there, he knew that she played things safe. And to be safe is to be self-conscious. Safe people have a certain self-awareness about themselves that makes them that way. He was playing mind games with her and it had costed her a job. Which probably had something to do with his inability to get her off his mind. Did he feel guilty? Was it the fact that he even felt guilty that made him think about her more?

“Good Lord, son. At an interview?” sulked Ms. Shug, shaking her head at Prodigy with dismay. “Why’d you do that to her?”

Prodigy stood up and headed out of the office. On his way out, he placed his hand on her shoulder and gave it a light squeeze, steady ignoring her questions.

He trusted Ms. Shug enough to leave her there alone. She was more like family than she was help. Prodigy met her many, many years ago, when he was eleven, staying at one of the group homes. She was his neighbor and the sweetest woman he'd ever met. She used to bake cookies for all of the kids at the home. Sometimes, she'd even pay Prodigy to do little odd jobs, like take her trashcan to the curb for trash day or mow the lawn and shovel snow. They disconnected, obviously, when Prodigy was thirteen and sent to a new group home on the other side of town. They didn't connect again until years later, when Prodigy was at the Four Seasons in California.

He was both stunned and delighted to see her working there, as a housekeeper. When they saw each other, they hugged, and talked like the old acquaintances they were. Ms. Shug was proud of him. She didn't know what 'Calvetti' was doing for a living, but she could see that whatever he was doing, he was doing very well for himself. She didn't care what it was neither. She was just happy and proud that he wasn't a lowlife statistic. She could see that he was about his business, as he was rarely ever seen wearing anything other than designer suits.

Ms. Shug made sure that she was his housekeeper the entire duration of his week-long trip. Just as excited as she was, Prodigy was too. Ms. Shug had been nothing but nice to him at a point in time when no one else was. On the last day of his trip, he offered her a job at his lakefront home in Gross Pointe Park, Michigan, a high-scale community bordering Detroit. She happily accepted, seeing as though there was nothing in California for her anyhow. She was widowed with no children, so picking up and moving was easy, especially when he mentioned living in the guest house. Prodigy was careful not to offend, although Ms. Shug wouldn't had taken an offense to the offer at all. She packed up and was back in Michigan that following weekend, expenses paid by Prodigy, of course. Over the past six years, Prodigy and Ms. Shug had formed a relationship similar to one of a mother and son.

“Did Prodigy tell y'all about how Trouble was *drooling* all over one of the bitches up the road?” said Yvette, talking to Aspen and Yara, the minute Prodigy entered the formal lounge room of the house, where the bar was.

“No, you know how he is,” stated Aspen, with a smirk on her face, eyeing Prodigy from head to toe as he smoothly swaggered through the room as if he was walking on clouds.

There was music playing at a low level, and an empty gold bottle of Ace of Spades sitting on the bar. Yvette’s glass was full to the rim. Yes, in the middle of the afternoon. She was drunk, in her feelings, recanting Trouble’s flirting for the hundredth time since it happened last week.

“Evie... Don’t start,” said Trouble, looking up at her from his phone.

Yara sipped from her glass but said nothing. She was drinking on a mimosa. She was still in her feelings about the way Prodigy handled her the other night. She had been short with him for days, but Prodigy hadn’t noticed. He had more pressing issues on his mind. Like, securing the land that *Hank’s Diner* sat on.

Yvette raised her glass in his direction, with raised brows. “What do you mean ‘don’t start’? Tuh! All up in that black bitches face like I wasn’t sitting there. I oughta raise up and smack yo ass. That’s what I should’ve done then!”

“Really, Evie?” said Yara with a frown on her face, clearly offended by Yvette’s colorist insults.

“Yara, now you know I love you. I didn’t mean anything by it. You’re a black beauty...” half-heartedly apologized Yvette, before turning her attention back to Trouble. “That bitch up the road? She’s the ashy kind. Just.. she looks dirty.”

“No, for real. Chill. You can insult her without adding color in the mix, aight?” snapped Yara before getting up from the couch to toss the Ace of Spades bottle in the recyclable can behind the bar. She noticed Prodigy notice it. His eyes had been fixed on it since he entered the room. To keep everything chill, she got rid of it before he could say anything.

Yara brushed by him as he continued his stride towards the bar, steady ignoring him like she wasn't staying in his house, rent free, reaping all of the perks that came along with it and the lifestyle he lived. He watched her, eyes turned up, as he poured himself a hefty glass of 1942.

“Okay, okay. You're getting offended for nothing—”

“She's getting offended because your insults are colorist as fuck,” interrupted Aspen with furrowed brows. “You can't say anything else about the girl? Got damn. Being dark isn't a flaw, Yvette.”

Although Yara was confident, and was as Yvette described, a black beauty, she hadn't always felt that way. The insults Yvette was spewing towards Toni, were some of the same insults Yara was on the receiving end of when she was younger. She was called darkie, and dirty all because of the shade of her skin. She didn't always feel as beautiful as she's always been because of the cruel things people used to say about her. Now, as a grown ass woman, no one could tell her shit.

“Insecure women with low self-esteems do that,” said Yara with a shrug. “Dark skin women are popping. And some light skin women... they can't handle it!”

“So, now you two are best friends? Oh God,” Yvette yelled with a sigh, staggering towards the bar, where Prodigy was still standing, gawking at Yara. “Anyway, I’m not insecure. And like I said, Yara. I didn’t mean it like that, so re-fucking-lax!”

What happened the night before wasn’t a painted picture of the relationship between Aspen and Yara. They weren’t friends, but they weren’t enemies neither. They were simply two women, competing for love and attention from the same guy. One couldn’t fault the other for that. Prodigy had the ability to make women do and put up with questionable things. He was truly addictive, for the both of them. They understood what it was and couldn’t be at odds with one another because of it.

Prodigy shifted his eyes away from Yara and put them on Trouble. ‘His bitch’, as he referred to her as on the regular, was drunk and running her mouth too much. Prodigy needed him to fix it before he intervened, which he really, truly didn’t want to. He didn’t like to waste his time on things that he considered frivolous and Yvette’s jealousy was frivolous indeed.

“Evie... come here,” Trouble said, before pushing up from the couch. “Let’s rap for a minute.”

“About what—”

“Bring yo ass on, Yvette!” Trouble yelled, causing her to flinch.

Yvette drew back with raised eyebrows, visibly caught off guard by Trouble yelling at her. Yvette loved it when Trouble got like that. The aggressive, angry shit turned her on.

At times, Yvette would purposely piss Trouble off just so she could get some angry dick. She sat her glass on the side table and ran her hands through her hair as she followed Trouble out of the room.

Aspen turned her glass up to her lips and walked over to Prodigy who had already had his attention fixed on her. She was the sexiest woman he'd ever laid eyes on. Aspen owned every curve, roll, and stretchmark on her body. She exuded confidence and was the embodiment of seduction. It was in every step she took. It was in her eye contact. It was simply Aspen. The sex appeal she possessed is what drew Prodigy to her a couple of years ago. She was everything he expected her to be. Confident, and self-assured. Prodigy knew, that unlike most women, she wouldn't question the motive behind him approaching her. She knew she was fine. She knew she had it like that. And she did. She wasn't just sexy neither. She was beautiful. Her confidence was rightfully owned.

"You're quiet," she said with her head cocked to the side and a half smile on her face.

Prodigy stepped closer to the marble bar top separating them from one another and locked eyes with her.

"I'm always quiet," he said before dragging his top teeth over his bottom lip.

That was true. Prodigy wasn't a man of many words. When he did speak, it was for great reason. He didn't care too much for small talk. He was more of an observer. He liked to watch the room. It was a trait he's always possessed. As a child, he was the same way. His quietness made people leery of him. While in some situations, that would be a good thing,

but as a child, in the system, it was a bad thing. Not only did people think he was weird, but his quietness made him invisible. On adoption days at the center, he was never picked because he was unlike the other kids. He didn't wear a bright smile. He didn't care to show them that he was worthy of adoption. Because Trouble was always under him, they didn't see him neither. The center would be full of people socializing, laughing, and oddly having a great time. But Prodigy and Trouble would be off someplace in the back, in their own little worlds, away from the commotion.

“That’s a fact,” said Aspen with a slight giggle, briskly looking over her shoulder at Yara who was awkwardly standing at the window, looking out into the yard. “What’s wrong with her? Still mad about the other night?”

Prodigy took another sip from his cup. “Shit, probably. Ask her,” he dismissively replied, slightly annoyed by Yara’s presence. “As a matter of fact... Yara!”

Yara looked over her shoulder at him, sighed, and walked his way. The attitude was evident. She did nothing to conceal it. She wanted Prodigy to know she was upset. She needed him to do something about it. When he called her, she knew that, finally, he had noticed her bad mood and gave a damn about it.

“Wassup?” she answered, leaning on the bar, standing next to Aspen with her brow cocked.

“Go home. If being here upsets you so much, take yo ass home, love,” said Prodigy before turning his glass up to his lips.

Love.

Yara hated when he called her that. Aspen did too. The poetic word spilled from his wet lips with a certain sweetness. A certain sweetness that once made Yara's heart thump with passion, and Aspen's knees buckle with desire. But as time passed on, they both realized that the word love... coming from Prodigy was everything but poetic. Some women accused him of using the word in place of the word 'bitch'. Prodigy didn't deny it, although that wasn't the case. If he wanted to call someone a bitch, he'd do just that. It did, however, come from a place of annoyance.

"Seriously?" asked Yara, drawing back, her heart breaking just a little bit.

Things were starting to get out of control and she never wanted that. All she's wanted from Prodigy was a little bit of attention. Some affection. Some... passion. She wanted to see his lips curl up into a smile. She wanted him to talk to her with the same cuteness that he's been talking to Aspen with. To get what she wanted, all Yara had to do was behave. All she had to do was set her pettiness aside and give him the only thing he asked of them. Peace.

Prodigy didn't do drama. He despised it, wholeheartedly. Before he'd argue with a woman, he'd cut her off. The same thing went for men, except he cut men off in different ways.

"What do you think?" He questioned, with his top lip curled up with disgust. Walking from behind the bar, he stood at her and gawked down at her as if she meant absolutely nothing to him, as he treaded by. Women, to Prodigy, were disposable. It was like a revolving door. There were too many

beautiful, unproblematic women in the world from him to choose from. Do you think he cared to lose one? Because they had a few years together? Those years meant absolutely nothing to Prodigy. He was detached, despite the love both Aspen and Yara had for him.

His rude disposition didn't come from a place of disrespect though. He had a low tolerance for anything that didn't serve him well. Once the value of something was lost, Prodigy's interest was lost too. Which was why he had multiple streams of income, in multiple industries.

Yara sucked her teeth and followed behind him. "I want to be here. I never said I didn't want to be here, Prodigy."

Yara did want to be there. She just wanted him to herself. She was three years in, and she was still having a hard time adjusting to the situation. Some days were better than others, but lately, the bad was outweighing the good. With the move to Rosebury, his work, and Aspen, Yara was barely getting any attention from him. She wanted things to go back to the way they were before Aspen came into the picture. After fucking around for about five months, Prodigy told her he met someone. Initially, Yara was offended and ended things with him, refusing to play second fiddle to anybody. But that didn't last long. She missed him—terribly. And a week and a half later, she was at his doorstep, asking him how it would work.

Prodigy had a way with people. He could make just about anybody do just about anything for him. Which was why being told no at Hank's Diner had been weighing so heavy on him. He wasn't used to rejection because rejection rarely came. Although Prodigy could be intimidating at times, he was

very persuasive. He didn't have to use fear as a bargaining chip neither. It was him. It was sort of like a superpower. Money, women, and power came to him with an ease comparable to simply breathing.

"You didn't have to say anything," he replied, glancing over his shoulder at him. "Words don't mean much to me."

Words didn't mean anything to Prodigy. He was a person that watched the way people moved. He picked up on energy and for the past couple of days, Yara's energy has been telling him that she didn't want to be there.

Yara glanced over her shoulder, to make sure Aspen wasn't in earshot, and whispered. "You've been treating me like shit. What happened to treating us, equally, Prodigy? You haven't done that."

Prodigy glanced over at her and snorted. "You want to be treated equally when it's beneficial to you. I know you, Yara. Let's not forget that. I know you very well. You're selfish, but in this situation you're not allowed to be, and that shit kills you."

Yara drew back. "I'm selfish?" she giggled and ran her hand through her hair. "You've got some nerve."

"I do. I own my shit though, love. You—"

"Prodigy, please," she interrupted with an exasperated sigh. "Please..."

"Please what?" Prodigy questioned as he made his way to the kitchen.

"You're," she glanced over her shoulder with tight lips. "*Love*... don't... don't call me that."

His cook, Gavin, had prepared lunch and Prodigy was starving. He hadn't eaten since breakfast at five this morning. So the buffalo chicken wrap platter was extremely mouthwatering.

"Give me more," she said with furrowed brows, and sad eyes. "I...I'm starving, Prodigy. I give... I give you all of me, but you give me bits and pieces of you. That's... that's not fair."

Yara really was starving... Starving for affection. Starving for love. She was smart enough to know that Prodigy didn't love her. She knew he didn't love neither one of them. He couldn't have. If he loved her, he wouldn't make her compete. Which, he really wasn't. But that's how Yara viewed it. She just wanted things to get better. To be even... even... in an odd situation. It was a farfetched request, but she needed him to know that she wanted to be there. She just wanted some things tweaked.

Prodigy stood at the island, grabbed a plate, and piled a few of the bite-sized wraps on it.

"I didn't force you into this situation, Yara," Prodigy reminded her, looking up at her briefly before pouring himself a glass of orange juice.

He refused to feel guilty about any of it. Yara knew what it would be like when she accepted Prodigy's offer. He made it abundantly clear to both Yara and Aspen that they would be treated equally and that he wouldn't be showing anybody any type of favoritism because to him, in a sense, they were one. Two women... with one purpose. He put it all

out on the table and told them both that if it made them uncomfortable that they could leave. They didn't.

Yara rubbed her full lips together with a sigh. "I know that. I'm in, Prodigy. I've been in."

"Aight then. But fix your attitude and understand that what I give you is all that I can give."

"Okay... But Prodigy... say that you haven't been treating Aspen better than you've treated me this week."

"I have been," he admitted, before taking a bite of his food. "Over the last few days, I have treated her better. But that's only because you've been how you've been. Blame yourself for that, Yara."

She swallowed and shook her head, anger rising from the pit of her stomach. "What you did that night..."

"Was necessary."

"It made me uncomfortable."

Prodigy walked from around the island to stand in front of her. "Of course it did. Just like you coming into the room, knowing she was there, made her uncomfortable," he countered, making sense of his wicked ways.

She should have known Prodigy had some sick, twisted, motive behind forcing her to watch him fuck Aspen into a coma the other night. She should have fucking known. The man didn't do anything without motive. He didn't do anything without some sort of message behind his actions. Prodigy was a genius. But at the same time he was a master manipulator, too. A manipulator that she couldn't get enough of.

Yara looked up at him, and a chill ran through her body. A weakness. A weakness that she couldn't avoid. The moment he stood in front of her, it was as if some sort of force was pulling her in his direction. He was magnetic, and she was drawn to him. As weak as she knew she was being, Yara couldn't help it.

He gripped her chin with his freehand, tipped her head back, and kissed her on the lips. "Stay."

He didn't have to tell her to stay. Yara wasn't going anywhere, anytime soon. If ever.



"How do you want it handled?" asked Trouble, sitting out back by the pool with Prodigy, passing a blunt back and forth.

It was late. Closing in on midnight, and the two of them were up, discussing Hank's and what to do about Mr. O'Donnell. Prodigy knew what he wanted to do, but at the same time, what he wanted to do wasn't what he needed to do.

Prodigy ran both his hands down his waves with a sigh before grabbing the blunt from Trouble's fingers. "I'm still undecided."

Trouble sucked his teeth. "All you have to do is call it and it's handled."

Prodigy glanced at him, pulled from the blunt, and said nothing. He wanted a clean slate. He wanted to start over. He

didn't want the demons of his past following him here. He knew that by making one simple call, or text, that his Hank's problem would vanish. But getting rid of a problem in that fashion would only cause more problems down the line. It would be a domino effect. What he could get away with in the D, he wouldn't be able to get away with out here. Not in Rosebury. Not in Littleburg. Out here, he had to handle problems the legitimate way. Handling problems that way, wouldn't get them handled at all. Prodigy was conflicted.

"I have to sleep on it," he decided.

Sleeping on it would be his best bet. Tomorrow, when he woke up, he'd know what to do. He decided that his first thoughts about Hank's Diner would be the decision he'd go with. There was no sense in thinking about and stressing over it tonight. Stressing about things did nothing for Prodigy.

"You got about five maids running around this bitch like chickens with their heads chopped off," joked Trouble, before pulling from the blunt. "You done?"

Prodigy chuckled. "I think so."

He wasn't sure. At the mention of 'maids', Prodigy's conscience immediately started to eat at him. He didn't know what to do about the Violet situation. He knew he'd handled the interview unprofessionally and he had the urge to correct it. He thought about giving her another interview, but then again, would she even be for it? After he treated her the way that he did? Prodigy wouldn't but he did want to give it a shot, at least.

"You hired the last chick that left?" asked Trouble, before inhaling smoke.

The last chick that left was Bleu, and he had his eyes on her. He watched from the top of the staircase, as she walked out of the house, wondering who she was and what she was about. She was sexy as fuck to him and he wanted to get to know her. Yvette told him not to bring ‘that shit’ to Rosebury but a tiger cannot change its stripes.

Prodigy squinted, with half a smirk on his face. “Why, nigga?”

Trouble shrugged his left shoulder, smirking himself, before passing the blunt back to Prodigy. “I’m just asking, brodie.”

“Yeah, aight,” he replied, before leaning forward a little to grab the blunt. “I hired her. She’s off limits though, nigga.”

“Off limits why?”

Prodigy looked up at him, and then back at the blunt. “You already know why. I told you, nigga, keep it at a minimum.”

Trouble was up to his usual ways, trying to get his dick wet. That wouldn’t be a problem if Yvette wasn’t always at the estate. She was supposed to stay over the weekends, but she had been there most of the week since the construction had finished. Instead of traveling back and forth from Sterling Heights, MI, to Rosebury, that happened to be hours on top of hours away, she’d rather spend most of her time there. Prodigy rarely required her services, but she liked to use that as an excuse whenever Trouble mentioned how long she’d been there.

“Hitting one of these lil’ Rosebury sluts would be keeping it at a minimum. You already know, I can do some real ass damage if it’s up there,” said Trouble, wearing a mischievous grin.

“You heard what I said though, nigga. The shit you be on with Yvette is already messy as is.”

“But you know... any mess between us, stays between us. You’ve never had to worry about anything interfering with business. Now have you?” Trouble reminded him.

“That’s beside the point,” said Prodigy, as he walked over to the pool, looking down into the blue waters, satisfied with life.

He didn’t want to risk anything destroying what he worked so hard at building. A lot of things threatened his lifestyle back in Detroit. He was lucky and fortunate enough to get rid of those threats, but life here... in Rosebury had to be simpler. If not, everything he lost sleep and spilled blood for would be stripped away. Sometimes, Prodigy questioned if this life was even rightfully his. He had done so much dirt, and had made so many questionable deals that sometimes, he felt that he didn’t deserve it. His heart wasn’t as cold as people assumed that it was. His heart was cold. But there was just a thin sheet of ice around it—it didn’t sit in an encasement of it. He had a conscience. He just knew how to turn it off. Thing is, at night, when the world around him is quiet, and he’s left alone with his thoughts, his conscience returns. And sometimes, it returns with a vengeance. He’s gone many nights without rest because of his troubled past. The decisions he’s made to get him and his brother where they were today were

necessary ones. Those decisions, were decisions he felt he no longer had to make. At thirty-three years old, he was satisfied with all he's accomplished. His finances were in great order, so he didn't have to do underhanded shit to get ahead. At least he thought that he wouldn't have to. The situation with Hank's and Mr. O'Donnell was forcing him to.

"I want to be invisible," Prodigy reminded Trouble, as he continued to stare down into the pool, tempted to get inside.

But he was fully clothed, wearing shoes.

Still, he got inside anyway. Who did he have to impress? Why couldn't he get inside of his pool, in street clothes? Prodigy could do whatever the hell he wanted. The house. The land. The pool. And the water in it... it was all his. And it felt damn good. Once upon of time, he couldn't say that. Once upon of time, he couldn't do what he wanted.

Trouble stood by the pool, watching as his brother swam on his back, with his eyes closed.

"Impossible. For one, you're too big, to be fuckin' invisible," joked Trouble, taking a jab at Prodigy's 6'6, 220lb frame. "Secondly... you just built the biggest house in Rosebury. Shit, the biggest house in Fairview County. Invisible? Nah bro. Right now... you're sticking out like a sore thumb."

Trouble was right. Everyone was talking about the house that had been built, and the expensive, luxury vehicles that had been frequenting the area too. People might not have known Prodigy yet, but there was only a matter of time before that changed.



Prodigy pushed the plush comforter from his body and swung his legs on side of the bed. With his elbows pressed against his knees, and his hands to his head, he took a deep breath.

Eyes closed, with a clear mind he said aloud, “*Hanks Diner. What’s the move?*” He was in the room alone, consulting with the only person he trusted. Himself. It was a brand-new day, and his mind was completely clear, the perfect time to make difficult decisions.

The first thought to hit his mind was an obvious one. He’d have to take the underhanded, grimy route. Instead of being conflicted, second guessing the decision he’d come up with, he was fine with it. Fine because he trusted that it was the right one. Fine because, as stated previously, he trusted himself. Any decision Prodigy made was carefully thought through. Every angle had been considered and when right wasn’t right, left was the way to go.

The minute he made a decision, his conscious was cleared and *Hank’s Diner* was no longer on his mind. He pushed up from the bed and gripped the crotch area of his boxer briefs as he made his way to the bathroom. After he pissed, he leaned into the walk-in shower to turn the water on. It was around 8:00 in the morning and Prodigy was up, ready to get his day started. Since a youngin’ he had a strong belief in the cliché saying, ‘the early bird gets the worm’. For as long as he believed it, it had been true. He was about his business,

although his business pretty much worked for him. He didn't have to put in any real work. He sat back and collected millions of dollars, effortlessly. It hadn't always been that way though. It took years, blood, sweat, and a few tears to get to where he was at today.

Once he was showered, and dressed in yet another tailor-made designer suit, Prodigy was ready to talk business. He got on his phone, called Trouble and waited. As he was clamping his Richard Milli watch on his wrist, the double doors to his suite opened and in walked both Yara and Aspen, wearing smile.

“Good morning, baby,” said Yara, sliding her arms underneath his, hugging him from the back.

She was in a better mood and had been behaving since she and Prodigy had their little talk in the kitchen yesterday afternoon. She was given an attitude adjuster for sure.

Aspen slid in between him and the floor mirror he was looking in and wrapped her arms around him from the front. “Morning babe. You smell delicious.”

“Don't he though?” said Yara, with her eyes closed, lying her head on his back, inhaling. “*Too* delicious.”

This was all Prodigy wanted. Peace, with pussy on the side. That extra shit Yara was doing, trying to complicate a situation that didn't need to be more complicated than it already was, wasn't needed. She knew, just like Aspen knew, that she was free to go. As wide as the door to leave was open, Prodigy knew that neither of them would ever walk through it.

“Mhmm. I’m thinking,” sang Aspen. “We could travel to Mackinac Island for dinner. It’s about an hour and a half away, but I say it’s a trip worth taking considering the only thing here is...” she paused and gagged. “Ponderosa.”

Prodigy lightly chuckled. “You too good for Ponderosa huh?”

“No,” she smiled, with a wink. “*You* are. Yara and I were thinking and—”

“*Andddd*, I haven’t been much of a team player lately, so I wanted to do something nice. *We* wanted to do something nice,” interrupted Yara, grabbing hold of Prodigy’s hand.

