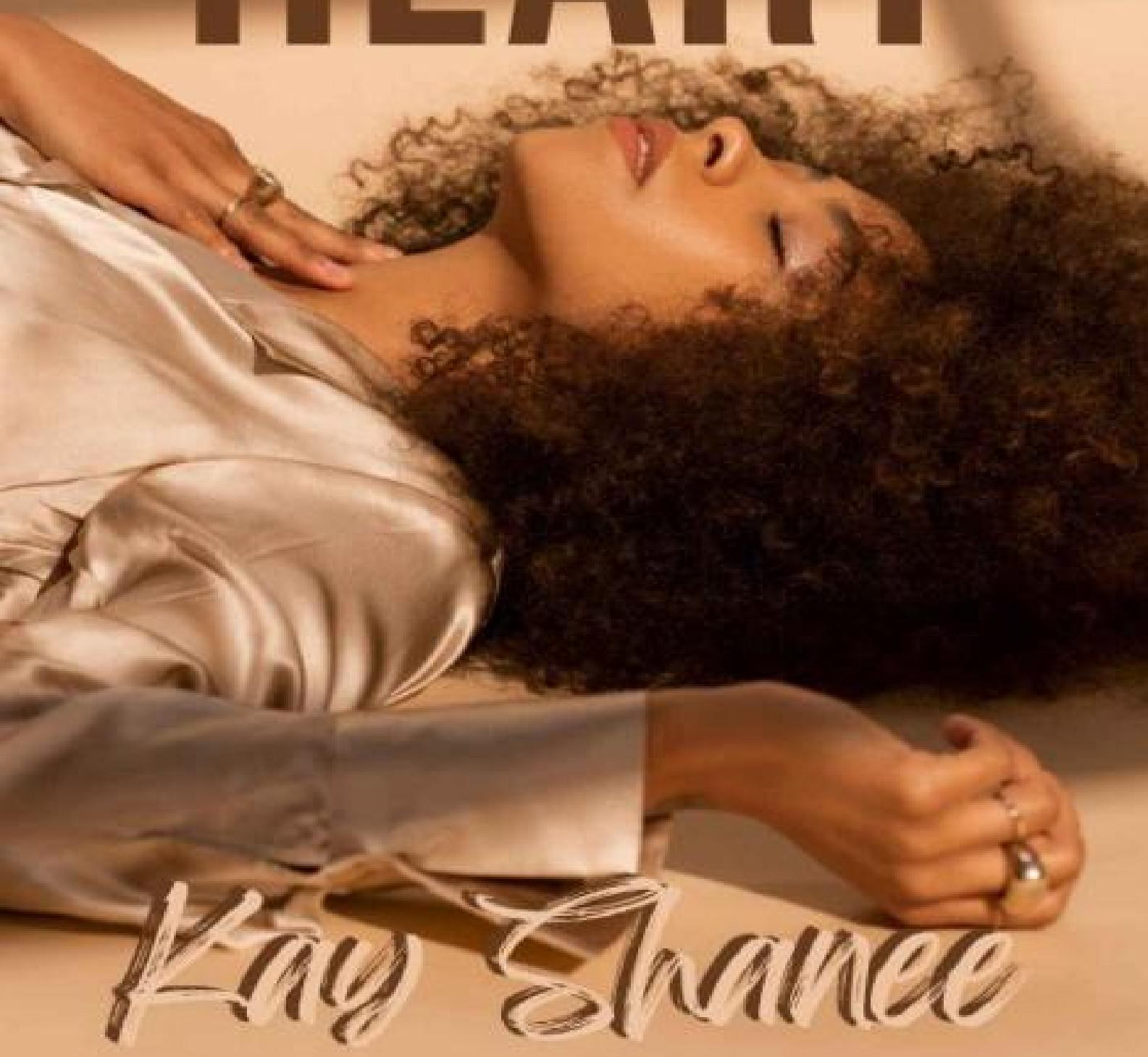


B. LOVE PUBLICATIONS PRESENTS

Conflicted HEART



Kay Swainee

CONFLICTED HEART

KAY SHANEE

B. LOVE PUBLICATIONS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kay is a forty-something-year-old wife and mother of two who was born and raised in the Midwest. During the day, she is a high school teacher. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends. Her favorite pastime is reading and writing romance novels about the

Dopeness of Black Love.

P R E F A C E

TRIGGER WARNING

This book contains some topics that may be sensitive for some. If death, the mention of molestation, or the mention of rape trigger you, you may want to refrain from reading this book. Please feel free to choose another book from my catalog. Also, please be patient with Siyanna. Her past creates a lot of uncertainty in her present life, but in the end you will understand why. Happy reading!

CONFLICTED HEART

Siyanna Cassidy was overjoyed to find that she was pregnant only one month behind her twin sister, Summer. The two had done life together on so many levels, including marrying twin brothers. However, in a brutal twist of tragic events, Siyanna is forced into early labor on the heels of the shocking loss of her sister. As if she hadn't been heartbroken enough, the shooting death of her husband follows swiftly. Suddenly a single mother and widow, she partners with her brother-in-law to raise their children. However, even the silver lining challenges her heart.

Drue Hendrix is a Black Romance Author. His stories of love and strength had his own life as added fuel now that his beautiful wife was having their first child. But when she dies in childbirth his world is flipped upside down. The pain is enough to bring him to his knees. Add in the news of losing his twin brother and life is hardly worth living. Still, for the sake of his newborn, and his brother's grieving household, he is determined to rise and raise his family. When healing begins to show its colors though, new life tastes like the forbidden.

Mirroring each other's grief turns into soothing each other's hearts for Siyanna and Drue. Yet will the nature of their bond ruin their chances at love? Or will they become one another's saving grace?

PROLOGUE

September

*L*ife has a funny way of letting you know you're not in control. Nothing is guaranteed except death, and if Siyanna didn't know it before, she knew it now.

As she sat in the pew on the front row of the church, listening to the pastor ramble on about the blessings of the Lord, Siyanna didn't feel blessed. In fact, she felt nothing but cursed. If she were blessed, the two people she loved most in the world wouldn't be lying lifeless in the caskets in front of her.

Siyanna blocked out the minister's voice and thought back to two weeks ago, the day Summer went into labor.

"Si-Si, I think it's time. Meet us at the hospital," Siyanna's twin sister, Summer, told her when she answered her phone.

"Oh my God! I'm on my way."

Siyanna moved as fast as she could with her protruding belly, wishing her husband, Drae, was home. He and a few of his friends had gone to a Las Vegas Raiders football game. She quickly sent him a text message informing him of her whereabouts. After pulling on one of his hoodies, she slid her feet into her pink Crocs, grabbed her purse and keys, and exited through the garage.

Siyanna didn't know who was more excited when Summer found out she was pregnant; her, her sister, or her brother-in-

law, Drue. Starting their own family had always been high on their list of desires. The sisters grew up in the foster care system, and all but one of the families treated them with some decency. Although they never felt welcomed or like they were part of the families, it was bearable. The last family they were placed with was a nightmare, though, and as soon as they turned eighteen, they hightailed it out of there.

All they'd ever felt they truly had was each other, and they did everything together, including fall in love with twin brothers and, apparently, get pregnant. About a month after Summer announced the news of her pregnancy, Siyanna found out she was with child, as well. They were ecstatic about experiencing pregnancy together.

Siyanna could barely contain her composure as she made her way to the hospital. In a matter of hours, her other half would become a mother, making her an aunt, and she couldn't wait to meet her nephew. She arrived at the hospital just as a nurse helped Summer into a wheelchair.

“Come on, Si!” Summer’s husband, Drue urged.

Inside the elevator, Siyanna bent as much as she could and hugged her sister.

“How do you feel, Summer?” she asked.

“Good until—Owww, shit!” she groaned through a contraction.

“Just breathe, baby,” Drue encouraged.

Since Summer was so close to her due date, Drue opted not to attend the football game with his brother and their friends. He was grateful he was home when his wife began to experience contractions.

When they arrived on the labor and delivery floor, things moved fast. Summer was allowed to have two people in the room while she gave birth, so Siyanna was a bit nervous. After the nurses prepped her, the doctor came in and checked Summer’s cervix, determining she was already eight centimeters dilated. It would take the anesthesiologist a while to get to her, so the likelihood of an epidural was slim.

"Oh my God! How am I gonna do this without an epidural? This shit—ahhh," Summer shouted.

Drue leaned down and kissed Summer's cheek, then whispered, "You got this, baby."

"I don't know, Drue. I don't think I can—fuucckk! Oh my God! Help me!"

Siyanna didn't know what to do, so she held her sister's hand and prayed. About an hour and a half later, Summer had fought through the pain and gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Minutes later, machines connected to Summer went haywire. They whisked her son away and shoved Drue and Siyanna out of the room.

Drue sat on the pew next to Siyanna with similar thoughts and feelings. One day, he thought he had it all: a booming career, a beautiful wife, and his first child on the way. At the blink of an eye, it was seemingly all gone. His brother and the woman he chose to spend the rest of his life with, were gone. The future he imagined was no longer attainable, leaving him with very little hope and praying things didn't get any worse.

When Drue and Drae were eleven years old, their father, David Hendrix, was killed while working at a construction site. That was the only time Drue ever recalled feeling anything remotely close to how he currently felt.

He questioned whether he could have done something differently on that fateful evening two weeks ago, but no scenario he created in his mind would have changed the outcome. Drue's mind drifted to the moment the nightmare began.

The doctor had just informed him that Summer was gone. She began to lose blood at such an alarming rate during labor, and by the time the doctors realized it they couldn't stop the bleeding. His knees weakened when he heard those words, and the gut-wrenching scream that came from him could be heard throughout the hospital. It was so loud Drue didn't hear Siyanna's screams until she was being put on a gurney and wheeled away. He jumped to his feet and followed them.

“What the fuck are you doing? Where are you taking her?” Drue shouted at the doctors.

When they ignored him, he picked up his pace and continued to follow them. Once he was close enough, he grabbed one of the doctor’s shoulders and demanded his attention.

“Where the fuck are you taking her?” he repeated.

“Sir, she’s in shock and was holding her stomach. We need to get her to a room to make sure she’s not in labor.”

“She can’t be,” Drue told them. “She’s not due for another month.”

“Sir, please. We need to—”

“No! Fuck that! You just killed my wife, and I’m not about to let you kill her sister, too.”

Drue gripped the sides of the gurney and held it in place while Siyanna groaned from the pain she was experiencing.

“Security!” one of the doctors or nurses shouted.

Before he could react, Drue was being pulled away from Siyanna by two large Black men. He wasn’t a small man himself, but the two men were handling him. Once inside a small room, they tossed him to the floor.

“Those muhfuckas killed my wife. I don’t trust their asses.”

“Sir, I understand you’re upset, but we need you to calm down,” one of them said.

“Calm do—”

“If you don’t, they’re gonna call the cops, and you’ve already had a fucked-up night. I don’t want to add to it. Please, bruh,” the other one added.

Considering their words, Drue took a few deep breaths. His cell phone began to vibrate in the pocket of his sweats, gaining his attention. He pulled the phone out and looked at the screen. It was his homie Fred, who was at the football game with Drae.

“Oh shit! Drae!” he said to himself when he realized he needed to get in contact with his brother. “Fred!”

“Yo, Drue!” Fred answered. “Drae’s gone, man. He’s gone!”

Fred was shouting, and Drue could tell from the tone of his voice that he was or had been crying.

“What the hell are you talking about, Fred?” Drue asked, confused. “Gone where?”

Fred’s words were slow and measured. “During the game, he got into it with some racist ass white dudes. It got so bad they almost put us out. When we left, we ran into the white dudes in the parking garage, and one of them got in Drae’s face again. He swung on Drae and hit him in his face, and before he could defend himself, he was shot in the back, man. One of the other dudes shot Drae in the back, bruh.”

“Fred, please tell me this is a sick joke. I know you not telling me my brother is dead.”

“I’m sorry, bruh. I swear to God I am. We called the ambulance but—but by the time they got here, it was too late.”

Drue couldn’t believe his ears...he couldn’t believe his life.

“Drue, come on, son. Let’s go say our last goodbyes,” his mother, Cherie, urged him.

“I can’t, Ma. Give me my son, and you go ahead,” Drue told her.

Cherie placed Dylan in his father’s arms, then put her hand on Drue’s shoulder.

“I know things seem bleak right now, but you’re gonna be okay. We all will,” she assured him.

Drue didn’t reply. He continued to look down at his son, who was the spitting image of him. Cherie finally left Drue’s side to get one final look at her son and her daughter-in-law. Although she spoke encouraging words to Drue, she wasn’t sure how any of them would get through.

Siyanna stood in front of Summer's casket, with her arms folded across her chest and tears falling from her eyes. Her heart shattered when she heard the doctor say Summer was gone, and she was so shocked she started having contractions.

Since conception, they'd done virtually everything together, and Siyanna didn't know how she would move forward without her twin. When she could no longer control her emotions, her cries filled the sanctuary, and her body shook with grief. Cherie pulled Siyanna into her arms to comfort her, even though she needed comforting herself.

Eventually, Siyanna said her final goodbyes to Summer and slowly approached her husband's casket with Cherie in tow. When her eyes landed on Drae, the floodgates reopened. She thought about how happy he was when she told him she was pregnant, and he was overjoyed when they found out they were having a boy, and their son and nephew would grow up together. It broke Siyanna's heart that Drae would never lay eyes on either of them.

Life as Drue and Siyanna knew it would never be the same, and neither of them was ready to tackle the days ahead.

A MONTH HAD DRAGGED by since Drae and Summer's funeral. Before his life changed for the worse, he'd purchased a new five-bedroom home for his growing family. It was supposed to be a surprise for Summer, but she didn't have a chance to experience it. The buying process was too far along for him to rescind, and he'd already sold his condo, so he moved forward with the purchase. He'd been there a couple of weeks and it felt nothing like a home unless Siyanna was there. Not even his mother's presence helped.

Today, Siyanna and Drae's son, Dash, would be released from the hospital after spending his first month of life in the NICU. Bringing him home was bittersweet for Siyanna, and it was tough not having Drae there to share the experience with her. While Dash remained in the NICU, gaining weight and

strength, Siyanna spent all her free time with him. It was hell getting him to latch on to her breasts, but her persistence paid off, and she was able to nurse him.

She hated being home alone and spent most nights sleeping in one of the guest rooms in Drue's condo, and then after he moved, his new home. So, when she wasn't with her son, she was bonding with her nephew, Dylan.

From the day he was born, he had a horrible reaction to the milk given to him by the hospital staff. After Siyanna gave birth to Dash, the nurses brought her nephew to her room and explained the situation, then asked if she could try to breastfeed him or pump some of her milk for him. Siyanna was more than happy to do it if it meant her nephew would get the nutrients he needed. It was a blessing being there for him in her sister's absence and made her feel closer to Summer.

It was crazy how much the two babies looked alike. Drue's mom, Cherie, was sure people would think they were twins. Dash was a bit tinier than Dylan, but Siyanna had no doubt he'd catch up to his cousin sooner or later. Cherie flew in from Chicago as soon as she was given the news about her son and daughter-in-law and was staying with Drue. Although she didn't want to leave, she was going home the following day.

"Hey, Si-Si. Are you ready to pick up my grandson?" Cherie asked.

"Yeah," she replied, not sounding very excited.

Cherie picked up on her mood and asked her about it.

"What's wrong, sweetheart? You should be happy."

"I am happy, for the most part. It's just...I miss Drae so much. He's supposed to be here with me, so we could do this together."

Tears gathered in her eyes and eventually fell down her cheeks. As she'd been doing for the past two weeks, Cherie pulled her daughter-in-law into her arms and let her cry it out.

"Summer and I were supposed to raise our kids together," she continued.

“I know, sweetheart. This is not a situation I’d wish on my worst enemy. This loss is immeasurable.”

Cherie was determined to be strong for Drue and Siyanna. There were moments when she broke down because the grief was unbearable, but she held it together in front of the new parents.

“How about I stay another week?” Cherie suggested.

Siyanna pulled away from her and looked her in the eyes.

“You don’t have to do that, Mama. I know you have a life to get back to.”

Since the day Cherie met her sons’ girlfriends, and they shared their upbringing with her, she insisted they call her Mama.

“I do, but you, Drue, and my grandboys are more important than anything or anyone waiting for me in Chicago. I’ll stay another week and help you get situated at home.”

Siyanna looked away, and Cherie felt her body tense.

“You’re not ready?” she asked Siyanna.

“I don’t know. Maybe with Dash there with me, it won’t be as bad.”

“Si, just bring him back here,” the ladies heard near the entrance of the kitchen, where they were sitting at the breakfast bar.

Most people called Siyanna by her nickname, Si-Si, but Drue shortened her nickname even more and had always called her Si. Both ladies looked at Drue as he entered the kitchen, cradling his son in his arms.

“I’ve been staying here a lot, Drue. It’s probably time for me to—”

“What about Dylan?” he asked with concern. *What about me?*

“I can pump as much milk as he needs. I don’t want to keep imposing—”

“It’s not just about the milk,” Drue stated, his voice slightly elevated. “He’s gotten used to your presence. I’m sure in his little mind he thinks you’re his mother. You can’t just up and disappear on him.”

To be truthful, it wasn’t just about his son. Drue had gotten used to Siyanna’s presence as well, and since Summer was gone, he felt a sense of comfort with Siyanna around.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m positive. Please stay. I still have to decorate, and the rest of the furniture should be delivered this week. I can fix up the room however you want. Dash can stay in Dylan’s room for now until we figure out what to do next.”

Siyanna was hesitant because she didn’t want to impose on Drue’s space. However, she was even more uncertain about being in her home permanently. She looked to Cherie for help.

“Stay here, Si-Si. I think that would be best,” Cherie advised.

*March
(approximately six months later)*

*A*lthough their hearts were broken and seemed irreparable, Drue and Siyanna were adjusting to their new normal. There were many sleepless nights, an abundance of dirty diapers, a river of tears, and continuous prayer. Neither had much experience dealing with newborns, but they figured it out with lots of trials, errors, and calls to Cherie.

Prior to the tragedy, they hadn't spent a great deal of one-on-one time together. What they knew of each other came from the mouths of their spouses, but because of their shared trauma and unique situation, the two developed a close bond.

On the rare occasion they went out with the boys, Drue and Siyanna looked like a typical couple with infant children. Instead, they were two people with shared pain, attempting to make the best out of the fucked-up hand they'd been dealt. Some days were harder than others, but they continued to push through.

When Siyanna decided she would be living with Drue for the foreseeable future, they decided to decorate Dylan and Dash's room, along with stocking it with all the things two growing boys needed. Neither of them had any experience in decorating, so there were some challenges along the way, but the two bonded during the process.

After the boys' room was completed, Drue insisted on hiring an interior designer for Siyanna's room. As much fun as they had tackling the boys' room together, they knew their limits. Drue's goal was for Siyanna to feel at home, and he believed the designer they hired accomplished that goal.

The holidays came and went without much fanfare. Of course, Cherie was in town along with a few of Drue's relatives from Chicago. It was the first time they'd seen Drue's new house, and Dylan and Dash in person. The boys were showered with more love and attention than they could handle.

At present, Dylan and Dash were the crankiest they'd ever been, and as the day turned into night, they weren't getting any better. It was after midnight, and Drue and Siyanna had tried everything they could think of to comfort the babies and were fresh out of ideas.

Like they'd done on dozens of other occasions, the four of them were in Drue's king-sized bed with the babies in the middle, crying their eyes out. Siyanna's breasts were so sore from continuous attempts to nurse them, she wanted to cry along with them.

"We've tried everything," Drue stated. "They're gonna just have to cry themselves into exhaustion."

Siyanna was worried. The boys had plenty of cranky days and nights since they'd been home from the hospital, but their crying spells never lasted for several hours.

"I think they're teething," she told him.

"Well, damn. Is this how they're gonna be until they have all their teeth?"

"I don't know, Drue. I rubbed some *Orajel* on their gums and gave them baby Tylenol. Nothing seems to be helping."

"Let me call Mama and see what she thinks."

"It's the middle of the night. Are you trying to give her a heart attack? Don't call her. We'll figure it out."

"It's not that late in Chicago. She's probably not even sleep."

“No, Drue. Don’t call her. There’s nothing she can do from there, anyway.”

“Fuck, Si. I’m tired as hell, and they’ve been crying nonstop for hours. This shit can’t be normal,” Drue spat before hopping out of bed and leaving the room.

He pulled some sweats over the basketball shorts he had on and grabbed a sweatshirt. A few minutes later, she thought she heard a door slam, but the boys were crying so loud, she wasn’t sure. Rolling out of bed, she went to look around the house and saw that Drue was gone.

“Really, Drue?”

Sighing, she shook her head in annoyance as she went back up the stairs. In the bedroom, Dylan and Dash were still wailing away.

“There has to be something I can do for y’all to stop crying,” Siyanna said aloud.

After checking their temperature, making sure they didn’t need a diaper change, trying to feed them, and looking for physical signs of pain, things they’d been doing all evening, Siyanna was at the end of her rope. Tears of exhaustion and frustration fell from her eyes as she paced back and forth.

Her blurry eyes landed on the *Weego Twin Baby Carrier* that she rarely used. Picking it up, she wondered if it was the answer to her prayers. She wiped away her tears and began putting on the contraption. About ten minutes later, Siyanna had Dylan and Dash securely inside, and she was grateful they weren’t too big.

Siyanna walked through the hallway of the upper level of the house, hoping the constant moving would be soothing. At first, it didn’t seem to be helping, but she kept moving as she hummed a soft tune and rubbed the babies’ backs. Relief overwhelmed her when their cries turned to whimpers, then finally...silence.

Now what?

Exhausted herself, the only thing Siyanna wanted to do was go to sleep.

But how?

Making her way to the family room, Siyanna slowly eased into the rocking chair. Once she was seated comfortably, she released a sigh of relief that the boys didn't wake up. Resting her head on the back of the chair, she closed her eyes and allowed herself to relax. Not long after, she was fast asleep.

As they often did, visions of Drae invaded her slumber. Sometimes memories of the life they shared would comfort her. Other times, it was dreams of what could have been. This time, it was the latter.

"Damn, baby. You did it," Drae beamed as the nurse placed Dash in his arms. "He's perfect, just like you."

With tears in his eyes, Drae kissed Dash's forehead before placing him on Siyanna's chest.

"Thank you for blessing me with a son," he told her. "I know you'll be an amazing mother."

As soon as Dash's cheek brushed against her breast, he tried to latch on. She guided her nipple into his little mouth and flinched when he began to suck. It was more painful than she expected.

"And I know you'll be an amazing father," she said as she looked up at him. "He looks just like you, baby."

Drae smiled. "Naw, that's all you. I hope he has your kind heart and gentle spirit, but he can't be no punk."

"With you as his father, he won't be a punk, Drae."

Drae leaned to kiss Siyanna's forehead, then the tip of her nose, and finally her lips.

"I won't be here physically but know I'm always here."

He pressed his index and middle finger against her heart.

"Baby, what are you talking about?"

"I love you and my little man. Thank you for loving me with your whole heart and soul. You've blessed my life more than I could ever say."

He kissed her lips and his son's forehead again, taking one last look at them.

"I love you, Si-Si. I'm sorry I had to leave you like this. Drue will take care of you and Dash, baby. Let him help you."

As Drae spoke those words, he walked backward until he disappeared. Siyanna cried out for him, begging him not to leave her, but nothing she said mattered. Drae was gone.

Siyanna's tear-filled eyes popped open as she tried to catch her breath. She looked around the room, trying to get her bearings. Looking at the two little angels sleeping on her chest, she realized it was just another dream. Fighting to control her emotions, she wiped her tears and took several slow, deep breaths.

"I miss you so much, Drae. It wasn't supposed to be this way," she whispered.

The babies stirred, so she gently rubbed their backs and silently cried herself back to sleep.

*W*hile Siyanna was home managing the kids, Drue drove around downtown Las Vegas. He knew he was wrong for walking out and leaving her to handle the boys on her own, but he let his frustration and exhaustion get the best of him.

By nature, Drue was a problem solver. The longer Dylan and Dash cried the more inept Drue felt. Not being able to do something to comfort his son and nephew had him feeling like a failure. So, even though he knew he was wrong, he left anyway.

Although it was late, the weather was pleasant for the time of year, so the Las Vegas strip was live. Tourists covered the sidewalk as if it was the middle of the day. After driving through the crowded streets for about an hour, he headed home, hopeful that Siyanna could calm the babies and wasn't too pissed at him.

While sitting at a stoplight, his eyes landed on a twenty-four-hour breakfast spot that him and Summer would frequent after a night of clubbing. He smiled as he thought back to the first time he'd taken her there.

*"Drue, why are you bringing me to this hole in the wall?"
Summer asked with her nose turned up.*

*"You know the run-down restaurants have the best food.
It's not about how it looks on the outside. It's about the good
ass food they're cooking inside."*

She still looked skeptical, but when he got out of the truck and walked around to the passenger side to help her out, Summer went willingly.

They found a small booth inside the empty restaurant, and almost as soon as they were seated, a waitress approached them.

“Good morning, I’m Sonya. Can I start you off with some drinks?”

They both asked for water, and Sonya left them to retrieve it, allowing them time to look at the menu.

“Baby, what’s good here?” Summer asked.

“I’ve only eaten their breakfast food, and all of it is good.”

“That helps,” she said with sarcasm.

Drue chuckled. “I’ll order for you, baby.”

She smiled as she closed her menu. When Sonya returned with their waters, she took their orders. Summer hoped the “Mama’s Special” that Drue ordered was good.

While they waited for their food, they used the time to get to know each other a little better. They’d only been dating for a few weeks, but Drue already knew Summer was it for him, and she felt the same way about Drue.

That night, or early morning, Drue found out how Summer and Siyanna grew up. He admired the women they’d become, considering their upbringing. Drue shared with Summer how losing his father almost broke their family. He and Drae were close to both of their parents, but their father was very intentional about creating a bond with his boys. After almost two decades, they still had a hard time dealing with the loss.

Drue was pulled out of his thoughts by a honking horn. He looked in his rearview mirror and got a glance of his face which was wet with tears. When he pulled away from the stop sign, he wiped away the tears he didn’t know had fallen. As he approached the restaurant, at the last second, he turned into the parking lot.

He slowly got out of his truck, unsure if he wanted to go inside. Ultimately, his feet led him to the door even though his brain wasn't entirely on board. Once inside, he found the booth that him and Summer always sat in when they visited. A few minutes later, a waitress he didn't recognize approached the table.

"Good morning, my name is Clair. Can I get you something to drink?"

"Yes, I'll have a water. Can I go ahead and order the *Mama's Special*?"

"Of course. Is there anything else I can get you?"

"No, thank you."

Clair walked away, and Drue put his elbows on the table, then closed his eyes, resting his head in his hands. As he released a deep breath, he was startled by the table shaking. He lifted his head and found a familiar-looking woman in front of him.

"Hello, handsome," the woman greeted.

"Wassup?"

"Nothing much. I just got off work and decided to get a bite to eat. I'm glad I did."

Drue frowned, wondering why the woman looked familiar.

"Why is that?" he asked cautiously.

"Because I ran into you."

Drue knew flirting when he saw it, and the woman was definitely flirting.

"I'm sorry. Do we know each other?"

"No, but I'd like to change that. I'm Natalie."

She extended a hand across the table, and he shook it as he introduced himself.

"I'm Drue. You look familiar to me. Are you sure we don't know each other?"

“I come here often on my way home from work. I’ve seen you a few times, but you’re usually with a woman. It’s been a while, though.”

Drue nodded as he thought about the times he and Summer stopped there to eat. Most times, the place was empty, but he did recall a few times when there were some other patrons.

“Yeah. It has been a while.”

“Ma’am, would you like your food served here?” Clair asked Natalie.

Natalie looked at Drue for approval. He didn’t mind her company, so he agreed. Clair placed Natalie’s meal in front of her.

“Yours is on the way, sir.”

Natalie didn’t pick up her silverware until Clair had returned with Drue’s meal and placed it in front of him. When Drue picked up his fork, Natalie reached across the table for his hand and bowed her head. He accepted and did the same before they silently blessed their food and dug in.

“I see you got *Mama’s Special*, too,” Natalie commented before taking her first bite.

“I almost always get it. Can’t beat pancakes, French toast, bacon, sausages, and seasoned potatoes.”

“True. It’s a lot of food. I usually eat half of it now and the other half before I go to work.”

“Where do you work?”

Natalie looked down at her plate and moved the food around.

“I’m a stripper, Drue.”

“Oh.”

“Are you judging me now?”

“Huh? Oh, no. Not at all,” Drue lied.

Natalie laughed. “It’s cool. You don’t have to lie. I’m used to it.”

Drue didn't have a response, so he continued to eat his food. They ate in silence for a few minutes. Every so often, Drue would steal glances at Natalie.

She doesn't look like a stripper, he thought.

Natalie was light-skinned and had natural hair that she wore in a medium-sized curly afro. Drue thought she was pretty but wouldn't have guessed that she stripped as a profession.

"I'm also a student at UNLV. After this semester, I'll have one more to go before I'm a registered nurse."

Drue had to admit, he was surprised and felt bad for judging her.

"Good for you. Congratulations."

"What do you do for a living?" she asked.

"I'm a writer," was all he said in reply.

"Really? Wow!"

"It's really not all that exciting, but I earn a pretty good living."

"What kind of books do you write?"

"Take a guess."

"Umm, crime and suspense?"

"Naw, that's not my thing." He chuckled.

"Horror?"

"Not at all. I write Black Romance."

"Black Romance? That's actually a thing?" she asked, shocked.

"You sound shocked, but yes. It's a whole genre. I'm guessing you don't read much."

"I'm embarrassed to say, I don't, unless you count my textbooks. What's your author name?"

"D. Blackmore."

He used his first initial and his mother's maiden name as his pen name in order to keep some anonymity and privacy.

"Cool. I'm gonna look up some of your stuff."

They finished the rest of their food in silence. The late-night meal didn't turn out the way Drue planned, but he enjoyed the distraction Natalie offered.

When Clair came with their bills, Drue was a gentleman and paid for Natalie's meal. Once they were outside, they stood near the building facing each other.

"Well, the night ended, or should I say this morning started a lot better than I expected. Thank you for letting me crash your meal, and of course, paying for mine."

"No problem. I appreciated the company."

"Can I ask you something?" she asked hesitantly.

"Sure?"

"Are you still dating the woman I used to see you with?"

Drue felt a pang in his heart.

"No," was all he managed to say.

He had no desire to go into any more details.

"Oh. Can I give you my number?"

Drue had no interest in dating her but didn't want to be rude. So, they exchanged numbers then he walked Natalie to her car. Once she was securely inside, they said their goodbyes before Drue went to his truck.

He watched from his vehicle as Natalie put her key in the ignition and turned it. When her car didn't start, she turned it a few more times with the same result. Drue got out and made his way to the driver's side of Natalie's car.

"Come on. It's late. I'll give you a ride home."

He didn't know anything about cars, so it would've been pointless for him to offer to look at it. A few minutes later, they were settled in Drue's truck.

"Put your address into the G.P.S.," he told her.

“I can get an Uber if—”

“It’s cool. Put your address in.”

Natalie finally did as she was asked, and they were on their way.

“Thank you, Drue. I really appreciate this.”

“It’s not a problem. Doesn’t look like you live too far from me.”

The only women he’d been this close to since Summer died were his mother and Siyanna. Drue assumed that was the reason Natalie’s scent caused his manhood to harden. She smelled like vanilla and cinnamon, and he liked it more than he cared to admit. He shifted in his seat in an attempt to adjust his dick.

“It’s that small house on the left at the end of the block,” Natalie directed.

When Drue turned into the driveway, he put the car in park and watched her as she gathered the things she’d taken from her car.

“Do you know anyone that can take a look at your car?” he asked her.

“Yeah. One of my brother’s friends is a mechanic.”

“Good. Well, good—”

“You want to come in?” Natalie rushed out before she lost the nerve.

Drue was shocked and intrigued by her question. When he didn’t answer right away, Natalie’s hand found its way between his legs, and she groped his dick.

“This answers my question,” she said.

“Look, Natalie. I—”

“Nope. I already have my answer. Come on,” she coaxed.

Before Drue could say anything else, Natalie had opened the door, hopped out of the car, and slammed the door shut. He

watched her let herself inside her home, leaving the door open for him to follow.

“Shit, Drue. What the fuck are you doing?” he asked himself.

Letting the wrong head decide, Drue finally got out of his truck and went inside. Natalie was waiting for him near the door, and as soon as he crossed the threshold, she closed and locked it behind him. Before he could go any further inside, Natalie had him pinned against the door.

“Hold up, Nat—ah, shit!”

And just that quick, Natalie had pulled down Drue’s sweats and shorts, and was on her knees with his dick in her mouth. It had been so long since he’d felt the touch of a woman. Drue was defenseless against her powers. Natalie performed magic tricks with her mouth, and it didn’t take long for her to pull Drue’s nut from his sack.

“Nat—got dammit—shit, I’m ’bout to cum!” he warned.

That was music to Natalie’s ears, causing her grip to tighten at the base as she suctioned her cheeks tighter. Within seconds, Drue’s warm semen shot down her throat. Natalie didn’t stop until she’d sucked him dry, causing him to push her away aggressively.

“Chill, Natalie,” he pled.

She stood to her feet with a smile on her face while Drue stuffed his dick back in his sweats. It wasn’t until Natalie began to undress that he knew he’d made a mistake.

“Hold on, Natalie. This ain’t right. We can’t do this.”

“Excuse me! Suddenly, it ain’t right *after* you nutted down my throat. Wow!”

“My bad. This was a mistake. I need to go.”

With Natalie spitting expletives at his back, Drue got out of there as fast as he could. He pulled out of her driveway like a bat out of hell, his heart racing a mile a minute. The first chance he got, he pulled out his phone and blocked her number. By the time he made it home, he felt sick to his

stomach. As soon as he opened the door to his truck, the meal he'd just eaten came up with a vengeance. All he wanted to do was go to bed and forget the past few hours ever happened.

he following day, the tension between Drue and Siyanna was thick. She was angry with him for walking out and leaving her alone to deal with the boys. To make matters worse, Siyanna heard Drue come in, and he didn't even have the decency to check on them.

Drue could sense Siyanna was upset with him, but he was dealing with the guilt he felt for allowing Natalie to suck his dick. Although he was exhausted when he finally made it home, Drue took a long hot shower attempting to wash off the memory of the strange woman. When he finally got in bed, he tossed and turned for a while before he was finally able to get a couple of hours of sleep.

Dylan and Dash were content in their swings, so Siyanna took the time to make herself a huge breakfast. Since the death of her husband and sister, her appetite had been almost nonexistent, but today, she woke up starving.

She moved around the kitchen in silence, ignoring Drue. When she finished cooking, she filled her plate with French toast, bacon, and eggs. Drue watched her as she sat down, blessed her food, and began eating.

Ain't this some shit, he thought.

Usually, the two took turns cooking the meals. Siyanna hadn't been eating much, but Drue always made sure to cook enough for her. She did the same for him even if she wasn't hungry. He couldn't believe she made herself such a big breakfast and didn't make enough for him.

“This what we doing, Si?”

“No, this is what *I’m* doing.”

“Where’s my food?”

Siyanna shrugged her shoulders.

“That’s messed up,” he growled, slamming the refrigerator door, and storming out of the kitchen.

Siyanna couldn’t care less about Drue being mad. She continued to enjoy her breakfast while Dylan and Dash napped in their swing. A few minutes later, she heard the door slam.

I’m knocking him out if he woke up the boys, she thought as she went to see if they were still asleep.

Drue was pissed, even though he knew he had no right to be. Because he vomited up the late-night meal he had during the wee hours of the morning, he woke up starving and excited about the aroma coming from the kitchen. The urge to snap on Siyanna was strong, but he took the high road and left the house instead.

He hopped in his truck and ended up at a park a few blocks away from his house. After parking in a spot at the back of the lot, he took his phone out of the pocket of his hoodie, and a card fell into his lap. Picking it up, he read the information printed on one side.

It was a business card for a psychologist by the name of Dr. Rochelle Miller. Drue remembered getting the card from one of the nurses at the hospital the day he brought Dylan home. At the time, he was barely functioning, so he stuck it in the pocket of his hoodie and didn’t think any more about it.

“Maybe this is what I need,” he said aloud before releasing a deep breath. “Maybe I need to talk to someone.”

Sticking the card back in his pocket, he picked up his phone and called his mother.

“Hey, son,” Cherie answered.

“Hey, Ma,” he returned, sounding dejected.

“What’s wrong, Drue?”

“I messed up, Ma.”

“You messed up, how?”

“It’s so hard, Ma. Last night, the boys cried for hours. Siyanna says they’re teething. We tried everything to get them to stop, but nothing we did worked.”

“Did you hurt my grandboys?”

“What? No! I would never hurt them.”

“Then what are you talking about. How did you mess up?”

“I couldn’t take the constant crying, so I left,” he responded.

“You left? What do you mean, you left?”

“I left the house,” he stated.

“You left Siyanna to handle them alone? Tell me you’re kidding.”

“I’m not, and that’s not even the worse part.”

“Drue, get to the damn point.”

“I drove around for a while and ended up at this restaurant that Summer and I used to go to. This woman invited herself to my table, and we ended up back at her place.”

“You’re telling me you left Siyanna alone to handle cranky babies, to go have sex with some strange woman?”

“We didn’t have sex; she suck—”

“Aht-Aht! I’ve heard enough, boy, I get the picture.”

“Summer would be so disappointed. She’s only been gone _____”

“Drue, I hate you’re going through this, but Summer is gone. I know it might feel like you cheated on her, but that’s not the case. You can’t beat yourself up about it.”

“I miss her so damn much. I don’t know if I can do this without her, Ma.”

Tears gathered in his eyes, threatening to fall.

“Son, you know I understand. When we lost your father, it was the hardest thing I’d ever experienced. After all these years, it’s still hard for me. But know this, you’ll survive. You have to, for Dylan, Dash, and Siyanna. I won’t lie and tell you it’ll be easy, but you’ll be alright.”

They sat quietly on the phone as Drue gathered himself and Cherie, unsure of what to say.

“Thanks, Ma. I appreciate you being here for me,” Drue said when he spoke again.

“You know I’m here whenever you need me. As a matter of fact, I’m about to book a flight. I need to come check on my grandsons.”

“They seemed fine this morning. Siyanna’s not fooling with me right now, so I didn’t get to ask her what time they eventually settled down.”

“I don’t blame her for being pissed. Siyanna doesn’t know any more about babies than you, and you left her alone with crying babies to go get that little thing sucked by some nasty woman.”

Drue chuckled. He could always depend on his mother to make him laugh.

“Woman, you used to change my diapers. You know good and well ain’t nothing little down there.”

“On that note, I’m gone. I’ll let you know what day I’m coming.”

He laughed again. “Okay, Ma. I love you.”

“I love you more, baby boy.”

When he ended the call, he placed his phone in the cupholder and let his head fall to the headrest.

“Summer, I don’t know how I’m gon’ make it without you, baby, but I don’t have a choice.”

The past six months had been the hardest of his life. When he lost his father, he and Drae were able to support each other as they grieved. Losing his twin brother, who was also his best

friend, on top of the loss of his wife, was a level of grief that even the strongest person would have difficulty getting through.

Before going home, Drue stopped at McDonald's to grab something to eat. By the time he pulled into his driveway, he'd finished eating and was prepared to get back on Siyanna's good side. They'd been through so much together. She'd become his closest friend. He didn't want her to be upset with him for any reason.

When he entered the house, he went directly to the family room. Siyanna sat in the rocking chair, reading something on her Kindle while the boys bounced up and down in their walkers. They noticed him and began bouncing with excitement while babbling and reaching for him. When Siyanna realized what the excitement was for, she smacked her lips and rolled her eyes.

"I guess you still mad?" he asked.

"You're a genius," she replied with sarcasm.

"Man, Si, my bad. It was fucked up of me to walk out on you like that. I don't have an excuse, and I'm sorry."

Minutes went by before Siyanna spoke.

"Don't do that shit again, Drue."

"I swear I won't. We good?"

"I guess. Are you about to do something?"

"No, why?"

"I need to get some air. There's milk in the fridge for the boys. I won't be gone too long."

She leaned down and kissed Dylan and Dash on their cheeks before leaving the room. Although she had somewhat accepted his apology, Drue could tell she still had a slight attitude. When she skirted passed him, he grabbed her by the waist before she got too far away. With her body flushed against his, she looked up and into his eyes.

"What, Drue?"

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Where’d you go last night?” she returned with a frown on her face.

Did she know about Natalie? He thought. *Naw, that’s impossible.*

“For a drive, and then I stopped to get something to eat.”

“Good for you. I’ll be back soon.”

“At least turn on your location just in case something happens,” he told her.

“I’ll be fine, Drue.”

She slipped out of his grasp as quickly as she could because being that close to him caused a buzzing in her body. Drue felt it as well and was confused by the feeling.

He shook his head as he said, “Hardheaded ass.”

Siyanna was gone so she didn’t respond to his name-calling, attempting to shake off what she’d just experienced with Drue. The only problem was she didn’t have any place to go. After driving around for about thirty minutes, she ended up at *The Boulevard Mall*. These days, the only time Siyanna left the house was to take the boys for a walk or go to the grocery store. Occasionally, Drue took all of them out to dinner, but that wasn’t often.

Siyanna and Summer shared a love for fashion. Siyanna worked as a manager at Nordstrom, while Summer held the same title at Neiman Marcus. They learned a lot about working with high-end manufacturers and planned to put that knowledge to use. After they earned a business degree from UNLV, the sisters dreamed of opening a high-end clothing boutique they’d call *Passion 4 Fashion*, for which they’d written a business plan and were preparing to seek a loan from a bank. With the money she collected from Drae’s life insurance policy, Siyanna didn’t need a bank loan anymore, but now, she didn’t have her sister, or the drive to continue with the plans.

As she casually strolled in and out of stores, her mind wandered aimlessly. There were some moments when she enjoyed looking through the racks of clothes. A couple of times, she was tempted to try on something sexy then take a picture to send to Drae, and others when she lifted something from a rack and turned around to get Summer's opinion, forgetting she was alone. Despite the sadness that seemed to encompass her, she enjoyed her time away from the house.

Siyanna ended up in *Bath & Body Works*. She'd only been in the store for a few minutes when someone tapped her shoulder. She turned around, and her eyes landed on a familiar face.

“Siyanna, right?”

“Yes. You look familiar but—”

“From the hospital. I work in NICU.”

“Oh, yes! Nurse Weston. I remember now. How are you?”

“Please, call me Dani. I’m doing well. How are you and little Dash adjusting?”

“We’re hanging in there. It’s been tough because I’m also taking care of my nephew.”

“Oh? How old is your nephew?”

“He’s actually the same age as Dash. My sister...she umm, passed away after she delivered him.”

“Oh, my. I’m so sorry. I had no idea.”

“It’s okay. I—”

“No, Siyanna. It’s not okay. How are you, *really*? ”

Out of nowhere, tears sprang from Siyanna’s eyes. Dani put her arm around her and led her out of the store. They found a nearby bench, where they took a seat, and Dani pulled Siyanna into a hug.

The only real friends Siyanna and Summer ever had was each other. They had a hard time trusting people because of their past experiences. When she and Summer turned eighteen, they left the foster care system and didn’t maintain contact

with any of the families they'd lived with and did their best to forget the hell the last family put them through. Now that Summer and Drae were gone, Siyanna didn't have a shoulder to cry on when her emotions got the best of her. Drue and Cherie experienced the same loss as she did, so she didn't want to burden them.

Siyanna didn't realize how much she needed Dani's warm embrace and shoulder to cry on. She took advantage of Dani's compassion, releasing the tears she had built up for months. After ten minutes, Siyanna finally pulled away, and Dani looked at her with sympathetic eyes.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cry and snot all over your shirt. I just—"

"Sweetheart, you don't have to explain. Besides, you needed that, and I'm glad I was able to be here for you. I'm not trying to pry, but if you need to talk, I'm a great listener," Dani offered.

"I don't know. It's a lot, and I don't even know where to begin."

"How about we go grab a bite to eat, and you start from the beginning?"

And that was what they did. The ladies settled in at *Just Crack 'N Seafood*, and after placing their orders, Siyanna started from the day she and Summer met Drae and Drue and ended at the crying spell Dash and Dylan had the previous night. While she spoke, their food arrived, and she paused to take a few bites. By the time she finished, Dani was teary-eyed.

"Wow, Siyanna. It's hard to imagine someone going through all that you've been through. You've barely had time to breathe, let alone grieve."

"I know. I mean, I know women birth multiples all the time, but I wasn't mentally prepared to breastfeed or take care of two infants at the same time I was mourning the death of my sister and husband. It's been an experience, to say the least."