He appreciated them more than he cared to admit. They were one hundred and ten percent devoted to him, and that devotion wasn’t just because he gave them mind-blowing orgasms. He poured into them, the way they poured into him. But his generosity didn’t come from a place of love, like theirs did. It came from a place of loyalty and appreciation. He took care of them, because they took care of him, despite how rough the road got along the way.

There was a knock on the door before Trouble peeked his head inside.

“Dinner on Mackinac Island sounds good. Call Joffrey,” he told them before giving Yara’s hand a slightly squeeze and walking away.

Five

“Don’t let her watch too much TV, Vi, I’m serious,” said Bleu, as she gathered her work bag from the backseat.

Violet wasn’t listening, not that it mattered. She was letting Heaven watch TV for as long as she wanted, regardless of how Bleu felt about it. It was no big deal to her. Violet was the fun aunt that let her niece get away with everything her mother wouldn’t.

“Did you hear what I said, Violet?” asked Bleu, trying to snatch Violet’s attention away from the house outside of the window.

It was early in the morning, and Bleu was getting ready to start her nine o’clock shift at Clairmont Manor. It was her first day. And luckily for her, ‘Candy’ started up just fine. Violet was dropping her off because she needed the car to get to Peachtree Mall to job search. She’d much rather be working here, with her big sister, in this massive ass house, but unfortunately, the boss was a dick who rejected her application.

Two whole days had passed, and Violet was still pissed about the situation. She’d stare off into space, thinking about the way he made her feel, with tight lips and an attitude out of this world. She had never been treated like that before, so she was totally caught off guard.

“I heard you, Bleu,” said Violet with a sigh, finally turning away from the house, scratching the top of her head out of annoyance.

“It’ll be okay, babe. I think you’ll find something soon,” said Bleu before unclicking her seatbelt to get out. “I’m sure you will.”

Violet just didn’t know. There weren’t a lot of jobs in Rosebury. In Rosebury, people stayed at the same job for years on top of years, so trying to find a new one was stressful. There was one job opening though. At Pop’s, since Bleu had accepted the offer at Clairmont Manor. Violet was iffy about applying there, though. She felt like it would be like getting her sisters sloppy seconds. She was weird about it, so instead she was going to try her luck at the mall.

“I hope so,” mumbled Violet, rolling her eyes before averting her eyes back at the house. “Asshole.”

Bleu giggled. “Get over it, Vi. Hey... have a good day and don’t let Heaven watch—”

“Okay, okay. Bye! Get out before you’re two seconds late and he fires you,” Violet rushed, rolling her eyes again. She had been rolling her eyes so much that she was surprised they hadn’t gotten stuck, like her mother used to say they would if she kept rolling them.

Bleu finally got out of the car and leaned into the window. “Seriously, Violet. And don’t let her eat too much candy—”

“She’s my niece! I can take care of my niece, Bleu!” said Violet, slightly yelling with a giggle. “Go on!”

Bleu was only pressing Violet because she knew how her sister got down. Violet thought it was nothing, but her letting Heaven get away with things that Bleu didn't let her get away with made things hard on Bleu. She had Heaven on a routine. Once she was knocked off, it was hard to get her back on it.

Bleu squinted and pointed. "Okay, Violet. But if Heaven ends up crying all night, throwing a fit because she can't have any extra candy, tomorrow, I'm smacking the heck out of you."

Bleu gave her the side eye up until she opened the back door to give Heaven a kiss on the cheek and a hug. "Be good. If your aunt tries to get you to do bad stuff, don't do it. Okay, baby?"

"Okay mommy," giggled Heaven. "Bye!"

Heaven was just as sneaky and devious as Violet was. She was going to let Violet get away with whatever because that meant a good time for her.

Violet laughed and shooed Bleu away. Once she walked away from the car, Violet's eyes met his. Prodigy. He had the nerve to throw his hand up with a head nod, as if they were friends or even associates. Violet didn't return the dry, awkward greeting, she turned away, shifted the car into drive and sped off as fast as 'Candy' would allow her to.

Today, Violet wasn't stuck in a daze, mesmerized by his good looks. She couldn't believe he didn't give her a job. After conducting what Bleu described as an odd interview, he practically throws her out of the office. The fact that her gave

Bleu an actual, professional interview and gave her the job had Violet more pissed.

The ringing of her phone caught her off guard. No one ever called that number. The last time she got a call on it, was for the interview. She hadn't put minutes on it in months because no one ever called. Unless it was an emergency and typically, emergencies in the McClain household consist of adding or subtracting things from the grocery list.

Violet flipped the phone open and answered, although the phone number was unfamiliar to her.

“Hello?” she answered, with dipped brows, confused, as she slowly drove down the hill from Clairmont Manor.

“There is still a job opening here at Clairmont Manor. If you'd like—”

“No thank you. I'm no longer interested,” she interrupted before rudely slamming her flip phone shut, hanging up on who she knew for sure was Prodigy. The deep baritone sound of his voice had been embedded into her mind since the interview.

Violet couldn't believe he had actually called her, trying to get her to work for him. The nerve of him! Did he think that she'd be flattered, or that she could be weak enough to accept a job offer... from *him*? No thank you. Violet would shovel dog shit before she mopped a floor at Clairmont fucking Manor.



“Well? What did you say?” asked Theory, Violet’s friend.

Theory met Violet at the mall about twenty minutes ago. They had been walking around the mall, trying to find Violet a job to apply at the whole time, and she hadn’t signed one application. Peachtree Mall only had about ten stores, and she had already been turned away from three. The odds of her finding a job there was slim to none, but she stayed looking anyhow. She was trying not to lose hope.

“I told him I was no longer interested. Screw him and his fancy mansion,” said Violet with an attitude, and her top lip curled up. “I don’t need that job.”

Theory threw her hands up, gesturing towards the mall. “Um. Hello! Yes you do. We’ve been in three stores. No one is hiring, Vi. Even if you were having luck here, no one is paying what he’s offering. Heck, I wish I would have seen the posting or at least knew about it. But someone wanted to keep her so called best friend in the dark.”

Theory gave Violet the side eye, as she tossed her keys up into the air and caught them.

Violet glanced over at her and sucked her teeth. “Shut up, Theory. I wasn’t trying to keep you in the dark.” She shrugged. “Telling you just slipped my mind. Besides, you have a job down at your ma’s salon and we both know you’re not leaving there, ever.”

Theory and Violet had been friends since they were young girls. Theory always referred to Violet as her best friend, but Violet never had. Since the passing of her parents, Violet’s struggled with holding onto and putting labels on

relationships. She didn't like to put labels on things because to her it was pointless. Violet felt like it was pointless because nothing lasts forever. She didn't want to grow attached to anything because she didn't want to stomach the pain that came with loss.

If it weren't for Bleu and Ruby being her siblings, she wouldn't interact with them much either. She's always been kind of reserved and to herself, but after the loss of her parents, her disconnect with people outside of the McClain residence had gotten worse. Over the past couple of years, Violet had been pulling away from Theory, but Theory wasn't allowing it. If Violet wouldn't call her, she'd do the calling. Since Violet rarely visited, she was doing the visiting. She didn't mind, nor did she feel some type of way about it because Theory knew Violet and she knew that she meant no harm by it. Violet losing both her parents affected her majorly, so Theory would never fix her lips to call Violet a bad friend.

Because she didn't care to build bonds with people, she was single. She didn't fight for anything. The last relationship she had was years ago, when she was in high school and that was short lived. Violet's tolerance for anything that didn't make her happy was pretty much nonexistent. All it took was for Emmanuel to mess up once, and Violet was done. They got into one argument about him giving some girl a ride home from work and that was the end of them. Violet didn't care to listen to him plead his case about not cheating. That wasn't the issue. The issue for Violet was that she found out about Mannie giving the chick a ride from someone else. She felt like he was sneaky, and she had absolutely no interest in

sticking around for him to mess up. Plus, she just didn't care enough to stick around.

“So? That’s not the point. You never tell me anything anymore,” pouted Theory before stuffing her keys into her purse, with a sigh. “If it wasn’t for me calling you, you wouldn’t have even told me anything about Clairmont Manor and this... this Prodigy. Would’ve you?”

Violet looked over at Theory again. “I would’ve,” she said with a shrug, telling the truth.

It might have taken her weeks to, but she would have told her. Although Violet wanted to be left alone for the most part, she had these spurts in time where she missed Theory terribly. After weeks of not speaking, Violet would have ended up stopping by the shop to spill all of the juicy gossip she had collected over time. It was kind of their thing, really.

“Mmhmm,” said Theory, with twisted lips. “Anyway, I think you should call him back and tell him you’re interested. Nothing is going on up here.”

She wasn’t lying. Peachtree Mall was dead. There were only a handful of people walking around shopping. The mall had nothing to offer, really. Most of the people of Rosebury were too broke to shop at the mall. They wore hand-me-downs passed down from generation to generation. Hell, the jeans Violet had on once belonged to Bleu.

“I’m not calling him, Theory,” said Violet before opening Heaven’s sucker and handing it back to her.

She was on sucker three and hyper as all get out. Bleu was going to have a hard time getting her to go to bed later on

tonight. You think Violet cared? Nope. Not one bit. What Heaven wanted, she got.

“You have to stop letting that pride of yours get in the way,” said Theory shaking her head before pulling her short locs into a ponytail. “Hey. Isn’t that Ruby at the pretzel stand?”

Violet whipped her head in the direction Theory had nodded in and immediately redirected her steps. She didn’t even care to respond to Theory’s little comment about her pride. Seeing Ruby at the pretzel stand with her friends and three boys had all of her attention. She wouldn’t have cared much if it was the weekend. Ruby could hang out. They were fine with that. The problem was that Ruby was cutting school. So what it was the last week before summer break? Violet and Bleu were both adamant about her finishing until the last day.

“Tee-Tee Ruby!” yelled Heaven, drawing attention to them.

When Ruby saw Violet marching over to her, wearing a frown almost identical to the frown their daddy used to wear when they were in trouble, scared the shit out of her. She dropped her fruit punch slushie all over her thong sandal covered toes and jumped back.

“Fuck. My sister is here,” she mumbled, glancing at her little boyfriend Adonis.

Adonis looked over towards Violet and them and then turned his attention back to Ruby. “Oh shit.”

“Exactly. What is she doing here?” mumbled Ruby, bending down to wipe her toes with napkins.

“What am I doing here? No, Ruby, what are you doing here?!” Yelled Violet, pointing her finger into Ruby’s face. “It’s ten in the morning! You’re supposed to be at school, Ruby McClain! I have the right to be here!”

Violet was livid. For the most part, Ruby was an alright kid. She didn’t get into much trouble, but she was a follower and Violet hated it. She had this need to be in the in crowd that drove Violet insane.

“Okay Vi! Okay! Chill. You ain’t my momma!” Ruby yelled, glancing over at her friends, embarrassed, wishing she hadn’t been caught cutting school.

She had this bad girl persona to keep up, so she got snappy at Violet, knowing that it was the wrong thing to do... and to say. Violet couldn’t believe she’d said what she’d said. Ruby was out of line! It was Bleu and Violet’s responsibility to look after her because they didn’t have their mother. To even insinuate that Violet was trying to act like their deceased mother was highly disrespectful. She was caught so off guard by the disrespect that all she did was walk away. Violet wasn’t just mad—she was hurt. Ruby knew better than to say anything like that to her. For her to do it, with all of that attitude... Violet knew that if she reacted to it, she’d probably beat Ruby bloody.

“Vi... you alright?” asked Theory, glancing over her shoulder at Ruby as she walked alongside Violet.

Violet didn’t say anything, she just fished around her little purse for Bleu’s car keys. She had to get out of that mall before she did something irrational.

“I can’t believe Ruby! Who does she think she is? Running around with Adonis and Georgiana. They’re no good. She had some nerve,” fussed Theory. “I could go drag her up out of here if you want me to.”

Violet shook her head, power walking for the malls exit, tears stinging her eyes. She refused to even look over her shoulder at Ruby.



Hours had passed since Violet ran into Ruby in the mall, and she still wasn’t speaking to her. Ruby came walking into the house at her usual time, as if she had been at school all day. When she walked into the house, Violet treated her like she wasn’t even there. The house was totally quiet, with the exception of the TV blaring, playing reruns of Caillou.

Violet spent the majority of her afternoon on the front porch, drawing. Sam stopped by for about an hour, and chilled, but for the most part, Violet’s day was pretty mellow as it usually is. She couldn’t wait for Bleu to get off at five to hear all about her first day at the infamous Clairmont Manor.

Violet was strapped in and speeding off from in front of the house by 4:45. The drive up to Clairmont Manor was about fifteen minutes, but Violet got there within ten. She couldn’t believe that she was literally itching to hear what Bleu would have to say about work. She would rather experience it herself, but because she couldn’t, she’d have to live vicariously through her sister.

She was sitting out, in front of the house, on its motor court, waiting when two black trucks pulled up. One a Mercedes Benz G-Wagon, the other an Infiniti truck. The Infiniti truck sped down the long driveway to what Violet assumed, lead to the garage area. The Mercedes parked right behind her. Violet's eyes stayed glued on the rearview mirror, heartrate picking up, eager to see who was sitting behind the dark tints. She knew it was him. It had to be. Who else could it be? The person driving purposely made a detour. They were heading in the same direction as the Infiniti truck up until they were directly across from where Violet was parked. Then, they made a quick right, whipped around, and parked behind her. Who else would make a move like that? Someone wanted her attention. And since their new neighbors came into town, there had only been one occupant interested in her attention. Prodigy.

When the driver door opened up, Violet gripped the steering wheel, slightly twisting with sweaty palms. Her heart was beating so hard against her chest, that she could literally hear each thump in her ears. She was nervous. Nervous because she hadn't been close to him since the interview. And then... then... she was in a trance, completely taken back by him and his aggressive intoxicating presence. Well... up until he practically threw her out.

Violet swallowed when his face came into view. It was him. He was dressed in a black dress top, unbuttoned at the top, the tattoos on his butterscotch skin playing peekaboo with every move he made. He wore his shirt tucked into his black tailored slacks. And he was coming her way.

She wanted to start the car and pull off, but she couldn't because Bleu was going to be walking out from the back of the house at any minute now. She thought about starting the engine, and rolling the windows up, but that wouldn't work because it was hot, and 'Candy' didn't have air conditioning.

Violet quickly darted her eyes to the side of the house, where Bleu would come walking from, wondering where the hell she was. Looking at the time, she saw that Bleu still have two minutes before clocking out time. Vi was stuck, and she hated it.

"You hung up on me earlier," said Prodigy, kneeling at the window, at eye level with Violet.

She swallowed and turned to face him. "I thought the conversation was over," she replied, partially lying.

Prodigy slightly smiled, before running his hand over the top of his head. "I didn't say goodbye."

"Okay..." replied Violet, trying to avoid the eye contact he was giving her.

To avoid it, she looked back towards the home, although, there was some sort of force pulling her into his direction. Or was it the scent of the cologne he was wearing? He smelled so good. Violet could smell the woody, citrusy notes in it, and wanted to ask him what it was.

"Are you going to apologize?" he asked, snatching her attention away from the shrubbery she was using to avoid eye contact.

“Excuse me?” she asked, slightly moving her neck, with attitude.

“About hanging up on me. I think I’m due an apology.”

Prodigy wanted to see her eyes. And because he knew that the only way he’d get to see them was by saying something that would most definitely upset her, he asked for an apology. They were beautiful. In the sunlight, shining down on them, they were of a honey tone. Out of the sun, they were of an auburn color. It wasn’t just the color that attracted Prodigy though. It was how sultry they were. They were almond shaped, and slightly turned up at the edges.

Violet laughed, with her head slightly cocked to the side, eyebrow cocked, eyes suddenly locked on his. And then... she was speechless. She was stuck. His eyes had caught hers, and he had held them captive. In his dark brown, nearly black, irises, she was lost. Her laugh had subsided. She was just sitting there, staring into his eyes, mesmerized, with labored breathing, sweaty palms, and her heartbeat in her ears.

She had been so strong earlier when she hung up on him. And she was so disgusted with him when she talked to Theory about him at the mall. Her attitude and disinterest in everything Clairmont Manor stood strong before. But now? Now she was like butter, on the pavement, on the hottest day of summer. Melting. Turning into mush.

“Sister!” sang Bleu, skipping from the side of the house, wearing a big grin, like a little girl.

When Prodigy stood up, coming into full view, she stopped, and wiped that big smile from her face. She was being goofy, thinking that only she and Violet were out, so

seeing him, see her, acting like a big kid was kind of embarrassing. Well, not kind of. It was embarrassing.

Bleu rubbed her lips together, suppressing a smile, before looking away from him. She had seen very little of Prodigy around the house, but from the times she did see him, he was always intense, never wearing a smile. He didn't have that welcoming presence like his brother, Trouble. He was intimidating, and quite scary.

“Have a... have a great evening, Mister.”

Prodigy squinted before backing away from the now idling car. “Prodigy.” He paused and again, laid eyes on Violet. “You ladies have a great evening as well.”

Violet pulled off before Bleu could close the door.

“Oh. My. God,” said Bleu, with wide eyes. “What was he saying to you?”

Violet stared, wide eyed, steady gripping the steering wheel in a twisting fashion. She hated the way he made her feel. The way he looked at her... it made her feel naked. It made her feel vulnerable. It made her feel like he could see inside of her. Like there was nothing that she could hide from him. It was extreme, and it made Violet feel weak. She didn't like that. She hated it.

There was so much she wanted to say. She wanted to curse him out. She wanted to tell him that he had some nerve, expecting an apology out of her, after the way he treated her. After the way he denied her, after she had practically told him that she'd be poor without the job. He denied her... and told

her to get out. If anybody was due a thorough, sincere apology it certainly was not him.

“Vi,” said Bleu, giving Violet a light shove.

Violet snapped out of her trance and glanced from the road, at Bleu. “I don’t like him.”

“Are you sure about that?” asked Bleu, nodding towards the sweat glistened steering wheel. “I’d beg to differ,” she sang, before pulling the sun visor down.

“What? Bleu please. I’m... it’s... it’s hot,” said Violet, in defense, taking her hands off the steering wheel to quickly wipe them on her jeaned shorts.

Bleu giggled and shook her head. “I get it. That man is gorgeous. He has the ability to leave women speechless. That and how intimidating he is... I get it sis. He’s nothing like Rosebury has ever seen. That brother of his isn’t neither.”

She shuddered a little, thinking about the way both Prodigy and Trouble made her feel. They were an odd pair. Prodigy was quiet, mysterious, and reserved. While Trouble was loud, predictable, and flamboyant. He was the epitome of a Detroit cat. And Bleu couldn’t understand for the life of her while either of them were in Rosebury, staying in the biggest mansion the town had ever seen.

“His brother?” Questioned Violet as she made her way down the road.

Could there be two? Violet really doubted that there was another man on earth anything like Prodigy. To own a presence that was both suffocating and mesmerizing at once was... unheard of. For Violet it was at least. She hadn’t

crossed paths with anyone quite like him. With fiery eye contact that made you feel naked and as if it were just the two of you in the entire world. It was... intense.

Bleu nodded with her lips pulled into her mouth. “Yep. His brother. He reminds me a lot of Heaven’s daddy.” She rolled her eyes thinking about her ex-boyfriend and deadbeat baby daddy, Darnell. “The way he moves and talks. It’s so Detroit. That swagger is what got me in the situation I am in today.”

Bleu had a thing for guys from Detroit. When she first touched down in the D all of those years ago, she was bright eyed, and ready to explore. She didn’t know what she was getting herself into, being from the small town of Rosebury. The flossing. The stunting. The Cartier ‘buff’ Frames. The money. Everything about Detroit’s culture had her smitten. She was so wrapped up in the flashiness that she didn’t take heed to her then roommate, Bri’s, warnings.

Bri, being born and raised in the D, kept trying to tell Bleu that the men weren’t shit but Bleu refused to listen. She let Darnell finesse her right up out of her panties, striping her of her virginity, and her innocence at once. All of the teachings that her parents instilled went completely out of the window. Bleu was partying and having unprotected sex like crazy. So, when she took that pregnancy test, after only being in the city for two months, she wasn’t surprised when it came back positive. She might not had been surprised, but she was devastated. Bleu was even more devastated when Darnell fell off the face of the earth the day after she told him. It was almost as if he was a ghost. She couldn’t find him at any of the hangout spots, and he had blocked her from calling him.

Because their relationship was still fresh, she didn't know any of his family, or any background information to look further for him. So, Bleu did what she didn't want to do—she called home crying, embarrassed that what her parents predicted had come into fruition.

“Oh, in that case, stay very far away from that fool,” said Violet with a little giggle, running her hand through her hair.

She said it jokingly, but she was serious. She didn't think Bleu had learned a single thing from what happened with Darnell. Her being so eager to get back to a big city made Violet raise a brow. Violet thought the first go around being a bust would scare Bleu away from big cities but that wasn't the case. She couldn't wait to get back.

Bleu shrugged. “I was trying to. All day long. But girl, he kept following me around, trying to create small talk and mess. Like his girlfriend wasn't lurking around the corners.”

“His girlfriend?!” yelled Violet. “Oh yes, please Bleu, stay away from him. That just sounds like a bunch of mess to me.” She paused and shook her head, with scrunched up lips “What else happened working up in that raggedy ol' house? You like it?”

Bleu laughed and playfully hit Violet in the arm. “There is nothing raggedy about Clairmont Manor,” she stated, as if Violet didn't already know that. “Goodness! It's much bigger in the inside than it looks on the outside, Vi. There are like... like, four different parts to the house, and you're not going to believe this.”

“What?” asked Violet, full of excitement.

“There is this area for staff. We have our own kitchen, lounge area, and bedroom with a shower and all. The place is ridiculously massive. And guess what? There is furniture in every damn room. Do you know how much it had to cost to furnish every room in a house that big?” She paused and shook her head, thinking about her first day in the palace.

“What is the purpose of a house that big?” Violet asked, lips still twisted, lightweight feeling some type of way about not being able to witness the luxuriousness herself. “There is no purpose. I’m telling you. Black people just don’t know what to do when they get their hands on a little money.”

Bleu cut her eyes at Violet. “Vi, hush. You just mad you don’t work there,” she joked.

Violet looked over at her, rolled her eyes, and then laughed. “You’re right, you’re right.”

Violet cracked up laughing, before playfully bumping into her. “Didn’t he call you earlier? When you left? And then... he was at the window. What happened?”

Violet pretended to gag. “Yes he called. Talking about there was still a job available. Just now he was at the car, talking about I owed him an apology for hanging up on his smug ass earlier.”

Bleu’s brown eyes widened. “Vi! You did not hang up on that man!”

“After declining the job offer, I sure the hell did,” said Violet, rolling her eyes. “He’s got some nerve.”

Bleu looked down, twirling the strings to her worn out fringe satchel. “You declined the offer?”

Violet glanced at her, as she made a left turn into the driveway. A tinge of regret sat in, noticing the look of disappointment on Bleu's face. She wasn't interested. At all. But did she need it? Hell yeah. She was, as always, letting her pride get in the way of something very beneficial and she could tell that Bleu felt the same exact way about the situation.

"Yeah. I had a little luck at the mall. I'm going to see how that goes," she lied. "Speaking of the mall. Guess who I saw there? Like they belonged?"

She had to change the subject. Because if she didn't, she would end up telling Bleu the truth, and she didn't want her sister to know that she turned down a thousand dollar a week job with absolutely nothing lined up. It was embarrassing and a huge let down. Her and Bleu typically got along very well, but there was no telling how Bleu would react to that.

"Who?" asked Bleu, still somewhat upset about Violet turning the job down.