“And the only help you have is your brother-in-law?” Siyanna nodded. “You don’t have any family here?”

“Summer and I grew up in foster homes. Drue is from Chicago, so that’s where his mother and the rest of his family live.”

“Wow!” she expressed in awe. “Well, you have a friend in me. We don’t know each other, but I am here to help. I believe it was meant for us to run into each other today.”

“Me too. Thank you so much.”

They finished their food, and before they left the mall, they exchanged numbers, with Dani making Siyanna promise to call her if she needed anything or just wanted to talk. On the ride home, Siyanna felt a lot lighter than she had in a long time.

A

few days later, Siyanna was surprised when the doorbell rang, and Cherie waited on the other side of the door.

“Mama,” Siyanna gasped as she embraced her. “What are you doing here?”

“Drue didn’t tell you he sent an S.O.S. the other day?”

Siyanna released her and took a step back, allowing Cherie room to enter the house.

“I told him not to call you. The boys had one rough night, and he left in the middle of it.”

Cherie left her rolling suitcase by the door and stopped to use the bathroom before heading to the family room.

“He felt bad about abandoning you like that,” she said, picking up their conversation. “But he felt even worse about that nasty woman sucking on his little wiener.”

“What?” Siyanna asked, confused about what Cherie revealed.

“Damn, Ma. Why you come in here telling Si all my business?” Drue fussed as he entered the room. “And didn’t I tell you ain’t nothing small about my—”

“Boy, you better watch your mouth. And I thought she already knew.”

“Why would I tell her that, Ma?”

Cherie shrugged her shoulders before gushing over her grandsons.

“Oh, my goodness. They look like twins,” she said in awe before lifting Dash from the playpen.

“Hey, Nana’s baby. Look how big you’ve gotten,” she beamed.

After fawning over Dash for a few minutes, she returned him to the playpen, then lifted Dylan to shower him with the same affection. While Cherie loved on her grandbabies, Siyanna tried to process Drue walking out on what was probably their toughest night as new parents to get his dick sucked.

“Is that where you went the other night?” Siyanna asked angrily.

“That’s not why I left, Si. It just kinda happened.”

“Whatever, Drue.”

Siyanna shook her head and was annoyed by his behavior and the way that little piece of information made her feel. She was angry but didn’t know if it was because he left her to deal with the babies, or because he let someone suck his dick.

“See what you did, Ma, running your mouth. Now she got an attitude again.”

“No, I don’t. What you do with your dick is not my business. Next time just don’t leave me with two hollering babies to bust a nut. Sorry, Ma.”

With that, Siyanna left them in the family room and retreated to her bedroom, needing a few minutes to herself. When her phone rang and Dani’s name flashed across the screen, she answered quickly.

“Hey, Dani. What’s up?”

The two hadn’t spoken since they’d seen each other at the mall, but they had exchanged a few texts messages.

“Nothing much. I’m off for the next couple of days and thought you might want to do something.”

“Something like what?”

“I don’t know. Maybe go to a few clubs on the strip.”

Siyanna frowned, even though she knew Dani couldn’t see her.

“Shit, It’s probably been over a year since the last time I went out. I don’t know, Dani.”

“What’s there to know? Find something sexy and let’s go have some fun. You deserve it.”

Siyanna was quiet for a minute, and her thoughts went to the information Cherie accidentally shared.

If he can go out and get his dick sucked, I can hang out with a friend, she thought.

“You know what? You’re right. My mother-in-law just got into town, and I’m sure she’ll be happy to help Drue with the boys tonight.”

“Yes! Perfect. Text me your address, and I’ll come pick you up at ten.”

“Ten?” Siyanna shrieked.

“Oh, is that too early?”

“No, no, it’s fine. I forgot how clubbing works. It’s been a minute. I’ll definitely be taking a nap before we go.”

Dani laughed, but Siyanna was serious about that nap. They ended the call with Dani promising to let her know when she was on her way.

It had been months since Siyanna put any effort into her appearance, so she was excited about getting dressed up. However, a part of her felt as if she was betraying Summer. The two did all their clubbing together, and Siyanna knew it would feel strange without her sister. Shaking off those thoughts, she went to her closet to find something to wear.

Between breastfeeding two growing boys, and her lack of appetite, Siyanna had lost all the baby weight, plus about ten more pounds. On top of that, when she couldn’t get her mind to rest, she made use of the weight equipment Drue had set up

in a corner of the garage and she took the boys for a brisk walk almost every day just to get out of the house.

For obvious reasons, shopping had been the last thing on her mind, so her clothing options were slim. However, she settled on a pair of severely ripped jeans that had previously been too tight, with a black lace bodysuit.

A couple of hours later, she woke up from a nap feeling well-rested but with full, achy breasts. After relieving her bladder, she went to find the boys so she could feed them. From the sound of it, she was right on time.

“I guess somebody’s hungry,” Siyanna sang as she entered the family room.

Cherie was sitting in the rocking chair, holding a whiny Dash, while Drue paced the floor with a cranky Dylan.

“Why didn’t you get them a bottle from the fridge or feed them some of the baby food I made?” Siyanna asked.

“Oh, they haven’t been this way for long. They must have sensed you coming down the stairs,” Cherie told her. “How do you feel?”

“Great, actually. That nap was everything.”

“Good. Your body must have needed it.”

Siyanna and Cherie switched positions, and once Siyanna was situated in the rocking chair, Cherie placed Dash in her arms. Once Siyanna had Dash in his feeding position, Drue put Dylan on the opposite side and helped her position him. It wasn’t often that Siyanna nursed them at the same time anymore because they’d gotten so big.

“So, what have y’all been up to?” Siyanna asked.

“I’ve been loving on my grandbabies. I can’t believe how much they’ve changed since the last time I was here.”

“Mama, it’s been three months. You know babies change overnight,” Siyanna commented. “And you’ve seen them on FaceTime. Do they look that much different?”

“FaceTime don’t do my babies justice. I don’t know how I feel about not seeing them regularly.”

“Me and Drae been trying to get you to move out here for years. Maybe now you’ll consider it,” Drue mentioned.

“To be honest, I’ve been thinking about it a lot lately.”

“Really, Mama? Having you close would mean so much,” Siyanna admitted.

“Being close would mean a lot. Losing Drae and Summer...I pray to God for strength to hold it together in front of you two, but it’s been hard.”

“Damn, Ma. You lost your son and someone who was more than just your daughter-in-law. I’ve been so caught up in my own grief, I didn’t even think about how you must feel.”

As Drue spoke, he made his way to the couch and sat next to his mother, then pulled her into a hug.

“I’m sorry for being so inconsiderate,” he told her.

“You weren’t inconsiderate, baby boy. Grief is hard, and we deal with it the best way we know how.”

“I’m sorry, too, Mama,” Siyanna said, on the verge of tears.

“I’m thinking about seeing a therapist,” Drue confessed.

“I don’t think it would hurt for all of us to seek therapy,” Cherie said. “After your father died, it was a blessing to me.”

“I’m not interested,” Siyanna told them.

“Why not? I think it would be—”

“Summer and I were sent to therapy all our lives by one foster parent or another. All they did was tell my foster parents what they wanted to hear, and all of it was bullshit. Sorry, Mama, but it was.”

“I’m sorry you had a negative experience with therapy, but they’re all different,” Cherie told her. “You—”

“I’m really not interested, Mama. I hope it helps if y’all decide to go, though.”

No one spoke for a minute. Drue and Cherie wondered if something happened during Siyanna's past therapy sessions that caused her to be against it.

"When are you thinking about moving?" Siyanna asked, changing the subject.

"I haven't decided for sure, Si-Si. I don't know if I want to retire early or see if I can be transferred to the Vegas location."

Cherie worked as a paralegal for a law firm with offices in Chicago, Las Vegas, and Texas.

"Ma, you may as well retire. You could have stopped working when Dad died."

With the life insurance policy her husband had, on top of the payout from the construction company he worked for, Cherie could have lived comfortably had she decided to stop working after his death. However, she needed something to keep her busy, and she truly loved her job. She did choose only to work part-time until Drae and Drue went away to college, though.

"No, I couldn't have. I needed something to keep me busy."

"Well, now you have two grandsons, so that shouldn't be a problem. You already have a room here. I can—"

"Oh, hell no, Drue. If I move to Vegas, I'm getting my own place."

"What? Why? We have plenty of room here. Right, Si?"

"Umm, I'm a guest here, so I have nothing to add."

Drue frowned at Siyanna's comment. She'd been living with him all this time, and had her room designed exactly how she wanted. He couldn't believe she still felt like a guest. Instead of saying something to her about it, he let it go.

"I'm a grown woman, who does grown woman things, and I need my space."

"Eww! On that note, I'm out," Drue said, pretending to get up and away from his mother.

Cherie pulled on his arm, making him stay seated.

“Don’t get mad ’cause Mama got a life,” Siyanna teased Drue. “By the way, I was invited to go out tonight. Do y’all have plans?”

Drue frowned again, shocked by Siyanna’s question. The only place she ever went was the grocery store, the park, and a few times, he convinced her to pack up the boys and go to dinner with him. Most of their time was spent watching old movies after the boys were asleep. So, this bit of news surprised him.

“Plans? With who?”

“Dani.”

“Who the fuck is Dani, and when did you have time to meet this nigga?”

Drue didn’t mean to sound so abrasive, but he didn’t like the idea of Siyanna going on a date. Cherie didn’t say anything, but she made a mental note of her son’s reaction.

“Dani is a woman. She was one of Dash’s nurses in NICU.”

Relief washed over Drue, and he was confused by what he felt, but he would have to unpack his feelings another time.

“It would be good for you to get out, Si-Si. If Drue has plans, I can handle the boys, as long as you have some bottles prepared.”

“Of course,” she replied with a smile.

“Where are y’all going?” Drue asked, still not comfortable with the idea of her going out with someone he didn’t know.

“To some clubs on the strip. Can you grab Dash and burp him?”

Drue did as she asked, peeking down at his son, who was still latched onto his food source. Dylan had a much bigger appetite than his cousin. A few minutes later, Dash released a healthy burp and dozed off with his head on his uncle’s

shoulder. By that time, Dylan had finished eating and let off an even louder burp.

“My goodness,” Cherie said. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d think y’all were feeding these boys table food already.”

The three of them laughed at Cherie’s exaggeration. A little while later, Cherie sent Drue to the grocery store because she wanted to bake a pan of lasagna. When he returned, they hung out in the kitchen while she prepared the meal. At some point, the boys woke up from their nap, giving Siyanna a chance to feed them again before she had to get ready for her night out.

Since Siyanna would be gone, Drue invited his friends over to chill. While his mother tended to the boys and Siyanna got dressed, Drue went to the screened-in patio to turn on the heater. The weather was still mild for mid-December, but at night it was a little chilly. As he went back inside, Siyanna was coming down the stairs. When her full body came into view, Drue had to do a double take.

“Damn,” he said under his breath.

It was kind of weird because Summer and Siyanna were identical twins, but Drue was automatically drawn to Summer’s outgoing and witty personality, as Drae was to Siyanna’s quiet and reserved demeanor. Of course, Drue thought Siyanna was attractive. However, he’d never thought of her as anything more than his sister-in-law. Lately though, she looked...different.

It had been a while since the last time Drue saw her dressed up, and he didn’t realize how much Siyanna had slimmed down. When he and Drae met the sisters, they would describe them as thick-fit. Now, Siyanna was looking more slim-thick. With the way her appetite had been and the time she spent exercising, Drue shouldn’t have been surprised she’d lost a few pounds.

Instead of taking Drue’s slip of the tongue as a compliment, Siyanna frowned.

“What?” she asked, voice laced with attitude.

“Huh? Oh, nothing. I just—it’s umm, been a while since I’ve seen you in regular clothes.”

“Do I look okay?” she asked nervously.

“You look fine,” is what came out of Drue’s mouth, but in his head, he said, *“You look good as fuck.”*

“Okay, good. Thank you. Dani should be pulling up any minute. I pumped before I got ready, so there’s fresh milk in the fridge for the boys.”

“Cool. How late you planning to stay out?” Drue asked casually but still feeling anxious about her going out at all.

“I don’t know. I hope not too long. I’ll probably be delirious if I’m out past midnight.”

“Well, call me if you need anything.”

“Will do. Oh, Dani just texted she’s here. Bye.”

“Hold on. Can I at least meet this woman, or can you give me her number?”

“Drue, why are—”

“For safety purposes, Si. I don’t know this person.”

Siyanna thought about it and realized he had a good point. She quickly went to the kitchen and wrote Dani’s number down on a napkin.

“There! Are you satisfied?”

“I think I should meet her, but this will have to do, I guess.”

“Whatever. Bye, Drue.”

Drue watched Siyanna walk away and didn’t like the feeling that stirred inside of him. Shaking it off, he went to the garage to grab a cooler. After filling it with ice, he added some bottled waters, pop, and beers.

Fred, Joseph, and Torrence arrived within minutes of each other. They’d all been friends for over two decades. Fred owned a couple of fitness centers, Joseph worked in the IT industry, and as mentioned before, Torrence was a police

officer. He sent them to the patio before going to check on his mother and the boys.

“Aye, Ma. Y’all good?”

Cherie had them in the guest room with her, in the middle of the bed. They both seemed content as they played with some of their toys.

“We’re fine. You go on and enjoy your friends. I got this.”

Drue nodded then made his way back to the patio. The guys had already made themselves comfortable and were seated, drinking beer, and puffing on cigars.

“Damn, y’all didn’t waste no time,” Drue commented.

“Where the fucking food at, man?” Torrence asked.

“Nigga, it’s after ten o’clock. If you ain’t had dinner, I’m sure as hell not feeding your ass.”

“How the hell you invite us over and ain’t got snacks or nothing?” Fred added.

“Cause I didn’t invite y’all asses over to feed you. Enjoy that damn beer and the ambiance. That’s all I got for you.”

“I don’t know why y’all expected anything more. This nigga has always lacked hospitality,” Joseph chimed in.

“True. Summer was the one that...oh, shit. My bad, D,” Fred said.

“It’s cool. Summer was the one preparing snacks and shit for y’all. So, unless Siyanna or my mama are moved to do so, y’all better be happy with these damn drinks,” Drue informed his friends.

“How’s Siyanna doing?” Joseph asked.

“Surviving. Most of the time, I feel like we’re both just going through the motions. Last week, the boys had an all-day crying spell. It was past midnight, and their little asses would not shut the fuck up. I messed around and left.”

All three of them pulled their heads back and frowned. Joseph was the first to speak.

“What do you mean you messed around and left. Like, left the house?”

“That’s exactly what I mean. I thought my damn head was about to explode. We tried everything, and nothing we did soothed them enough to shut the hell up.”

“Damn, bruh. So you left her to handle it alone?” Fred asked.

“He sure did,” came from behind him.

Drue cringed when he heard his mother’s voice.

“Heeyy, Ms. H. Drue didn’t tell us you were here visiting,” Torrence said as he stood from his seat.

After he hugged then kissed Cherie’s cheek, the other two men did the same.

“I had to come and make sure my grandbabies were okay. They had a rough time a few nights ago,” she told the guys.

“I was just telling them about it,” Drue said.

“Did you tell them how you called me about to cry after you let that nasty woman suck on your—”

“Wasn’t nobody about to cry,” Drue denied.

“Tuh! I beg to differ,” his mother continued to tease.

“Ma, please go back inside,” he begged.

Cherie laughed until she made it back inside the house. Before she closed the patio door, she yelled, “There’s plenty of lasagna left if you boys get hungry.”

“Lasagna?” the three of them yelled as they got up and hurried inside.

Drue didn’t even bother getting up. His friends knew their way around the kitchen. He just hoped they left some for him to have tomorrow.

When they returned to the patio, the plates in their hands were piled high with lasagna and garlic bread. Drue shook his head and chuckled as his friends began to stuff food in their mouths.

“Man, I can’t believe you tried to keep this from us,” Joseph griped with a mouth full of food.

“Y’all better had left a nigga some for tomorrow,” Drue warned.

“Your mom said she’ll be here for a few more days and will make you another pan,” Fred informed him.

Drue didn’t respond, but if his mother let them eat all the lasagna, he’d make sure she stood by her word.

“So you out here getting sloppy toppy from nasty women?” Torrence casually asked.

Drue had hoped they’d forgotten about that.

“It wasn’t the plan. That shit just happened,” he admitted.

“Nigga, you sound like a man that just got caught cheating. What the fuck you mean, it just happened?” Joseph pressed.

“Shit, it feels like I cheated,” he confessed before sharing with them the events of that evening. He even went so far as to tell them how guilty he felt afterward.

“It hasn’t been that long, bruh. It’s understandable,” Fred said, with Joseph and Torrence agreeing.

Then Torrence said, “But, you are a man, and a man has needs. It doesn’t mean you love Summer any less or that you’re ready to jump into another relationship.”

“Yeah, well, enough about that,” Drue blurted out, wanting to be done with the conversation.

“Have you tried writing again?” Joseph inquired.

“Yet another topic I’d rather not discuss, but no, I haven’t.”

Drue earned his living as a Black Romance author. In the Black literary world, he was famous, and he also made a name for himself amongst the mainstream authors. However, Drue was not a fan of the limelight and kept a very low profile. Drae used to always give him shit about not wanting the fame and attention that came with his success, because Drae would have taken full advantage.

Before the passing of his wife and brother, he'd been working on his thirtieth novel. However, his desire to write was nonexistent, so that was a sore subject for him, and Joseph knew not to press the issue.

"I saw online that the muthafucka that shot Drae pled guilty," Fred said.

"Yeah, his bitch-ass finally caved. Outside of y'all, there were a ton of other witnesses, plus with all the videos taken, he couldn't do anything but admit it. His public defender has got to be dumber than a box of rocks. He didn't even arrange for a plea bargain, so per our lawyer, the judge is likely gon' give his ass the maximum."

"Shit, he deserves that and more," Fred said.

Fred and Joseph were with Drae when he was killed. Seeing their friend take his last breath had changed them forever. Torrence had driven separately to the game and was in a different area of the parking garage when the shooting occurred. With him being a police officer, he felt horrible about not being there to stop the situation from escalating.

They changed the subject, and as the night progressed, no more sensitive topics were discussed. While dominoes were slammed on the table between the four of them, they talked shit and cracked jokes. Before long, it was creeping up on two in the morning.

"Damn, I didn't realize it was so late," Drue said after glancing at his watch.

"Shit, let me get my ass outta here. I told Anya I'd slide through," Fred shared. "I'm surprised she ain't blowing up my phone."

Although Fred swore him and Anya weren't serious, they were serious enough for him to bring her around his friends occasionally.

"You still dealing with that crazy ass girl?" Drue asked, surprised.

"Why not? She offers pussy with no strings attached, and most of the time, she's the one calling me requesting dick."

“Yeah, it’ll be no strings attached until she runs into you out with another woman. She only saying that shit because you ain’t trying to commit to nobody else,” Torrence warned Fred.

“That’s gon’ be some funny shit. I hope I’m around so I can get a front-row seat,” Joseph joked.

The men walked around to the front of the house. Seconds later, a car pulled up, and a tipsy Siyanna stepped out. She didn’t notice them until Drue spoke up.

“Have fun?”

Siyanna gasped as she grabbed her chest.

“Shit, Drue. You scared me half to death,” she fussed.

“My bad, Si. I thought you saw us standing here.”

“How you doing, Siyanna?”

“It’s good to see you, Si-Si.”

“Looking good, Siyanna.”

Fred, Torrence, and Joseph greeted Siyanna as she gathered herself.

“Hey, guys. Thank you, Joseph. Umm, I’m going inside. Y’all have a good night.”

Siyanna slipped out of her heels, picking them up before she slowly headed toward the house. All four men’s eyes were glued to her ass as she walked away and disappeared inside.

“Is it just me or—” Joseph began.

“Nope, it’s not just you,” Fred said.

“Y’all niggas going to hell for looking at her like that. I’m out, Drue.”

“Don’t try to act all high and mighty now, Mister ‘It’s good to see you, Si-Si,’” Joseph teased.

It had been seven months since they lost Drae, and although he was their boy, they were still men. They would have had to be blind not to notice how good Siyanna looked. Drue didn’t comment on their banter because he was just as

guilty as they were for checking Siyanna out, and he hated himself for doing so.

“Alright, I’m tired of y’all niggas. I’ll get up with y’all in a few days,” Drue told his friends.

They said their goodbyes, and a few minutes later, Drue had secured the house and was headed up the stairs. When he got to the top, he turned the corner and ran into Siyanna. He caught her in his arms just before she fell back.

“Damn it, Drue. Are you trying to give me a heart attack tonight?”

“I didn’t see you, Si. You good?”

“Yeah,” she replied.

Although she said she was okay, she remained wrapped in Drue’s arms. He was in no rush to remove them, and she was in no hurry to move. When their eyes connected, goosebumps covered Siyanna’s arms, and Drue’s heart rate increased. His eyes went to her lips as he licked his. Suddenly, they heard some movement in the guest room, where Cherie was staying, causing them to snap out of their trance. He released her just as his mother stepped out of the room.

“I thought I heard some noise out here. Y’all better not wake up those babies,” Cherie said as she headed toward the bathroom.

Thankfully, it was too dark and Cherie was too sleepy to notice the electricity between her son and daughter-in-law. Without another word, Drue and Siyanna went their separate ways.

*T*he following morning, Siyanna slept in, partly because she had a slight hangover and partly because she hoped to avoid Cherie and Drue. When she remembered what had almost happened the night before, embarrassment wasn't enough to describe her feelings.

She couldn't believe how close she was to kissing Drue. Just the mere thought of it made her want to stay in bed and hide under the covers all day. The only thing that stopped the kiss from happening was Cherie coming out of the bedroom. It didn't seem as if she noticed anything, but Siyanna prayed she didn't pick up on the vibe between her and Drue.

Her breasts were heavy, which meant she needed to either pump or feed the boys. Either way, she couldn't hide any longer. After taking care of her basic hygiene, Siyanna slowly opened the door to her bedroom.

“Damn, Si! I was about to come check on you. You good?”

Just her luck, Drue was coming out of the boys' bedroom when she stepped into the hallway.

“I'm fine. Are the boys okay?”

He nodded, then told her, “Ma made breakfast and fed them before she left.”

“Did she give them the food I made for them or the food she cooked?”

“Who are we talking about here?” he asked with a smirk.

“You let Mama give them table food? Drue, you know their stomachs can’t handle that kinda food,” she fussed.

“You know damn well I couldn’t stop her. They’ll be fine,” he assured. “They’re sleeping real good right now.”

“Shit! They’ll probably be sleeping all day. Where’d she go, anyway?”

“Shopping, I think. I’m not sure.”

Siyanna finally moved away from her bedroom door and headed toward the stairs. Unfortunately, Drue was right behind her.

“There’s a plate for you in the microwave,” he told her.

“Thank you.”

She went to the microwave and opened it to find a plate filled with eggs, bacon, and seasoned potatoes.

“The grits are still in the pot on the stove.”

“Okay.”

A few minutes later, she was seated at the breakfast bar with her food in front of her, while Drue stood on the opposite side watching her. He was behaving strangely, and Siyanna knew why but pretended as if she didn’t notice.

“Ma told me she made her decision,” he finally said.

“About what? Moving to Vegas?” He nodded. “Well, what did she decide?”

“On Monday, she’s gonna call her boss to see if she can work from the Vegas branch for a couple of weeks to see if she likes it. If she doesn’t, she’s gonna retire early.”

“Really? That’s great. So, either way, she’s moving.”

“Yeah, I’m excited to have her here. She wants to look at some condos in the area, but I don’t see why she won’t stay here.”

“Because she’s a grown woman that’s used to having privacy. It sounds good now, but eventually, you’ll want your house back and be pushing me and Dash out the door.”

Drue frowned. “That’s how you feel?”

“Umm, yeah,” she replied, a little confused by the change in his tone. “One day, you might want to date, even marry again, and have more kids. I’m sure your future wife won’t want us living with y’all.”

Siyanna appreciated Drue for allowing her into his space for such a long time. She didn’t know if she would have survived without him, Dash, and Dylan. Although it wasn’t ideal or what they planned for their lives, she loved the little family they’d created from their horrible circumstances.

Drue laughed, but not because what she said was funny. He simply couldn’t think of anything, or anyone, that would cause him to put Siyanna and his nephew, who was more like his son, out of his house.

“What’s so funny?”

“You think I’d make you leave *our* home?”

“It’s not—”

“You changed your whole life to accommodate our situation, which included selling your house. The minute you did that, this became just as much your home as mine. Do you honestly think I’d ever make you leave?”

“You wouldn’t have to make me, but I don’t plan to overstay my welcome.”

“Overstay your—really, Si? I’m fucking offended you think it’s that simple.”

“I didn’t say it would be simple, but it seems you’re already exploring your options.”

Drue grimaced, annoyed by Siyanna’s assumptions. All he wanted to do was forget what happened between him and Natalie, but much to his dismay, it wouldn’t go away.

“I’m not exploring my options, Si.”

“Tuh! You’re doing something,” she mumbled, finishing her food then heading to the sink.

“That shit was a mistake,” Drue stated firmly as he followed her.

Drue couldn’t see Siyanna roll her eyes at his remark because her back was to him.

“If you say so.”

“You don’t believe me?” he questioned.

“What I believe doesn’t matter.”

“But it does.”

Siyanna turned around to find Drue standing only inches away, causing her to catch her breath.

“What you think matters, Si. Probably more than anyone else.”

The intense way he looked at her set her body aflame and caused her to have to look away, but Drue wasn’t having it. He dipped his index finger under her chin and brought her focus back to him. This time, their eyes locked, and Siyanna couldn’t look away if she tried.

After taking a deep breath, she whispered, “Why?”

Instead of responding with words, he leaned down and slowly brushed his lips across hers. The electricity between them from the previous night returned with a vengeance and would not be ignored.

Drue’s hand moved from Siyanna’s chin to the back of her neck as he slid his tongue into her waiting mouth. The touching of their tongues shocked and turned her on at the same time, and she moaned at the welcomed intrusion.

He pressed her backside against the edge of the sink, allowing her to feel the firmness of his body against hers. The kiss became deeper with each twirl of the tongue, and Drue’s manhood hardened as Siyanna’s panties became moist. Neither wanted to stop, and they wouldn’t have if they hadn’t heard the front door open.

“I’m back,” Cherie shouted as her footsteps neared.

By the time she made it to the kitchen, Siyanna was fiddling with something near the sink, and Drue was seated at the breakfast bar staring at the home screen of his phone.

“You weren’t gone long. Where’d you go?” he casually asked his mother.

She sat her bags on the counter and began to unpack them.

“To the grocery store to get more ingredients for lasagna. Your friends didn’t leave but a few pieces.”

“Well, you didn’t stop them,” Drue scolded her.

“Which is why I promised to make another pan. I’m gonna freeze half of this one so you two can enjoy it later.”

“Thanks, Mama,” Siyanna finally chimed in. “I heard you gave my babies—”

“Aht-Aht, Si-Si. Don’t start with me. Those boys will be just fine.”

“You think so?” Cherie nodded. “Okay, well, you’re on diaper duty until you leave.”

Siyanna turned and left the kitchen.

“She must be drunk from last night, talking to me like she grown,” Cherie fussed. “I hope she’s going up to sleep it off.”

Drue chuckled but didn’t comment. His mind was still spinning from what transpired less than five minutes ago, and he was sure Siyanna’s was as well. The question was...*now, what?*

October

During the six months that followed the incident in the kitchen, Siyanna and Drue quietly fought an internal battle. It was never spoken of, and it never happened again. The experience stirred something in their souls, and neither of them felt good about how amazing it felt. Denying it was their first line of defense, but after a while, denial became a challenge. It was then that Siyanna began to avoid Drue. If she wasn't caring for the boys, she spent as little time as possible in his presence.

Drue noticed the change in Siyanna's behavior and let her do her thing. He had to admit, though, he missed the times when they played with the boys and did their nightly routine together. He couldn't remember the last time they had a deep conversation, chilled and watched one of their favorite movies from the nineties, or even went out to grab a bite to eat. As he drove to his therapy session, he thought about their situation and realized how easily the lines could be blurred, giving him a better understanding of why Siyanna pulled away from him.

"It's hard to believe the boys are already a year old," Drue told his therapist thirty minutes later.

"Time flies. How did you celebrate? I don't recall you mentioning it."

Drue's mood shifted. He, Siyanna, and his mother were torn about celebrating the boys' birthday. With it also being

the same day they lost Summer and Drae, it was bittersweet.

“As much as we wanted to celebrate their lives, we allowed our emotions to get the best of us.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Yeah. We took the boys to the cemetery for the first time, and that was about it. Being there didn’t mean anything to them, but one day it will.”

“Of course, it will,” Dr. Miller agreed.

“Sometimes, I feel guilty about how much I love them.”

“Guilty? Why?”

“Summer died so Dylan could live. I beat myself up because his existence brings me so much happiness, but I miss the hell outta my wife.”

Dr. Miller nodded and waited for him to continue. It took a lot for Drue to confess his true feelings, so he needed a moment to process.

“Dash thinks I’m his father, and Dylan thinks Siyanna is his mother.”

“Essentially...you are.”

“Yeah, but we don’t ever want to replace Summer and Drae, and it kinda fucks with us.”

“So, Siyanna has communicated with you her feelings about this?”

Drue nodded. “She cried the first time Dash called me Da-Da, and Dylan called her Ma-Ma. We talked about it then and decided we would tell the boys everything when we think they’re mature enough to handle it.”

“That’s good. I don’t know if you’ll still be seeing me when that time comes, but if I’m around, my door is always open.”

“Thankfully, we have a while to prepare.”

“Drue, I want you to know your feelings are normal and valid. Tell me something, though. When Summer found out

she was pregnant, how did she react?”

“Shit, she was ecstatic. Probably the happiest pregnant woman you could ever meet. Not once did she complain about any part of it.”

“And I believe you. Do you think she would’ve opted not to have Dylan if she’d known the outcome?”

Drue processed Dr. Miller’s words before replying, “Not at all.”

“And what about your brother? Would Drae have told Siyanna that he didn’t want Dash if he’d known he wouldn’t be here to help her raise him?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“I know I’m your therapist, but I don’t have all the answers. I don’t know why things happen the way they happen. I especially don’t know why bad things happen to good people. If everything you’ve told me about Summer and Drae is true, they wouldn’t want you to feel guilty about anything regarding their sons. They would want you to shower them with love and raise them to the best of your abilities.”

Drue nodded as Dr. Miller spoke. What she said made sense, but he knew it would take several more sessions for him to receive what she’d spoken. He’d been going to therapy once a week for about five months. After he came across the card that day at the park, it took him a while to find the courage to make an appointment. However, so far, he had no regrets.

“You’re probably right, Doc.”

“I know I am.” She paused to look at her watch. “Well, that’s our time for today. I’ll see you next week.”

“Cool. Maybe I’ll be able to convince Siyanna to come with me.”

“Don’t press her. When she’s ready to talk, she will. Remember, everyone processes traumatic experiences differently and in their own time.”

“I know, but you’ve helped me a great deal, and I know you could do the same for her. She spends most of her time

closed up in her room unless she's taking care of the boys.”

“As I said, people process differently. Is having Siyanna in your home putting you in a dark space?”

Drue didn’t answer that question quickly.

“No, I wouldn’t say that. Honestly, I’m glad she’s still there. She’s amazing with the boys, and I owe it to my brother to look out for her and Dash.”

Dr. Miller gave what Drue said some thought and wondered if there was another reason why he wanted Siyanna around. He hadn’t mentioned having any romantic feelings for his sister-in-law, but he also hadn’t mentioned dating anyone either.

“Why do I feel like there is a ‘but’?”

Drue wondered if he should share with Dr. Miller his true feelings for Siyanna. It had been several months since the kiss, and he could still feel her lips on his.

“Naw, there’s no but.”

A wave of sadness washed over Drue whenever he acknowledged his feelings for Siyanna. Even though he hadn’t told a soul, nor had he acted on his feelings, he felt disloyal to his brother and his wife.

“Well, as long as this arrangement is working for both of you, keep doing what works.”

“Will do. Thank you, Dr. Miller. I’ll see you next week.”

Drue left Dr. Miller’s office and checked with her assistant to confirm he was scheduled for the next week. After his therapy sessions, Drue either felt refreshed or exhausted. Today, he felt the latter. The past year had been the hardest of his life, but his son, nephew, and Siyanna kept him going.

He didn’t want to be in a solemn mood, so Drue shifted his thoughts. As he pulled out of the parking lot of his therapist’s office, his phone rang through the car’s Bluetooth. He cringed when he read the name on his dashboard screen.

“Wassup, Patrick?” Drue answered dryly.

Patrick was the agent assigned to Drue when he signed with Creative Minds Publishing Company almost two years ago. For several years, Drue had been a successful independent author. He'd been doing so well that big-name publishers were knocking down his door with hopes that he'd sign with them.

Melody, Drue's publicist, told him to expect a call from Patrick. He'd reached out to her to get a feel for where Drue's head was and get some advice on how to handle him. Melody told Patrick not to reach out to Drue at all and encouraged him not to put any pressure on Drue to produce until he was ready. She knew Patrick wouldn't take any of her advice and gave Drue a heads up about his call.

His first release with Creative Minds was still on the New York Times bestseller list, and the company had been anticipating his next release. However, he couldn't find the inspiration to finish the book he started before his life took a crazy turn.

Initially, the company was understanding of his situation. However, as time passed, they began to lose patience. Drue knew that was why Patrick was currently on his line. It didn't make sense at the time, but now, Drue was glad his attorney talked him into not taking an advance. Before signing with Creative Minds, he'd been living well off his royalties and continued to do so. And although he refused to touch it, he received a huge settlement from the hospital after Summer's death, and he also collected a nice amount from her life insurance policy.

"Hey, Drue. You good?"

"As good as can be expected. Just left my therapist's office."

"Really? That's great. How's that going?"

Although Patrick was a Black man, there were many times when Drue looked at him sideways. He didn't wholly trust Patrick to always have his best interest at heart, so Drue never showed his full hand with him.

“It’s going. I think it’s helping. Of course, I still have good days and bad days, but I’m sure that’s not why you called. Wassup?”

“Come on, now, Drue. You know I care—we care about your well-being. But I did want to check on your progress with your next release. Have you been able to work on it at all?”

“I’m not gon’ lie to you, Patrick. I haven’t opened my laptop, and I honestly can’t tell you when that will happen. My life is...it’s different now. I’m a single father of an infant. I’m still trying to figure out how to live without the woman I planned to spend the rest of my life with and the man I shared a womb with.” *Not to mention I’m doing my damnedest to suppress the feelings I have for my dead brother’s wife, who is also my dead wife’s sister.* “I’m not ready, and I don’t know when I will be.”

“Look, Drue, I don’t want you to think I’m unsympathetic about your situation because Lord knows, I am. I hate this happened to you, and I wish I could do something to help you through it. I wouldn’t even be calling you if the higher-ups weren’t on my ass.”

“Well, relay my message to the higher-ups, and if they want to give me a call, they have my number.”

“I will, and I’ll figure out a way to buy you more time. I’m not trying to pressure you, but maybe writing will be therapeutic for you.”

Maybe Patrick wasn’t as big of an asshole as Drue assumed. He seemed to be showing an ounce of compassion.

“Maybe. I’ll keep you posted.”

Drue ended the call without waiting for a reply from Patrick. For the rest of his ten-minute ride home, Drue thought about his current work in progress. Nothing in him was inspired to continue that story. His life had changed so drastically since then. He felt like a totally different person.

He dismissed the thoughts of writing as he pulled into his driveway then the garage connected to his house. Before going inside, he went to the front to check the mail. As he crossed

the sidewalk to reach the curb where the mailbox was located, he saw Siyanna headed in his direction, pushing the double stroller.

Drue admired how good she looked in the colorful biker shorts and fitted T-shirt.

Chill, man!

He had to figure out a way to reign in his thoughts about Siyanna, because more often than not, he looked at her in ways he considered inappropriate. Constantly reminding himself of who they were to each other wasn't helping anymore. Shaking off the thoughts, he retrieved the mail then waited for her to reach him.

"Hey. How was therapy?" she asked with a smile when she was close enough for him to hear.

"Wassup? It was good. It always is. You should come with me some time."

Her eyes rolled as she released an annoyed breath then smacked her lips.

"Don't start, Drue. I'm having a pretty good day," she warned him.

"That's good to hear. How are my boys doing?"

Drue stepped in front of the stroller and kneeled to see his son and nephew's faces. The resemblance between them was uncanny, and one would be hard-pressed to convince anyone they weren't twins.

"Wassup, my young kings?" Drue asked as he leaned closer to the boys and noticed Dylan was asleep.

"Out, Da-Da," Dash said, lifting his arms toward Drue.

"You wanna get out?" he confirmed.

Dash continued to hold his arms up as he opened and closed his hands. Drue leaned down and undid the stroller straps, then put him on his feet. As soon as they touched the ground, he tried to take off.

“Not a chance, Dash,” Siyanna said, snatching him up before he could try to run off.

It took almost a year, but Dash and Dylan were finally the same size.

“Come on. Let’s go inside,” Siyanna urged with a wiggling Dash in her arms.

Once they were inside, Siyanna took Dash to the family room and made a beeline to the corner where their toys were stored. Drue took Dylan out of the stroller and upstairs to his crib. They tried to keep the boys on the same schedule, but it didn’t always work. On his way to the family room, he stopped Siyanna as she was headed to the stairs.

“Hold up, Si-Si,” Drue said, gently grabbing her wrist. “Let me talk to you for a minute.”

“Not if you want to talk about me going to therapy.”

Drue didn’t want to talk to her about going to therapy, but he’d roll with it if it meant having a full conversation with her.

“I just think—”

“Nope! Not doing it. I’m going to take a nap. Keep an eye on the boys.”

Drue hadn’t released her wrist, so when she tried to continue up the stairs, she couldn’t.

“Why do you always do this?” he shouted.

“Do what? I’m tired, and I wanna take a nap.” She snatched away from him.

“You always run away or shut down, Si. Why don’t you talk to me?”

“You want me to talk to you *and* a therapist? Why, Drue? Ain’t shit neither one of y’all can do. What do you want to talk about?”

“Everything. Something. Anything, Siyanna. Damn. We both experienced the same fucked up shit. The least we can do is be here for each other.”

“I’m here every day, Drue. I sold my house, quit my job, and I’m here, every fucking day, taking care of our boys. What more do you want?”

You!

“Yeah, you’re physically here, but where’s your head? We’ve been living in the same space for a year. At first, it was cool, but now we barely talk. When you’re not with the boys, you’re in your room. What’s up with you?”

*W*hen Siyanna didn't reply to Drue's question, he continued.

"Si-Si, if you can't talk to me, you need to talk to somebody."

"Why, Drue?" she shouted. "Is talking gonna bring my husband and sister back?"

"No, but it—"

"Exactly! Talking won't fix shit," she cried.

Siyanna was holding so much anger inside. Of course, she was angry about the loss she suffered, but she was also furious with herself for the feelings she had for Drue. The feelings she tried to bury and pretend didn't exist. The feelings she didn't plan to admit, so she stuck with the obvious...their shared loss. After all, it didn't seem as if her heart would ever heal from that. Losing Drae and Summer was always at the forefront of her mind, and she didn't think talking to a therapist would change that.

"It won't bring them back, but it'll help you sort out your feelings. This is hard, but we gotta move forward. Therapy has helped me a lot."

It didn't take much for Siyanna to cry. Damn near anything the boys did would cause her tears to flow. The other day, she cried because she couldn't open a jar of jelly. Of course, memories of Drae or Summer had the potential to break the dam. Siyanna had no control over her emotions, which was another reason why she stayed in her room as much as she did.

Dani extended a few more invites to Siyanna to go clubbing, of which she declined. They still talked and texted regularly, even went out to eat on a few occasions, but Siyanna was simply never in the mood to engage with too many people. Drue seemed to handle the loss of their loved ones a lot better than Siyanna did. Although she hadn't seen him writing, he was more social than she was and seemed to have adjusted to his new life.

What she didn't see each morning was when he stood underneath the showerhead, letting the water run down his face to mask his tears. What Siyanna didn't see was when Drue was in his room, lying on his bed staring at the ceiling, willing himself not to take a bat and smash everything in his path. She didn't know that it took every ounce of strength he had to get out of bed each day. Drue was adjusting to his new life, but it was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do.

"Si-Si, I'm sorry." He pulled her into his arms, and she let him, crying into his chest. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"I'm so angry, Drue. Why did this happen? They didn't deserve to die the way they did, and we didn't deserve to lose them. How will we explain all this to the boys when—"

Siyanna was on the verge of hysterics. The more she spoke, the more she cried.

"Si-Si, calm down." He gently gripped her upper arms, moving her away from his chest to look into her eyes. "We already talked about this. We'll figure all that out when the time comes and get through it together."

She wasn't confident they would figure it out, but she nodded anyway. Drue pulled her into his chest again, holding her tight as her arms went around his waist. She couldn't deny how good it felt to be in his arms, inhaling his manly scent. Siyanna allowed herself a moment to relax until she felt something firm against her stomach. When she realized what it was, her eyes popped open, and she released the hold she had around his waist, taking a step back. Before either of them could address the obvious, one of the boys started crying.

"I got the boys."

Her response was a weak smile before heading up the stairs.

“Siyanna.” She turned to face Drue before she got to the top of the stairs, and he said, “Enjoy your nap.”

He wanted to say so much more, but couldn’t find the words, so he let the moment pass.

Once Siyanna was in her room, she softly closed the door, then turned around and pressed her back against it. As her body slid to the floor, she covered her mouth with her hand to hide her cries. Her mind replayed the conversation with Drue, and she knew he was right. Her and Summer’s life could probably be a case study for therapists. Losing her sister and husband the way she did was just the tip of the iceberg.

When she and Summer were seven years old, their mother took them to their great aunt’s house. Aunt Mabel was elderly and not in good health, but she was as sweet as pie. What was supposed to be a sleepover with Aunt Mabel turned into them being placed in the system. Their mother dropped them off and never came back for them.

Their aunt was too old and sick to be their caregiver, so when a nosy neighbor found out that they’d been left there, she called child protective services. When the state couldn’t locate their mother or the father they’d never met, they became wards of the state.

From age seven until eighteen, the girls lived with six different families. They went to three elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. Siyanna and Summer were grateful not to be separated, but the lack of stability caused them to lack faith and trust in others. At an early age, they learned to only depend on each other.

When they met Drae and Drue, it was a dream come true. Siyanna and Summer were at a popular club on the Las Vegas strip, celebrating their twenty-seventh birthday. It was only the two of them in V.I.P. because they didn’t have any friends. Drue noticed them first, but when he pointed them out to his brother, Drae wasted no time approaching them.

Siyanna and Summer were sure they were in love with the brothers by the end of the night, but they played hard to get for about three months. Once the ladies finally gave in, their relationships took off. Within six months of meeting, the couples were married and living happily ever after...until they weren't. Their love was a whirlwind, and two years later, everything came crashing down.

WHEN SIYANNA OPENED HER EYES, it was dark. She had no recollection of when she stopped crying or how she made it to her bed. Her breasts were full, letting her know she'd been asleep for a while. As she relieved her bladder, she looked in the crotch of her panties and noticed they were soaked.

“What the hell?” she said aloud. “Why are my underwear so wet?”

Suddenly she gasped. The memory of the dream she had, where Drue was the star, flooded her mind.

Drue had been bugging Siyanna about watching a movie with him. It was something they started doing when she first moved in with him, but she shied away from it months ago after they kissed. She finally agreed, and after putting the boys down for the night, the two got settled in the family room.

“What are we watching?” Siyanna asked as she settled in on one end of the couch.

“A classic,” he told her with a smirk. “Take a guess.”

One thing Siyanna appreciated about Drue was his love for older movies because one of her favorite past times was watching classic Black films. Growing up, she had to bribe Summer to watch them with her, and Drae wasn't much different. Every time he agreed to watch a movie with her, he had an ulterior motive, and his head ended up between her thighs, with the movie soon forgotten.

“Umm, I don't know. Is it old school classic or nineties classic?”

“Nineties.”

“Who’s in it?”

“Si, if I tell you all that, I might as well tell you the movie. Take a guess.”

“Okay, fine. Umm, Crooklyn?”

“Naw, but good guess. Jason’s Lyric,” he told her.

“That’s one of my favs,” she said. “It’s been a few years since I watched it, though.”

Drue stood in front of the T.V. as he pushed several buttons on the remote. Siyanna caught herself admiring him from the back. It was hard not to be attracted to him since he was the spitting image of her husband. Add to that, his caring, easy-going personality and Siyanna barely stood a chance, but she fought her attraction to him on a daily basis.

“Did you make the popcorn?” he asked, his back still to her.