She'd never say anything to her about it, but she didn't think Violet was in any position to turn down jobs. Bleu didn't believe for one second that Violet had luck applying for a job at Peachtree Mall. She knew jobs in Rosebury were hard to come by, so she knew Violet was being a stubborn, hard ass like always. She loved her little sister more than Violet could ever know, but she drove Bleu crazy with her stubborn attitude at times. When she was fired from Pauly's, Bleu felt like it was partially Violet's fault. The girl couldn't bite her tongue, nor back down to save her life. She thought her dignity was everything. All she had to do was listen to Paul Jr. But Bleu

knew that Violet would be losing her job soon as soon as she found out about Paul Jr. taking his fathers spot.

“Ruby,” said Violet, before turning the corners of her full lips up, shaking her head in dismay. “And you wouldn’t believe what she said to me...”

The two girls sat in the car, talking about Ruby and what to do about her sneakiness for nearly an hour. Although they were talking, Violet’s mind was heavily on Prodigy.

Six

It was late. Too late to be showing up at someone's house unannounced. But Prodigy found himself parked outside of Violet's house, tugging on his short beard, debating on rather he was making the right decision or not. Before he left the house, he felt like it was in his best interest to quiet his racing thoughts. Prodigy thought this was the only way to get rid of the guilt that was eating at him. He'd tried to be professional by calling her, but she was still upset and hung up on him without giving the job offer much thought. That should have been his cue to just let it go, but he couldn't. Not after the phone call, and certainly not after their short encounter in front of his house earlier.

The minute Prodigy noticed the slightly rusted Impala sitting in front of his house, he made an abrupt detour. He and Trouble had just come home from a short but necessary trip to Detroit. He couldn't help but pull up on her. He had never been treated with such disrespect by anybody—especially not by a woman. Instead of upsetting him, it intrigued him and made him want to push more. Forcing him in not just two uncomfortable situations, but now three.

“Fuck it,” he mumbled before shifting the car into park and killing the engine.

He glanced down at the job application to make sure he was at the right address. He was, so he got out of the car. The

quiet of Mayberry St., hell, Rosebury period, made Prodigy exceptionally aware of his surroundings. Before, the quiet meant something wasn't right. The quiet used to make him slightly paranoid. He was used to looking over his shoulder, and he was sure that that habit wouldn't be dying anytime soon. One thing Prodigy told himself was that he wasn't going to come to this little town and get comfortable. A mistake like that could very well cost him his life.

He walked up the creaky stairs and grinned a little. The creakiness of the stairs reminded him of home... before shit went left. Before his mother's depression pushed her to extreme limits. The creakiness reminded him of the tag games he used to play with Trouble and his neighbors. It reminded him of a time when life was simpler. Happier. He had his innocence. Sometimes he missed it.

Prodigy knocked on the door before looking down at his Rolex at the time. *10:13PM*. It was late. Too late. He wondered if people in Rosebury even stayed up this late? The town was far too quiet. Too... still. After a couple of seconds, he turned to leave, sure that she was sleeping.

“Hello?”

On his way down the stairs, he was stopped by the sound of her voice. The voice of the woman he couldn't get out of his head. Turning around, he redirected his stride up the stairs.

“Are you lost or something?” asked Violet before crossing her arms over her chest.

She knew he wasn't lost, but she didn't know what else to say. Violet was sitting on the couch in the living room, with

her knees pulled up to her chest, drawing, when she heard someone pull up in front of the house. She rarely ever sketched in bed. Sharing a room with Ruby wouldn't allow her that privilege. Either her sister was on the phone, loud, or she was complaining about the light Violet would be using.

When she heard gravel cracking under tires, she got up and peeked out of the drapes. Gasping at the sight of the same Mercedes G-Wagon Prodigy was pushing earlier, she jumped back, surprised. She stood there, behind the drapes, watching him just sit there. The dark tints wouldn't allow her the pleasure of seeing him contemplate driving off or not, and for that, Prodigy was grateful. Violet paced the living room floor, running her hands through her wild hair, perplexed. What did he want? Why was he there? She told him she didn't want the job earlier, and she made it clear just a few hours prior. So, what could he possibly want now? Violet prayed and hoped that he didn't do anything extreme like ask her out on a date. She wasn't sure if she'd be able to decline the offer or not. Prodigy had an unexplainable effect on her. That always made her react in ways opposite of what she wanted to. In person he did, at least.

Through the dark, worn screen door that had certainly seen better days, Prodigy noticed that she was wearing pajamas.

“Did I wake you? I didn't mean to wake you—”

“You didn't wake me,” she interrupted. “Are you lost... or something? What do you want?” she questioned again.

Prodigy chuckled a little, scratching at the scruffy hair on his left cheek. “No, I’m not lost. I wanted to offer an apology. I handled things wrong, and that was terribly unprofessional on my behalf—”

“Unprofessional, like popping up at an applicant’s house at 10:30 at night?” Violet interrupted again. “Besides, I told you earlier that I was no longer interested in the job. I told you no, and hung up on you earlier... remember? Sure you do. Somehow you think you’re due an apology.” She chuckled and looked down at her bare feet.

Again, she was letting that foolish pride of hers get in the way. Before Bleu went off to bed, the conversation of Clairmont Manor was brought up again. And, Bleu told her that she thought she should take the job. She didn’t mention the fact that her income was the only income in the household. That would just start an argument, so Bleu used a different angle. One that would excite Violet to a point where she’d want to work there... badly. She went on and on about the décor. She gave Violet each and every detail there was to give about the east wing. She talked about the windows, the marble flooring, the clawfoot, soaker tub, and the art lining the walls of hallways that seemed to go on for miles. Violet’s eyes sparkled with excitement the entire conversation.

She was seriously reconsidering and had even told Bleu she’d talk with Prodigy tomorrow morning after dropping her off. She was excited to see what she knew Bleu had been poorly describing, sure, but her decision to reconsider wasn’t only based on that. She could see that Bleu really wanted to say much more. She wanted help. Bleu would be able to take care of the taxes, bills and food working at

Clairmont Manor, but did that mean Violet wanted to leave that burden on Bleu? Of course not. She knew Bleu had plans and was trying to save up money to put those plans in motion. Her declining a job she needed was selfish.

So, Prodigy pulling up like that startled Violet. It was almost as if he had read her mind or something of that nature. Had they been thinking about each other at the same time? Whatever the case, Violet wasn't going to buckle down easily. She wasn't going to succumb. She was going to give him a hard time, and then... then, she'd soften up a bit.

Prodigy stuffed his hands in the pockets of his basketball shorts and approached the door. Even dressed down, in what Violet presumed were pajamas, he had the poise of a boss, and the stance and stride of a God. It was what commanded the attention of everyone in his vicinity. That and his piercing, hypnotizing brown, almost black, eyes.

“May I ask why not?” he questioned, gazing down at her, staring at her with the same intensity he stared at her with during the job interview.

Violet's heart immediately began to thump rapidly against her slowly heaving chest. *Fuck.*

“I don't like the owner,” replied Violet, taking a step back away from the door.

“That sounds like a personal problem,” he replied. “You gon' let personal feelings get in the way of your paper? Or are you going to say fuck how you feel about me, secure the bag, and make sure you don't go poor and homeless?”

Violet swallowed and crossed her arms over her chest, impressed by his efforts. She was allowing her personal feelings to stop her from making money, but then again, she's always done that. Violet was passionate about her feelings and a lot of times, she allowed how passionate she was get in the way. This time had to be different. She needed to, as Prodigy put it, secure the bag. She knew accepting the offer would be her best bet.

“When will I start?” asked Violet with her head slightly cocked back, trying to hold on to the pride she felt like she was losing by accepting his offer.

“*Now*. Tomorrow. Whenever you'd like. It's up to you, Ms. Violet McClain,” replied Prodigy with a half-smile, pleased with her response.

“You're the boss. It's up to you, right?”

Again, she was trying to hold on to what little pride she had left. She was using attitude a barrier, but she knew she needed to dial back. He was the boss. He was her boss. And he had come all the way from Clairmont Hill to press her about accepting a job he didn't really have to offer her. Although she knew these things, she still kept the attitude. Stubbornness was another flaw Violet clung onto. A flaw she really, desperately needed to let go of.

“Tonight then?” he eyed her up and down. “That work for you?”

Violet rubbed her lips together and looked down at her pajamas. “Well—”

“Tomorrow morning then,” interrupted Prodigy with a smirk.

He was fucking with her. He couldn't help it. She had asked for it with her smart-ass mouth.

“Tomorrow morning,” she said with a nod, before pulling her lips back into her mouth.

Prodigy nodded. “Have a good night, Ms. McClain.”

“Good night,” said Violet, as she watched him descend the stairs, wondering who he was. She wanted to Google him, but she was sure that if she put Prodigy into the search bar, she wouldn't get any information about him. Prodigy couldn't be his real name, thought Violet, steady watching him walk to his car.

Prodigy felt her eyes on him. It took everything in him not to turn around. He couldn't. If he did, she'd know that he found her interesting enough to do so. Instead of turning around, when he got back into the car, he sat in his seat, looking up at the house, staring at her stare at him, hidden behind those tinted windows.

He cranked the engine up, and stared a bit longer, but not long enough for her to figure it out. It was something about Violet that had piqued his interest. It wasn't that she was just beautiful neither. Violet was a classic beauty. To him she was at least. With her wild curly mane, light brown eyes, adorned by naturally long eyelashes, and caramel colored skin. Women like her... you don't come by these days. She was a gem. In the plain, quiet town of Rosebury, Prodigy had found a gem.



“Come in,” said Prodigy, as he stood at the floor mirror, adjusting his tie.

Ms. Shug walked into his bedroom and handed him a mug of black coffee and a buttered croissant roll.

“Good morning Mister,” she said, cheerfully greeting him. “I stopped Gavin on his way up, to catch you before you left this morning.”

Prodigy had a meeting to attend. A meeting with Hank. Since losing his diner to a tragic electrical fire the other night, Hank had a change of heart. The building was nearly burnt to the ground. Nothing was salvageable. Even if he could salvage some of it, Hank couldn’t afford to have repairs done. He hadn’t turned a profit on the restaurant in years. With nothing to lose, but everything to gain, he gave Prodigy a call yesterday morning.

“You’re just the woman I need to see,” Said Prodigy before taking the drink and croissant from her. “Violet McClain starts this morning.”

Ms. Shug’s face lit up before she gave Prodigy a crooked smile, in a manner that said she knew he would fix things.

“Does she now? Hm!”

Prodigy smirked, before sipping from his mug. “And what does that supposed to mean?”

“Oh nothing,” sang Ms. Shug. “I wanted to speak to you about Ms. Yara. She’s been giving the girls extra tasks that aren’t in their job description.” She rolled her eyes a bit. “Yesterday evening, she had Opal escort her to the mall. I’m not sure if you’ve been made aware or if I’m to add ‘chauffeuring to the job details.’”

Ms. Shug used a professional tone, but Prodigy knew her well enough to notice the sarcasm. She didn’t particularly care for Yara, or Aspen, but that was because Ms. Shug was old-school and couldn’t understand why a woman would put up with being number two to another. The situation, to her, was odd and she didn’t like it. She wanted Prodigy to settle down with a nice wholesome girl. She figured, at thirty-two he should be planning to get married and start a family of his own. Prodigy was the closest thing to a son to her, so she saw a lot of potential in him. Despite his temper, and the things she’s witnessed with her own two eyes, Ms. Shug loved him and thought he was a good man. He just had flaws, like the next, and needed love from the right person.

She didn’t think Yara nor Aspen were right for him. In Ms. Shug’s eyes, they were weak and a man like Prodigy needed someone strong. Someone who loved themselves and wouldn’t put up with being anything other than the only one. She didn’t think Yara and Aspen had either of those qualities. But at the end of the day, what *she* thought didn’t matter. She and Prodigy were close, but she was in no position to speak on his love life or his choice in women, so she kept her ill feelings to herself, although Prodigy was fully aware of the way she felt.

Prodigy took another sip from his cup and nodded. “No, chauffeuring isn’t a part of the job description. I’ll speak to her about it.”

Ms. Shug nodded, steady smiling, with her arms crossed at the wrists, resting in front of her. “So, Ms. Violet McClain. How did that happen?”

She was sincerely happy to hear that Violet would be working at Clairmont Manor. In such a short span of time, she had taken a slight liking to her. She knew Prodigy would too. It wasn’t that she was beautiful. It was something in her eyes, and the way that she carried herself that made her unforgettable.

“I went to her home and offered her the job... again.”

“You did what na?” Ms. Shug asked with raised eyebrows. “And what do you mean... again?”

Prodigy sat his coffee and croissant on the dresser beside him and smiled as he finished tightening his tie.

“I went to her house... after she declined my offer over the phone.”

Ms. Shug shook her head, with her arms now crossed over her chest. “You’ve never been able to accept the word no. I can just imagine... You have a great day, Mister.”

“Ms. Shug,” said Prodigy with raised eyebrows, looking at her through the reflection. “That’s enough, now.”

Ms. Shug smiled sweetly and walked out of the bedroom fore looking down at her watch. She had ten minutes before the girls would come in for their shifts, she had no time to go back and forth with Prodigy over her calling him Mister.

Prodigy shook his head before going back to getting ready. Looking down at his Rolex, he realized that he had about two hours before his flight was scheduled to depart. Before leaving, he had to talk to Yara about her behavior towards the help. Prodigy didn't hire the girls for her personal needs, he hired them for his.

Things between him and Yara had been good. She had been respectful and considerate of Aspen's time and everything. The feelings she had towards needing more attention were still there, but she decided that it would be best if she took a different approach towards the situation.

A few seconds later, the bathroom door opened and out walked Yara, in the nude, wearing a knowing smirk, prepared for the lecture she knew Prodigy was going to give.

"That old lady know she be meddling," joked Yara, before wrapping her arms around Prodigy's waist, and lying her head on his back.

"That old lady is doing her job. The ladies aren't here to serve you, Yara," he sternly told her, unamused by her joke.

She sighed and rolled her eyes. "Why not? What's wrong with getting one of them so chauffer me, Prodigy? They're maids, right?"

"Housekeepers," he corrected. "They're not servants. Don't treat them as such."

"Okaaaay," she sang, before sucking her teeth. "Why are you so upset?"

Respect was important to Prodigy. Not only when it was given to him. He wanted the people he had working for

him to be respected too. It didn't matter that Opal was a new employee who Prodigy barely knew. The fact in the matter was that he didn't want people uncomfortable. Yara was getting in over her head, trying to abuse power she didn't even have.

"I'm not upset. You heard me though, right?" He verified, looking at her with raised eyebrows through the reflection.

"Loud and clear, daddy," said Yara with a sigh, running her small hands through the abs through Prodigy's buttoned up shirt. "Tonight is going to be amazing... I can't wait."

It was going to be. Nights spent with Prodigy, alone, were always amazing.. Yara's great mood was because of that. There was nothing that Ms. Shug, Aspen, or anyone else could say or do to change that neither. She was genuinely, excitedly looking forward to tonight. She and Prodigy had diner by candlelight, in the formal dining room. Prodigy made sure that Gavin prepared her favorite dish, mussels in a white wine and garlic sauce, with potato and leek sauce, and garlic bread. It was delightful. They sat and had a quiet, romantic meal, away from everyone. Prodigy wasn't big on wining and dining, but every now and then, he could put something together. Afterall, it was the least he could do. He understood that the situation between him, Yara and Aspen could be stressful for the women. True enough, he didn't force either of them in the position, but they were in it because they loved him. Although those feelings weren't a reflection of what he felt for them, he felt the need to at least show them that he cared. Of course he cared about them. If he didn't, they wouldn't be living with him. They wouldn't be living a life of luxury neither. He took

care of them financially, and sexually too, but sometimes, for women that isn't enough. They want to be cared for spiritually and emotionally. Most of all, they wanted to be loved. And while Prodigy couldn't offer them that, he gave them the next best thing: romance.

Yes. On his schedule. Romance was rarely spontaneous, due to his work schedule. That's why he accepted the girls offer to dinner on Mackinac the other day, which ended up going amazing. But because they rarely did things like that, Prodigy was forced to reserve two days a month, specifically for them. Every month on the 12th, he had dinner by candlelight with Yara. On the 19th, he had it with Aspen. Yara had called him selfish a few days ago, but that wasn't completely true. He was greedy and if being greedy classified him as being selfish, then so be it. He owned it. He might have been selfish, but he was one hundred percent devoted to making sure the people in his life were comfortable. Especially his women. Which was why he was so upset about Yara interrupting his time with Aspen. He placed certain rules in place for specific reasons.

“Neither can I,” said Prodigy.

Tonight would be amazing for Prodigy for a completely different reason than Yara. It would be amazing for him because of the sex. When it came down to it, Yara was fully devoted to pleasing him. If he allowed her to, she'd suck his dick all day, every day around the clock. She didn't just suck his dick, she made love to it with her mouth. Pleasing him was her top priority. For Yara it was always a competition. She wanted to win him. She wanted Prodigy to see that there

was no need for Aspen. There was only need for her. So she always went above and beyond to please him. Especially on the 12th of the month. He always made time for the individually, but on their days, things were bumped up a notch and they felt like he only truly, belonged to one of them.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

“Mister. I have Violet McCain here for the tour, since she’ll be scheduled on this wing.”

At the mention of Violet, Prodigy’s eyebrows jumped just a little bit.

“Go put some clothes on,” said Prodigy before giving Yara’s juicy booty cheeks a smack.

She giggled and pinched her bottom lip between her teeth before lightly jogging away, purposely making her ass bounce with every step. Prodigy made a slight adjustment to his crooked tie before heading for the oak double doors to his bedroom, excitingly anticipating what it would be like to place his focus on her. He wondered what her wild hair would be like today. Would it be pulled up into a high bun, with her curly bang hanging in her face like it was the day of her interview? Or would it be in twists, the way it was last night? Or perhaps, it’d be brushed over to the side, held over with clips, the way it was the morning she dropped her sister off at work? Every time he saw her, it was always different, so on today, he was truly anticipating her arrival.

“Good morning, Ms. McClain,” greeted Prodigy, opening the doors, staring down into Violet’s honey-toned eyes.

His gaze slowly shifted from her eyes, to the rest of her face. Her lips were bare, glossed, and the prettiest natural shade of pale pink. His eyes washed over her cheek bones, before landing on her curly bush. Today, it was untamed, in a wild afro. She was so eccentric, standing there, with her shoulders slightly pulled back, tall, although she was only about 5'5. She oozed confidence, the sexiest thing a woman could wear. In Prodigy's opinion at least.

Violet stood there, watching him examine her, while she too, examined him. The man was fine as hell. The type of fine that pulled you in. It captivated you and kept you in a trance. The type of fine that was nearly impossible to look away from. It was forceful. And intimidating as hell.

“Violet is fine,” said Violet.

Violet is beautiful, thought Prodigy. *That's what she is.* Violet wasn't just fine. To call her fine would be an insult. She was beautiful... gorgeous... breathtaking...*classic*. Her beauty was effortless. Of course Prodigy knew what she really meant by what she'd said, but he couldn't help but to think about how beautiful she was. He wondered if she knew. The confidence was clear, but he wondered... if she *truly*, knew.

He nodded. “Good morning... Violet.”

Violet nodded with a sweet, pursed-lipped smile. “Yes. Good morning to you, Mister.”

This morning, she woke up in a great mood. She decided that she would show up with a better attitude than she had last night. She had to let go of the ill feelings she had towards him in regard to the interview, if she wanted this job to work. And because she *needed* the job, she would sat those

feelings aside. Outside of Clairmont Manor, she could feel however she wanted. But while she was here, working for him, she'd be professional. Even if the guidelines, and cleaning rules were a little... particular. Violet could adjust. She'd have to, if she wanted to hold on to the job. Ms. Shug made that abundantly clear.

Prodigy placed his hand on his chest, as if he was offended. "Prodigy... please."

Ms. Shug looked between the two of them with a polite smile. "Well, alright then. Mister, Violet is assigned to your wing this week. If everything goes smoothly, this shall be her permanently assigned area."

Prodigy nodded and stepped aside as a gesture to let the women come inside. His eyes stayed locked on Violets, and hers on his. Which, he wasn't particularly used to. Women tended to shy away from his gaze once his eyes met theirs. But not Violet. To Prodigy, that meant that Violet was up to the challenge. What challenge? Him.

He didn't like to mix business with pleasure, but after only lying eyes on her four times, he was willing to bend that rule a little... or a lot. Whichever was fine with him. Her fiery, bold, but poised persona intrigued him beyond understanding. It wasn't just how beautiful she was neither. Prodigy was fascinated with getting to know what lied beyond the surface. And that was out of the norm for him. Which, in turn, only intrigued him more.

"I'm sure everything will go exceptionally fine," Prodigy retorted, steady gawking at Violet who was forced to

turn away from him at the sound of the bathroom door opening.

When Yara stepped out into the bedroom, a tinge of annoyance washed over Violet. *Who is she?* Wondered Violet, eyeing Yara from the top of her head to her pretty, French-pedicured toes. Violet's thoughts shifted back to the day of her interview. She remembered her from the pool. She was beautiful then, but now, in just an oversized white buttoned up top, that clearly belonged to Prodigy, she was even more gorgeous. The tone and the smoothness of her Hershey's Milk Chocolate skin is what Violet noticed first. Despite being light skin, she had always had an infatuation with dark skin. Her mother was chocolate, with the softest skin. She thought mocha colored skin was absolutely beautiful. To Violet, the darker the more beautiful. And Yara was a perfect shade in between. Her long weave was pulled up into a high bun, accentuating her high cheekbones and feline-like eyes.

Yara sliding her hands across Prodigy's abs told Violet exactly who she was. Of course she was his girlfriend. She was in *his* bathroom, wearing *his* shirt. Still, the question of who crossed Violet's mind.

Yara looked Violet up and down with a slight smile. "Who do we have here?"

"I'm Violet," said Violet, with the same pursed-lipped smile.

"Yara," replied Yara, steady looking her up and down.

Ms. Shug looked over at Prodigy and then at Violet. "Right this way, Ms. Violet. I'll show you to the en suite. It is decent, isn't it Ms. Yara?"

Yara's small nostrils slightly flared. "Certainly."

Prodigy stuffed his hands into his pockets, watching as Ms. Shug and Violet walked towards the bathroom.

Yara interlocked her arm with his and looked at him with contempt. "New girl?"

Prodigy nodded. He didn't take his eyes off of Violet until she was no longer in his view. "Yes."

"She's... she's pretty. In a plain way," said Yara, slightly annoyed with the fact that Prodigy's attention was on someone other than her.

Today was for her. Today, she was his and he was hers... and hers only. But yet, someone else had caught his attention and that irritated her to a point that nearly threatened her good mood. When the day was for the two of them, Prodigy's attention was always on her. If Aspen entered the room, while Yara stood beside him, hands on his abs, he wouldn't bat an eyelash at her. But this girl? This girl that Yara considered plain... had caught his eye. And that... that made her feel a way.

"Is she?" Prodigy questioned, his eyes finally on hers.

He saw the jealousy. But what did Yara have to be jealous of? *She* was with him. *She'd* given him mind-blowing sex last night and this morning too. *She* had him grunting and cumming all down her throat. *She* was having dinner by candlelight with him. Not her. This girl... this 'plain' girl, worked for him. She didn't have half of what Yara had. But yet, Yara still felt a way.

“Isn’t she? You think otherwise?” Yara questioned with a raised brow, sliding her arm from his.

Prodigy chuckled a little, kissed Yara on the forehead and told her to behave. Today, Prodigy would be nice. Today, he’d spare her feelings. He wanted to, however, tell Yara exactly what he thought about Violet’s beauty. But today... he wouldn’t. Had she asked him that same question, 24 hours ago, he would have been honest. Brutally honest. Violet could be described in many ways, none of which contained the word plain.

“I am behaving,” said Yara, her arms now crossed over her chest. “*You* behave, sir.”

Prodigy laughed, shook his head, and headed for his dresser. He stood there, opened his watch box, and clamped his *Audemars Piguet* watch onto his wrist.

“You already have two. You don’t need another... do you?” asked Yara, steady pressing the issue. This time leaning against the wall across from where Prodigy stood.

He shifted his eyes up away from the watch, averting his gaze to her. “Stop pressing me for a conversation you really don’t want to have, Yara. For her to be so *plain*, you can’t stop talking about her. I get it. I understand the infatuation.”

Yara wouldn’t let it go because he hadn’t agreed with her. She could tell that he didn’t agree with her by the way he avoided the question. She couldn’t let it go because she needed him to answer her question. Did he think she was anything but plain? Yara began to worry. Would she have to compete with another?

Yara drew back. “Prodigy, stop playing with me. I’m not infatuated with her. I’m just asking questions.” She cocked her right brow. “Is two enough?”

Two had been satisfactory. But he could always go for another. Especially after lying eyes on Violet. Sex for Prodigy was an art. He loved everything there was about a woman. But his absolute favorite had to be the ripe peach between their legs. Men liked to say that all pussy was the same, but not Prodigy it wasn’t. They all varied. He’s bedded a lot of women, but no two vaginas were ever the same. Some were wetter, while some were simply average. They all had their individual grip. Their scents were different. Some had nectar of a creamier substance, while others were clear, like water. No two pussies were the same. Just as penises came in all shapes and sizes, vaginas did as well. To say that it was all the same would be a lie. If it was all the same, Prodigy would be satisfied with just one, which he clearly wasn’t.

It wasn’t just the pussy that he loved about women though. He loved the sensuality. He loved the scent of a woman. The beauty. The softness. The delicacy. And the *submission*. Everything there was about a woman... he adored. The feistiness too.

“Okay, Mister. We’re done here,” said Ms. Shug, coming from the bathroom, with Violet in tow, before Prodigy could answer Yara’s question.

Out of respect, Violet kept her eyes off him. Instead, she looked everywhere but at him, although, his aura was literally pulling her in his direction. His presence was consuming. His presence filled the entire room. As big as it

was, she could feel him all over it. Even in the bathroom, with a thick wall, and doors between them.

“Alright. Were you clear?” Prodigy asked, adjusting his cufflinks.

Ms. Shug cleared her throat and nodded. “I was.”

“We won’t have any issues, will we?” he asked, this time, with his eyes on Violet, who, against her will, had her eyes on him too.

Her knees buckled a little, causing her to run her hand through her untamed hair. Prodigy’s eyes averted to the cluster of beaded black bracelets on her wrist. His eyebrows knitted a bit.

“Issues? No...” Violet replied, with furrowed brows, thinking about the rundown of rules Ms. Shug had been giving her as she toured the spacious home.

The west wing, where Prodigy resided, was the size of two, or three of Violet’s houses put together. It was huge. The biggest, most luxurious wing at the manor. The way Bleu had described it the night before did the home no justice. That doesn’t say that Bleu was bad at describing it; Clairmont Manor is just one of those homes that you must see for yourself. It’s the only way to appreciate the beauty that it is.

“That’s good to know,” said Prodigy, staring into her eyes.

Yara gripped Prodigy’s strong bicep and smiled, inserting herself into a conversation that wasn’t for her to join in on. “You’re starting now? The linen... they need to be washed. We have linen for days, but there is something about

this bedding in particular that I prefer over the others. I need them for tonight.” She looked away from Violet, and at Prodigy with a lustful grin. “Please, don’t use too much—”

“Ups! That’s right. I knew I was forgetting something. The Red Room,” said Ms. Shug, snapping her fingers, purposely disrupting Yara. “Would you excuse us please, Mister?”

She hated the girl. At least Aspen was tolerable. Yara really knew how to grind Ms. Shug’s gears and it took next to nothing to do it. Yara simply breathing annoyed Ms. Shug to a level of annoyance one wouldn’t believe. She hated the way Yara walked around the manor like she owned it, and Prodigy too. She thought she was the queen, and Ms. Shug hated it with every fiber of her being.

“When you’re done there, be sure to come back here,” said Yara with raised brows as Ms. Shug rushed a confused Violet out of the suite.

She’d already seen The Red Room. Twice. Ms. Shug made sure of that. It was Prodigy’s spot. The most important room of the wing, aside from his bedroom.

Prodigy turned to Yara and looked down at her with dipped brows, and a squint. The fire behind his gaze was chilling.

Yara cringed. “I’m sorry... I just—”

“Don’t treat them like servants. The housekeepers... they work for *me*. And, I want everyone comfortable. Is that understood?”

Yara swallowed, and nodded, as she wrapped her arms, rubbing her goosebump covered skin. Prodigy had a way about him. He could make you feel like the only woman on earth, and in the next instance, he could make you feel as insignificant as an ant.



“So, tell me... how did the meeting go?” asked Yara, before putting a forkful of linguine in her mouth.

Two hours had passed since his meeting with Mr. O’Donnell. He secured the land Hank’s sat on for \$10,000, which was \$50,000 cheaper than what he had initially offered. The low dollar amount did make Hank cringe, but he was in no position to negotiate, so he shook hands with Prodigy. They were scheduled to finalize the deal once Prodigy’s lawyer made it into town the following afternoon. Once everything was settled, Prodigy would be ready to move forward with his next project.

“It went well,” said Prodigy before eating a forkful of collar greens. “Very well.”

“That’s great news. I’m happy you’re happy,” she replied, with a bright smile.

Dinner had been going exceptionally well. Gavin had prepared a shrimp and linguine dish for Yara, and a plate of good ol’ southern soul food for Prodigy. He didn’t indulge in the foods he loved often because if he did, 220 pounds of muscle would turn into 300 pounds of fat, with ease. So, he

was enjoying his buttermilk fried chicken, collard greens, mac and cheese, yams, and cornbread.

“Excuse me,” said Violet, coming into the dimly lit formal living room.

The minute he laid eyes on her, it was as if Yara wasn't sitting across from him, beautifully dressed in an elegant olive-green gown. Her makeup was done to perfection, and her long weave was parted down the middle, gracefully hanging over her exposed shoulders. She had put in extra effort to look good tonight, but yet, Prodigy's eyes were glued on who she deemed plain. The minute she noticed his attention snatched away from her, her nostrils flared, and she reached across the table for his hand. He gave it to her, but he didn't give her what she wanted. His undivided attention. It wasn't like Prodigy was gazing at Violet because she had asked for some assistance. The lust was heavy in his gaze.

“Wassup? You good?” he asked.

“I'm sorry to disturb. I'm just... I'm getting ready to go and I was wondering if there was anything else you needed.”

You. For dessert, was the first thought that came to Prodigy's mind. And he was so straightforward that he had nearly said exactly that.

“Naw. You've done enough. I'm sure you need to get home. Gavin kept you over long enough,” said Prodigy before pulling his hand from Yara's. “Do you need me to show you out?”

Yara cleared her throat and annoyingly placed a piece of hair behind her ear. She was trying not to overreact. Prodigy was only being polite, right? She kept telling herself that, but there was this feeling in her gut that she only got one time before—when she found out about Aspen. It wasn't that she was upset about Prodigy seeing someone else. That was what she signed up for. Starting out, he'd dip in something new every now and then. But this girl... Aspen... he was spending real time with her. She wasn't just something he dipped in and tossed aside. Yara was comfortable with that. But when she popped up at Prodigy's house, to find her there, wrapped in silk sheets she used to roll around in, she got this feeling in her gut. The same feeling she had in that moment, watching the exchange between Prodigy and Violet.

The tension was thick. Not the bad type of tension neither. That sexual, I want you type of tension. It wasn't one sided at all. But what panged Yara was the energy coming from Prodigy. She was used to women drooling over him. She was used to women stammering over their words, and looking at him lustfully, wanting him. But what she wasn't used to was what Prodigy gave Violet in return. He didn't even look at Aspen with the type of desire he stared at Violet with.

Violet pursed her lips together with a nervous smile. "Please? I'm sorry. I just... It's my first day and—"

"No need to apologize," interrupted Prodigy, before eagerly standing up.

Yara squinted at him with her head cocked to the side. "Umm."

"Eat. I'll be right back."

Yara crossed her arms over her chest and sat back against the chair. She wanted to curse him out, but she knew that if she did, the night would be completely ruined. She wouldn't end the night with his kids swimming in her stomach. She wouldn't get the mind-blowing, toe curling, I love this dick, orgasms she had been thinking about all day. She would be punished and tonight, she didn't want punishment. She wanted him inside of her. Balls knocking against her pussy.

Violet left the dining room without uttering a single word to Yara. She didn't like her solely based off the way she came at her earlier when she started her shift. One thing about Violet, she held grudges, and she held on to them good. All a person had to do was rub her wrong one time and she was good on them. She treated people like they were disposable, because to her they were. To Violet, life was too short to be unhappy.

“I didn't mean to interrupt,” said Violet, as she hiked her bag up over her shoulder.

She really didn't mean to. The last thing she wanted to do was to be caught roaming around someone's big ass house looking like she was snooping instead of looking for the front door.

“How was your first day?”

She sighed with a shrug. “It was fine.”

He stuffed his hands in the pockets of his slacks, as they walked the long hallway towards the front door. “Any regrets?”

“About what?” asked Violet, placing a piece of hair behind her ear to glance at him.

Chills ran down her spine once she did. The man was gorgeous. He didn’t have a single flaw and to Violet, that only meant one thing. He was deeply flawed where people couldn’t see. Inside. No one could be this perfect.

“Accepting my job offer.”

She shrugged. “When Ms. Shug was training me, I had a few,” she joked.

Prodigy opened the door and stepped aside so that she could walk through. “You didn’t walk off. That says something, right?”

Violet walked through the door, inhaling the scent of his cologne.

“Yes... It says I’d rather work here than to be poor and homeless,” she joked again before turning to face him. Once she did, their eyes met and like before, she was stuck there. Staring into his alluring brown irises, heart rate picking up, goosebumps creeping up the nape of her neck.

“You have a great night, Ms. Violet McClain,” said Prodigy, his eyes stuck on hers as well.

He told her to have a good night, yet neither of them moved a muscle. Violet wasn’t the only one of them stuck in a trance. He was stuck too, being pulled in her direction by an unexplainable force. He wanted to touch her. He wanted to hug her. He wanted to kiss her plump lips. The ones on her face, and the ones down below too. He had never craved a person as much as he craved her.

“Babe...” called Yara from behind, pulling both Prodigy and Yara out of their lustful trances.

Violet took a deep breath, gave him a tight smile and said, “You too.”

Seven

“It’s the best thing to do, Bleu. I promise I don’t mind, okay?” said Violet, as she leaned into the backseat to grab her work satchel.

Bleu clicked her seatbelt on. “Are you sure, Vi? I could see if Ms. Hattie has room for Heaven at her center. It’s—”

“I told you, it’s fine! I’m sure. Why waste money on daycare services when I can just work the night shift? Heaven’s a good kid, I don’t mind keeping her during the day. Besides, Ruby will be out on summer break next week. You know she’ll pitch in. I got it sis,” Violet interrupted, trying to get Bleu to understand that she really didn’t mind keeping her niece during the day, and working at night.

It had been two weeks since Violet first started at Clairmont Manor. The job in itself was pretty straightforward. So having to transition to the night shift wouldn’t be an issue for her. Violet truly didn’t mind because Heaven was a good kid who took naps often and just liked to play with barbie dolls. Bleu was worried about Violet not getting enough rest, but she didn’t sleep much as is. Her drawings, and insomnia kept her up on most nights, anyhow. Violet only got about four, or five hours a sleep per night.

As Bleu predicted, Ms. Gladys couldn’t keep Heaven to accommodate the full-time hours she was working at

Clairmont Manor. Yesterday, after picking Heaven up, Ms. Gladys granddaughter pulled Bleu to the side and told her that Ms. Gladys was growing too old and fable to babysit five days a week, for eight hours a day. Bleu understood; Ms. Gladys was approaching seventy. And while she did understand, that just created problems for her.

When she told Violet, she wasn't expecting her to come up with a solution so soon. Against Bleu's wishes, Violet called Ms. Shug that evening, expressing their dilemma. An hour or so later, Ms. Shug called back and told Violet that Prodigy was fine with her switching over to the night shift. Technically, there was no night shift, but when Ms. Shug called Prodigy with the news, he put one in place just for her.

"Alright..." said Bleu, as her voice trailed off a bit at the sight of Trouble approaching the vehicle. "What is he doing?"

Violet stood up and looked over the side of the car to see what or who had Bleu's attention. She sucked her teeth at the sight of Trouble, waltzing his bow-legged self in their direction.

"What does he want? Bleu, I know you haven't been entertaining his trifling behind," said Violet, with dipped brows before slamming the car door shut.

Every chance Trouble got he was sniffing behind Bleu—literally. He was really feeling the vanilla-scented chick, with the shy, timid voice, and the cute smile. Bleu hated to admit it, but she was starting to look forward to and enjoy his company. That is, if Yvette lingering around, which she made it her business to be around as much as possible. The only time

Trouble and Bleu really did get to talk was when Bleu was doing laundry or if Yvette was away from the estate.

Bleu sighed and looked away. “No, I haven’t. He’s just... he’s cool, alright?”

“Cool? Really?”

“Yes! He makes my shift go by faster. Vi, relax, nothing is going on,” said Bleu with a dramatic eyeroll.

Violet put her hands up. “Hey, you’re grown. I trust that you’ll make the best decision, regarding that. Considering the fool is obviously in a serious relationship.”

“Violet, you have a fantastic night at work, okay?” said Bleu dismissively.

Bleu needed Violet to mind her own business. She could do without the condescending sarcasm. Bleu’s a grown woman who’s fully capable of making her own decisions. She had no intentions on being anything other than friends with Trouble. However, Trouble had something totally different on his mind.

“Mmhm,” said Violet with twisted lips, as she closed the back door. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I told you to call me when your shift is over. I’ll come get you.”

Violet swiped a fallen curl from the front of her face. “No. There is no need for you to come all the way up here at one in the morning. The walk down might get my creative juices to flowing.”

Another reason Bleu didn't want Violet working the night shift was because of the hours. Violet wouldn't be getting off until after one in the morning and that didn't sit well with Bleu. But Violet being the fearless chick that she is, didn't mind it one bit. Violet actually preferred the night over the morning shift. She liked the quiet of the night. She'd be able to get some work done without interrupts. Plus, how much work would she have to do at night? She'd have plenty of down time, which she planned on utilizing by curling up in one of the darkest corners of Clairmont Manor with her pencil and sketchpad.

“What? No—Call me!” exclaimed Bleu.

“What up? You good?” greeted Trouble, nodding at Violet.

She gave him a fake smile. “Hey. I'm good... See you sis. Please... remember what I said.”

Bleu sighed, nodded, and pulled her lips into her mouth before averting her gaze to Trouble. *Got damn this man is fine*, thought Bleu, eyeing him up and down, wondering what it was that he wanted. Of course she found him attractive. Who wouldn't? Trouble was extremely appealing, but Bleu honestly wanted nothing more than a friendship with him. Since Yvette had been out of the house for the most part of the day, they spent most of Bleu's shift chatting. She learned that Trouble wasn't just the bad boy he looked to be. He was actually funny, and pretty smart too. She learned that he'd graduated high school from Osborn High School in 2007 and had a degree in business. Bleu was thoroughly impressed.

“Hey, wassup?” said Bleu, looking up at Trouble with furrowed brows, visibly confused.

Trouble squatted down at the window, resting his forearms inside of the window. “Where can we grab something to eat at? I’m trying to take you out to eat...”

Bleu drew back with a slight giggle. “Um. Yvette?”

“What about her?” he said, with little to no emotion.

“She’s your girlfriend... And I happen to work for her.”

“You don’t work for her. You work for bro. And her being my girl ain’t got shit to do with me trying to eat you... I mean,” he slightly chuckled and ran his tongue over his bottom lip. “Trying to eat *with* you. I’m hungry.”

“You have a chef. Gavin was preparing supper before my shift ended. Besides,” Bleu paused and pulled her seatbelt on. “I’m not comfortable having a meal with someone’s boyfriend.”

“What does she have to do with anything?”

Bleu looked into his eyes, deeply confused. “Are you serious, Trouble? I’m not the type of woman that has dinner with another woman’s man.” She shook her head and shifted the car into drive. “Good night.”

Bleu barely gave Trouble enough time to move away from the car before she was pulling off. *The audacity!*



“How are you adjusting to the night shift?”

The sound of his deep, baritone voice in the quiet room made Violet flinch. She briefly glanced over her shoulder at him before going back to folding the freshly dried laundry. “I’m adjusting fine. It’s... it’s pleasantly quiet.”

Prodigy leaned against the stacked washer and dryer and crossed his big arms over his chest. “Pleasantly? You enjoy the quiet?”

Violet nodded and swallowed. “I do.”

“Yeah... I do too. It’s something really therapeutic about it.”

Violet had been working for two hours, and now was the first time she’s seen him all day. As she walked the dimly illuminated hallways of Clairmont Manor, she wondered where he could have been. She wanted to see him. She had spent extra time on her twist out last night. She wanted her curls to be popping today, which they were. She had brushed her hair to the side and applied a little gel on the edges to make sure they were slicked down to perfection. She even put on a little eyeliner, curled her long, voluminous lashes and applied a few coats of mascara. She let Ruby arch her naturally thick eyebrows too. She even stopped at Rite Aid before picking Bleu up for some new fragrance. It was a small \$1.49 personal sized bottle—that she would be keeping in her purse. Violet couldn’t fully wrap her mind around what it was that she was doing. She just knew that she wanted to be exceptionally pretty today. For him.

She had been thoroughly enjoying his company. Every now and then, he’d peek his head in and they would talk. Briefly, before he was pulled away to do something else. Their

conversations were always short but sweet. Violet had really taken a liking to him beyond his physical.

Violet glanced away from the clothes, at him, and asked, “Do you need anything?”

Prodigy was tempted to tell her exactly what it was that he needed, but he decided against it. What he needed was for her to stay out of his mind. What he needed was for her to fulfill his undying thirst. For her. His mouth literally salivated at the sight of her, standing at the dryer, pulling clothes out. He’d learned, over the course of the two weeks Violet had been working there, that there was much more to her than what meets the eye. Although, quite reserved and somewhat standoffish, she was unexpectedly down to earth, with a sense of humor. She was infectious in a way that made him want to be near her whenever she was within reach.

The first thing he did when he got to the estate was search for her. He was excited to see her. Excited to see what her hair would be like today. Excited to bask in her beauty. Excited to see if today, she’d smell like the detergent she washed her clothes in. Today, he was disappointed to learn that she didn’t. Disappointed because he preferred the vague scent of nothing over the fruity smell of whatever cheap perfume she sprayed on before starting her shift. But, he was pleased with everything else. The thin line of eyeliner, lining her top lid, curved at the ends, giving her already slanted eyes, more dimension. The mascara. He was pleased, with her hair. Bushy, pushed over the side, accentuating her high cheekbones, and sharp jawline. Her lips, were bare, shining with clear gloss. He was pleased.. with everything but her scent.

“What are you wearing?” asked Prodigy, with his arms crossed over his chest.

“Huh? The uniform Ms. Shug provided—”

“No, the fragrance. What is it?”

Violet rolled her eyes around with a shrug. “Something I picked up from the drug store. Why?”

“Throw it away,” he told her, totally oblivious to how rude it was.

His intentions weren't to be rude. Prodigy was honest... brutally honest. Without a filter, too. It was just... him.

Violet drew back, offended. “What? No. I'm not throwing my perfume away. I like it. It doesn't matter who doesn't.”

She was trying not to be snappy. She was trying not to take an offense to what he'd said, but she couldn't help it. She purposely bought the perfume before work. She wanted to look good and smell good. For him. But now, she regretted even giving a damn. Violet felt like Prodigy was an asshole, who didn't deserve the extra effort she had put into getting dressed today. She felt silly. *Rude dick*, thought Violet. *I wish I could quit. I do not like this man. Hell... yes I do. I hate it. I truly, truly do.*

“Did I offend you? Offending wasn't my intention,” said Prodigy, taking notice to the frown on her face.

“You basically told me I smelled bad.”

Prodigy eyed her up and down. “*You* don’t smell bad. The perfume does.”

She rolled her eyes and sucked her teeth. “Same thing.”

“No, it isn’t.” he laughed. “Not at all. I prefer the scent of you to whatever bullshit you sprayed on.”

“It isn’t bullshit. And how I smell is none of your business.”

It *was* bullshit. Violet knew that. But the little body mist was all that she could afford. Although she was making more money, she wasn’t completely comfortable spending extra money on things like perfume. Besides, why did Prodigy care about how she smelled anyway? Violet could pretend all she wanted to, him saying that he preferred her natural scent did make her smile inwardly. However, she was still a tad bit embarrassed.

“True,” he said with a shrug, realizing that he was really overstepping boundaries.

Boundaries that were placed with a purpose. He couldn’t do to Violet what he really wanted to do to her. He couldn’t have that. He knew, that if he gave her what he wanted to give her, there would be a shift. There would be complications, and feelings would get involved. From where Prodigy stood, he could see that she was innocent. The type of feelings she’d catch would break her. He’d rip her of her innocence. He knew that it was in his best interests to steer clear of her. But he couldn’t, even if he truly wanted to. Starting out, her regal beauty mesmerized him, and made him want to run his tongue over every inch of her skin. But now,

there was more. He was mesmerized by her scent. Her mind. Her voice. Everything Violet McClain.

“Babe... I’ve been looking all over for you,” said Aspen walking into the laundry room, eyeing Violet up and down. She smiled and extended her hand to her. “Oh, hello. I’m Aspen! And you are?”

Violet looked down at her lingering hand, and then she looked over to Prodigy, who was tugging on his beard, looking back at her. Violet was hesitant, not because she wanted to be rude, but because she was confused. *Seriously? He’s a dog? Of course he is. They all are,* thought Violet. She couldn’t believe Prodigy was ballsy enough to have another woman in the same house he shared with Yara. Because she didn’t know about the arrangement, she thought Prodigy was cheating. With Aspen being out of the house for two weeks, she hadn’t had the pleasure, or displeasure rather, of running into her. She was thoroughly confused. But then again, she wasn’t. This is what men did. Cheat. And shamelessly at that. Prodigy knew she knew Yara and he hadn’t batted an eyelash.

Finally, Violet put a fake, tight-lipped smile on and lightly shook Aspen’s hand. “Violet.”

Aspen nodded before taking a deep breath and turning her attention to Prodigy. From the corner of her eye, Violet watched as Aspen ran her hand down Prodigy’s chest, with a flirty grin on her face.

“When did you get home?” asked Aspen.

“About twenty minutes ago,” replied Prodigy.

Violet's eyebrows wiggled a little, surprised. *He got home twenty minutes ago? He just got here, and his first stop was in here? To talk to me...?* They had to be talking for at least ten of those.

Violet couldn't understand it, but those butterflies returned, and again, she smiled inwardly. Or was it a blush? Whatever it was, she didn't need to be feeling it. She couldn't understand why she felt it... even after learning about his cheating ways. She didn't want to feel anything at all for him, being that she met his girlfriend yesterday morning.

"Come to the room with me. I missed you," whined Aspen.

Violet rolled her eyes, steady folding laundry, wishing they'd take their conversation elsewhere.

"Go ahead. Wait for me. I'm right behind you," said Prodigy, his eyes locked on Violet.

Yes. His eyes were boldly locked on Violet, as if Aspen wasn't standing directly in front of him, expressing how much she missed him yesterday. It was rude, but *it* was Prodigy.

Aspen glanced over at Violet, frowned a bit, and grabbed Prodigy's chin to turn his head back in her direction. "Prodigy."

Prodigy took a deep breath, finally locked yes with her, and grabbed Aspen by the waist. "Aspen."

Aspen slightly cocked her head to the side and nodded. "I said I missed you. It's been weeks. You missed me too, right," she paused and bit down on her bottom lip before boldly grabbing hold to Prodigy's already semi-erect penis.