“Oh, no. I forgot,” she said as she hopped off the couch and headed to the kitchen.

“Don’t forget to put the seasoning salt on it.”

“Why would I forget that? I’m the one that put you on.”

Siyanna returned to the family room a few minutes later to find Drue on the couch and the movie ready to go. Passing him the bowl of popcorn, she returned to the kitchen and grabbed two bottles of water.

Just before she sat down, Drue said, “Can you grab me a beer? And I bought some wine coolers for you.”

Putting the waters on the floor, she went back to the kitchen to grab Drue a couple of beers. Against her better judgment, she got one of the wine coolers for herself.

“Anything else, sir?” she joked.

“Stop playing, Si.”

Siyanna settled back into the corner of the couch, putting as much space as she could between her and Drue. He started

the movie, and right away, they were enthralled by the storyline as if they hadn't seen it several times before.

A few times, their hands connected when they reached for the popcorn. Drue downed both beers, and she finished the wine cooler before he went to retrieve another one for each of them. Before long, the popcorn and the second round of drinks were gone, and Siyanna had extended her legs, resting her feet on Drue's lap.

At first, it was innocent enough. Then Drue took one of her feet in his hands and began massaging. It had been so long since Siyanna had felt a man's touch, she wouldn't dare stop him. As he kneaded his thumb into the arch of her foot and squeezed her toes, she released a moan.

Siyanna's moan was music to Drue's ears, and his dick hardened at the sound. He stuck his free hand into his shorts and gripped his dick, groaning at his own touch. Siyanna watched him stroke himself, and her pussy responded by filling her panties with her juices.

"Touch yourself," he demanded in a whisper.

She didn't hesitate to slide her hands into her leggings and panties, quickly finding her swelling nub with her thumb and sliding her index and middle finger inside her hole.

"Mm, shit."

"Fuck, that's sexy."

"Oh God, Drue! I'm about to cum," she warned him.

"Me, too!"

And simultaneously, his volcano erupted, and her dam broke, leaving them both out of breath but fully satisfied.

"Maybe it wasn't Drue," she whispered, trying to convince herself she didn't just have a wet dream about her brother-in-law. "It was Drae, not Drue. It had to be."

Instead of dwelling on what she knew to be true, she stripped out of her clothes and took a shower, then went to see what the boys were doing.

“Hey.”

Drue was in the family room, in the middle of the floor, wrestling with the boys. When they noticed Siyanna, they forgot about Drue and made a beeline in her direction.

“Hey,” Drue replied.

His eyes traveled the length of Siyanna’s body. She had on a pair of spandex shorts with a loose-fitting T-shirt that hung off one shoulder. *With no bra!* Her legs looked long from his position on the floor, even though she was of average height. His eyes stopped at the gap between her thighs, and when his dick threatened to stand at attention, he quickly looked away.

What the fuck are you doing? he thought.

He cleared his throat, then asked, “Did you get enough rest?”

Meanwhile, Siyanna pretended she didn’t feel the heat from Drue’s gaze.

“Yeah. What time is it?”

He glanced at his phone. “Almost eight.”

“Wow! I didn’t plan to sleep that long. Hey, my babies,” she cooed as she eased down to the floor.

In response, they began talking to her in the language only they understood. Siyanna and Drue could pick up a few words here and there, but it was gibberish to them for the most part.

“Oh my God. Do you see the way they’re attacking me? Did you feed them?”

“Their little asses are just greedy as hell. There’s no way they should be hungry,” Drue remarked.

“They probably wanna be nursed to sleep. My chest is about to explode, anyway.”

Drue shook his head because he knew the boys were spoiled rotten. Siyanna put her everything into raising them, and he loved her for it.

“You need to wean them, Si. Them lil niggas are too big to be still sucking on your titties.”

She rolled her eyes. This wasn’t the first time Drue had said that, but she refused to argue with him about what she did with her breasts. The idea of weaning them made her very emotional. She’d been trying but nursing them was just as much for her as it was for the boys, and it was hard to let go.

“So you keep saying,” she mumbled.

Drue knew it would be pointless to press the issue, so he dropped it.

“You wanna feed them now or after you eat?”

Drue approached them, picking Dylan up while Siyanna stood with Dash in her arms.

“I’ll feed them now.”

“Okay. I ordered pizza.”

Siyanna went to sit in the rocking chair, and once she was comfortable, she made sure Dash was situated before taking Dylan from Drue.

“Thank you,” she told Drue.

“No problem. They already had their bath, so if they fall asleep, we can put them straight to bed.”

“Okay. I’ll let you know when they’re done.”

Drue left her in the family room and went to take a quick shower. He was shaken up by the reaction his dick had to Siyanna earlier and a few minutes prior. Granted, he hadn’t had sex with anyone since Summer, not counting when he slipped up and let Natalie suck his dick.

“Fuck, man,” he whispered to himself.

While in the shower, his dick demanded some attention, so Drue had to rub one out. Of course, it wasn’t the first time he’d fantasized about Summer. However, this was the first time he didn’t know who he was fantasizing about, his wife or her twin sister? He prayed it wasn’t the latter.

Twenty minutes later, he returned to the family room, and the boys were asleep.

“That didn’t take long.”

“Not at all. They were dozing before you made it up the stairs,” Siyanna told him with a chuckle.

“Spoiled asses.”

“Don’t talk about my babies,” she warned him.

After they put the boys in their cribs, Siyanna went to the kitchen to have a few slices of pizza. She warmed it in the microwave, then grabbed a bottle of water from the pantry before sitting at the table to eat. A few minutes later, Drue joined her in the kitchen with a small bag in one hand. Using his other hand to get a slice of pizza, he leaned against the counter as he chomped on it.

“Didn’t you already eat?” she asked him.

“Yeah. I got something for you.”

He pushed himself off the counter and stepped toward Siyanna, handing her the bag. She wiped her hands on a napkin and took the bag from him with a curious look on her face.

“What is it?”

“Nothing special. Look in the bag and see.”

Siyanna removed the tissue paper from the bag and reached inside, pulling out two journals.

“Journals?”

“Yeah. I thought since you weren’t interested in talking about your feelings, maybe you’d want to write them.”

Journaling? She thought.

She looked at the cover of the journals and tears gathered in her eyes. The purple one was engraved with the words *Forever Summer*, and the blue one was engraved with *My Dearest Drae*.

“Wow, Drue. This is very thoughtful of you. I’ve never kept a diary or journal. Thank you.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I think this would be good for me.”

“Good. I bought those a few weeks ago but wasn’t sure how you’d feel about it. I’m glad I finally decided to give them to you.”

“Me too.”

Siyanna put the journals back in the gift bag and continued eating. As Drue finished the slice of pizza he was eating, he almost dropped the crust onto the floor. When he moved to catch it, something caught Siyanna’s attention.

Is that his dick swinging like that? She thought. *This nigga ain’t got on no draws?*

Drue had on a pair of gray sweats and a black tank top, something she’d seen him in at least a hundred times over the past year. Instead of looking away like she should have, her eyes zeroed in on the target. *What is going on with me?*

“Ma is coming over tomorrow,” Drue said.

Cherie had officially been living in Las Vegas for three months. The condo she bought was a fifteen-minute drive from their neighborhood, but they hadn’t seen her as often as they thought they would since her move. Whenever they mentioned how little she visited, she would say, “*Mama gotta have a life, too.*”

“Okay? Why’d you have to announce that?”

“Because she wants the boys to spend the weekend with her.”

Siyanna frowned and replied defensively, “The weekend? Like—”

“At her place for the whole weekend, Si. She’s been waiting to use the extra bedroom she had set up for them.”

“I know, but why can’t she stay here with them?”

“Because she wants to stay with them at her place. I already told her it was cool.”

“What? Why would you tell her that without asking me first?” she shouted.

“I didn’t think I needed to get permission for them to spend the weekend with their grandmother. What’s the problem, Si?”

Siyanna couldn’t respond because there wasn’t a problem, at least not one that would make sense to anyone but her. When she didn’t answer him, Drue continued.

“You’ve been taking care of our boys since we brought them home from the hospital. There hasn’t been a single day you haven’t been with them. I think you deserve a break.”

“I haven’t complained not one time about taking care of the boys, so I don’t know what makes you and Mama think I need a break.”

“Why are you making such a big deal about it?”

“I’m not, Drue. The decision has been made. It’s whatever.”

Annoyed, Siyanna got up to get another slice of pizza. Drue was still leaning against the counter, now with his arms folded across his chest. The box of pizza just so happened to be behind him, making it out of Siyanna’s reach. He knew what she wanted but didn’t move out of her way.

“You think I haven’t noticed?” he said, his eyes glued to hers.

“Noticed what?”

“The way you avoid me.”

Siyanna eyes widened in surprise, but she recovered quickly.

“Avoid you? Drue, what are you talking about? And can you move so I can get more pizza?”

“Not until you admit you’ve been avoiding me.”

Siyanna glared at him before releasing an annoyed, deep breath. She then tossed the empty paper plate she was holding at his chest, then turned to stomp away.

“I’m not admitting to something that’s not true,” she shouted as she headed out of the kitchen.

Drue caught her by the arm before she could get too far. She tried to pull away, but his grip was firm. Angrily, she turned to face him.

“What, Drue?”

“Running upstairs to lock yourself in your room is your way of avoiding me. Spending every waking moment with the boys is your way of avoiding me. You’ve been acting like you can’t be in the same room with me for far too long. Even Ma notices it when she’s here.”

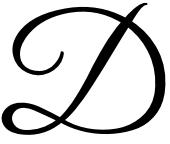
“You and Mama are imagining things, and clearly, you’ve been talking about me behind my back.”

“Ain’t nobody talking about you like that, Si.”

“Maybe not, but your imaginations are running wild.”

“Did I imagine how your breath hitched when I touched you? What about the goosebumps on your arms? Am I imagining how hard your nipples are right now? I bet your pussy is wet, too.”

Drue’s words were scandalous, and he knew it but didn’t care. Siyanna wanted to be offended, but he was speaking facts. With one hand still holding her wrist, he used the other one to grasp the back of her neck. Before she had time to retract, they were consumed in a kiss.

Drue's dick sprang to life as soon as their tongues connected. His hands moved to Siyanna's ass, and as he lifted her from the floor, she wrapped her legs around his waist. For months, their bodies had been longing for this kind of intimacy. Now that they'd thrown caution to the wind, neither of them wanted to turn back.

Like two starved savages, they devoured each other, groaning, groping, and grinding like they knew this would only happen once. Drue slowly walked them out of the kitchen, up the stairs, and to his bedroom, kicking the door closed. Through the darkness, they made it to his bed, with Siyanna's legs still around his waist. He fell on top of her, and at no point did their mouths disconnect.

The crotch of Siyanna's spandex shorts was soaked, and the head of Drue's dick was sticking out of the waistband of his sweats, seeping precum. He used one hand to push her shirt up to her neck, finally detaching his mouth from hers, only to latch on to her breast.

As he licked and sucked her nipple, it leaked with milk, but Drue gave zero fucks, and lapped it up like a newborn baby. After briefly providing the other breast the same attention, he moved down Siyanna's body, taking her shorts and panties with him. Positioned on his knees, he tossed them behind him and buried his face between her thighs, holding her legs open as his tongue brushed against her slick folds.

"Oh my God!" Siyanna screamed.

It had been so long since she'd been stimulated in such a way, an orgasm ripped through her body as soon as Drue's tongue made contact. Never in her life had she cum so easily and quickly, and that realization had her shook.

"I'm cummin', Drue. Oh my God, I'm cummin'!"

Over the years, there had only been a few women Drue blessed with his tongue, and he always felt immense joy from their reaction. Siyanna's verbal praise earned her pussy more licking, sucking, and kissing, which, in turn, summoned another orgasm.

"Drue, please," she begged as she attempted to wiggle out of his grasp.

He didn't stop until he had his fill, which was more than a minute later. Without delay, he stood to his feet and pushed his sweats to his ankles before stepping out of them. Siyanna's legs were wide open, ready for the dick she'd been avoiding for months.

Pulling her to the edge of the bed, Drue propped her legs onto his shoulders, gripped his dick, then lined it up with her opening. He rubbed his already moist head in a circular motion around her slippery hole, teasing her and causing a whimper to escape her lips. When he couldn't take it anymore, he plunged inside.

"Fuck!"

Right away, Drue knew he wouldn't last very long, so he paused his movements.

"What's wrong?" Siyanna asked, concerned about him having second thoughts.

"It's been too long, and you feel too good."

When he felt as if he had control, he began to move slowly. With each stroke, Siyanna's pussy contracted around his dick. Drue's strength weakened, and he knew it wouldn't be long before he erupted. He wanted to prolong the experience because he knew there was a possibility of it never happening again.

Siyanna was becoming unraveled. Every time Drue went deep, he followed up by pulling out almost all ten inches of dick, then ramming it back inside of her. It hurt so good she didn't know what to do. Words spilled out of her mouth in a foreign language until they became screams of ecstasy.

"Drue—"

"Me too, Si. Let it go!" he demanded.

Their orgasms collided, causing vibrations to shoot through their bodies like rockets into space and sent their heads spinning into another universe. *But...now, what?*

DYLAN AND DASH woke up bright and early, as usual. It was a little after six in the morning when Drue heard them babbling back and forth to each other through the baby monitor he kept on his nightstand. They seemed to be content, so he was in no rush to check on them.

When he opened his eyes, a big puff of hair blocked his view. He was confused momentarily until flashbacks of the previous night flooded his mind, making his dick react. He scooted closer to Siyanna, put his chest against her back, pressed his hardening dick against her ass, then moved her hair away from her face. He stared at her briefly before kissing her cheek then burying his nose in her neck. His hand slid down the front of her body, stopping at her honey pot.

"I'm tired, Drue," she whimpered. "And sore."

"I'll be gentle," he replied between the kisses he planted on her neck.

"It's too early. Go back to sleep."

"The boys are already up, but they're entertaining themselves."

Drue pressed his index and middle finger against her nub and moved his fingers in a circular motion.

"Druuee," she whined.

Siyanna wanted him as much as he wanted her, but the realization of what transpired between them hovered at the edge of her conscience. However, Drue wouldn't let up, and her thoughts went back to the way he handled her body the night before.

The first round of sex was an ice breaker. After recovering, they spent the next few hours exploring each other in ways they never imagined. The hesitancy and fear were momentarily forgotten, and they focused on satisfying the intimate needs they'd each been missing. It was some of the best sex either of them experienced in their lives.

“Come on, Si. Please.”

As he begged, Drue lifted Siyanna’s leg and pulled it back, on top of his, and slipped inside of her juiciness.

“Ssss,” she hissed when his length and girth filled her.

“Damn, you shouldn’t feel this good. I don’t know if I’ll ever have enough.”

She wanted to tell him to enjoy it while he could because they couldn’t keep doing this. Instead, she adjusted her body in a way that allowed him to go deeper and kept her thoughts to herself.

Drue kissed her tenderly on the neck as he deep stroked her from the back, using his two fingers to massage her clit. Just like last night, it hurt so good, and Siyanna’s journey to ecstasy didn’t take long.

“Drue!” she said as she gasped for air.

He knew she was cumming because he felt her walls closing in around his dick, pulling his nut to the surface.

“Let it go, baby,” he encouraged.

When she released, the wetness between them sent Drue over the edge, and he filled her with his seeds only seconds later. They remained in that position until his dick softened and slid out of her domain.

Once their high began to fade, the guilt of what they’d done consumed them. Siyanna was disappointed she wasn’t

strong enough to fight the feelings she had for Drue. Avoiding him wasn't enough, and now that they'd cross the line, turning back seemed impossible.

Drue didn't feel much different. He imagined how betrayed Summer and Drae would feel about what had transpired between him and Siyanna, and he felt sick inside. To make matters worse, he wasn't sure he'd be able to go on as if nothing happened.

Neither of them were prepared to discuss the situation, and the silence between them was deafening. Before rolling out of bed, Drue kissed the back of her neck one more time.

"I'll check on the boys," he told her before entering the bathroom.

Siyanna heard him use the bathroom, flush the toilet, then turn on the water.

"Dear God, what have we done?" she whispered.

Drue came out of the bathroom, dressed in a pair of basketball shorts, and left the bedroom. He returned with Dash and Dylan in his arms and tossed them on the bed. Immediately, they crawled toward Siyanna.

"Ma-Ma," they sang as they climbed on her back.

Mornings with her son and nephew brought her the most joy. Today, though, she had too much on her mind to embrace the beauty of their presence. However, when she managed to turn onto her back, Dylan and Dash were grinning in her face, and she couldn't help but mirror their smiles.

"Hey, my babies."

Wrapping her arms around them, she pulled them into a hug, letting them plant wet kisses all over her face. As soon as she released them, Dash tried to pull the sheet away from her chest.

"Dash, no!" she told him.

Dash began to whine, causing Dylan to mimic him.

“I told you to wean them. They’re too old for that shit,” Drue commented from the other side of the bed.

“Shut up, Drue. Women breastfeed kids well past the age of one. Besides, I’ve been weaning them, but it doesn’t happen overnight.”

Drue wanted to say more, but he knew it was a touchy subject for her.

“Can you take them downstairs and feed them while I shower?”

“Yeah.”

The boys didn’t want to leave Siyanna and whined even more as Drue carried them out of the room. She could hear him fussing at them as they headed downstairs. Not long after, a freshly showered Siyanna joined them in the kitchen. After kissing the boys on the cheek, she made herself a plate of pancakes, eggs, and bacon.

Drue was seated in the chair closest to the boys’ highchairs. Broken pieces of pancakes were on their trays, along with their sippy cups filled with water.

“Ma is on her way to pick up the boys. She said not to pack anything because she has everything they need at her place.”

“I never agreed they could stay the weekend,” Siyanna said, suddenly very nervous about being alone with Drue for three days.

He laughed. “Yeah, well, you can tell her that when she gets here.”

“Did you tell her how we felt about it?”

“I don’t have a problem with them going, but I told her you weren’t in agreement.”

“Wow, Drue. We’re supposed to show a united front.”

“I’m not gonna unite with you on some shit I disagree with. Ma has wanted the boys to spend the weekend with her

for a while, but we both knew you wouldn't be comfortable
___”

“Another conversation y'all had about me behind my back?”

After releasing an annoyed breath, he replied, “Damn, Si. It was just a conversation. When she mentioned talking to you about keeping them, we didn't think you'd want to be away from them overnight, let alone a whole weekend.”

“I just...”

Her voice faded when she couldn't think of the words to say.

“You just what, Si? Give me one legitimate reason why Ma can't keep her grandsons for a few days, especially since you claim you're trying to wean them.”

Aside from the babbling from the boys, the kitchen was quiet as Drue waited for her to answer.

“Exactly,” he continued when a minute passed without a word from Siyanna. “Si, being away from them for one weekend won't kill you. Your whole world has revolved around them for over a year, and it's time to let go a little.”

Let go?

Siyanna heard Drue and knew he was right but wasn't ready to accept the truth. Dash and Dylan were her entire world, and she would spend every waking moment with them for the rest of her life if she could.

“*J* was sure you’d put up more of a fuss and came prepared for a fight,” Cherie said as Siyanna strapped the boys into their car seats.

Siyanna didn’t respond to Cherie because she was on the verge of tears. Her goal was to ensure the boys were securely strapped into their seats with their favorite stuffed animal, so she could go to her room and ugly cry in peace. Once that was done, she kissed their foreheads and cheeks, then headed back into the house, still not addressing Cherie’s comment. Drue and his mother watched the whole scene and were somewhat amused.

“She’s really in her feelings, huh?” Cherie commented.

“Yeah, we had some words about it when I told her you were on your way. She’ll get over it, though.”

“Oh, I know she will. I’ll see you on Sunday, and don’t y’all be calling me every five minutes about my grandsons either. I got this.”

“I know you do, and I’ll relay your message to Si-Si.”

Drue kissed his mother’s cheek, then waved goodbye to the boys before going back inside. He probably should have gone upstairs to talk to Siyanna, but he decided to give her some space. Instead, he went to the family room to watch ESPN. Before long, he had dozed off.

While Drue napped, Siyanna was in her room, trying not to panic about the boys leaving and being left alone with Drue. She had to find something to keep her busy so she wouldn’t

end up in his bed again. Her cell phone rang with Dani's name flashing on the screen, pulling her out of her thoughts.

"Hey, Dani."

"Damn, you sound horrible. What's wrong?"

"Literally, everything."

"Aww, Si-Si. What happened?"

"Mama came and took the boys for the whole weekend," she told Dani as more tears gathered in her eyes.

"Why you sound sad? You could use a break."

"Ugh! You sound just like Drue. If I needed a break, I would ask for one."

"No, you wouldn't. I'm glad they put their foot down and forced you to have some time for yourself."

"I don't need—"

"You absolutely do. And I know the perfect way for you to spend some of your time. Be ready in an hour."

"But—hello? Dani?" She pulled the phone away from her ear and looked at the screen. "She hung up on me!"

Siyanna didn't feel like doing anything but sleeping, so she called Dani back, but Dani kept declining her calls.

"This heffa!"

Since she wouldn't answer the phone, Siyanna sent her a text.

Siyanna: Don't waste your time. I'm not leaving this house.

Dani: You wanna bet!

Siyanna: Dani I'm serious. If you come over here you'll be standing outside.

Dani: Okay.

Satisfied that she dodged that bullet, she got comfortable on her queen-sized bed and pulled out one of the journals Drue had bought for her. Drae and Summer had been heavy on her

mind, considering what she and Drue had done, and the guilt she felt was overwhelming.

My Dearest Drae,

It's been hard without you. I still have a hard time believing you're gone. Dash is growing up fast, sometimes I want to stop time so he can be my baby forever. I miss you so much and think about you daily. Please forgive me for what I've done...forgive Drue, too. He misses his brother and best friend. If you were here with me, with us, none of this would've happened. We'd be living happily ever after and so would Summer and Drue. I'm not blaming you because I know none of this is your fault. Drue's been here for me and Dash in so many ways, and I don't think I could've gotten through it without him. For months, I've been battling these feelings, and I promise you, I never planned to act on them. But it happened and now I'm filled with guilt. I don't want to feel this way, but I can't deny it any longer. I am so sorry for betraying you this way. I still love you so very much and I know what's happened with me and Drue breaks your heart. What am I supposed to do? How do I move forward?

Her thoughts were all over the place but writing them out was the release she needed. Siyanna bawled as she poured her heart out to Drae. She planned to write to Summer as well, but by the time she finished her letter to Drae, she was exhausted. After putting the journals away, she cried herself to sleep.