Again, Aspen cocked her head to the side. This time, she smiled. “Of course you did,” Foolishly assuming that Prodigy’s hard-on was brought on by her.

It wasn’t.

He had acquired a new craving. Violet. Simply standing beside her had aroused him. Her smooth, buttercream skin, and hypnotizing honey brown eyes had him slightly captivated. In all of the thirty-two years he’s lived, no one had ever had this effect on him. It was something about her aura that was pulling him in her direction.

From the corner of her eye, Violet saw where Aspen’s hand had went and she was disgusted. So disgusted that she had to excuse herself to fight the urge to voice her opinion about it. But, on her way out of the laundry room, Prodigy touched her arm, sending a chill through her entire body. A chill so intense that she shivered, and her eyebrows quickly knitted together. His touch... his touch made her shiver.

“Please, I didn’t mean to disturb you. Finish. We’ll be out of your way,” said Prodigy, grabbing Aspen by the waist again. This time, slightly pushing her in the direction that Violet was once walking in. “Set it up. I’m right behind you.”

Aspen, deeply confused, but obedient all the while, simply walked out of the laundry room. The last thing she wanted to do was upset Prodigy. That was no good for her... nor anyone else in the house.

Violet made eye contact with him, squinted, but said nothing. It wasn’t her place. She had questions. She wanted to know how he could be so bold. What about Yara? Did he sleep with Aspen in the same bed he shared with Yara. Of course he

did. But again... that part of Prodigy's lifestyle, much like everything else, hadn't been shared with Violet.

Prodigy crossed his arms over his chest again, this time, taking notice to the laundry Violet was folding.

“Whites with whites. Red, with reds. Blues with—”

“You said you'd be out of my way,” said Violet, rudely interrupting him.

Prodigy roughly scratched at his scruffy cheek. “Blues with blues. Coordination. You tired or something, love? This night shift ain't working out for you huh?”

He didn't want to be rude. He couldn't control it. He wanted things done a certain way for a reason. She was doing it wrong and that was bugging the hell out of him.

She wasn't tired of anything but having to remember the ridiculous way he required every little thing to be done. Every now and then, she'd get comfortable and forget, but she'd always correct herself before finishing. Every little tedious detail of the way he wanted his laundry washed and folded. Every silly detail about the way his books must be placed back on the bookcase. She told her how Prodigy despised clutter, and mess. He wanted the house dusted, top to bottom. He absolutely hated streak marks and needed every piece of furniture exactly the way it was placed, originally. If a painting was crooked, you'd better fix it before he saw it. He liked for his toilet tissue to be placed on the roll a certain way. The blinds must be opened at sunrise, so it was important to make sure that the automatic timer was always set. And if there were blinds that required manual opening and closing, the first person at work was responsible for opening every set

of blinds in the home. And if you were responsible for closing them, they had better been closed correctly, facing down and not upward.

Violet raised her eyebrow at him. “Love? Look... I forgot. Color coordinating laundry is silly to me.”

It was silly. And easy to be forgotten about. Seeing as though, *normal* people didn’t operate the way Prodigy wanted his staff to.

“Is it?” Prodigy questioned. “Why is that? What’s wrong with coordinating?”

“*Color* coordinating. Color coordinating laundry... is silly because what difference will it make once you put it away? You’re going to throw it all into dresser drawers... the colors.. they’ll end up mixing eventually.”

“I won’t throw them into dresser drawers. They will be hung up in my closets,” he said, as his eyes stayed fixed on her full lips.

“*Hung... in your closets.* Well... why fold do I have to fold them at all?”

He hadn’t had the pleasure of seeing her smile, but he knew, just by the fullness of her lips, that when she did smile, it was beautiful. And whenever she spoke, the dimples in her cheeks exposed themselves, letting Prodigy know that her smile would be a deep-dimpled one. He wanted to see it. He wanted to make her smile. But, life wouldn’t allow him to spend more than five minutes alone with her.

“Because I told you to,” Prodigy snappily retorted, now sliding closer and closer to her. “Smile.”

Prodigy couldn't care less about judgment. He wanted things done, the way he wanted them done. And if anybody had a problem with delivering, he'd happily let them go. Ms. Shug told Violet that he was a peculiar man, but she didn't expect this. He was, indeed, peculiar. And while he was peculiar, he was interesting. Listening to Ms. Shug ramble off rule, after rule, Violet wondered what made a man the way that Prodigy was. Something had to trigger it. She wanted to pick his brain.

Violet drew back, offended. "What? Also, you don't *tell* me to do anything. You *ask* me to. And I do, because I'm being paid to."

Prodigy dug into the front pocket of his dress pants and pulled a knot of money out. Unfolding it, he peeled a hundred-dollar bill from it and handed it to her. "Smile."

Violet drew back with a light giggle. "You've got to be kidding me. I'm not for sale. What is wrong with you? You're playing, right?"

But he wasn't. Prodigy was as serious as a heart attack. He didn't laugh with her. He didn't smile. He didn't smirk. His facial expression was flat, but stern. His eyes, however, were planted on her lips, heart thumping intensely against his chest... watching... waiting. He wanted to see her smile. He wanted to see a real smile. Not the forced one she puts on for the sake of being polite. He was waiting for her full, pink, lips to turn curl up into a beautiful smile. He had wanted to see it since he snatched it from her face once the interview started to go left.

Prodigy slowly ran his tongue over his bottom lip and put his money back into his pocket.

“Are you going to smile?” he asked, steady inching in closer to her.

Violet looked up at him, her eyebrows steady furrowed, with her head slightly cocked to the side. “I have absolutely nothing to smile about. I’ll fix your laundry. Just for you to unfold it and hang it in one of your closets.”

She huffed and turned away. With shaky hands, she began to restack laundry in separate piles. She had a hard time concentrating. A hard time breathing, steadily too. Prodigy was so close to her that she could smell the faint scent of cologne he sprayed on at the beginning of his day, and his minty breath too. He was so close that if Violet made a step to the left, they’d be touching.

With his head slightly cocked to the right, he realized that the smile he wanted from her was a real one. Not one you could pay for. Not a forced one. A real one. The type of smile that he’d have to work for.

“What makes you smile?” he asked, studying her facial expression.

Prodigy never had to put in any work to get a woman to smile. Not for him. The smiles... the flirting.. the sex... it all came with ease. So, this situation... this exchange with Violet was an odd one for him. He didn’t have to do much of anything to get a smile out of a woman. They came willingly. With Violet, he had to work a little. Having to work for it made him want it more. Prodigy’s hunger for what he wanted

increased tenfold when what he wanted was hard to get. He grew up poor, and starving.

“Why? Shouldn’t you want to finish up with your... side chick, before your girlfriend comes home?” Violet snapped. She quickly shook her head and apologized. “I was out of line, pardon me.”

Prodigy snorted, with a slight chuckle. “Aspen isn’t my ‘side chick’.”

“Who she is or isn’t is none of my business. So, I was out of line. My bad,” stated Violet, before placing her hands flat on the granite countertop. “Please... excuse me. I will finish this before I leave. It’s—it’s time for my break.”

It wasn’t. But Violet had decided to take her break early. It was for the best. Prodigy’s presence was smothering her. Literally. She was having a hard time breathing and she knew it was because of him. Before, she had been doing just fine, washing and drying laundry, humming a tune she heard playing on the radio earlier in the afternoon. The closeness, and the heavy eye contact always sent an unexplainable wave of feelings to wash over her.

Prodigy stepped aside and allowed her to walk through. He stood there, briefly, watching as she made her way out of the laundry room, thinking, telling himself that one day he would get a smile out of her. A real one.

Eight

“What took you so long?” Asked Aspen, sitting on the bed, wearing nothing but a white, furry, lace French robe. Her pretty French pedicured feet were bare, with the exception of some sort of classy feet jewelry that connected at the ankle, and the middle toe. “I thought you were right behind me. “

Prodigy turned his eyes up at Aspen and squinted before running his tongue over the inside of his jaw. “Stand up.”

Aspen stood up and he stood in front of her, with his head slightly cocked to the side, examining every curve on Aspen’s curvy body. She stood there, chest slightly heaving, excitingly anticipating the first touch. The first touch always made her nature rise. It was the start of one of the most intense sensations she’d experience this week... or until he laid hands and dick on her again. Prodigy was a pussy connoisseur. Especially when he was extremely turned on, which tonight he was.

He took a step closer to Aspen and finally, placed his large hands on her shapely hips, pulling her into his chest. She gasped and wrapped her arms around his neck. She shivered and chills ran from her spine, down to the puffy, bulging bud below. He was both rough and delicate at the same time. Rough in grip, but delicate with his touch. She had completely forgotten all about how long it took him to come to her. That

no longer mattered. What mattered now was what was to come next. She had been without him for two weeks, visiting family and friends. Those two weeks were torture. For her it was at least. For Prodigy, the days seemed to simply run together. He didn't long for her as she longer for him. And it wasn't only because Yara had been around neither. Prodigy had placed his attention on someone else. Violet. The very person his attention was on now, and she was many, many walls away.

He placed his hands on her shoulders, and slowly lowered the top of the robe until it hit the floor. Aspen stood before him, completely naked, face full of makeup, beautiful as ever, but Prodigy's mind was on the barefaced, innocent, small town girl with the honey brown eyes and golden curly tresses. He wanted to touch her. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to taste her. But tonight, he'd settle. Tonight, he'd settle with fantasies, because once he got his hands on the real thing, there would be no limits to what he did to satisfy her. Because, in satisfying her, he would be satisfying himself.

Prodigy stood behind Aspen and with his eyes closed, he kissed the top of her shoulder, and then the other. She shuddered at the feel of his soft, cool lips against her warm skin. He felt good. He always felt good. When he pushed her hair aside and kissed the side of her neck, Aspen moaned. In Prodigy's ears, her moan had a different melody to it. Her moan was softer, more innocent... barely audible. A soft melody, like music to his ears. When the moan fell from her lips, and crept into Prodigy's ears, he grunted and grabbed a fistful of Aspen's hair. In his hands, her hair was soft, curly, and smelled of shea butter. Everything that Aspen was had been replaced, with the likes of Ms. Violet McClain. With his

eyes closed, he saw her... he felt her. He smelled her. Instead of the cheap perfume she wore tonight. Instead of the sultry scent of the Chanel No. 9 Aspen had spritzed on as a finishing touch to her look for the night.

He held onto her hair with force, pulling her head to the side as he kissed and bit on her neck. Aspen's knees buckled and her pussy pulsed... gushing. Her mouth salivated at the thought of the way his dick would taste when he slid it down her wet throat. She missed it. Long, thick, curved, three shades darker than he was and covered in veins. If Aspen could, she would make a mold of it, to have for the times when they were apart. Even then, it wouldn't suffice, she'd simply be settling. The real thing was more than just meat. With the real thing came passion, fire, feeling. All of which a toy could not.

Prodigy's kisses lowered to the back of her shoulders. Aspen moaned and arched her back a little, anticipating his next move. He grabbed her waist and bent her over, until her hands were flat on the floor. Prodigy stood behind her, spread her ass cheeks, and ran his tongue down the back of her pussy, until he met her clit. He sucked and dug his nails in her juicy ass cheeks.

"Oh my God. Fuck daddy. I missed... I missed this so much," cried Aspen as he began to suckle on her clit, driving her crazy.

She threw her ass back, smacking it against his face, and he smacked her cheeks, telling her to stop.

"Don't move," he said, as he stood completely up to drop his shorts. Once they pooled at his ankles, he forcefully

gripped her cheeks again, before roughly sliding into her. He close his eyes, enjoying the feel of her wet, warm pussy on his dick. Wishing he was sliding inside of Violet instead. Wanting to give her what he was giving Aspen. Wanting her to give him what he loved. Pussy.

Aspen stood there, bent over, hands to the floor, holding on for dear life, as Prodigy savagely slammed his dick in and out of her, his balls knocking mercilessly against her pulsating clit. Her pussy was so wet. Dripping, creaming.

“Yes—Yes! Fuck me! Mmmmh. Fuck me,” moaned Aspen.

Prodigy smacked her on the ass and told her to shut the fuck up. She listened, as he continued to dig inside of her. All nine inches of his thick dick was buried balls deep inside of her, as he gravitated his hips, upward, poking at her spot, forcing her to squirt all over his dick and the floor, too.

“Mmmm. Baby... mmm,” she moaned, trying her hardest to keep quiet. Trying her hardest not to fall.

Prodigy gripped her hips, holding her up, feeling her slip just a little. He opened his eyes, to look at the mess she was making, except something else caught his eye. There was a shadow outside of his door. Someone was pacing back and forth. He was sure it wasn't Yara, as she was away. The only person on the wing was Violet. She was listening. Listening to him fuck Aspen. Listening to him grunt. Listening to her whimper. Pacing, wishing she was there. Wishing she was the one being fucked by him. He was sure of it.

His dick grew harder... longer... with excitement. Excitement and purpose. He kept his eyes on the shadow, as he

pulled out of Aspen, and then slammed back into her again.

“Oh my God, *papi*. *Al carajo con este coño, papi* (fuck this pussy papi),” Aspen cried, her Spanish roots coming to surface.

Prodigy pulled out and said, “Eat this dick.”

Aspen eagerly turned around and reached for his dick. But he smacked her hands away, tapping his hard, pussy juice drenched dick on her lips. She opened her mouth and he slowly inched in, until he hit her tonsils.

“Mmhm. Eat this muthafucka, baby,” he told her before smacking her across the face. Aspen moaned and began to slurp and suck on his dick like never before, loving the taste of herself on his dick. Prodigy grabbed a handful of her hair and began to viciously fuck her face. Aspen kept up, her gag reflex nonexistent, pussy dripping with cum. She was just that turned on.

Prodigy kept fucking her face, with his eyes on the shadow... that had stopped moving. Violet was positioned right outside of his door. Right there. A few feet away. He wanted her closer. On her knees, with his dick buried in her pretty little mouth. He wanted her sucking her pussy juices off his dick. Not Aspen. No one but her.

He grunted, as thoughts of what he wanted to do to her filled his mind. Before he knew it, he was cumming down Aspen’s throat. Uncontrollably, grunting, damn near moaning. And the work Aspen had done had nothing to do with it. It was all Violet and she hadn’t even touched him.



The new girl. Violet? She's... She's interesting, huh?" asked Aspen, as she sat behind Prodigy, him between her thick thighs, as she ran some of her natural hair moisturizer over the top of his waves.

After Prodigy's first orgasm, the shadow disappeared. Aspen wanted more, so he gave her that. With thoughts of Violet on his mind of course. They went two rounds, with Aspen cumming more times than she could count on both hands. They were all showered up and were just kicking it. Something Prodigy didn't get from Yara often. With Aspen, things were chill and easy. Yara? Yara was always in competition. She liked to mask it as really caring about Prodigy, but he saw straight through it. She was trying to compete for a spot that wasn't open. A spot that would never open. Not for her at least.

Prodigy lightly grunted, with a slight chuckle. "She is."

Aspen leaned forward to get a look at his face, smiling. "What? Why'd you say it like that?"

"How long have you been wanting to say that?"

Aspen bit down on her bottom lip, with a giggle. "Since I saw you gawking at her, as if I wasn't standing directly in front of you. She's interesting. She has a look to her. I know you noticed, because you never... and I mean never... look at women *like that* around me."

It was true. Prodigy had never looked at a woman the way he looked at Violet ever. In life. No one had been enticing

enough. No one had piqued his interest the way that she had. He grew up a very, very curious boy. And as an adult, that curiosity lingered. But these days, his curiosity was geared towards things that served him monetary gain. He was always curious about how and where he could make the most money. Being in Rosebury... around her... that had shifted a bit. He was truly curious about her.

“What makes women smile?” asked Prodigy as Aspen brushed the top of his head.

He had game. That wasn't the issue. The issue was that Violet clearly wasn't wired like most women. Not like the women he was used to encountering at least. He couldn't flash his money. She didn't bat an eyelash when he pulled his fat wad of cash out. He didn't know what she liked. He was sure it wasn't the finer things in life. She wore off brand clothes, and obviously wore cheap perfume. He couldn't get her some of the best bundles Instagram baddies had to offer, because she didn't rock weave down to her ass crack. Her nails were natural, so he was certain that a trip to the nail shop wouldn't suffice. Her body was natural, and curvy in its own authentic way. He didn't even want to offer to pay for enhancements, seeing as though, she definitely did not need it. Not in Prodigy's eyes at least. She didn't need a big, superficial ass or big, perky titties. Her frame was perfection. So... Prodigy was slumped. He didn't know how to approach her.

She paused. “What do you mean? Where'd that come from?”

“Just answer the question.”

Aspen sighed and looked up at the ceiling. She knew where it had come from. The mention of Violet had shifted Prodigy's thoughts to her. Before, they had been pretty much sitting in silence. Him with his eyes closed, her with her hands in his hair. Just... a vibe. Aspen kicked herself for even bringing her up. But, not asking had been gnawing at her, so she just spit it out.

“Prodigy, you're fully aware of what makes women smile,” she said, shaking her head. “Are you asking about *women*? Or *women like Violet*?”

Her question was perfect, because they weren't two of the same.

“Women like... Violet.”

“You really like her, don't you? Have she met Yara?”

Prodigy lightly chuckled. “She called you my side chick.”

“Ouch!” Aspen joked, with her hand on her chest. “I mean, once upon a time I was... many years ago. But... anyway... So, I take it she doesn't know about this little arrangement huh?”

“Are you going to answer my question?”

“After you answer mine, I will,” she said, with her head slightly cocked back, in a confident, playful way.

“She doesn't.”

She shook her head. “Don't waste your time. Women like Violet... she wouldn't understand. Putting in effort to

make her smile would be pointless because she'd never, I mean... *never*, agree to what I've agreed to."

There was a sadness in Aspen's voice that Prodigy took notice to but chose to ignore. The sadness that was there was her own fault. Prodigy felt absolutely nothing towards it. It was almost as if the sadness, clearly in her tone of voice, didn't even exist. His mind was on Violet and what Aspen had said. He knew that. Violet was nothing like Aspen and Yara. She was nothing like any woman he's ever encountered, so he knew for certain that this situation he had with them wouldn't fly. Not starting out, at least. Prodigy was a confident man who knew he could get anyone to do anything for him. For Violet, it would require a little work, but all he had to do was get her alone. All he had to do was give her something she's never had before. Him.

Aspen sighed. "But, I am who I am. And Prodigy... You are who you are. So, I know you're going to do whatever you want to do regardless. Who knows," she paused and bit her bottom lip. "You have your ways. Just do you. You'll get a smile out of her. That's nothing for you... even with women like Violet."

Prodigy said nothing. He sat there, while she brushed his hair, thinking... Eager to get back to the common quarters of the house just to bump into her again. As eager as he was to be in her presence again, he sat still.

And so, it begins...



“Why didn’t you wake me when you made it home, Vi?” asked Bleu, standing in the doorway of Violet and Ruby’s bedroom.

Ruby tossed her pillow over her head and grunted. “What time is it, Bleu?”

“Time for you to get up,” she replied, before reaching over to snatch the pillow from her. “Violet!”

Violet jolted awake, sitting straight up. “What?!”

“Why didn’t you wake me when you made it home?!” repeated Bleu, throwing the pillow in Violet’s face.

She blocked it, and it went crashing to the floor. She groaned and laid back down, turning over to face the wall. “Why would I wake you at 1:30 in the morning?”

Violet was cranky. She had just fallen asleep what felt like ten minutes ago, although, it was actually about two and a half hours ago.

“To let me know that you made it! That’s why!” yelled Bleu.

“Of course she made it,” grumbled Ruby. “It’s Rosebury. Everyone makes it home.”

She rolled her eyes and reluctantly rolled over to the side of the bed. Snatching her watch from her cluttered nightstand, she groaned at the time. 6:12AM. She still had at least an hour and a half before her alarm sounded. “Bleu! It’s not time for me to get up.”

“Well, you’re up now. Might as well get ready for school,” Bleu said with a shrug, before approaching the bunkbed.

Leaning over the worn, wooden guardrail of the top bunk she rested her chin on her arms. “Vi. How was it? Did *you know who* say anything to you? Was it creepy being there that late at night? Ms. Shug says he likes it dark. Was it pitch —”

“Leave me alone. I’ll tell you all about it on the way up the hill, Bleu. Let me sleep,” interrupted Violet.

Bleu couldn’t help it. She was overly curious to know what it was like to be at Clairmont Manor at nightfall. Clairmont Hill was always dark and creepy at night. Well, at least it was before the house was built and the lighting was put in place. Growing up, there were so many stories told about Clairmont Hill and what happened up there at night. It was the darkest place in all of Rosebury at nightfall. With no streetlights, or roads aside from the long one running up Mayberry St., it was pretty quiet up there. Quieter than all of Rosebury. Still, and spooky as hell. As teenagers, they played around up on the hill at sunset, but they never stayed after nightfall, too afraid of the unknown.

Violet was eager to tell her that it wasn’t creepy at all. The streetlights, lining the road gave her a sense of calmness. She loved it. The cool night air, brushing against her cheeks, whisking through her wild tresses, was therapeutic to her. With the moon, shining brightly over her head, illuminating parts of the road that the streetlights missed was all of the company she

needed. She loved it and was actually looking forward to her next walk down.

“Okay,” whispered Bleu before creeping away from the bed. She frowned at the sight of Ruby curled up snoring just that quick. “Ruby! Get up!”

Two hours later, Violet was sitting in the driver’s seat of ‘Candy’ while Bleu strapped Heaven in, in the backseat. She was tired and couldn’t wait to get back to her bed. Especially since Ruby was off to school, and Heaven would likely be going back to sleep too.

“Okay, tell me,” Bleu pressed, as soon as she closed the passenger door.

Violet glanced at her and then back at the road before pulling off from in front of the house. “Tell you what?”

“What happened, Vi. Stop acting like you don’t know what I’m fishing for. Did you talk to him? How was it being there after dark? You know—”

“Yes, I talked to him. We always talk,” Violet interrupted, before running her hand over the slickness of her ponytail.

“Well what did you talk about? That late at night?”

Violet swallowed, thinking about the way he made her feel. That conversation in the laundry room was the first and only conversation between them for the whole night. The remainder of her shift was spent hoping to run into him again. Which, she couldn’t understand for the life of her. As suffocating and as intense as it was to be around him, she wanted it. She wanted it badly. To a point where she found

herself pacing back and forth in front of the towering double doors to his bedroom. She paced back and forth, listening to the sound of Aspen's moans. Listening to him grunting. Listening to the slurping sounds of her giving him head. Violet paced, listening to the love making on the other side of the door, full of curiosity. Curious about what it felt like to feel what Aspen felt. Was his sex just as intense as he was? Was he an attentive lover? Was he rough? Was he gentle? She was curious. Curious about what it would be like to be in Aspen's position. As the other woman. As the woman on the receiving end of love making so good that she whimpered and screamed out in ecstasy... like Aspen.

“Nothing. He told me to smile. Actually tried to pay me to smile,” Violet finally responded, shaking the thought of Aspen's moans from her mind.

Bleu's eyes widened. “Seriously?! Wow! Well... Did you?”

Violet brows dipped. “Huh? No, I didn't. Hell no. I'm not for sale, Bleu.”

“He just wanted you to smile. Which, you should do more often. You have a beautiful smile, Vi,” said Bleu with a shrug. “You could've done that for free.”

“Well, I didn't have anything to smile about,” mumbled Violet.

“You have a lot to smile about, Vi. Anyway, come on, tell me about the rest of your night.”

The rest of the ride up to Clairmont Manor, Violet talked about what it was like working up there at night, and

how her walk down was. All the while, her mind was on what Bleu had said about smiling more. About how she did have something to smile about. According to Bleu, Violet had a lot to smile about. However, she didn't feel the same. She wasn't happy. As content and comfortable Violet was in Rosebury, she was mostly lonely, and unhappy.