“AYE, SI,” Siyanna heard between knocks on her bedroom door. “Dani’s here.”

“What?”

Her bedroom door opened, and Drue stepped inside.

“Dani’s downstairs. She said you were expecting her.”

“Ugh! I told her not to come. Tell her I’m not here.”

Drue stepped back out into the hallway and shouted, “Come on up.”

“Oh my God, Drue,” she groaned as she picked up a pillow and threw it at the door.

Seconds later, Dani entered her room.

“I told you to be ready in an hour, and it’s been two hours,” she said.

“And I told you I wasn’t leaving the house. Feel free to let yourself out.”

“You know what? You’re rude as shit, but I’m gon’ let it slide because I know you’re in your feelings about the boys being gone. But what I won’t let you do is sit in this house and sulk. Now, I’ve already made you an appointment for the works at my favorite spa, and I begged my hairstylist to squeeze you in. Get your ass up, and let’s go before we’re late.”

Siyanna put a pillow over her head and groaned into the mattress. *Why can’t people just let me be?*

Fifteen minutes later, Siyanna trudged down the stairs behind Dani.

“Where y’all going?” Drue asked as they headed for the door.

“She’s about to get pampered for the next several hours. When she gets back, she’ll feel like a new woman.”

Drue’s eyes remained focused on Siyanna. The energy between them didn’t go unnoticed by Dani, and she planned to find out the tea as soon as they got in the car.

“If anyone deserves it, she does. Have fun.”

He turned and went back to the family room before anything else was said. Siyanna’s eyes lingered on his back until she couldn’t see him anymore. When she noticed Dani watching her watch Drue, her face turned red.

“I want to know everything!” Dani demanded while pulling Siyanna out of the front door.

As soon as they were on their way, Dani pressed Siyanna to spill the beans.

“Before you open your mouth to lie to me, there’s a hickey on your neck.”

Siyanna sucked in some air and put her hand on her neck.

“Other side. Now, either you got a boo you been keeping a secret, or you and your brother-in-law have become...more acquainted. Which one is it?”

Siyanna sighed and shook her head. She knew Drue was her brother-in-law, twice over as a matter of fact, and she’d been trying to push that reality to the back of her mind since the first time he made her stomach flutter months ago.

“I’m going to hell,” she stated in a low, dejected voice.

Dani gasped. “Siyanna Cassidy Hendrix! You didn’t!”

“I did, and I don’t know how I feel about it. I mean, I feel sick about it, but I don’t know how to stop the feelings I have for him.”

“How long have you had feelings for him?”

“A while. Maybe five or six months.”

“Wow,” Dani replied in amazement. “You know, I’ve often wondered how either of you could stand to be around each other the way you are considering...”

“Drue has Drae’s face, but their personalities are the total opposite. Drae was...he was rough around the edges, wore jeans and Timbs all year, even had a grill he wore when he wasn’t working.”

“What did he do for a living?”

“Worked construction just like their father,” Siyanna shared as she stared out of the passenger side window. “There was nothing about Drae that was polished or clean cut. My nigga was a thug, for real. From his locs, his long beard, and down to his Timbs.”

“And Drue?”

“You’ve seen Drue. Low Caesar cut, beard always nicely trimmed and lined up, he has Timbs but he rarely wears them. On the outside, Drue and Drae didn’t appear to have much in

common, but Drue can be a thug if he's pushed. He's reserved most of the time.”

“Oh, like you,” Dani said with a giggle.

“Opposites normally attract, which is why I thought Drae and I were a perfect match.”

“I’m sure you were, Si-Si.”

“Yeah, me too. But over the last year, Drue and I discovered we have a lot in common. I didn’t mean to fall in love with him—”

“Wait! Hold up! You’re in love with him?”

Siyanna’s head fell against the headrest as she groaned.

“Dani, please don’t be judgmental right now. I need a friend and some advice if you have it.”

“I’m sorry, Si-Si. I wasn’t judging you. I’m just a little surprised.”

They pulled up at the spa but left the car running while they remained inside to continue their conversation.

“As soon as I realized my feelings for him changed, I did my best to avoid him. If I’m not with the boys, I stay in my room. Being alone with him is risky, so I try not to do it if possible.”

“How, though? It’s basically just the two of y’all in the house. I know the boys are a distraction, but it can’t be easy.”

“It’s been torture. I know this isn’t right. How could I allow myself to fall for my husband’s brother, who also happens to be my sister’s husband? There’s gotta be a special place in hell for me.”

Dani could see the torment in Siyanna’s eyes and knew she genuinely felt bad about the situation. Never having dealt with anything similar, Dani didn’t have any advice to give.

“That’s a lot, Si-Si, and it’s heavy. I wish I could offer you some advice, but I don’t know what to say.”

“I’m screwed. How the hell am I gonna get myself out of this?”

“Do you want to?”

Siyanna frowned. “What do you mean? Of course, I do. I never intended for this to happen. Yesterday, Drue came from therapy wanting to talk and—”

“Wait. He goes to therapy?”

“Yeah, and he always wants to talk afterward. He’s been trying to convince me to go, but I’m not interested.”

“Shit, that might not be a bad idea.”

“No, Summer and I were in therapy for a good portion of our childhood, and it wasn’t helpful at all. The last thing I want to do is tell all my problems to some rich white woman who can’t relate.”

“Is his therapist a white woman?”

“I don’t know. I never asked because I’m not interested in going. Anyway, he came home wanting to talk. We had an emotional moment, and while he hugged me, his dick got hard. I hurried my ass up to my room but later he wouldn’t let me get away.”

“What do you mean?”

Siyanna replayed the events of the night before, not giving Dani all the details, but enough for her to understand her predicament. She noticed the sympathetic look in her friend’s eyes and appreciated having someone to share her troubles with.

“It sounds like you two have been tiptoeing around your feelings for a while. Honestly, it was inevitable.”

“But it’s not right. I can’t do this with my sister’s husband and—”

“Siyanna, I’m not trying to be hurtful or mean, but Summer and Drae are gone. If they were alive and something like this happened, it would be shady as hell, and I’d be looking at you sideways.”

“That still doesn’t make it right.”

“But it’s not wrong. Look, we aren’t gonna figure this out sitting in this car. Let’s go in and get pampered. You’ll have a clear mind and feel better when we’re done.”

Siyanna nodded in agreement before they went inside the spa. While she received a full body massage, facial, manicure, and pedicure, she focused on relaxing and enjoying the moment. By the time they hopped back in Dani’s car, Siyanna felt much better.

“Wasn’t that amazing?” Dani asked.

“It was. Thank you, Dani. I truly enjoyed myself.”

“That was the whole point. You put so much into the boys and nothing into yourself. You need to change that.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

Their next stop was to the mall because Siyanna was in dire need of some new clothes.

“I’m not trying to break the bank in this mall, Dani.”

“Girl, hush. Drue slid me his credit card, so you’re about ball out!”

“What? Are you serious?”

Keeping her eyes on the road, Dani dug into her purse and pulled out Drue’s American Express Black Card. Siyanna gasped when she realized what it was.

“Oh my God. I can’t believe he gave that to you, but I’m not about to use that man’s money.”

“The hell you ain’t. Shit, I might get a few things for myself.”

When they arrived at the mall, Dani acted like a kid in a candy store. As much as Siyanna tried not to jump on the whirlwind, she couldn’t resist. By the time they left, Siyanna had gotten a substantial number of things, and Dani did indeed pick up a few things for herself.

The ride to the salon was short and quiet. Siyanna was exhausted from their shopping spree. Once they arrived and were inside, Dani took her to a gorgeous specimen of a man.

“Ethan, this is my friend Siyanna. Si-Si, this is Ethan. He’s been doing my hair for years.”

Ethan was *fine* and looked more like a runway model than a hairstylist. He had smooth ebony skin, high cheekbones, deep round eyes with long lashes, and a smile that could blind someone.

“He—umm—hi—hello, it’s nice to meet you,” Siyanna stuttered.

“Damn!” Ethan exclaimed. “Hello, beautiful.”

He took her hand, which was resting at her side, and brought it to his lips. Siyanna damn near moaned when she felt his soft lips brush against the back of her hand.

“The pleasure’s all mine,” he continued when she pulled away.

“For real, Ethan? You ain’t never greeted me like that,” Dani fussed.

“Stay outta grown folks’ business. Had I known your friend was this fine, I wouldn’t have given you so much trouble about moving my schedule around.”

“Whatever, nigga. Can you hook my girl up?”

The whole time they spoke, Ethan and Siyanna’s eyes were glued to each other’s. Siyanna was intrigued by him because she’d never met a Black male hairstylist that wasn’t flamboyantly gay. From what she could tell, Ethan didn’t fit that stereotype.

“Don’t ask questions you know the answer to,” he told Dani. “Siyanna, what are you looking to have done?”

She shrugged her shoulders because she truly had no clue. Dani dragged her out of the house, and she was just along for the ride.

“I think you should do something drastic,” Dani suggested.

“Drastic? Drastic, how?”

“The big chop kinda drastic.”

Siyanna frowned. For her entire life, she's always had a head full of curly hair and had never considered cutting it all off.

“The big chop?” Her hand went to the puff sitting on top of her head. Suddenly, she felt a wave of courage and said, “Let's do it.”

“You sure?” Ethan confirmed.

“No... but do it anyway.”

Since Siyanna was gone and the boys were with his mother, Drue decided it was time for him to try writing again. It had been so long since he'd touched his laptop that it had begun to collect dust.

Patrick continued to reach out to him every few weeks and had somehow managed to keep the higher-ups off Drue's back. However, Drue knew the grace the publishing company had given him wouldn't last forever. Once his laptop powered on, he opened the document he'd been working on before his life took a traumatic turn.

As he read the words, they seemed foreign to him. It was about a couple who met at a party on a college campus they were both visiting, had a one-night stand, and then went on with their lives. Ten years later, they run into each other at a business conference and pick up right where they left off. Only this time, she was newly engaged to a man she didn't love, and he was a recently divorced single father.

The storyline was good, but Drue wasn't feeling it anymore. There was a time when he refused to write about anything but love and happy endings. His reality had proven that not everyone would be happy at the end of their story. Maybe it was time for a change. By the time he closed his laptop, two hours later, he had outlined a new book. He shot his publicist a text letting her know of his achievement, and just like he thought, Melody was excited.

As he left his office, his stomach growled, reminding him he hadn't eaten since breakfast. He went to the kitchen and

rummaged through the refrigerator but didn't see anything he wanted. Deciding he would order in, he pulled his phone out of the pocket of his shorts and looked through the restaurant apps. Joseph's name appeared on his screen before he decided what he wanted to eat.

"Wassup?" he answered.

"Shit. Seeing what you were on for the night. You wanna hit up the strip club?" Joseph asked.

Drue wasn't one to frequent strip clubs; it was more Drae's thing, but he didn't mind going occasionally. He was hungry as hell, and the club they usually visited had the best chicken wings in town.

"It's still early, but I'm hungry as hell. What time you heading that way?"

"It's never too early for the strip club, nigga. I'll meet you there in an hour."

Joseph ended the call before Drue could reply. His stomach growled again, prompting him to get a granola bar from the pantry. He grabbed a bottle of water and leaned against the counter while he ate. When he heard the front door open and close, his ears perked up as he attempted to eavesdrop on Siyanna and Dani's conversation.

"It looks good, Si-Si. I bet Drue will love it."

"Hopefully he'll hate it and not be attracted to me anymore."

"Is that what you really want?"

Dani looked at her with raised eyebrows while Drue held his breath as he waited for the answer that Siyanna never gave.

"I doubt that'll be the case, anyway. Did you see the way Ethan was looking at you? You were already beautiful, but this haircut took your beauty to another level."

Haircut? And who the hell is Ethan? He questioned.

"Thank you, Dani. I guess I just need to get used to it. I've always had a head full of hair, so this is different for me."

Summer would flip if she was here.”

Drue’s curiosity got the best of him, and he stepped out of the kitchen and to the entryway of their home. He was shocked by what he saw.

“What did you do?” Drue asked.

Siyanna turned around to face him, and Drue was stunned by her beauty. The massive amount of hair he was used to was gone and cut into a curly fade, with the top of it dyed honey blonde.

“Doesn’t she look amazing?” Dani asked when Siyanna didn’t reply.

Drue was at a loss for words. Of course he agreed with Dani, but he had other thoughts running through his head.

What am I going to grip when I hit it from the back?

“You, umm, you look so...different,” he finally said.

Siyanna’s hand went to her head as she said, “Different? Is that good or bad?”

Even though she told Dani she hoped Drue hated it, that couldn’t be further from the truth, but she wasn’t ready to admit that.

“You don’t—umm—you don’t look like the—uhh—same woman that left,” Drue stuttered.

There were a few moments of awkward silence.

“Whatever, Drue.” She turned back to face Dani. “Let’s go upstairs so you can help me find something to wear.”

“Girl, you can put on a potato sack, and Ethan would still be drooling,” Dani commented as she followed Siyanna up the stairs.

“Who is Ethan?” Drue asked to their backs.

“Nobody you need to worry about,” Siyanna replied just before she closed her bedroom door.

Drue stood at the bottom of the stairs for a minute, processing what had just happened. Siyanna came home

looking like a different woman, then insinuated that she hoped he didn't find her attractive anymore. If that was the effect she was going for, she failed miserably. If Dani hadn't been there, he would have deep dived into her pussy right at the front door. Erasing the thoughts of what he wanted to do to Siyanna from his mind, he went to shower and change to meet Joseph.

Before she showered, Siyanna pumped because her breasts were full. Even if she decided to listen to Drue and wean the boys from her breasts, she planned to continue to pump so they could have breastmilk for a while longer. Once that was done, she took a quick shower while Dani looked through the things Siyanna bought at the mall and put together an outfit.

"Any luck?" Siyanna asked when she walked into her closet with a bath towel wrapped around her body.

"You bought some cute shit. It's kind of hard to decide."

"I know. It's crazy that I can't fit most of the clothes in my closet. This is the smallest I've ever been in my life, and I wasn't even trying to lose weight. My appetite disappeared for months, and I started exercising to keep my mind occupied. The weight just fell off."

"It's been a rough year for you, Si-Si, but if you truly plan to jump back out into the world of dating, you're off to a good start with the stuff you bought today. What do you think about this for tonight?"

Dani had chosen a plum-colored bandage dress with black heels and accessories.

"That'll work," Siyanna agreed.

Since her hair was already done and she didn't wear much makeup, she was sure to cover up the hickeys Drue left. Siyanna was dressed and ready to go in no time.

"Ethan seems to be a good guy, but I only know him as my hairstylist. I'm not about to have you out here alone. I'll be somewhere incognito with my eyes on you the whole time."

"Oh my God, Dani. It's not that serious. If I get weird vibes, I'll call an Uber. You don't have to stay."

Dani wasn't sure that was a good idea but would give it some thought on the way to the lounge. She was a few years older than Siyanna and had taken on the big sister role in some way. She was very protective of her friend, especially with all that she'd been through.

They left Siyanna's room to find Drue waiting at the bottom of the stairs. He was dressed in light-washed blue jeans, a black polo shirt, and a pair of red and black Jordan 1's on his feet. His eyes widened when they landed on Siyanna.

"Damn, Si. Where you going dressed like that?" he asked.

"She has a date," Dani answered before Siyanna could say a word.

The expression on Drue's face was one of surprise, then confusion, then hurt. Siyanna saw all those emotions in ten seconds or less.

"Dani, can I talk to Siyanna alone, please?"

Their eyes connected and remained that way until Siyanna was standing in front of him.

"I'll be in the car, Si-Si," Dani told her.

Once he knew Dani was gone, Drue reached up and ran his fingers through Siyanna's short curls.

"You don't like it?" she asked cautiously.

His hand stopped on the back of her neck, and his fingers glided to the side of her face, then cupped her chin.

"Isn't that what you were hoping?"

Realizing he overheard her conversation with Dani, her embarrassment caused her to look away from him. His hand fell to his side when she turned her head.

"I, umm, we can't—" she started to say.

"Have fun on your date."

He leaned down and kissed her cheek, then walked away. Siyanna heard him enter the garage, followed by the opening

of the garage door. When she knew he was gone, she released a breath she didn't realize she was holding.

"Lord, give me strength."

Siyanna managed to talk Dani into going home. Thus far, Ethan had been nothing but a gentleman, and she was enjoying her time with him. As the band played soft jazz, they indulged in great conversation, amazing food, and even better drinks, although Siyanna limited herself to three.

“Can I ask you a question without you being offended?” she asked him.

“You know, that’s always been such a strange question to me. How can I agree not to be offended when I don’t know what you’re going to ask?”

She laughed. “True.”

“But ask me anyway. You’re too pretty to offend me.”

Siyanna blushed. “Thank you, but now that I think about it, you may be offended.”

“Ask me.”

“Are you bisexual?”

Luckily, Ethan wasn’t sipping on his drink because he would have sprayed a mouthful in Siyanna’s face. The shocked expression didn’t surprise her. She was expecting it.

“Why would you ask me some shit like that?”

“It’s just...I’ve never met a male hairstylist that wasn’t gay or bisexual.”

“You should get out more, Siyanna. I’m not gay or bisexual, and I only like pussy. I’ve only ever liked pussy. Nothing about the male anatomy turns me on. Does that answer your question?”

“You’re offended.”

Ethan held a glare for as long as he could before he busted into laughter. Once he gathered himself, he responded, “Naw, I’m just fucking with you. People ask me that all the time. I know the stereotype about male hairstylists, but that’s exactly what it is—a stereotype.”

Siyanna felt terrible about the assumption she made and was glad Ethan didn’t seem to hold it against her.

“Don’t get all quiet on me now. We’re good,” he assured her as he reached across the table and took both of her hands in his. “I feel like I’ve monopolized our conversation all night. You know all about my family and upbringing. Tell me more about Siyanna.”

Siyanna enjoyed listening to Ethan talk about his life. He was the oldest of six children and the only boy. When his mom suddenly passed away, he had to help his father raise his younger sisters, and styling their hair was how he found his passion as a hairstylist. The more Ethan talked, the less she had to, which was precisely what Siyanna preferred.

“What would you like to know?” she asked timidly.

“Anything you’d like to share. Do you have siblings or children? Have you ever been married? How long have you known Dani?”

I don’t want to talk about any of that.

“Oh, umm, okay. Well, I’m an identical twin.”

“Shit! There’s two of you?”

She pulled her hands out of his grasp and looked everywhere but in his eyes.

“There were two of us, but—” She paused and took a deep breath. “My sister passed away a little over a year ago.”

“Damn, Siyanna. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—”

“No, it’s okay. You didn’t know.”

They sat quietly for a minute. Ethan didn’t know what to say, and Siyanna was trying not to succumb to her emotions. When she felt she could continue, she did.

“We grew up in the system, and we were all each other had until we met a set of identical twins and married them.” Ethan’s eyes grew in surprise. “Yeah, I know. Sounds like it would be the perfect love story, right?”

He didn’t respond, but he was anxious to hear more. Surprisingly, Siyanna felt like sharing...so, she did. It was the second time she’d verbally recounted the trauma she experienced, and this time it felt oddly therapeutic.

Being that he was a hairstylist, Ethan had a gift for gab and was rarely left speechless. He was a good listener, as well, and as Siyanna spoke, he knew there were no words he could say that would make it an easier story to tell.

“Wow, Siyanna, I’m sorry doesn’t seem like enough, but I truly don’t know what to say.”

She offered a closed-lip smile before saying, “It’s fine. Probably not what you expected to hear on a first date, or any date for that matter.”

“It wasn’t, but I appreciate that you felt comfortable enough with me to share.”

“That actually felt good. The only other person I’ve talked to about it is Dani.”

“Oh? You don’t talk to your brother-in-law?”

Siyanna didn’t get far enough into her story to discuss her living situation. Ethan knew she’d lost her sister and husband on the same day her nephew and son were born.

“That’s another story for another time.” She looked at her watch. “Wow, it’s later than I thought. You ready to go?”

“No, but I understand if you need to leave. Probably need to relieve your sitter.”

She agreed with him even though that wasn't the reason. Siyanna was afraid that if she stayed any longer, he'd want to know more about her personal life, and she had done all the sharing she would do for the night.

WHILE SIYANNA ENJOYED her night with Ethan, Drue was having a miserable time at the strip club because he couldn't stop thinking about Siyanna. In an attempt to get her off his mind, he requested several lap dances from multiple strippers.

"Wassup with you, bruh?" Joseph asked.

"What?"

"All that cash you dishing out. That ain't usually how you roll."

He took a sip of his drink before saying, "Feeling generous today, I guess."

"Naw, something's up."

"I'm good," he told his friend as a familiar face strolled toward him.

Natalie didn't give Drue a chance to request a lap dance. As soon as she was close enough, her small hand landed hard on his cheek.

"What the fuck?" he growled as his hand went to his face.

"Asshole," she spat before she turned to walk away.

"Damn, nigga. What the hell you do to her?" Joseph inquired, shocked by the whole scene.

Drue's hand remained on his cheek as he watched Natalie disappear behind a door.

"I ain't do shit."

Joseph laughed. "Oh, you did something. She didn't slap you like you stole her last dollar for nothing."

“Man, I’m out. I’ll hit you up tomorrow,” Drue told his friend.

The sting on his face lingered as he stood to connect his fist with Joseph’s. Before he made it to the exit, the lights on the stage dimmed, gaining his attention. “Ride” by Ciara featuring Ludacris began to play, and Natalie sauntered onto the stage.

At that point, Drue’s feet may as well had been glued to the floor. Natalie began her routine, and almost immediately, money was being tossed onto the stage. Every pair of eyes in the club were on her as she executed each move flawlessly. By the time the song ended, the stage was filled with bills of denominations from one to one hundred.

Before she exited the stage, Natalie’s eyes locked with Drue’s. He smiled, hoping it would be a peace offering, but Natalie didn’t take the bait. Instead of returning a smile, she mouthed, *fuck off*, with her middle fingers in the air, then vanished behind a curtain. He smirked as he shook his head and made his way out of the building and to his car. He couldn’t even be mad because if the roles were reversed, he’d give Natalie his ass to kiss as well.

When he was about five minutes away from home, his mom called. Worried there may be something wrong with the boys, he answered quickly.

“Hey, Ma. The boys okay?”

“They’re perfect. I just put them down for the night and—”

“Just now? It’s almost midnight.”

“And? They got a job they gotta report to tomorrow or something?”

“No, but Siyanna would have a fit if she knew they were up this late.”

“Well, keep your mouth shut, and she won’t know. I didn’t call her because I didn’t want to hear her mouth, but I’m getting lip from you anyway.”