Unhappy because she wanted more for her life. Unhappy because she stood in the way of her own happiness. She knew she was the problem, which was to her, the hardest thing to battle. She wanted to be happy. She wanted to fall in love. And for the first time, fall freely. She wanted to someday get married and start a family of her own. But Violet was incapable of letting go enough to fall for someone. She wasn't afraid of a broken heart. She wasn't afraid of commitment neither. What she was afraid of was losing. She didn't want to love, just to lose. She didn't want to grow attached to anyone, knowing that at the blink of an eye, they could be gone. She didn't see the purpose of falling in love, because love... it didn't last forever. Life didn't last forever. She couldn't stomach another loss. So, because she was afraid of losing, she suffered.



Violet stood at the sink, looking in the mirror. She had just started her shift at Clairmont Manor. Her first stop was the staff quarters of the house, to the bathroom to get herself together. She hadn't be able to get the sound of Prodigy's lovemaking off her mind. If she wasn't occupied, she was thinking about it. She found herself wondering what it was like

to experience him. She wondered if his ‘fuck face’ was sexy, or if he wore the same intense, flat expression he always wore.

Knock. Knock.

“Hey Violet! Are you finishing up in there? You don’t want to be late. He’s not in a good mood today,” said Opal from the other side of the door. “Hurry up.”

Violet sucked her teeth and rolled her eyes, as she put on a thin sheet of clear gloss. “I’ll be out in a sec.”

“Shoot yourself. I’m just giving you a heads up.”

Violet closed her eyes and took a deep breath, as she listened to Opal walk away from the door. Once she heard the door close, Violet opened her eyes and again, stared at her reflection. Today, she didn’t do too much. She did just enough. Her hair was loose, in its natural curly state, untouched. She didn’t wear any perfume. She opted out. His words echoing through her mind as she got dressed this afternoon. She didn’t want to care about what he thought, but she did. Prodigy had been on her mind since she first laid eyes on him and it bugged the hell out of her. Now, she was getting dressed, with what he’d think on her mind. That was out of the norm for Violet. She pretty much went with the flow of things and moved the way she wanted to move. Especially when it came to her appearance. Not these days though. These days, she considered what he would think.

Looking down at her watch, she decided that she had wasted enough time in the bathroom. She had been trying to avoid the inevitable. Running into him. She wasn’t sure how she’d react, being that she had been intrusive, listening to him during what sounded like a very intimate moment.

Finally, Violet hiked her workbag further up her arm, and walked out of the bathroom, bumping right into his chest. He stood there like a statue, looking down at her with that flat expression on his face. Violet's eyes widened and she collected herself, stepping back.

"I'm sorry—"

"Are you coming up to the wing any time soon?" Prodigy interrupted, before looking down at his watch. "You're ten minutes late."

"I've been here since the start of my shift. I'm not late," she corrected, as she maneuvered around him, as quick as possible without it seeming as though she was running away, which, she actually was.

She didn't want him to see her cheeks turn red. She didn't want him to notice the lust in her eyes.

Prodigy followed behind her, his eyes roaming the curves on her petite frame. She was shaped like a Coca-Cola bottle; small waist, curvy hips. Sexy, with just the right amount of 'body'. Prodigy didn't consider himself an ass or breast man. He didn't care for the superficial ass, nor the double-d tits. As long as there was something there, he was cool. What satisfied him was concealed. It was sacred. It was hidden.. between the legs. Between slippery folds. *Pussy*. He appreciated the beauty of a woman... and the *feel* of a woman.

"You've been *here*. Here and there are two totally different places. You work there. Not here, so Ms. Violet, you are late."

“Okay,” said Violet as she slid the double doors to the massive walk in closet open. “I’ll be right up. I just... I have to put my things away.”

Violet could feel Prodigy standing behind her. She wondered if the way she smelled today pleased him. She wondered... if he truly did prefer her natural scent to the fruity smell of the body spray. She wanted to hear him say it.

But he wouldn’t.

Prodigy stood behind her, studying her. Subtly inhaling her scent. Today, she smelled like *Violet*. A scent he preferred over *anything* else. Her scent was exhilarating. He didn’t know if it was the shampoo she used, or if it was what she washed her clothes in. Or... if it was simply the scent of her. Whatever it was, she smelled lovely. Soft... feminine... delicate. Like a woman.

“Do you need anything else?” asked Violet, her heart intensely thumping against her slightly heaving chest. He was still in the doorway, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his black dress slacks, looking over at her. Looking down at her.

She hadn’t made eye contact with him, but she could feel how intense it was. His eyes were all over her. His eye contact is what made her care. It’s what made her pay special attention to how she wore her hair. It’s what made her pay close attention to the thickness of her brows. It’s what made her give a damn about looking good. She had to make sure that not one strand of hair was out of place. She had to make sure her nose was clean, and that there wasn’t any food in her teeth. She had to make sure her armpits stayed dry too. She couldn’t

risk him seeing her like that again. Off her game, a sweaty mess.

Prodigy wanted to tell her, yes, there was something else he needed. What he needed was her. On his tongue. In his bed. On his face. What he needed was for her to stay out of his head, as he always needed. He wanted to forget her. But it was as if since she stepped foot in his office, forgetting her had become nearly impossible. Her face was planted there. Seemingly stuck.

Instead of lying, telling her that there was nothing else he needed, Prodigy simply walked away.



“*That’s* the girl you were talking about? I saw her before. But I just knew you weren’t talking about *her*,” said Yara, with her lips twisted up, eyeing Violet up and down. “You’ve got to be kidding me. She’s wearing an afro. Please, Aspen, don’t tell me you’re worried about a bitch that rocks an afro.”

Aspen, Yvette, and Yara were sitting out back, dangling their freshly pedicured toes in the pool, sipping on strawberry margarita’s Gavin prepared.

“He asked me how to make women smile,” said Aspen with her head cocked to the side. “He’s interested. So, get ready to share him with another.”

Yvette giggled, shaking her head. “Yara, you’re talking like the girl is ugly. She’s really cute. Light skin, curly hair... very cute. Out of Prodigy’s league, but definitely doable. You

two were out of his league once, too. Now look at you. Wearing Fendi swimsuits, riding luxury. She might not look like his type now but trust me... give him some time. That'll change."

Yvette's opinion was the only one that was of substance in their conversation. She was unbiased. Yara was speaking from a place of jealousy. Aspen was full of concern, yet she hadn't said anything bad about Violet. She understood Prodigy's attraction towards her. She was different and not necessarily in a bad way neither. Interesting and a puzzle. Two things that always seemed to pique Prodigy's interest. What Yara failed to realize was that Violet was everything they weren't but everything Prodigy wanted to learn. Unlike Yara, Aspen paid attention to the small details about Prodigy. Yara was blinded by the competition. She was always trying to outshine Aspen, instead of just sitting back and learning the man she claimed she loved.

Yara squinted at Yvette and cocked her head to the side. "Evie, shut up. You don't know what you're talking about. The girl is plain... plain as hell. There is nothing special about her. At all. Look at me... and look at Aspen. Please... we've never been that basic, ever." She paused, steady watching through the glass walls of the home as Violet scrambled around the staff quarters, getting ready to head up to the West wing. "What does her being light skin have to do with anything? You do know that all light skin women aren't pretty... right? You've really been on that ignorant shit lately."

Yvette shrugged with a laugh. "Take it how you want to take it. I was not being colorist. I was simply admiring her beauty. And it's become obvious that I'm not the only one in

this household that finds her attractive. Prodigy does, and so does Aspen. Isn't that right?"

"Why are you even here? Trouble is barely here, chasing around Rosebury pussy, but yet you stay here all of the time, wearing out your welcome, annoying everyone," said Yara, squinting at Yvette. She pointed. "Watch what you say, you might end up getting your ass beat today, Evie. Keep trying me with that light skin, dark skin shit and you will see."

She was only mad because Yvette was right. Yara could play it off all she wanted; she saw the beauty that Violet possessed. She saw the attraction in Prodigy's eyes the day she met Violet. She saw how distracted, yet focused he was at their special dinner. But still, she couldn't see *her* winning Prodigy. She couldn't even see her in the equation.

"Now you want to get rid of me. The truth hard to swallow huh?" said Yvette, unmoved by Yara's threats. Getting up under peoples skin was one of Yvette's favorite things to do. You'd think that by now, Yara knew that.

"Evie, leave it the hell alone," said Aspen, looking away from the house. "She said what she said."

There Aspen was again, defending Yara. She couldn't stand her on most days, but Aspen would be lying if she said she didn't feel a little something for Yara. They had been in each other lives for about three years now. They might have been in love with the same man, but that didn't mean there wasn't just a tinge of mutual love between them too. Plus, she felt threatened, just like Yara. They had that in common. They had been used to each other. Sharing Prodigy with another

woman aside of each other would complicate things. So, Yvette joking about the situation annoyed Aspen.

“And I said what I said,” countered Yvette with a shrug. “You can’t even deny that she’s beautiful, can you? If you thought she was plain as Yara puts it, you wouldn’t be worried.”

“She is beautiful. I never said she wasn’t,” admitted Aspen with a shrug. “And yeah, he thinks so too. I mean, if it comes down to it, I guess we’ll be adding another to this trio.”

Aspen was pretty much laxed about it on the outside. But internally, she was hoping and praying that that didn’t happen.

“I bet,” said Yara with a laugh. “Anyway, like I was saying... She won’t be a factor. Trust.” She shrugged, steady eyeing Violet. “Besides, a square like that couldn’t possibly be built for this lifestyle.”

“It takes a special type of woman to be built for the ‘lifestyle’,” said Yvette using air quotations. “And I do mean *special*.”



“He was persistent,” said Los, one of Prodigy’s business associates as he held the door open for him.

Prodigy nodded at him, adjusted the collar of his suit coat as he stepped inside. They slapped hands and Prodigy asked, “He’s alone?”

“Hell yeah. He already know how it goes. Back there with bro.”

Los was the middleman, connecting the illegal business deals Prodigy had in place. Him and his twin brother, Ebro. They had been associates of Prodigy for over a decade now. They met back when Prodigy was on the come up, hustling nickel and dime bags of weed wherever he could. He used to serve them, before they were put on by the same weed connect Prodigy copped from. They'd see each other in passing, nod, and keep it moving. Years later, Prodigy ran into them and at this point, he was leveling up. Not only was he selling weed in large quantities, he was getting into the cocaine business. Because he needed some reliable, hungry niggas on his team, he recruited them. Since then, he'd ventured off into various illegal businesses. The drug business, still as profitable as he always knew it would be, was steady afloat. Prodigy was a hustler at all angles. He was in the business of illegal firearms, drugs, counterfeit money... you name it, he was into it. Not only was he into illegal activities, but he had multiple streams of legal income coming in too. He was making more money than he could keep up with, and it was all he ever wanted. Financial freedom.

“What up doe, Troub?” said Los, slapping hands with Trouble.

“Shit. Y'all boys been straight?” Trouble replied as he stepped inside of the dimly lit two-bedroom house.

“You know how it be. Same as always, my baby. Business as usual,” Los responded.

You'd think that with the history they shared with Los and Ebro, that they would be the best of friends. But they weren't. Prodigy didn't have friends. The only person he associated himself with outside of business was Trouble and vice versa. Being in and out of foster homes, Prodigy was pretty much a stranger to building bonds. He never stayed one place long enough to establish any real friendships. Making friends weren't important to Prodigy. At a young age, his primary focus was bettering the fucked-up situation his mother put him and his brother in. That's all he cared about. Besides, he didn't trust anyone. Of course he didn't. The one person that was supposed to love, nurture, protect, and care for him abandoned him. Left him and his brother to fend for themselves, knowing how fucked up the system and the city was. What she did to him made him heartless.

Prodigy and Trouble were in Detroit. In their old stomping grounds, on the east side off east Seven Mile and Conant. Their name rang bells everywhere, but it was in this neighborhood that they were known the most. They grew up here. Ran up and down the block, played tagged, hide and seek, and ate frequently at the Deluxe Coney Island across from the Church's Chicken and the liquor store they use to hustle dime bags at. This *was* home.

But, Prodigy's feet were only planted on Detroit soil if business was involved. The city had love, respect, and fear for him, but he wasn't naïve enough to believe that he wouldn't be touched if a nigga was dumb enough to try it. He always stayed on his p's and q's. And there was always someone backing him. Trouble wasn't the only set of eyes he had on him neither. There was always someone lurking in the

shadows, a few feet away, sitting inconspicuously, waiting for anybody to make a foul play. They wouldn't be seen until they were heard first. A man of Prodigy's caliber, had to have an extra layer of body armor on standby. He believed that it was better to be feared than loved, but with fear came animosity, and someone stupid enough to believe that they could get off on him. It was no secret—Detroit housed some of the most savage, and larceny hearted mothafuckas in the world.

They walked into the house and Banks, one of Prodigy's long-time customers, was sitting at the dining room table. Once he realized Prodigy and Trouble were there, he pushed back from the table, and stood up to greet them.

With his hand extended, he approached them. "Prodigy. What's good my baby?"

Prodigy shook hands with him. "Everything," he replied. "So this little meeting better be worth my time."

Banks lightly chuckled and ran his hand over the top of his head. "I already know what it is. You know I'm not fucking with you if it's not real bread on the flo'." He turned his attention to Trouble. "Troub. My nigga. You been straight —"

"Skip the formalities nigga, and get to the point," interrupted Prodigy before adjusting his pants to sit down. He sent a subtle head nod to Ebro who was standing behind Banks, hand inconspicuously on his burner, ready for buddy to make a foul move.

Banks scratched at his cheek and nervously chuckled. "Aight. Look. You remember my cousin Vennie? Probably not. Listen, he got a crib and some shit set up in Florida. He

been trying to get his hands on some heavy shit. You feel me? Army guns... I been tryin' to set shit up between you two but this wide neck nigga, Los been standing in the way. I tried to tell him we go way back, before the Benz's, Bentley's and Lambo's. You feel me?"

If it wasn't for history, and good money Prodigy wouldn't fuck with Banks. At all. He was a knucklehead nigga, who always had a gang of cats with him. They were heavy in the hood and stayed doing nut shit. To Prodigy, Banks was reckless, and careless when it came to the company he kept, and the way he handled his personal affairs. As stupid as Prodigy considered him to be, he was one of his top paying customers and business was always on point. Always. Out of the seven years they had been breaking bread, they've never had any issues. There was a mutual respect, and an understanding on Banks behalf that Prodigy was always about business and his paper. Anything interfering with that would result in bloodshed neither of them wanted spilled.

Prodigy didn't say anything, so Banks continued.

"Anyway... like I said, he's got some bread he's trying to break with you. Some real official shit, bro. If it wasn't, I wouldn't have even brought it up to you. I'm talkin' about a 100k plus ticket. You feel me?"

Prodigy tugged on his beard. "Aight."

"That's it?" Banks asked.

Prodigy stood up and nodded. "If I'm interested, Los will call."

“I’m telling you bro, cuzzo is official. I wouldn’t even be vouching for dawg if he wasn’t. I—”

“You heard me?” interrupted Prodigy with raised eyebrows.

Banks nodded, roughly running his hand over the top of his head. “Heard you.”

Banks was trying to sell his cousin to a man that did his own homework. If he thought Prodigy was going to agree to a meeting solely based off his word, and his word alone, he was sadly mistaken.

Nine

It was quiet, and Violet was in her own world, focused on what she was drawing. So focused that she hadn't heard Prodigy enter the room. Which was fine with him. He wanted to go unnoticed, as he stood in the doorway, watching as Violet sat in the middle of the floor, on top of one of the many Persian rugs of the house, with her legs crossed, Indian style writing... drawing? She was doing something with an ink pen and a pad. Prodigy couldn't see what from where he stood, but she was drawing. Free drawing. One of the paintings in the hallways had caught her eye, drawing inspiration. To a point where she snatched up a pad from the staff lounge, and an ink pen to draw with. Usually, she sketched with a pencil. But not tonight. Tonight she was fearless. Tonight she was comfortable. Comfortable enough to be pushed out of her comfort zone by drawing with an ink pen. Unafraid of mistakes. Okay with making them as well. Fine with making adjustments if she needed to. But Violet was too good for error. She drew, flawlessly, pen moving elegantly against the small pad. She needed more space, but she'd make do with what she had. She'd flipped through five pages since she began. Mind moving at rapid speed. Her thoughts moving faster than her hands could. She wished she could finish what was already drawn. Sketched in her mind.

Prodigy had been standing in the doorway for a good fifteen minutes, staring at her. He had ran his eyes over her a dozen times, falling more with every second that had passed by. How was it possible? She was as beautiful as a porcelain doll, flat expression, focused on what held her attention. Golden toned eyes slightly glowing in the light that was pouring into the dark room from the hallway. She was stunning.

Prodigy flicking the light on made Violet flinch. Once she realized he was standing there, she quickly stood up and stuffed the writing pad and pen inside of her smock. “I’m sorry. I’ll get back—”

“You shouldn’t write in the dark,” said Prodigy, interrupting her, as he walked into the room. “It’s bad for your eyes.”

Violet swiped a fallen curl from her face and stuffed both hands into her front pockets. Fiddling with the pen she shrugged. “I could see just fine. Excuse me.”

Earlier, he had been so rude to her, that she didn’t know what to expect, so she just wanted to get out of his way.

But Prodigy stood in her way, blocking her path. “Violet. You’re not in trouble. Relax. I didn’t mean to disrupt you.”

But he did. He purposely stopped her flow because he wanted her attention to be on him. Not because he was self-absorbed but because he really wanted to make a connection. Violet was giving him thee hardest time with that and he was having a hard time accepting it. Prodigy was sure that after

listening in the other night, she'd be falling over, begging for the attention that he found himself begging her for.

“Oh. Okay. Well, I do have to get back... back to work.”

Violet swallowed and took a deep breath. It was taking everything inside of her not to look down at the print in his grey, fleece, basketball shorts. She knew it would be there. It was too thick. And too big not to be. She wanted to look. But she couldn't steal a glance because his eyes were always on her. She didn't want him to see her looking. That would be rather embarrassing.

“The house is clean,” Prodigy said, with his hands stuffed into his pockets, wishing they were wrapped around her waist. Or her neck. Or... someplace on her. Because he didn't want to startle her, or push her away, he kept his hands there, stuffed in his pockets, concealed. Controlled. Afraid that if he did pull them from his pockets, that he wouldn't be able to resist the urge to touch her. “Why are you always in a rush to get away from me?” he asked, his eyes locked on hers. They were mesmerizing. Sultry. Inviting.

“I'm not.”

“Still don't like me huh?” Prodigy joked, with half a smirk.

Violet nervously giggled and glanced away. “You're okay.”

Violet cocked her head to the side, blushing. Uncontrollably. *What am I doing? What... what is this?* She thought, caught by surprise at her reaction. The feelings she

felt were foreign to her. She didn't turn into mush around men. She didn't blush. She wasn't one of those girly-girls who giggled and who were bashful around men she liked. She didn't want to blush... she didn't want to giggle. She wanted to give him the resting bitch face. She wanted to storm out of the study. But she didn't. She could have easily maneuvered around him. It wasn't like he was holding her hostage. She didn't move though. Her mind wouldn't send the signals she needed it to send, to her extremities. Mentally, she was saying 'leave. Stop smiling.' But she hadn't quite processed it. She had absolutely no control of her emotions, nor her body. It was as if she was a puppet and Prodigy was pulling the strings, making her do everything he wanted her to do.

"*Just* okay?" he questioned, with his left brow cocked. "That's it?"

"I mean... I guess." Violet paused and looked down at her watch again, her heart now thumping against her chest. It beat with so much intensity that she wondered if he could hear it. Or if he could see it. "I have to—"

"You don't have to do anything. Your job for the rest of the day is to keep me company," he seriously said before pulling one of his hands from his pocket and gesturing towards the couch. "Have a seat."

"But—"

"But what? Sit down." Prodigy interrupted again, with raised eyebrows. "Why are you always so uptight? Relax. I don't bite unless I'm asked to."

She drew back a little, taken aback by his straightforwardness. "Excuse me?"

“Excuse me?” he mocked. “I’m fuckin’ with you,” he said with a slight smirk. “Please... sit down.”

Violet didn’t oblige. She slowly headed over to the couch, feeling his eyes on her as she made her way over. Again... she was a puppet, and Prodigy the puppeteer. Violet hated how nervous he made her. She hated the way her hands grew clammy whenever he spoke to her. She hated how she had been unable to get him off her mind since they met too. She hated it mostly because she couldn’t understand it. She knew he had a girlfriend... or girlfriends... but yet she had been lusting over him. She had touched herself... at the thought of him. Violet knew she should have walked out of the study, but she didn’t she sat down, because he told her to. It had nothing to do with him being her boss neither. She hated to admit it, but she wanted to spend time with him. She wanted to go back and forth. She wanted to be around him. Despite the fact that she had seen both of his girlfriends.

All day long, she was hungry for some sort of interaction. Hungry for the feel of his piercing eyes on her. Slowly washing over her petite frame. She was hungry for the smell of him. But he had been nowhere to be found. Up until now.

There were two chairs and a loveseat, but Prodigy chose to sit next to her. Right next to her. His leg brushing up against hers. He was close. He didn’t need to be. He could have created a little space between them, but he didn’t. He didn’t because he wanted to touch her. Prodigy wanted to reach and touch her rosy cheeks. He wanted to run his thumb over her pouty bottom lip too. But he couldn’t. So, instead of being more of a creep than he already was, he sat close to her,

settling for the bare minimum. He wanted to touch her. Without fabric between them. But... again... there were boundaries and Prodigy had to be careful.

He was satisfied, for now. With the scent of her flowing through his nostrils, and the feel of her against him. He was alright.

“How has your day been going?” asked Prodigy, looking over at her, his eyes stuck on hers.

Violet fumbled with the paper in her pocket. “Pretty good,” she paused and gave him a fake, pursed lip smile. “How was yours?”

She was trying to play it cool, although what she really wanted to do was to straddle him. She wanted to wrap her arms around his neck and press her lips against his. Violet wanted him to make her moan, and cry, and curse, the way he made Aspen moan, cry, and curse last night. She wanted to feel him.

“Good. I’ve gotta say though,” he paused and tugged on his beard, his eyes lowering to her full lips. “It would be going great if you would give me something other than that forced smile you keep giving me.” He was still hung up on her smile, and Violet was surprised. “You give me these fake smiles, like you don’t want to smile at me at all.”

“What is it with you and me smiling?” she asked, eyebrows furrowed. “I’ve smiled for you... at the interview.”

“You smiled at me... the same way you smiled at me a second ago. Lips pressed tightly together; cheeks slightly raised. No teeth. No dimples. I want to see a real smile.”

“Are we going to talk about me not smiling every time we talk?”

“Depends. Will this be the last conversation about it?”

“I don’t know. I guess it depends on the way this conversation goes,” said Violet, with a shrug, loosening up just a bit.

Violet and Prodigy sat in the study talking for the remainder of her shift. Before either of them knew it, it was going on one in the morning. They talked for two hours and surprisingly, the conversation flowed the whole way through. Violet learned that Prodigy owned several businesses across the country, and Prodigy learned that Violet was an artist. She downplayed her skills, but Prodigy was thoroughly impressed. She showed him the sketch she was working on before he disrupted her, and he asked her if he could purchase it from her once she finished with the real thing. She couldn’t believe someone actually wanted to buy a drawing from her, but she told him that she’d just give it to him. Prodigy told her something that would be with her for the rest of her life: *If you’re good at something, never do it for free.* Violet always considered her drawing to be a hobby she picked up as a child, but after talking with Prodigy she started to give taking it seriously some thought.

“Wow. It’s late. I spent too much time here... doing nothing. I’m sor—”

“Stop apologizing for things that does not require an apologize. You didn’t do nothing all night. I told you... your job for the remainder of your shift was to keep me company,”

he paused and slightly smirked. “And you did just that. Wonderfully, might I add.”