“I won’t tell her, but can you please make sure they go to bed by eight tomorrow?”

“You know what? I was calling as a courtesy to let y’all know the boys and I are having a ball, but you done pissed me off. I’ll see you Sunday.”

Cherie ended the call before Drue could respond. He was glad his mother was enjoying her grandchildren, but he knew he and Siyanna would have hell to pay when they put the boys to bed on Sunday night.

When he arrived home, an unfamiliar car was parked in his driveway. He pulled to the side of the street, turned off his lights, and watched as Siyanna spoke to a man whose face he couldn’t see well but didn’t appear to be familiar to him. Drue noticed every time she laughed at something he said, she would touch the man’s chest, and that simple action caused his own chest to tighten.

The strange man then leaned down to kiss Siyanna’s cheek, and Drue’s hands tightened around the steering wheel. He didn’t release his tight grip until the man drove away. Finally, he turned into his driveway and entered the garage.

Once he calmed himself, he went inside and found Siyanna in the kitchen. She was leaning against the counter drinking a bottle of water, and when their eyes met, she quickly averted hers.

“How was your date?” he asked her.

“Fine. Where’d you go?”

“That’s Ethan?” She nodded. “Where’d you meet him?”

“He’s the hairstylist that cut my hair.”

Drue nodded. “So, he’s the one responsible for this new look?”

Siyanna frowned. Drue had yet to tell her what he thought about her new look.

“If you don’t like it, Drue, just say that. I can handle it.”

“Why does it matter? Didn’t you say—”

“I know what I said. I’m going to bed.”

She aggressively pushed the empty water bottle into the trashcan and kept that same energy as she left the kitchen. Drue chuckled at her display of so-called anger, but he didn’t give her the satisfaction of the compliment she wanted.

After making sure the house was secured, he went upstairs. As he walked past Siyanna’s room, he paused and put his ear against the door. When he didn’t hear anything, he slowly turned the knob. Inside the room, the bathroom door was partially open, and he could hear the shower running.

The thought of her wet, naked body made his dick stiffen. By the time he made it to the bathroom door, he was naked. He peeked inside and could see her silhouette in the mirror, which was beginning to fog.

Siyanna stood in the corner of the shower with her arms wrapped around her body. He watched her for a moment to see what she was doing, and when her body shook, he realized she was crying. Within seconds, Drue slid the shower door open and stepped inside. Siyanna gasped in fear at first, and even when she realized it was him, her body remained tense.

“Drue! What are you—”

He grabbed the back of her neck and brought his mouth to hers, shutting her up. Drue didn’t want to hear her voice unless she was screaming his praises. Siyanna only resisted for a split second before her body molded against his.

Their hunger for each other was apparent in the way they kissed. His mouth smothered hers, their tongues doing an exotic dance. With her back pressed against the cold shower wall, Siyanna lifted her legs around Drue’s waist, and his erection was ready and waiting, allowing him to slide inside her with ease.

“Ahh,” she moaned.

“Mm, shit,” he growled.

They continued to kiss as if their next breath depended on their connection. Siyanna held him tight while he stroked her

deep, bending his knees as he attempted to hit her chest with the head of his dick.

“Fuck, Drue,” Siyanna whimpered after pulling her mouth from his. “It’s too deep.”

“I want to touch your soul. Can I do that? Will you let me feel your soul with this dick?”

She couldn’t speak, so she waved her head from side to side, declining his offer.

“We can’t keep doing this. We can’t—”

“This shit is real, Si. I can’t help how I feel. I know you feel it, too.”

All Siyanna could feel was Drue’s dick in her chest. She couldn’t process thoughts or decipher emotions, and the only thing on her mind was the orgasm building in her belly.

“Cum on this dick, Si. I can feel that shit. Let it go, baby.”

At his command, her pussy contracted at a rapid pace, covering him with her feminine juices while snatching his nut from his sack. Groans, moans, curse words, and screams filled the bathroom as they reached their peak. He buried his face in her neck as her head fell against his shoulders while they caught their breath.

Minutes passed before they moved from their position. When they did, they both felt a sense of loss. After bathing in silence, they found themselves standing at the foot of Siyanna’s bed, wrapped in towels.

“Drue, I thought we agreed we couldn’t do this?”

“I didn’t agree to anything. I’ve had feelings for you for quite a while, and I’m tired of fighting them.”

“You’re my brother-in-law. I’m married to your brother. You’re married to my sister. We are betraying them in the worst possible way.”

“I don’t know if you missed the memo, but they’re both dead, and they ain’t coming back.”

“Damn! Do you have to be so harsh?”

“Saying it another way won’t make it easier, and it won’t make them come back.”

“You’re right, but you don’t have to be so blunt. They’re probably turning over in their graves at what we’ve done already. There’s no way they would approve of this or us having a full-blown relationship.”

“We don’t need their approval. As long as we’re good with it—”

“I’m not, Drue. I’m not okay with this. I don’t know how you are.”

“You think I planned this shit? You think I planned to fall in love with my sister-in-law?”

“Of course not! I didn’t plan to fall in love with you either, but—”

“You’re in love with me, Siyanna?”

Siyanna didn’t realize she exposed her true feelings with the slip of her tongue. She tried to think of what she could say to take it back, but nothing came to mind. He continued when she didn’t respond.

“What’re you gonna do, Si? Ignore your feelings? Start dating other niggas to keep your mind off me?”

“That’s exactly what I plan to do, which means we can’t keep this up. Things have to go back to how they were before.”

“Oh, with you avoiding me and locked up in your room all the damn time? Naw, I refuse to let that happen.”

“What do you mean? You can’t force me to engage with you if I don’t want to.”

“Try me,” he challenged.

Siyanna couldn’t believe Drue was behaving in such a way, but she didn’t want to go back and forth with him anymore.

“Look, it’s been a long day, and I’m tired.”

She thought he would leave, but instead, he let his towel fall from his waist, walked to the head of the bed, and pulled the comforter back. She had to fight to keep her eyes off his third leg, which was resting on his thigh.

“What are you doing?”

“Going to bed,” he said with a smug look on his face.

“I said—”

“You’re in love with me. That’s all that needs to be said.”

He slid between the sheets and pulled the comforter up to his waist, leaving his chest exposed.

“Oh my God, Drue,” she whined. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because it’s time for us to face the inevitable. We can still have our happily ever after.”

“With each other?”

“Why not?”

“How can you even say that?”

“Because I’ve been going to therapy and come to terms with losing the only woman I’ve ever loved until now, as well as my twin brother and best friend. I want to move on with my life, and my heart is saying you’re who I should move on with.”

“But—”

“Let’s just go to bed. We can talk more in the morning.”

While Drue made himself comfortable in Siyanna’s queen-sized bed, she stood frozen in place. She thought about going to sleep in another room, but she had a feeling he’d follow her. So instead, she put on a pair of leggings and a T-shirt before crawling in bed and staying as close to the edge of the bed as possible.

“If you don’t want this dick, just say that shit, Si,” Drue told her. “You didn’t have to come to bed fully dressed.”

Little did he know, her actions were to strengthen her willpower because she very much wanted the dick. However, she had to stand her ground and end whatever it was that they'd started.

“h my God! Right there, baby,” Siyanna urged as Drue’s finger applied pressure to her clit while his tongue lapped up her savory juices.

She wasn’t quite sure how they got in their current position, but she was too far gone to make him stop when she realized what was happening.

“Drue, I’m cummin’!” she warned just before her dam released.

He didn’t waste a second, pulling his face away from her mound and gliding up her body until his dick was snugly inside her walls.

“Fuck!” he groaned.

Siyanna’s pussy still trembled from the orgasm, and Drue’s intrusion pushed her even further over the edge. His eruption had been waiting until the right time to release, and her vibrating walls snatched it much sooner than he wanted.

“Damn it!” he griped as he filled her with his seeds.

Drue planned on redeeming himself in a second round. When they recovered, he eased himself out of his new favorite place and rolled to his side of the bed.

“You refuse to respect my boundaries,” Siyanna fussed.

“What boundaries, Si? I woke up to you rubbing your pussy on my leg. I assumed you had changed your mind about us.”

“Changed my mind? Nigga, I was sleep, and you took advantage of that.”

“You already had your pants off. I ain’t take advantage of shit. Don’t play me like that.”

“Whatever, Drue. I’m going to take a shower, and don’t follow me.”

Siyanna angrily got out of the bed and stomped to the bathroom. Drue respected her wishes and didn’t follow her. He went to his room and showered in his bathroom before going downstairs to make breakfast. When Siyanna made it down, her short hair was wet, and her curls were tighter than the previous day. Drue loved her new look and planned to let her know as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

“You want pancakes or French toast?” he asked her.

“French toast.”

“Oh, I’m good enough to cook for you but not good enough to be your man?”

Siyanna frowned as she took a seat on one of the stools at the breakfast bar.

“What does that have to do with anything? You know what,” she continued, not waiting for him to answer. “Don’t make me anything. I can cook for myself.”

“Calm your ass down. I was just playing with you. Bacon or sausage?”

“Bacon.”

“Yeah, you just had sausage, so—”

“Really, Drue? What is wrong with you?”

“Nothing. I’m trying to lighten the mood because I know you’re all in your feelings over there.”

“Yeah, well, guilt will do that to you.”

“You have no reason to feel guilty because we ain’t done shit wrong.”

“I don’t wanna talk about it, okay? Let me sit here in peace while you cook.”

He shook his head as he began to prepare their first meal of the day. Siyanna couldn’t hide the look of frustration on her face, and it bothered Drue that their situation made her feel that way. He wanted to turn her frown upside down.

“I like the hair, Si. It looks good on you,” Drue finally confessed.

Their eyes met as she ran her fingers through her hair. The corners of her lips threatened to curl into a smile, but she fought the urge.

“Are you for real or still trying to lighten the mood?” she asked cautiously.

“No, I’m serious. I love it. And you should know, I’m more attracted to you now than I was before.”

Siyanna couldn’t stop her lips from forming a smile that time. She didn’t want to care what Drue thought of her new look, but she couldn’t help herself.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Does that smile mean you didn’t mean what you said?”

Playing coy, she asked, “About what?”

“Didn’t you cut your hair hoping I wouldn’t be attracted to you anymore?”

The tone of his voice caused the mood to suddenly become serious.

“Summer and I have always looked the same. For the most part, it was intentional. If I wore my hair straight, she did too. If she colored her hair, I did as well. Neither of us had ever done anything this drastic.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

“I didn’t cut it for that reason, but I did think if I didn’t look so much like Summer, you wouldn’t find me attractive.”

“You think I fell for you because you have my deceased wife’s face?”

“I mean, yeah.”

“That’s so far from the truth. You and Summer were identical in looks but that’s where it ended.”

“So, you’re telling me you’re attracted to my personality?”

As he scrambled the batter for the French toast, he replied, “There are a number of things about you that made me fall for you. It probably started the moment you agreed to breastfeed Dylan without a second thought. You’ve always taken care of him as if you birthed him. You lost your husband and sister, and had a newborn of your own, who was born prematurely, but still created a space for Dylan and me in your life.”

“We both experienced the same loss and were there for each other,” Siyanna added.

“True, but what you sacrificed was on another level. Dylan needed you more than he needed me. Had you not stepped up, I’m sure I would’ve figured it out, but because you are who you are, I didn’t have to do anything alone.”

He dipped a slice of Texas toast bread into the batter, putting it on the electric griddle before doing the same with a few more pieces.

“Do I need to mention how much we have in common?” Drue didn’t wait for her to answer. “We’re both somewhat reserved, prefer staying in more than going out, like classic Black movies, and deep conversations. None of what I’ve said means I didn’t love Summer because I did—hell, I still do, very much. I had every intention of spending the rest of my life with her and I have no doubt we would have been happy. But, that’s no longer an option, and coincidentally, I’ve fallen for someone who is equally dope but for different reasons, and happens to be her twin sister.”

He flipped over the French toast before opening the oven, removing the pan of bacon and setting it on the top of the stove.

“That last part is the reason why we can’t do this.”

“We can do whatever the fuck we want, Si. We’re already raising our boys together, as brothers, not as cousins, and that will be the case for many more years to come. We’re Ma-Ma and Da-Da to them until we both feel they’re old enough to know any different. The only thing that’s missing is us.”

Us, she thought.

Siyanna remained in her thoughts until Drue slid a plate filled with two slices of French toast, bacon, and scrambled eggs her way.

“Thank you.”

He sat next to her at the breakfast bar, took her hand, and blessed the food, something he usually did when they shared a meal. While they ate, all that could be heard was forks hitting plates. Drue said an earful, and Siyanna didn’t know how to respond, so she remained quiet. Her feelings for him were wrapped in guilt, and unless she figured out a way to get past it, she couldn’t see herself in a relationship with Drue.

“Ma’s bringing the boys back tomorrow afternoon,” Drue told her, breaking the silence.

“Yeah, I know. She told me when she sent a text with a few videos of the boys.”

“Since we’re still kid-free, can I take you out on a date?”

“Drue—”

“Don’t give me some lame-ass excuse, Si. Let me take you out. We’ve never been anywhere without the boys.”

“I agreed to go out with Ethan again tonight,” she confessed.

“Fuck that nigga. Cancel it.”

“Nooo, Drue. That would be rude. Besides, I had a really nice time last night and want to see him again.”

“When you see him, you make sure you tell him how you climbed on my dick after he dropped you off.”

She gasped. “That is not what happened, and you know it.”

“Did my dick end up in your pussy?”

Siyanna was a bit taken aback, and a lot turned on, by the way Drue was talking. She was used to him being more laid back, but that wasn’t to say he didn’t have a wild side.

“You invited yourself into my shower,” she defended.

“But you didn’t have to hop on my dick. Oh, and make sure you let him know you woke with my face buried—”

“Okay, okay! Damn. I’ll reschedule the date. Geez!”

Drue finished the last of his food with a smirk on his face. When he finished chewing the last bite, he said, “Good decision. I didn’t want to have to blow up your whole spot.”

“What do you mean?”

“Si, that date wasn’t happening, baby. I would have made sure of it. As a matter of fact—”

“Hold up, Drue. I agreed to cancel the date tonight and go out with you, but don’t put any more demands on the table. Regardless of what’s happened between us over the past couple of days, I’m still not feeling good about any of it.”

“My goal is to change that.”

He picked up his plate, then hers, before going to the dishwasher. She watched as he loaded it, wondering how in the hell she was going to continue to coexist with him on a platonic level.

Lord help me! she mused.

Ethan was very understanding when Siyanna canceled their date. She told him she couldn't find a sitter, and he asked if she'd be available for breakfast the next morning. She felt bad about canceling and lying to him about the reason, so she agreed to breakfast.

When she ended the call with Ethan, she called Dani. They'd last communicated when Siyanna arrived home from her date with Ethan. Dani had an early and long shift, so Siyanna hoped to catch her before she went to sleep.

"Hello?" Dani answered in her sleepy voice.

"I woke you. I'm sorry."

"No, I'm not sleep yet, just tired. What's up?"

"You sure? Because we can talk later."

"No, I'm fine. Tell me about your date with Ethan."

"Overall, it was good. He's a nice man."

"But?"

"But nothing. I agreed to go out with him again tonight."

"My gut is still telling me there's a 'but' somewhere in the mix."

"Drue asked me, well, told me to cancel it because he wants to take me out."

"And?"

"I did, and—"

“Hold on. Correct me if I’m wrong. The last time we spoke about Drue, you wanted no parts of a relationship with him. What happened?”

“Nothing about that has changed, Dani, but we did have sex again...twice.”

“Si-Si, why don’t you stop fighting the inevitable? I mean, I get how you feel, girl. I swear, I do. But the reality is, there’s nothing wrong with pursuing a relationship with Drue.”

“He’s definitely exposing to me a side of him I’ve never seen.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s a bit rougher around the edges than I thought. But anyway, I’m not ready to entertain thoughts of a relationship with him.”

“Then why did you agree to go out with him? And why did you give him the pussy again?”

“I don’t know, and I tried not to sleep with him again but —”

“Yeah, I bet you did.”

“I did, I swear. Anyway, he threatened to tell Ethan about our little rendezvous, and that’s the last thing I need if I plan to continue seeing him.”

“Did he really?”

“You should have heard him. Girl, he was talking nasty as hell, but I was turned on.”

“You know what? I’m not gon’ say another word about this situation. I already know how it’s gonna end anyway.”

“Whatever, Dani. I’ll let you go to sleep because clearly, you’re delirious.”

“Mark my words, Si-Si. Call me tomorrow.”

Dani ended the call before Siyanna could reply. Siyanna tossed the phone on her bed and fell back. After lying there for a few minutes, she fell asleep. Sometime later, she woke up to

soft kisses on her cheeks that moved down to her neck. Her eyes fluttered open, and she saw the top of Drue's head as he began to move down her body.

"No, Drue. We're not doing this again. What are you doing in here?"

He sat up and looked at her as if he wanted to devour her.

"I came to tell you we're leaving at six. Our reservation is for seven, and it's four-thirty now."

"Can't we just order some food and watch a movie?"

He chuckled. "If you don't want me to end up between your legs again, going out is probably best."

He stood from the bed and adjusted his dick before heading for the door.

"I'll be waiting for you at the bottom of the stairs six. Wear something sexy for me."

When he was on the other side of the door, Siyanna released a deep breath. With every interaction she had with Drue, her attraction to him became more intense. That was one of the reasons she began avoiding him. Now that they'd complicated their relationship with sex, it would truly take all the strength she could muster up not to give in to him.

SIYANNA ENDED up wearing a black catsuit that she'd purchased the previous day and paired it with some clear heels. It was cut low in the front, putting her cleavage on display, and she added a silver necklace, earrings, and bracelets.

Just as he said, Drue was waiting at the bottom of the stairs. He was scrolling through his phone, and she waited until he looked in her direction to begin her descent. His eyes widened as they took her in from head to toe. Before she made it to him, he had to adjust his dick.

“Damn, Si. You look beautiful,” he said before taking her hand and kissing the back of it.

“Thank you! You’re looking pretty good yourself.”

Drue had chosen to wear all black as well. His dress pants and button-down shirt fit him as if they’d been tailored, hugging his solid frame perfectly.

“I appreciate that. You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” Siyanna replied.

He continued to hold her hand and led her to the front door, where his truck was already parked in the driveway. Once they were on the passenger side, he helped her in, then made his way to the other side.

“Where are we going?” Siyanna asked as Drue backed out of the driveway.

“To dinner.”

She smacked her lips and rolled her eyes. “Duh. I meant what restaurant.”

“Have you ever been to Top of the World?”

“No, where’s that?”

“At the top of The Strat.”

Siyanna immediately pulled her phone from her small purse to look up the restaurant and menu.

“What are you doing?”

“I want to see the menu.” Drue quickly snatched her phone from her and put it in his shirt pocket. “Why’d you do that?” she almost whined.

“Because you can see the menu when we get there. I want you to get the full experience.”

She huffed and folded her arms across her chest. He took his eyes off the road for a millisecond and saw her pouting.

“Don’t get all in your feelings, Si. I’ve never been here before either, and this is our first date, and let you tell it,

possibly our last. I just want to experience it all together. From what I've heard, though, the food is good as hell."

"Fine," she agreed, trying not to smile.

The rest of the ride was in silence while R&B music played softly in the background. The traffic on the strip was heavy, as Drue expected. Eventually, he pulled in front of the massive hotel, leaving his keys with the valet before helping Siyanna out of the truck.

As the name indicated, the restaurant was at the very top of the hotel. Since they had reservations, they were seated as soon as they arrived. The server arrived quickly and took their drink orders. Siyanna ordered a glass of wine, and Drue ordered a beer. There were a lot of food options on the menu, and they took their time perusing.

"You know what you want?" Drue asked after several minutes.

"If you would have let me look at the menu on my phone, I would," she told him with a fake attitude.

"Nothing is piquing your interest?" He ignored her attempt at pretending to be mad.

"Hell, everything is, which is why I can't decide." He reached across the table and gently removed the menu from her hands. "What are you doing?"

"Do you mind if I order for both of us?"

"I thought you said you've never been here?" she questioned.

"I haven't, but what does that matter? Can I order for you or not?"

"Sure...and you better pick something good."

"I got this, baby."

Drue looked at the menu a little longer, and when the server returned with their drinks, he was ready to order. He chose the crispy crab cakes with a roasted poblano remoulade as an appetizer. For Siyanna's meal, he chose stuffed poblanos

with quinoa, charred corn, asparagus, and chipotle tomato sauce. For himself, he decided on smoked pork rack with apple and bacon chutney. The server assured them the servings were large and there would be plenty to share.

Once they were alone again, Siyanna found herself blushing under Drue's intense glare.

"Why are you staring at me like that?"

"Like what?" he asked with a smirk.

"I don't know; like you'd rather have me for dinner than the food that'll be here shortly."

"Shit, I would. But I can have you for dessert."

She looked away from him as she smiled, knowing resisting him would take an act of God.

"They have some great-sounding desserts on the menu," she told him.

"I guarantee, nothing on that menu tastes as good as you."

"Drue, will you stop? You're making me blush. Not to mention the fact that you shouldn't even know how I taste."

There were some moments when Siyanna wanted to forget the reasons why she and Drue couldn't be together, but they were always lurking in the back of her mind.

"We're not about to go there right now. Tonight is about us having a good time and enjoying each other's company."

"Okay."

The intensity of his gaze didn't lessen as they conversed.

"Have you thought about when you want to open the boutique?"

Siyanna felt a rush of sadness, but thankfully, it didn't last long.

"I think about it all the time. I'm not sure it's something I want to do without Summer."

"I can understand that, Si, but I think she'd want you to do it. I know it was your dream to do it together, but she'd be

proud as hell if you made it happen without her.”

“Maybe. I’ll give it some more thought. Now that the boys are a little older and—”

“You realize the three of y’all will survive without them being attached to you all day.”

“Shut up, Drue. It’s not that bad.”

“Hell yes, it is. All three of y’all are ridiculous, but I can’t be mad at them. I wanna be up under your pretty ass all day, too.”

“I never imagined you to be the clingy type. Drae was—”

“Nope, we’re not gonna do that, Si.”

“Do what?”

“I don’t want you to compare me to Drae, and I won’t compare you to Summer.”

“I wasn’t—I didn’t—”

“Our situation is already tough, but if we’re doing this, you have to remember I’m not Drae. It won’t work if you’re always comparing us.”

We can’t do this, she thought.

Siyanna took a moment to process Drue’s words, and instead of telling him what she was thinking, she nodded in agreement.