Violet swallowed and blushed a little. “Thanks I guess...”

She stood up and Prodigy followed suit.

“How do you get home? Your sister picks you up?” asked Prodigy, not really ready to say goodbye to her just yet.

Everything he felt about keeping up boundaries was gone out of the window. He had never given a fuck about boundaries before, why did he care now? Because Violet was different? Because he didn’t want to taint her? None of that mattered anymore. He wanted her. And he was going to stop at nothing to get her.

She was beautiful, smart, interesting, and unique. He loved the way her eyes twinkled when she talked about her drawing. He learned that like him, she was serious about her loyalty to her family. The fact that she didn’t know anything about Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat or TikTok made his dick swell with excitement. Violet was unlike anything he’s ever encountered. Of course he had to have her. She was like a unicorn. He was surprised he had been enjoying her company as much. For Violet to be from a small town, she sure had a lot to share. And she shared with ease. She reminisced about the time she spent on Clairmont Hill. She smiled, talking about the picnics she and her family used to have on the hill. It was refreshing, listening to someone talk. Conversation was vague around Clairmont Manor. Yara and Aspen spent a lot of time on their phones, although they did give him attention every now and then. They were consumed with social media, while

Violet was not, so her conversation skills were stronger. She didn't mind him sitting there, simply listening neither. She didn't try to get him to engage, or share. She just talked and let it flow. Prodigy loved it. As he sat there listening, he thought about Yara calling her plain. There was nothing plain about Violet. Not at all. Not her personality, not her looks... nothing.

The sexual tension between the two of them had been thick since they've met each other. Too thick. But tonight, it was more than just sexual tension. It was actual chemistry. There was something there. The both of them noticed it. Tonight, they actually got to talk. Alone. With peace and quiet. That was rare. Usually, Prodigy would be pulled off to do something else, but tonight he had time. With Yara out of the house, and Aspen asleep, he had time.

Violet shook her head. "Nope. I walk."

He sucked his teeth and drew back a little with a frown. "You walk? Shit, not anymore."

She nodded. "Yeah. I like it. It's... therapeutic."

"I'd prefer if you let me take you."

"No thank you," she declined.

"I wasn't asking. I'm not letting you walk out here alone, at one in the morning."

Violet shrugged.. "I'll be fine. Nothing happens in Rosebury."

"Until something does," he added, shaking his head at her naivety.

He was glad to be from where he was from. To be so comfortable in your neighborhood because it was quiet, and nothing ever happened there was reckless.

“Don’t tell me you care about something happening to me,” Joked Violet, trying to lighten his mood.

How passionate he was about her carelessness was obvious and she didn’t want the conversation to shift to a conversation about if rather Rosebury was a safe place or not. Violet could be very vocal about the way she felt about her town. She’d end up taking jabs at Detroit and the people who lived there. She’d talk about the hood and how Rosebury was nothing like it. She didn’t know much about Prodigy, but she knew he was from Detroit and she didn’t want to offend. So, to keep the conversation from going completely left, she decided to joke a little.

“I do,” he confessed, staring into her eyes. “I’d hate for something to happen to you before I’ve been given a chance to have you.”

Violet swallowed and her eyebrows dipped a little. Glancing at him, she nervously giggled. “What?...”

“You do that a lot. Ask me to repeat myself, knowing you heard me clearly. Why? Is it because you’re not used to people being so direct about the way they feel about you? The niggas in Rosebury don’t know what to do with you huh?”

Violet was caught off guard. She wanted to shift the conversation, yes, but she wasn’t expecting for it to take this route. Prodigy was right though. The men of Rosebury didn’t know what to do with her. If they knew, she wouldn’t be single. Nor would she be a twenty-three-year-old virgin. Her

love life was pretty much nonexistent. The men all found her beautiful, but because she had a sharp tongue, and a permanent resting bitch face, they didn't know how to approach her.

“I mean... No one talks to me the way that you talk to me.”

Prodigy nodded. “My sentiments exactly. They don't know how to handle you.”

Violet twisted her lips up with a smirk. “And I'm guessing you do.”

“You wouldn't have to *guess* if you let that guard down a little. Give me the opportunity to show you exactly how much I can handle you.”

Prodigy had no problem voicing how he felt about Violet. He wanted her to know that he wanted her. He had made subtle hints here and there, but he was beginning to wonder if the subtle hints were enough or not. She hadn't budged much and that was bugging him. After every one of their short encounters, he was left wondering why she hadn't bent towards his advances a little.

Violet was quiet. But her thoughts were running rampant. She wanted him to show her. She wanted a lot of things... from Prodigy. But her morals, and the drama that would come with letting her guard down stopped her from giving into those wants. She had done everything by the book her whole life. She was a good girl. She always took the safe route. And taking the safe route hadn't really gotten her anywhere. She wondered... should she step over onto the bad side?

“Grab your things. I’ll be waiting for you in the car.”

“Are you sure one of your girlfriends aren’t waiting for you in bed right now. You’ve been occupied with me for hours. Someone is missing you. Who is it tonight? Aspen? Yara?”

She had steered clear of conversation about his cheating ways. Although she had wanted to talk about it, she decided not to. They were vibing and the conversation was effortlessly flowing but she didn’t really know him. She didn’t want to pry.

Prodigy laughed. “I don’t have any *girlfriends*. No one is waiting for me in bed. I sleep alone.”

He did. Yara and Aspen had their own rooms in the house, rooms that Violet had always assumed were simply guest rooms. Prodigy didn’t like to share his bed with anyone unless it was for the purpose of fucking. Sleeping together for him, was too intimate. He didn’t want to wake up to anyone. He wanted his California king bed to himself. Both Yara and Aspen hated going to bed alone. The both of them had tried sleeping overnight with him on countless occasions, just to be politely asked to leave.

“So, what are they?”

“None of your concern,” he replied. “I’ll be outside.”

Violet watched as he swaggered away, standing tall, broad shoulders, with the stride of a boss. She was ready and willing to risk it all. She just knew he was the type of trouble she didn’t want to get involved with. As time went on, she knew that somehow, someday she was going to end up in

whatever entanglement he had going on with Aspen and Yara. As wrong as she knew it was, she was sure that she wouldn't be able to help it. Prodigy was so damn alluring that she knew that she'd be willing to risk every bit of morals her parents instilled in her just to be with him. He had this way about him that made Violet do things she knew she should have been doing the complete opposite of.

He said he was single. And he said it with such conviction that she really did believe him. But what about the women? Should she just let it go and leave it at what he said? None of her concern...

Fifteen minutes later, Violet was walking out of Clairmont Manor. Prodigy, as promised, was sitting out front waiting for her. He was, as always, sitting behind the wheel of his G-Wagon, his favorite out of the plethora of others he had. Waiting for her. Watching her. Excited to be spending just a little more time with her. Excited to be given another opportunity to see her smile. During their conversation, she giggled, she smirked... she gave that uneasy smile. But not what he wanted. He was still working for that one. That cheek hurting type of smile.

She stood at the passenger door, biting her bottom lip. Prodigy rolled the window down and asked, "What's wrong?"

She dragged her teeth over her bottom lip with an uneasy smile. "Can I drive it?"

"You want to drive my truck?"

She shrugged, hiking her back up over her shoulder. "I've never driven in one of these. I've never been inside of

anything remotely close to it. I've been driving *Candy* for years. It'd be nice to see what riding luxury is like," she joked.

She'd been curious about the expensive cars since she's seen them speeding up and down Mayberry St. during all of the construction.

"Candy?"

She giggled. "Bleu's car."

Prodigy lightly chuckled and rolled the window back up. Again, she had surprised him. She had boldly asked him to drive his hundred-thousand-dollar truck, and he was going to let her. Violet could have and do anything she'd like, if it was left up to him. She was everything plus more. He wanted to spoil her rotten and he intended to, if she'd allow him to. First, she had to let him in, which he was working really hard at. Prodigy wasn't even sure if he could call it 'working' anymore. Getting close to Violet was starting to be more than a ploy to get her on his lips. He was really feeling her.

Prodigy got out of the truck, leaving the door open and the engine idling. "Come on."

"Seriously?" she asked, eyes lighting up with excitement.

Prodigy nodded and made his way to the passenger side of the truck. Violet lightly shrieked with excitement eagerly walked over to the driver's side, smiling brighter than she had since he's met her. Still, it wasn't the smile he wanted from her. It was there, but he knew she had more to give, so he simply observed without mentioning it.

Once Violet got inside, she sat there a bit, enjoying the feeling of soft, cool leather against her skin. The seats being temperature controlled was a major, major upgrade from the lack of AC in Candy. The interior was mostly red, with black accents to compliment that matte black body. Violet gripped the steering wheel, and when she went to put her foot on the brakes, she was unable to reach the pedal. Prodigy's long legs required the seat to be pushed way back. Reaching under the seat, and on the side of the seat for the control, but couldn't find it.

Prodigy noticed and took advantage of an opportunity to get ridiculously close to her by leaning over to help. When he reached over, leaning across her lap to hit the control on the door, Violet gasped. The contact drove her nearly insane, as the scent of him evaded her nostrils. Her heart rate picked up and in that instance, she wanted to wrap her arms around him and never let go. The simplest touch from him made her want more.

"I got you," said Prodigy, pushing the button to adjust the seat which only brought her closer and closer to him.

His eyes were glued on her lips, and her eyes on his. They were literally inches away from kissing when he decided that she was close enough to both the gear shift and his lips. Violet's chest heaved, and her breathing grew labored as she anticipated the feel of his full lips against hers. And when he reached his hand up and delicately caressed her cheek she closed her eye and lightly moaned. His touch made her tingle all over. He was so delicate with his touch, as if he was placing hands upon God's most precious creation. Which, to him she was. Beautiful in every sense of the meaning. Externally.

Internally. You know how people say that nothing or no one in life is perfect? Well, Prodigy begged to differ. God had outdone himself with this one.

“You’re perfect,” complimented Prodigy before finally making the next move.

He wet his lips, pulled her closer, and slowly put his lips against hers. Again, she moaned. Violet slightly parted her lips, and Prodigy followed suit, allowing her thick, sweet tongue to roam sultrily around his mouth. She boldly wrapped her arms around his neck and climbed over to sit on his lap. His dick responded immediately. Instead of pulling away like most men would, Prodigy wrapped his arms around her and held her tighter. He wanted her to feel what he wanted to give, and as if she wasn’t inexperienced, Violet pressed against him, wishing there weren’t any clothes between them.

They sat in the car, the moon shining brightly down into the panoramic sunroof, wildly tongue kissing like two teenagers. Prodigy ran his big hands through her curly hair, massaging her scalp, sending more tingles down her spine. His kiss was so delicate, but his touch was rough and aggressive. He wanted to grab a handful of it, pull her head back and put his mouth on her flesh. He wanted to drag his teeth over the thin skin of her neck, before planting soft kisses that would soon land on the amplexness of her full breasts. He wanted to pull them out of her top so that he could devour her nipples, tugging, licking, sucking. But he couldn’t. He had to pace himself, even if pacing himself was driving him insane. He couldn’t give her too much too soon, although that was exactly what he wanted to do.

Violet moaned into his mouth and he liked to lose it. When Prodigy wrapped his arms around her body, she responded by slowly gravitating her hips, rubbing against his thick, hard dick, careful not to break the kiss. She decided that she was tired of being safe. She was done with that. Being careful, steering clear of risks left her grounded. She wanted to be free. Free from the barriers she placed herself. She had been depriving herself of happiness because of fear. Tonight, she decided to be fearless. He made her want to be. Prodigy made her want to do things she's only read about in the romance novels Bleu loved to read.

"Fuck," cursed Prodigy, after pulling away from the kiss, although Violet was clearly hungry for more.

Panting heavily, chest heaving, she swiped a curl from her face. "Let... let's go back inside. I... I want..."

"You want what?" asked Prodigy, his hands now firmly gripping her round ass cheeks.

"I want to make love." Living fearlessly, on the edge, going after what she wanted. Tonight, she was daring. She was bold. And she was horny as hell.

He grunted a little. "I don't *make love*, sweetheart."

Swallowing Violet leaned in for another kiss, giving him a quick peck. "I want...I want whatever you give."

Did she? Did she really know what it was that she was asking him for? She was asking Prodigy to strip her of every bit of innocence she had left. She was asking Prodigy to fuck her, mercilessly. She was asking him to invade not only her body, but her mind, and soul too. She wanted to cross a line

she would be unable to cross back over from. Did she really want that? To lose herself by giving herself to him? Did she really want to lose her virginity to someone like *him*?

“You don’t. You want me to make love to you. You want me to be soft, delicate, slow... I can’t give you that,” he confessed, although he really wanted to rip her clothes off and take her right there, in the middle of the road, right where they sat. If he was sure she wanted what he had to offer, he would’ve been slamming her little ass up and down on his dick five minutes ago.

Violet sat there, unmoving a bit staring at him, before crossing her arms and grabbing the bottom of her shirt to pull it over her head. She wanted—no, she needed—Prodigy to know that she wanted whatever he could give her, however he could give it to her. She didn’t care if it wasn’t love that he made. She just wanted what Aspen got. And what Yara got. She wanted to moan. She wanted to whimper. She wanted to yell out things like *Oh God I’m cumming*, and she wanted it all with him. No one else.

Prodigy’s jaw slightly dropped, and his mouth salivated at the sight of her full breast, sitting up perfectly in the lace, black bra she had on. His mind was made. If it was dick she wanted, he was going to give it to her. Not hurting her, taking it slow, caring about her feelings... it all went out of the window at the sight of her beautiful caramel mounds. They stood at attention, taunting him. Daring him. Begging him to put his hands there, to put his lips there, to run his tongue along them.. to swirl it around her chocolate chip sized nipples.

He lifted his hand and lowered the straps to her bra before leaning forward a little to kiss her shoulders. Both of them. Slowly, with passion and dampened full, soft lips. Violet threw her head back, and grabbed the back of his neck, lightly moaning. There was something about the sound of her moans that made him want to eat her up. Completely. His night with Aspen... the one where he imagined he was with Violet, couldn't compare to the real thing. At all. She was as soft as the silk sheets he slept on.

Prodigy lips found the ampleness of her breast, and he took his time. Enjoying the scent of her, enjoying the fullness against his lips. He planted kisses there, until he was ready to lower his head to a more intimate part of her. Her nipples. Beautiful. Perfect. Perky. Inviting. As he made his way down there, he lowered the bra completely from her arms until it fell to her waistline. He was soft. He was slow. He was gentle. For now.

How slow, soft, and gentle he was sent a wave of emotions rushing to Violet, and her eyes grew misty. There was so much passion behind the way he handled her that she was sure that this was love that he was making. It had to be. But she was wrong. This is what Prodigy did. He pampered the pussy. He handled the body of a woman with the delicacy and the attention it required. Careful to pay extra attention to the most sensitive places. He gave passion because he was passionate about sex. Passionate about passion. *Passionate about pussy.*

“Perfect...” mumbled Prodigy, as he slowly cupped both of her breasts, moving back and forth between each nipple, kissing, licking, and softly sucking. He transitioned

between them both because he wanted to give them the same attention. He wanted nothing to go neglected.

Violet shuddered, moaning. She's had her nipples kissed. She's made out before. But nothing like this. Nothing this... intimate. She grabbed his face, and brought his lips to her, hungrily kissing him, viciously attacking and sucking on his tongue, gravitating her hips, as if she was riding his dick. She was turned on so bad, that she had forgotten to mention that fact that she was a virgin.

Violet pulled away from the kiss, out of breath, with wide eyes.

“Um...” she mumbled.

“You want to stop? I understand if you—”

“No, no. Not that. Oh God not that,” Interrupted Violet, shaking her head before taking a deep breath.

Although hungry for her, Prodigy was a gentleman and if Violet wanted to stop, he was fully prepared to do that.

“What's wrong?”

She swallowed and ran her hand over the back of his neck, making him close his eyes, turned on completely. By her. By the simplest touch. The best head from Yara didn't make him feel the way Violet's small fingers felt caressing his skin.

“I'm a virgin. But, I want this. I just. I just thought you should know. You said you didn't make love. I mean, I understand... I just don't want you to rip into me and—I said I want it. What are you doing?”

In the middle of her talking, Prodigy had grabbed her shirt and her bra from the driver's seat. Men usually turned away from virgins. There was this stigma attached to virgins that scared men. The stigma that being a woman's first made them clingy. And that it made getting rid of them hard.

"And I'm going to give it to you," he told her as he slid her shirt over her head. "Not here."

Prodigy wasn't worried about the stigma's. Getting attached to Prodigy was a given. Which was why he was especially selective with who he laid with these days. He wasn't the man he was years ago, who changed his women as often as he changed his clothes. He wanted stability. Without commitment. And that is what Yara and Aspen were to him. And now, hopefully, if she'd allow it... Violet too. He had made the conscious decision to lay with her because he didn't want to get rid of her. He wanted her to cling on to him. He wanted her to cling onto him so tight that letting go would be nearly impossible.

Learning that she was a virgin did change things, however, not in the way that Violet thought it had. He *had* to take it slow. He couldn't fuck her as savagely as he wanted to. He *had* to make love to her, because what she was had just jumped up a notch. Violet was fucking perfect. He was completely sure of it at this point.

Ten minutes later, they were in his bedroom, in his bed, naked as the day they were born. Prodigy was on top of her making love to her with his mouth, kissing from the side of her neck, down to her flat stomach. Violet's eyes were closed, and her top teeth were clamped down on her bottom lip. She'd dug

her teeth there so hard that she had drawn a little blood. She couldn't believe she was with Prodigy. She couldn't believe that three weeks ago, she couldn't stand him. But now, lying in his California King, atop his black, silk sheets, she was almost sure that she was in love.

When Prodigy's lips fell below her belly button, she sucked in air and her eyes rolled to the back of her head. Prodigy grabbed the back of her knees and bent her legs. Violet allowed her legs to fall open, as she awaited the feel of his warm mouth on her wet, pulsating clit. After a few seconds of nothing, Violet opened her eyes to find Prodigy staring at her.

She flinched a little. "What? What's wrong?"

He shook his head. "Absolutely nothing."

He was in awe. And he was beginning to question why him? He didn't deserve to lay with anybody as pure as she was. She deserved more. Much more. She deserved commitment. She deserved love. All of which Prodigy was nearly incapable of providing. Incapable, but unwilling to let her go, so that she could get those things from someone else. He hadn't tasted her... hadn't penetrated her... but he was selfish with her already. He just knew the minute he placed his lips on her puffy pussy, that things would only intensify. And for the both of them.

Violet started to speak again, but Prodigy interrupted her by planting a soft kiss directly on her protruding, pulsating bud, making her quiver with desire.

"Oh my God," she moaned, as he began to softly suck on it, mouth extremely wet, saliva dripping between the

unexplainable things, as an intense rush of pleasure came over her.

“Mm, mmh,” said Prodigy, as he grabbed her waist, to stop her from running away. He wanted it all. He didn’t want a drop of her cum to miss his tongue. So, he tortured her, attacked her clit with little to no remorse to the squirming and crying she was doing. He tortured it, scooped up her juices, and then went back to torturing her some more.

Once he had satisfied his craving, he pulled back and reached over to the nightstand for a condom. Meanwhile, Violet laid there, panting heavily, legs trembling, coming down from what could’ve possibly been her third orgasm.

After sliding the condom on, Prodigy repositioned himself between her legs. Before sliding in, they made eye contact and he asked her if she was sure she wanted to do this. She pulled her lips into her mouth and nodded. She was sure. She had never been so sure about anything in her life.

Prodigy grabbed the back of one of her legs and wrapped it around his waist as he began to slowly enter her. He stopped, just as he got the head in, and looked up at her.

“You aight?” He asked, as he ran his hand over the top of her curly mane.

With misty eyes, Violet nodded and placed her hands on his waist so that she could control a little bit of his movement. She felt the thickness and the length of his dick when she straddled him in the truck, but this couldn’t compare. He was much harder than he was then, and she felt like he was ripping her completely open and all he had put in was the head.

Prodigy sat there a minute, enjoying the feel of her wet, tight pussy hug his dick. She felt good. Not nearly as good as he had imagined. She felt *much better*. He stroked, inching more of himself into her, and she shuddered.

Leaning down a bit, he kissed her on the lips. He wanted to distract her. And what better way than with a little pleasure, during pain? Her hands went from his waist, to the sides of his face, as they slowly kissed, at a synchronized rhythm. She gasped a little, as he slid more inside of her, at least halfway in at this point.

“If at any point you want me to stop—”

“I won’t,” she interrupted, before putting her lips against his again.

Their tongues did the tango, as he entered her completely. She was so wet that sliding in came with ease. But she was so tight that moving around was nearly impossible. With every stroke, her pussy gripped his dick in a way that made his eyebrows furrow and his lips tighten.

“*Damn,*” grunted Prodigy, as he stroked her, slowly.

Tears rolled down the sides of Violet’s face as he continued to open her up. She couldn’t believe she was in bed with him. She couldn’t believe she was losing her virginity to him. To this beautiful, mysterious, peculiar man. She couldn’t believe how much her life had changed in such a short period of time. She had gone from not wanting to be bothered with any man, to wanting to spend all of her time with him. To wanting to lose her virginity to him. To losing it. And Violet had absolutely no regrets.

She gave herself to him, willingly, happily, wholeheartedly. And when they both reached climax, she gave him the one thing he had been asking her for. A smile. A real smile. A big smile. A deep dimpled, cheek-hurting smile.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jen". The letter "J" is large and loops around the "e", which is written in a cursive style. The "n" is also cursive and ends with a small flourish.

Three weeks had gone by since Violet lost her virginity to Prodigy, and she had spent the majority of those three weeks with him. She still worked at Clairmont Manor as a housekeeper and had absolutely no plans on changing that any time soon. Prodigy, on the other hand, wanted her to resign. He didn't like having her work for him. He ensured her, that if she quit, going poor and homeless would no longer be of a concern. He promised her that. But Violet, still as headstrong and as independent as she always had been, declined, deciding not to place the outcome of her fate in the hands of a man. Certainly not a man who wasn't hers to call her own.

Violet learned all about his arrangement with Yara and Aspen. As she sat there, listening to him talk about how they were for him, it all started to make sense. Seeing them around the compound, his nonchalant attitude towards it all, him telling her that they were of no concern... it all made sense. The looks both Aspen and Yara would give her in the beginning. Their territorial ways... it all made sense. She was uneasy about it, starting out, and had her uncertainties about it too. Especially after the way things shifted at the house, once Prodigy told Aspen and Yara. As a given, neither of them were happy to hear that the time Prodigy spent with them would be split with another. They were highly upset. Yara especially. Aspen, not so much, since she was the one expecting it.

Violet was happy and she refused to allow anything to come in between that. Prodigy had been giving her more smiles than she could count on both hands. She wasn't just floating through life anymore living as if she had no purpose. She was actually *living*. Prodigy made her exceptionally happy. Why deprive herself of happiness because there were a few people upset about it? Why deprive herself of happiness because his situation wasn't one of tradition? It wasn't like he was using her. He poured into her, and she poured into him.

“What are you walking up smiling about, Toni?” asked Bleu with a smile.

Violet, Bleu, and Ruby were sitting on the porch talking, while Heaven played in the yard, with her barbie dolls. It was a scorching eighty-something degrees Saturday afternoon in Rosebury, so instead of sitting in a stuffy house with no AC, they were outside catching as much of a breeze as the heat would allow.

“Guess who has a date tonight?” she sang, as she climbed the stairs. “Hey Ruby. Violet.”

“Hey,” said Ruby.

Violet said nothing. She kept her eyes on her sketchpad. She was working on the portrait Prodigy had offered to pay her for, so her attention was focused there. Although she had heard Toni loud and clear.

“Hey Violet!” yelled Opal and Albany, in sync.

Violet lifted her eyes and gave them a tight-lipped smile, before going back to her drawing.

“Anyways,” said Toni, rolling her eyes before sitting next to Bleu. “Guess who has a date tonight?”

“You,” said Bleu, with twisted lips, as to say, duh.

“Yep! Me! But,” Toni smiled. “But guess with who.”

Violet sighed, and rolled her eyes, annoyed with the childish games Toni was playing. Deciding that she’d rather burn up in the house, than to listen to the sound of Toni’s annoying voice, she grabbed the railing and pulled up from her seat.

“Who girl?” asked Bleu, rolling her eyes.

“Trouble,” said Toni with a bright smile. “We’re going to Mackinac Island for dinner by the water. I cannot wait.”

Bleu’s eyebrows raised with surprise. She didn’t know why she was surprised. Of course Trouble would be making his way through the women of Rosebury. That’s what Detroit men did. They played games. They cheated. And when they couldn’t get the girl they wanted, they moved on to a sad excuse for a replacement, which to Bleu, Toni was.

“He has a girlfriend, though, right?” said Bleu, shifting uncomfortably in her chair.

“Yeah, but what’s she gotta do with me? She’s the girlfriend.”

“Yvette’s a bitch anyway,” said Albany. “You know she had Gavin remake her grits three times because he wouldn’t get the texture to her liking? Toni is much better for Trouble. You’re going to look so fly sitting on the passenger side of that Benz, T!”

Bleu and Violet exchanged looks as Violet made her way into the house. Before going inside, Violet walked over to her and whispered in her ear. “You dodged a bullet. You deserve so much better.”

She gave her sister’s shoulder a squeeze and went into the house. Bleu had denied it, but Violet knew she had a thing for Trouble, and she knew that hearing that Toni would be going on a date with him stung.

Violet sat on the couch, Indian style and went back to her drawing, wishing she had something to listen to, to drown the sound of Toni’s voice out. Every time she mentioned Trouble and how they were going to have a great date, Violet wanted to jump up and bash her face in. Toni knew what she was doing too. She knew Trouble had a thing for Bleu. Opal told her about seeing them talking and laughing. Once she found out about that, she made it her sworn duty to run into him again. She lucked up one day, seeing him at the deli on Sugar Creek. Hooking him was pretty much effortless, since Trouble asked for her number first. So, she was purposely talking about him. Purposely rubbing it in Bleu’s face.

Groaning, Violet got up, and headed to the back of the house where her bedroom sat. She sat in Ruby’s bed in front of the cracked window, wishing the fan wasn’t broken, and went back to drawing. About ten minutes into drawing, the bedroom door creaked open.

“I just sat here to catch a breeze. Don’t start,” she said before looking up. Once she did, she jumped up, nearly hitting her head on the top bunk. “What—what are you doing here?”

She tossed her sketchpad on the bed and smoothed her hair over. She was dressed down in a pair of old biker shorts, a tank, and a pair of old thong sandals. She hadn't done a thing to her hair. It was in a wild bush, untamed, overdue for a wash. Her face was completely bare, and she was sure she had a white ring around her mouth from being dehydrated from the heat.

It was Prodigy, and he was wearing a half grin. "Good afternoon to you too."

Violet licked her lips, and again, ran her hand over her hair. "Are Opal and Albany still out there? They saw you come in?"

They saw him. They saw him the minute he pulled up in his black Lamborghini truck. They stood there, mouth hanging open, stunned. Only Bleu and Ruby greeted him. It was Bleu who showed him to the room. She knew all about what was happening between him and her sister. While she didn't like it, she trusted that Violet knew what she was doing and let her live. She was just happy Violet was doing something other than just drawing all day.

"Yes. What's wrong with that?" asked Prodigy, looking around the room, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his white linen shorts. He stood at the cluttered dresser and picked up several bottles of perfume, smelling them, wondering which one was the cheap fruity scent he smelled before. Once he found it, he would be tossing it. He planned on switching everything out with Dior, Chanel, and whatever else Ms. Shug would recommend. If she wanted to wear perfume, it would be

one of a higher standard. Something she wouldn't be able to find at the drugstore.

“What do you mean what's wrong with that?” Violet asked, taking a bottle from his hands and sitting it back on the dresser.

He turned to face her and grabbed her by the jaw, tilting her head back. Violet closed her eyes and grabbed his wrist before he placed a kiss on her lips. “Nothing is wrong with that. You ashamed?”

Violet swallowed and her legs turned into wet spaghetti noodles. “No.”

She wasn't ashamed. But she'd be lying if she said she wasn't worried about what people would say. She hadn't quite mastered the art of not giving a fuck about being the talk of the town.

She stood on her tip toes and leaned forward, asking for another kiss. Which he gave, with ease. His hand went from her jaw, to her waist. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her back, sure to slip some tongue in there. He had wanted to kiss her this morning, when he awoke. He wanted to put his face in between her legs, when he showered. He couldn't wait to finish up his business to get to her. This was why he needed her at the estate around clock. Wanting her. Craving her. And not having her there, within reach was an annoyance he wasn't sure he'd be able to put up with for long.

“What are you doing here?” asked Violet, once they pulled away from the kiss. She looked around the messy, cluttered room, and was immediately filled with embarrassment. “Why didn't you call?”

“I’m here because I missed you. I did call. You’re out of minutes,” he told her, as he stared down into her honey brown eyes, hypnotized, wishing that they were the first thing he saw when he opened his own this morning. “We need to fix that.”

Violet blushed at him missing her. There may have been two others, but Prodigy always made her feel like she was the one and only. He didn’t speak of Aspen or Yara, and neither did she, unless it was absolutely necessary.

“You missed me, huh?” She flirted. “How much did you miss me?”

“More than I’m comfortable admitting,” he honestly replied, as he brushed her cheek with his thumb.

Even dressed down, sweaty, with messy hair, she was an absolute beauty to him.

Violet laughed, shaking her head. “It’s okay to miss people, Calvetti.”

He knew that, but it wasn’t okay to miss someone as much as he missed her. Not after spending hours with her just yesterday. She was becoming an addiction and he wasn’t sure if he would be okay with that. Missing her as much as he missed her was uncommon, especially for him., Especially since they had just met not too long ago. Violet was doing something to him. He didn’t know what but whatever it was, he loved it and hated it at once.

“I have to take a trip,” he said, changing the subject.

“How long will you be gone?” Violet asked, sadness immediately washing over her.

Just as addicted as he was to her, she was to him. She missed him, terribly. But in an effort not to seem stalkerish, she occupied her free time with drawing. She couldn't get him off her mind. She wanted to be around him round clock, and she knew that was unhealthy. Especially unhealthy considering she had to split his time with two other women. Often, she wondered if she would really be able to play by the rules. She wasn't the only one questioning that though. Prodigy had been asking himself the very question since he slid between her sweet, slippery folds.

"I want you to come with me," he told her. "If you're comfortable with that. If not.... I don't know. I *need* you to be comfortable with that." He ran his hands over the goosebumps on her arms. "Tell me you're comfortable with that."

"Out of town?" she questioned, swallowing, with fear. "I've never been outside of Rosebury."

"That's gotta change, sweetheart," he told her. "The plane ride to Miami will only be about two hours, if that. We'll stay until Monday."

"When do we leave?" asked Violet, slipping away from him, to pace the creaky hardwood bedroom floor.

She hadn't been outside of Rosebury, ever in life. So the thought of getting on an airplane, flying thousands of miles away from home, gave her a little bit of anxiety. But she *had* to go. If she didn't go, she'd go sick, missing him as much as she would miss him. Declining his offer wasn't an option.

Prodigy grabbed her, to stop her from pacing. He looked down at his Richard Milli watch and said, "An hour and a half."

Her eyebrows knitted. “Calvetti!”

“It’s a spur of the moment trip. Come,” he told her, kissing her on the forehead. “I *need* you to come.”

Violet closed her eyes and fell into his touch. She thought about what it would be like to be in the busy city of Miami. She thought about being all of those miles away from Bleu, and away from Ruby, and Heaven too. This wasn’t just a quick trip to Detroit he was talking about. He was talking about putting some serious mile between her and the people she loved. What if something happened? What if her sisters needed her? What if she needed them. She didn’t know.

“I—I don’t know. I don’t know if I can do that,” she said, with teary eyes.

“You’ll be fine. I’ll never let anything happen to you,” he seriously told her. “Live, baby. Come with me.”

“Will it just be us?” she questioned.

Prodigy ran his tongue over his bottom lip and shook his head no. “Trouble. As well as Aspen and Yara. This is a business trip. If it were under different circumstances, we would be alone. But I need you there. All three of you.”

Violet couldn’t wrap her mind around his need of three women, so she didn’t try to. She just accepted him for who he was, although, the question of why always lingered, until she was reminded. Until she was forced to remember that she wasn’t the only one.

Violet looked away with a sigh and rolled her eyes a little. Prodigy grabbed her chin, turning her head to face him.

“I’ll be away mostly. I don’t want you alone. Do you understand?”

“I understand, Prodigy,” she said with a sigh. “I don’t have any luggage.”

“I figured you’d say that. I got you,” he told her before kissing her on her forehead.



“You sure you want to go?” asked Bleu, standing in the doorway to Violet’s bedroom, biting on her nail.

Violet looked up from the LV Luggage Prodigy bought her with a nod. “Yes, I’m sure. B, I’m going to be fine. I promise.”

“You’ve never been out of Rosebury. And you’re going with him. How do you know you’ll be fine? With someone you don’t even know? And those other women. I don’t know... Vi. I just don’t know,” rambled Bleu, pacing back and forth, stressed the hell out about Violet leaving town.

Violet zipped her carry-on up and pushed up from the bed. Walking up to Bleu, she wrapped her arms around her sister, in an effort to calm her down. In all actuality, she needed some calming down too, so a hug was needed on both ends. Violet was just too worried about worrying Bleu to speak up on her nervousness.

Of course she was nervous. She was traveling to one of the most popular cities in the country, with people she barely

knew. Barely knowing Prodigy wasn't scary to her though. She was comfortable with him. She felt exceptionally safe with him. She was sure that with him, no harm would come her way. She was more afraid of the crowds, and the hustle and bustle of city living, than she was about him turning out to be a monster. Usually reserved, and safe Violet was now willing and ready to take a few risks—because he said that it would be okay to. He told her that with her she'd be safe. She didn't just take his word for it. She believed it. She believed him because within the two months or so that they've known each other, he hadn't steered her wrong before.

Violet was changing. She was changing in a good way, but Bleu wasn't sure if it was for good reason. She knew how Detroit men were. She knew how manipulative and persuasive they could be. She didn't trust Prodigy nearly as much as Violet trusted him. After all, she was her little sister and she was scared shitless for something to happen to her.

“Can I come?” asked Theory, sitting in Violet's bed, Indian style, twiddling her braids, just as nervous as the other girls. “I'll see if my ma can get me a ticket—”

The minute Prodigy left; Violet called Theory over. To say goodbye and to see if she was making the right choice or not. Although she was nervous about her friend leaving, she supported her because she could see that Violet really didn't want to be without Prodigy for three days.

“Theory no,” Violet interrupted, shaking her head as she and Bleu pulled away from their hug. “I'm going to be fine. Please stop worrying about me, y'all. Bad enough I'm a little nervous myself,” she admitted.

“Why won’t you just stay then?” asked Theory. “I still haven’t met him. And then.... He has those other girls. What if they jump you or something? I don’t know, Vi. I want to be happy but... I don’t know.”

Violet giggled and shook her head. “Trust. There won’t be any jumping going on. If anything, Yara is the one I’d have to worry about having to fight with. She’s... I don’t know. But for the most part, they’re cool. He won’t let them touch a hair on my head. They do any and everything that Prodigy tells them to do..”

“Like you do,” mumbled Bleu, under her breath.

“I don’t do any and everything he tells me to do, thank you very fucking much,” snapped Violet, rolling her eyes.

Violet marched to the tempo of her own melody. She, unlike Yara and Aspen did not do any and everything that Prodigy told her to do. She did things on her own terms. She was very much her own woman and stood firm in it. Violet’s choice to intertwine with Prodigy was her own to make. She was tired of being safe. Tired of holding herself back because of fear. She wanted Prodigy so Prodigy is what she would have. Anytime of the day, however she wanted, whenever she wanted.

“Something’s going on. Somehow, you were convinced into being in that... whatever it is. He has two girlfriends already, Vi. Where would you fit into that equation? Weren’t you the one telling me not to deal with Trouble because of Yvette? You’re being hypocritical.”

“It’s obvious that you’re trying to start a fight to stop me from taking this trip. Bleu, it won’t work. So, just shut the

hell up,” said Violet, dismissing her sister. “Whatever decision I made was made because I wanted it.”

And because Prodigy had an uncanny hold on her. She tried to walk away from it, but a few days later, she ended up right where she wanted to be; squatting on both his face and his dick. She was addicted to the way he made her feel. Physically, and mentally too. He fed her soul in more ways than one. With him, life was risky. Life was unpredictable. She had something to look forward to. Without him... life was dull. Life was simple. Life was what it was before he came to town.

Bleu sighed, sulking. “You add minutes to your phone, Vi?”

Violet nodded. “I did. I have more than enough for roaming.”

“You should ask him to get you one of those fancy phones, that tracks location and stuff,” said Theory, before jumping down from the top bunk. “Just in case we have to have Toni’s dad look for you.”

“He mentioned getting me a phone earlier,” said Violet with a pause and a giggle. “But listen... I love y’all. I’ll call as soon as the plane lands okay? The minute we’re cleared to use cellular service, my first call will be to Bleu, and then you right after, okay Theory?”

Theory and Bleu rushed over and both wrapped their arms around Violet, sad to see her go. They held on to her so tight, that she could barely breath. Although she was full of mixed emotions, she couldn’t wait to see what Florida would be like. She was excited about the beach, and about the sand,

and about the sun and everything else that came with it. Rosebury would always be home, but she couldn't wait to lay her eyes on the beauty that was Florida. She was more excited about the artistic vibe she'd get from a new place, than she was about having fun. Violet felt like a vacation was way overdue. She didn't realize how weird it was to have never been outside of Rosebury until Prodigy mentioned how there was a whole world out there for her to explore.

“Don't forget to call me,” said Ruby, from the couch, flicking through channels. “I want a souvenir too.”

She didn't want to show it, but she was worried about Violet leaving too. Violet let go of Bleu and Theory and rushed over to the couch, where she literally jumped in Ruby's lap. Wrapping her arms around her neck, she pressed her cheek against hers with the biggest smile.

“Aww Ruby Ru, you're going to miss me aren't you?”

“Ewwww. Moveeee,” Ruby complained, laughing trying to get Violet off her lap. “I'm not! I want a souvenir!”

Violet laughed and kissed her on the cheek. “Yes you are. I'll bring you as many souvenir's as I can, baby sister.”



“It's cool girl. Trust. I'd never take you anywhere I wasn't comfortable myself. I just think it's good to get out and have some fun. You've been cooped up in boring ass Rosebury your whole life. Live a little! You look gorgeous, you're young... let loose a bit!”

Aspen was right. Violet had been cooped up in Rosebury. Getting her to leave home had been like pulling

teeth. And now that she had made it to Florida, it was like pulling teeth to get her out of the house. Violet was constantly in her head, worrying about every little thing. Worrying is what kept her planted. She was afraid of the unknown and being outside of Rosebury was as unknown to her as it gets.

And she definitely did look good! Once they landed, she and Aspen drove to the mall in the rented Bentley Prodigy got them. They shopped for a couple of hours, with Aspen picking out most of the clothes. Since Prodigy had given them his limitless American Express card, they could get just about any and everything they wanted.

She was wearing a sexy, strapless dress they got from a boutique, with sequins, that stopped a few inches above her knees. On her feet were a pair of two-inch, red Christian Louboutin's, since she couldn't walk in heels much. Her hair was pulled up into a bun, and her Aspen had beat her face to the gawds. Violet looked damn good. She looked like she belonged, instead of sticking out like a sore thumb, in her usual rags.

“Okaaaay,” sang Violet, finally giving in.

“I promise I'll tell him not to make it strong,” yelled Aspen over the loud music, “I can't believe you're twenty-three and you haven't even had a glass of wine. Whew girl, I was drinking at seventeen!”

Eight hours later, they were in Miami, at LIV, over an hour away from where they were staying in Manalapan, FL. Aspen had somehow convinced Violet to go out with her, since Yara was being a sourpuss. Yara had been standoffish since they boarded the private jet hours ago, refusing to

interact with Violet at all. She didn't care, Aspen had been great company while Prodigy had been away.

“Make her a strawberry daiquiri! She's a light weight! Don't put too much liquor!” yelled Aspen, at the bartender while Violet leaned against the bar, people watching.

Florida was nothing like Rosebury. Not by a long shot. The plane ride in, Violet gushed over the clouds and how much of an artist God was. How beautiful everything was from up top only boosted her excitement for what things would look like when she landed. She was actually excited about seeing people from all different walks of life. Once she learned that they weren't staying in Miami, but in a private beachfront mansion-style home, her excited overflowed. She couldn't believe that this was the life Prodigy and his women were used to.

Standing against the bar, people watching, she noticed something that she didn't see in Rosebury at all. People on their phones. Some were yelling into it, using the camera, others were texting. But everyone seemed to be using one. It was strange. If they were out, why were they occupied with their phones? Shouldn't they be enjoying themselves?

“Here!” yelled Aspen, pulling Violet's attention away from the girls dancing a few feet away from her.

The people were extremely different. Different from the people of Rosebury at least. These girls... they looked almost identical to what Aspen and Yara looked like. Long weaves, long lashes, dressed fashionably with makeup on. It was all such a sight to behold and Violet was happy that she had taken the trip after all.

She grabbed the drink from Aspen and took a sip of it.
“Oh, this is good!”

“I know right! And it’s not strong neither,” replied Aspen. “Hey, can I get a shot of Patron?!”

Violet took the straw out of the cup and started to drink straight out of the cup. Aspen stopped her, grabbing the cup from her. “Hey! You have to slow down girl. You light weight. It might taste good but there is still alcohol in there.” She giggled. “We cannot go back to the room with you falling all over. Are you trying to get me in trouble?!”

Violet giggled and Aspen gave her the cup back. “Yeah, I do need to take it easy., But GOD! It’s so damn good.”

“That’s the shit that sneaks up on you,” Aspen told her before taking her shot of Patron.

Violet was having the time of her life. She couldn’t believe how much fun Aspen had been since they arrived. And to think, she was a little down about them coming. As she stood at the bar, moving around to music, she was grateful for the company because Prodigy had been gone since they landed hours ago. She didn’t know where he was, and she didn’t ask. All she knew was that he would be back. Aspen and Yara seemed laxed about it, so she was too.

“I have to pee!” yelled Violet.

Aspen interlocked her arm with hers. “Come on. Bring the drink.”

They walked off, maneuvering through the thick crowd. If it wasn’t for the alcohol, Violet was sure that she’d

have some anxiety. But after taking a few hefty sips she was really chill. Once they got to the restroom, Violet was annoyed when she saw that there was a line, even if there were only two people in front of her. The drink had went straight to her bladder, but for some odd reason, she kept drinking.

“I have to peeeeee,” she complained, dancing around.

Aspen laughed and took the drink from her. “Well, stop drinking, girl. You’ll be using it in no time. See look... just one more in front of you.”

Aspen went back to looking down at her phone, strolling her newsfeed, trying to hide the fact that she was a little annoyed with Violet’s company. She wasn’t used to the complaining, or the innocence. She hated the fact that Yara was being standoffish and didn’t want to come out with them. Unlike Yara, she had accepted the fact that Violet was now a part of their ‘union’. She knew from the jump that Prodigy would stop at nothing to get her. Which he hadn’t. Yara had been in denial, all the while, Aspen was expecting it. So, the blow wasn’t that hard when he told them. Not for Aspen it wasn’t at least. Yara was devastated.

“Alright, come on,” said Violet, once it was her time to go in.

“She can go ahead. I don’t have to pee,” said Aspen, motioning for the girl behind her to go ahead inside. “I’ll be right here when you come back.”

Violet handed Aspen her new Chanel purse and asked her to hold it while she used it, before she pushed the door to the restroom open. Aspen leaned against the wall across from the bathroom, and waited, while Violet handled her business.

“Oh girl, that dress look so good on you,” said some girl standing at the sink washing her hands, when Violet walked in.

Violet smiled and thanked her before pushing the door to one of the stalls open. She was having such a good time in Florida that she couldn't wrap her mind around why she was worried to begin with. She couldn't wait to call Bleu and Theory with all of the stories about her shopping, riding in a Bentley and partying at one of the hottest clubs in town.

After using it, Violet pushed the door open and washed her hand at the sink. She was buzzing, but somehow, Prodigy came to mind, as he always did. She was deep in her feelings, thinking about the way he treated her and the way that he had changed her life in the course of a few months. Thinking back on the way things were before, and the way they were now left her in astonishment every time.

Violet snatched a few pieces of paper towel from the dispenser, dried her hands, and used the same paper towel to open the door. Once she stepped out into the hallway, she realized that Aspen was gone. With dipped eyebrows, she made her way to the common area of the club to look for her, thinking that maybe she was at the bar. When she went to reach for her purse to call her, she realized that Aspen had it, so she was without a phone and her purse too.

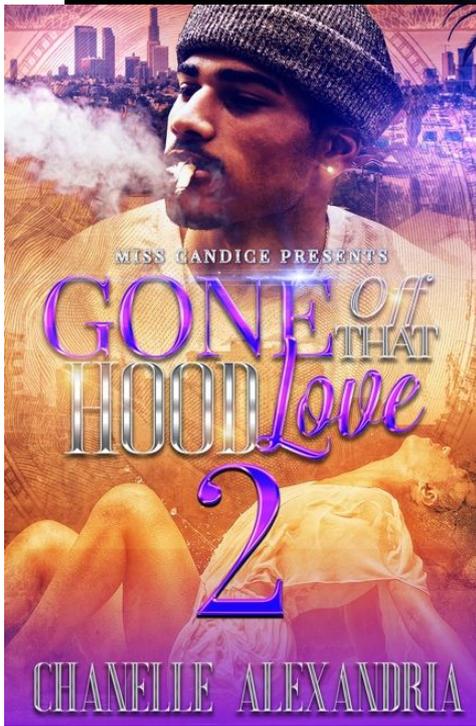
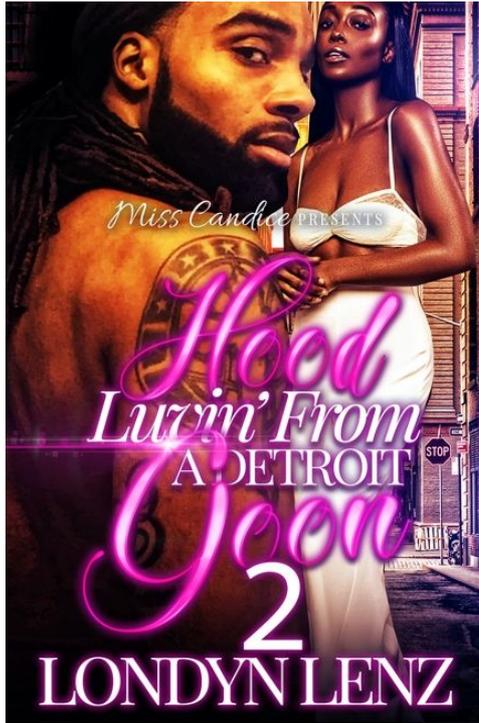
“Shit,” she cursed, as her hands went up to her head, when she made it to the bar to discover that she was not there. “Where the hell did she go? She said she would be waiting right there. What the hell...”

“Hey, did the thick girl I was up here with earlier come back around?” Violet asked the bartender who simply shook his head dismissively to tend to his customers.

Violet told herself not to panic, and she was doing a good job too. Up until she had spent nearly twenty minutes walking around the club looking for someone who had obviously left her. Over an hour away from where they were staying, in a dangerous city, with no phone, no purse, with absolutely nothing...

To be continued...

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