“Okay, I’m sorry. I know you’re not him, but it’s hard not to compare the two of you.”

“No, it’s not. When I look at you, even before you cut and dyed your hair, I only see you. It’s not hard at all.”

“Are you mad?” she asked with apologetic eyes.

“No, I’m not mad, baby. We’re good.”

She wasn’t sure they were good, but she didn’t want to dwell on it.

“Have you started back writing?”

A smile graced Drue's face as he replied. "I finished an outline yesterday."

"Really! That's great. What's it about?"

"Us."

Siyanna's eyebrows narrowed in confusion.

"Us?"

"Yeah, our story. As tragic as it is, I want to write our happy ending."

Before Siyanna could comment, the server returned with their appetizer. She placed the dish in the center of the table, then informed them their meal would be out soon. Drue reached for Siyanna's hands and said a quick prayer over the food before they dug in.

"Mm, these are delicious," Siyanna cooed after her first bite.

"They must be. You didn't even moan like that for me," Drue teased.

"Shut up." She rolled her eyes. "Do you remember what kind of sauce this is? I need the recipe."

"You don't want to know any more about the book I'm writing?" he asked, ignoring her chatter.

She shrugged her shoulders. "If you're writing about us, I know everything there is to know."

"Are you cool with me telling our story?"

"I have a choice?"

"Si, if you would rather I not, I'll trash the whole idea."

"You're a New York Times bestselling author, and that means *a lot* of people read your books."

"Yeah, and?"

"That's a lot of people in our business who will judge us for..."

"For falling in love?"

“Drue, you’re not in love with me. You only think you are because—”

“Don’t tell me how I feel, Si. I’m a grown-ass man who is very much in touch with his feelings. Now, if you don’t want me to write the book, I won’t. How you feel is important to me.”

“Can I have some time to think about it?”

“Of course, but don’t take too long. Now that I’m writing again, things will flow quickly.”

She nodded her reply, knowing she would encourage him to move forward because she didn’t want to be the one to stifle his creativity.

Their meals came out just as they finished the appetizer. After placing everything on the table, the server made sure nothing else was needed and disappeared, promising to check on them shortly.

For a few minutes, they didn’t speak as they savored each bite of their meal. Siyanna did her best not to moan, but a few slipped out, and each time, Drue warned her with his eyes.

“I thought we were supposed to be sharing?” he reminded her.

“Oh, my bad. Here you go.” She gathered a forkful and lifted it to his mouth. “Tastes great, right?” she asked.

“I like it. Here, try mine.”

He repeated her actions and fed her a forkful from his plate.

“Mm. Now *that* is good. Can I have more?”

As she enjoyed another mouthful, she closed her eyes and shimmied in her seat.

“It’s not that damn good, Si.”

Her eyes popped open and landed on him.

“I think it is. I haven’t enjoyed food this much in a long time. Let me have my moment.”

“You have a point. It’s good to see you like this.”

“Like what?”

The server came back to ensure they were enjoying their meal before leaving them alone again.

“Your mood is lighter than it’s been since...you know, and you’re even smiling.”

“Well, we both know why I wasn’t at my best,” she defended.

“Yeah, we do. I was in a dark place for a while, too.”

“How’d you pull yourself out? And don’t say therapy because—”

“But therapy is ninety percent of the reason I can put a smile on my face almost every day, so I can’t disregard it.”

Siyanna smacked her teeth and rolled her eyes.

“I know how you feel about it, and I’m sorry you didn’t have a pleasant experience. Therapy has helped me learn to cope with losing two people that I love the hell out of. Figuring out how to deal with the sadness, rage, fear, and a multitude of other emotions has been monumental in my healing.”

“Talking to a stranger about your feelings has done all that?”

“It’s more than just talking, but yeah.”

“I thought their deaths didn’t affect you as much,” Siyanna admitted.

Drue frowned. “How could you think that? Me and Drae shared my mother’s womb, and Summer and I planned to share the rest of our lives together. Why would you think losing them didn’t hurt me to my core?”

“I never saw you cry, not even at the funeral. You always seemed to be in a cheerful mood, and it just made me wonder...”

“Wow, Si. That’s crazy. But one of us had to be strong for the other, and it was clear you needed more support than I did. As a man, I had to be strong for you and the boys. My ass couldn’t go around crying and shit.”

“But—”

“Let me finish. For months, I cried every morning in the shower. I was filled with so much anger, it took everything in me not to smash a window, break every dish and piece of furniture in the house. It was hard for me to get out of bed every day, but I knew I needed to be there for you so you could be there for the boys. Like I said before, they needed you more than they needed me.”

“That’s not true.”

“In the beginning, yes, it was. So, I had to do what I had to do, to be strong for y’all. If that meant I had to mourn in private, that’s what I did.”

“Wow, Drue. I had no idea.”

“Then I did my job. But I can’t pretend like it wasn’t wearing on me. Going to therapy saved me from going off the deep end.”

“I guess I can see why you keep pressuring—”

“Don’t even tell that lie. I bring it up every now and then, but don’t lie and say I pressure you.”

“Same thing.”

They laughed at Siyanna’s exaggeration.

“Maybe I’ll give it some thought. Is this woman Black or white?”

“Do you really think I’m about to sit my big Black ass on some white woman’s couch and tell her all my problems?”

“I mean...”

“Hell no she ain’t white.”

As they emptied their plates, the server returned, asking if they wanted dessert. Siyanna was full but still wanted

something sweet, and Drue was serious about having her for dessert.

“No, thank you. We’ll just take the check,” Drue replied before Siyanna made up her mind.

The server dipped away, and Siyanna glared at him while saying, “I want dessert.”

“I gotchu, Si. You’ll get your dessert.”

Her eyes widened because she assumed he was talking about something sexual.

“I want real dessert, Drue. Not you on a platter.”

He chuckled. “Oh, you can have that, too. But that’s not what I’m talking about.”

“I wanted to try their layered chocolate hazelnut cake, so whatever it is better be better than that.”

“I promise you it will be.”

“ innaholic? I’ve been wanting to come here,” Siyanna cooed.

“See, I told you I gotchu.”

Drue opened the door for her and allowed her to step inside before following her. As they approached the counter, Drue asked, “You want to eat here or at home?”

“Home. I want to get out of these clothes and put on something comfortable.”

He smirked before saying, “You could have stopped at getting out of those clothes.”

She rolled her eyes but didn’t reply. After studying the menu for a while and still unable to decide what they wanted, they decided to get a baker’s box with a half dozen assorted flavors. Back in the car, Drue watched as Siyanna shimmied again.

“I love seeing you smile. For a while, I wasn’t sure if I’d ever see that again,” he confessed.

“Have I been that bad?”

Drue didn’t answer right away. Instead, he focused on the road.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” she said nervously.

“The first few months, we were both in survival mode. Taking care of newborns while grieving our siblings and the person we thought we’d grow old with wasn’t easy. It’s still

not easy. But sometimes, it seemed like you wanted to wallow in sadness.”

“Most of the time, I’m sad. When I’m not sad, I’m angry, and when I’m not angry, I’m scared.”

“Are you ever happy?”

Siyanna thought about the past year and the times she didn’t feel overwhelmed with one of the emotions she’d just mentioned.

“I’m always happy when I’m with the boys.”

“Is that why you never want them to leave your side? Are they your only source of happiness?”

Again, she pondered his words for a few minutes before replying.

“Pretty much. But I enjoyed the times you and I chilled together, and—”

“I can’t tell with the way you started avoiding me like I had the damn plague,” he said, interrupting her.

“Because I started to enjoy it too much. Mama almost caught us twice, Drue.” She shook her head as she thought back to those times. “I had to stay away from you because I was feeling things I knew I shouldn’t be.”

“I get it, and believe me, I tried to ignore my feelings for you. Even with you keeping your distance, you still managed to steal my heart.”

“If we—what do you think Mama will say?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. I think, at the end of the day, she wants us both to be happy. If we’re happy with each other, she won’t be against us.”

“What about the rest of your family? Everyone in Chicago?”

This time he laughed. “They’ll have plenty to say, I’m sure. Si, I know us being together is considered taboo, but my happiness is more important than what others think about me. I honestly don’t give a fuck.”

“That’s very obvious,” she mumbled.

Since they were talking when they got in the car, Drue had turned the radio off, and the remainder of the ride home was quiet. As they pulled into the driveway, then the garage, Drue wanted to ensure they were good before going inside.

“Aye,” he said, gaining her attention. “This was the most we’ve talked in a long time...probably ever.”

“Yeah, it was.”

“I know a few times the conversation became intense, but some things had to be said.”

“I agree.”

“But we’re good, though, right?”

“Better than good.”

“Does that mean you’ll stop fighting this?”

He used his index finger to press against her chest.

“I don’t know, but for now, we’re good.”

His head bobbed up and down while a satisfied grin graced his face. He got out of the car then went around to help Siyanna out. As soon as they were in the house, she slipped out of her shoes, then bent to pick them up.

“I’m going to change,” she said before heading upstairs.

“Hold up. I’ll come help you,” Drue offered.

“No way!” she shouted as she ran up the stairs and to her room, closing and locking the door behind her.

“Come on, Si. Let me help you get undressed.”

“No, because I’m not trying to go there with you again until we figure out what we’re doing.”

“I know what I’m doing,” he said calmly from the other side of the door. “Open the door.”

“Drue, I’ll be down after I change.”

Without replying, he went to his room to change his clothes as well. The next time he saw Siyanna, she had on an

oversized black T-shirt that hung off her shoulders and fell just below her ass and a pair of loose-fitting cotton shorts. His dick got hard with the thought of her not having anything on underneath.

“You ate dessert without me?” she whined.

“There’s five more rolls where this one came from,” he told her as he stuffed a forkful of the cinnamon roll in his mouth.

She pushed him on the shoulder, but he barely moved. Before she could get away from him, he grabbed her by the waist and pulled her back against his chest. Dipping his head, he planted a kiss on her neck before resting his chin on her shoulder.

“You wanna watch a movie?” he asked.

“Sure. What do you feel like watching?”

“I already got one picked out. Guess what it is?”

Something about their conversation seemed eerily familiar. As she tried to figure out why she moved away from him and got a plate from the cabinet. After putting a cinnamon roll on the plate and warming it in the microwave, she turned to face him.

“*Jason’s Lyric*,” she finally guessed.

“Damn! How’d you know?”

“I don’t know. It just popped in my head,” she told him as she remembered the dream she had a while back.

“It was between that and *Crooklyn*. I’ll meet you in the family room,” he told her after putting his plate in the dishwasher.

While she savored every bite of her dessert, she recalled waking up from that dream hot and bothered.

“Lord, give me strength,” she thought she whispered.

“What?” Drue yelled from the family room.

“Nothing. I hit my foot on the stool,” she lied.

“Bring your ass on, and I’ll rub your feet for you.”

“Lord, why doth thou forsaken me?” she whispered again as she looked up at the ceiling.

“Si, stop talking to yourself and come on.”

She put her dishes in the dishwasher, put some dishwashing liquid in the compartment, and started the machine.

In the family room, Drue was already sitting on one end of the couch. Siyanna sat on the other end and balled her legs up underneath her. Drue peeped what she was trying to do but wasn’t having it. He reached across the couch and gripped her ankle, then pulled her legs until her feet rested on his lap.

“What are you doing?”

“Just sit back and relax. Do you want this blanket?”

“Yes, please.”

He reached behind him and pulled the blanket from the back of the couch, then spread it out over them. Picking up the remote, he started the movie.

“Wait,” Siyanna blurted out.

“What?”

“Can we call Mama before—”

He shook his head as he said, “Absolutely not. She’s not about to cuss me out. The boys will be home tomorrow, so you gon’ have to thug it out until then.”

That wasn’t what Siyanna wanted to hear, but she knew he was right. She didn’t want to get cursed out either, which was why she wanted Drue to call.

“Fine!”

He laughed at her but didn’t pay her attitude any mind. Once he started the movie, they got comfortable and gave it their full attention. Well, at least that was the idea.

Before the opening credits ended, Drue was massaging Siyanna’s feet. She had to fight not to moan and prayed he

couldn't smell the arousal he was causing between her legs.

When a moan escaped her lips, he looked in her direction, warning her with his eyes.

"This feels good. I can't help it."

"You keep moaning like that and we'll be making our own movie."

"Then you need to let go of my foot."

She tried to pull her foot from his grasp, and at first, she struggled with him because he wouldn't let go, but he eventually conceded. He paused the movie to let her know what was on his mind.

"Si, we've already gone past the point of no return. I know all the intimate parts of your body, so there's no need for us to act like strangers."

"I'm not acting like—"

"Then stop tripping and bring your ass over here so we can watch the movie."

"I was trying to keep my distance, so we don't start anything."

"You do realize I went over a year without sex, don't you? The whole time you pranced your sexy ass around here in barely-there clothing, and I managed to control myself."

She opened her mouth but closed it when she didn't have a rebuttal. Instead, she moved to the middle of the couch so she was closer to him. Drue put his arm around her and pulled her even closer. Once he was satisfied, he restarted the movie.

They'd watched tons of movies together over the past year, minus the cuddling. Siyanna had to admit she loved the intimacy she felt being close to Drue. About halfway through the movie, Drue had gotten very comfortable and eased his hand into the waistband of her pants. It felt so natural Siyanna didn't notice until she felt some pressure against her clit.

"Mm."

A moan unknowingly slipped out of her mouth as she opened her legs a little wider. Drue took that as an invitation and slid his two fingers down her slick folds before pushing them into her opening.

“Mm,” Siyanna moaned again.

Drue used his other hand to grip as much of Siyanna’s newly short hair as he could and pulled her head back, giving him the access he wanted. As soon as their lips connected, his needy tongue attacked the inside of her mouth. The deeper the kiss became, the wetter her pussy got, causing his fingers to slip and slide against her walls at a rapid pace.

“Cum for me,” he demanded, his lips never leaving hers.

Siyanna didn’t need to be told because she was already on the verge of releasing. His command sent her over the edge, causing her body to vibrate under his touch. When the quake of her walls slowed, he slowly removed his fingers and lifted them to his mouth. The plan was to lick her juices from his fingers, but instead, he shoved them in Siyanna’s mouth.

“Mm,” she moaned as the sweet flavor from her womanly fluids hit her tongue.

Drue still wanted a taste, so once she got her fill, his tongue replaced his fingers, and he sucked any remnants of nectar from her tongue.

While they were locked in a passionate kiss, Siyanna maneuvered out of her shorts and straddled his lap. His dick was already playing peek-a-boo with the waistband of his shorts, so she pushed them down enough for her to sink on it.

“Got damn!” he groaned.

“Ssss,” she hissed.

Before she could begin the ride of her life, Drue grabbed her hips and began fucking her from the bottom. Siyanna wanted to be in control, but he had other plans. It felt too good to fight, so she fell in line.

“Si, baby, this pussy feels so fuckin’ good,” he grunted.

“So does this dick, baby. I can feel it in my chest.”

“Then I ain’t deep enough. I want you to feel it in your throat,” he told her as he plummeted her center from the bottom.

“Oh my God, Drue!” she cried out in ecstasy.

Suddenly, in one swift movement, Drue had her back pinned to the couch as he continued to slam into her. Both of her legs were propped in the crooks of his arms, and he anchored himself on his knees to ensure the perfect angle. His balls slapped against her ass, creating the perfect rhythm as they chased their orgasm.

“Fuck, baby! It’s right there—Drue, baby, it’s—”

“Cum with me, Si. I’m about to blow!” he warned.

And simultaneously, his volcano erupted, and her dam broke, leaving them both out of breath but fully satisfied. Although the road they traveled to reach their peak was different, the satisfaction and bliss she felt reminded her of the dream.

Why am I fighting this, she thought just before dozing off with Drue’s dick still lodged inside her?

he next morning, Siyanna woke up in Drue's bed. She only vaguely remembered how she got there. Flashbacks of them having sex in the family room popped into her mind, and the memory of it sent chills through her body.

We weren't supposed to have sex again...and again and again.

It was all coming back to her. Drue carried her to his bedroom, and they made love over and over again, well into the night. Nothing about it felt wrong. In fact, everything about it felt right, but she couldn't shake the nagging feeling that tugged at her heart. The possibility of living happily ever after with her sister's husband, who was also her husband's brother, was heavy on her mind, and the guilt she felt was overwhelming.

"Stop," Drue whispered from behind her.

"Stop what?"

"All that heavy thinking. It's too early for that."

"It's not that early; it's almost nine o'clock."

"We've only been asleep for a few hours. If you're up thinking about why we shouldn't be together, then obviously I ain't hit the right spot. Go back to sleep."

He put his arm around her waist, pulled her back to his chest, then kissed her neck.

“I have a breakfast date,” she responded as she attempted to get out of bed.

“Tell Dani she can come over, and I’ll make a breakfast feast if she can wait a few more hours.”

“Drue, my date isn’t with Dani. Let me up.”

All this time, he hadn’t opened his eyes, but Siyanna’s last statement got his attention. He sat up, giving Siyanna the opportunity to slip out of bed.

“Siyanna, if you tell me you going to breakfast with that Ethan nigga, I swear to God—”

“When I canceled last night, he asked if we could go to breakfast today. I felt bad for ditching him, so I agreed.”

“After the night we shared, you don’t see anything wrong with that?”

“Drue—he—I—it’s just breakfast. We—”

“Just breakfast? So I just crawled out of your pussy, and you’re about to break bread with another man?” He shook his head in disbelief. “You know what? It’s cool. Do whatever makes you feel good.”

“I’m trying to do what makes sense. For the past year, we’ve barely interacted with anyone outside of this house. Yes, I admit I have feelings for you that feel a lot like love. But you know what else I feel? Guilt, Drue. I’m also filled with guilt. I need to be sure about this before I go against—”

“Go against what? Is there some law somewhere that says we can’t be together?” He paused as she shook her head. “You think dating other people is gonna help you figure it out?” he continued.

“It might. I don’t know, but I have to—”

“You don’t have to do shit but fuck it! Do whatever makes you feel good, Si,” he repeated.

Drue hopped out of bed, naked as the day he was born with his dick swinging freely, marched into the bathroom, and slammed the door.

“Damn it! What am I gonna do?” Siyanna whispered, feeling defeated.

“YOU’RE QUIET THIS MORNING. Did you have a rough night with the kids?”

“Huh? Oh, no. I didn’t get much sleep.”

“You seem...distracted.”

Ethan was right. Siyanna’s mind was everywhere but focused on the breakfast and conversation with him.

“I’m sorry. I just have a lot on my mind. My life is... complicated, and dating is probably not something I should be doing right now.”

“You’ve been through a lot, and I’m sure you’re still trying to figure everything out. The last thing I want to do is make things more difficult for you.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

“I’m not gon’ lie. I enjoy spending time with you and wouldn’t mind seeing where this could go, but if you’re not ready, we can keep things on a friendly level.”

“I’d like that.”

“Then it’s settled. Friends with the possibility of something more when you’re ready.”

Ethan held up his glass of orange juice, prompting her to pick up her glass of water. They toasted to their newfound friendship, and Siyanna enjoyed the rest of their time together.

Before returning home, she went to the cemetery to visit Drae and Summer. It wasn’t a place she frequented, but she had visited a few times since their funeral. The situation between her and Drue weighed on her heavily. Pulling out the journals he’d given her, she penned her first entry to Summer before getting out of the car.

When she reached their graves, she opened the umbrella to block out the sun. As she stared at their headstones, tears fell from her eyes. It took her a while to gather herself enough to be able to speak.

“I’m sorry I don’t visit more often. Being here is weird to me because I’ve barely accepted your deaths. Every day that passes makes your absence more real to me, but I still don’t want to believe it.”

She paused and took a few deep breaths.

“Drue’s been going to counseling. He says it’s helped him a lot. Summer, you know how I feel about therapists, so it’s a no for me. He bought me a couple of journals, though, and I think they will be helpful in my healing. I only have a couple of entries, but it felt good to get some of my thoughts out.”

Siyanna pulled out Drae’s journal and turned to the first page. Through tears and blurry eyes, she read the words she’d written to her husband, praying it wouldn’t lighten the weight on her heart.

“Summer, I wrote one for you, too. Let me get myself together so I can read it.”

After putting Drae’s journal back into her bag, she pulled Summer’s out and turned to the first entry.

“Sissy. My forever Summer. Always my sunshine. God, I miss you. Drue misses you. Dylan...if he had the chance to know you, he’d be missing you, too. He’s such a sweet boy. From the time we brought him home from the hospital, he’s been an angel. Him and Dash are my heart and I feel blessed to be their mother. As soon as they’re old enough to understand, Drue and I will tell them everything about you and Drae.”

The waterworks began as she slowly inhaled, then exhaled, preparing to apologize to her sister.

“Summer, I’m sorry, please forgive me. We shared a lot of things during our lives, but we agreed to never share men. The tragedy of losing you and Drae has me doing things I wouldn’t have done otherwise. I would never betray you and I pray you

believe me. Now, I don't know how to move forward because the guilt is real. I love you, Sissy.

Just like when she wrote to Drae, her thoughts were a jumbled mess, but she didn't care. She remained at the cemetery for a while longer, enjoying the stillness and peace. On the ride home, although she felt better, she didn't know what to do about her situation with Drue. Taking things one day at a time was all she could do.

“Hey.”

When she made it home, she found Drue in his office. Leaning against the doorframe, she waited for his reply. Instead of replying verbally, Drue gave her a head nod and continued typing on his laptop. He didn't even bother turning around.

“Do you know what time Mama's bringing the boys home?”

“Nope.”

“Did she call?”

“Nope.”

Apparently, he was still upset about the conversation they had that morning and didn't want to engage with her. Instead of pressing, she went to her room.

As she changed into a pair of terry cloth shorts and a tank top, her phone chimed with a text from Dani.

Dani: Soooo?

Siyanna: Soooo what?

Dani didn't bother to send another text, and a second later, her phone rang with a FaceTime call.

“Don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about,” Dani said as soon as her face came into view.

“I'm not acting. What are you—”

“You play all day. Spill the damn tea!”

She let out a hearty laugh before she told her about the date with Drue.

“I knew you’d end up with your legs in the air again. You need to stop pretending you don’t want that man and let the chips fall where they may,” she said when she finished.

“Well, he’s not speaking to me now.”

“Oh damn, girl, what’d you do?”

“I had breakfast with Ethan this morning.”

“Siyanna, why are you stringing Ethan along when you know Drue is who you want?”

“First of all, we’ve been on two dates. Ain’t nobody stringing his fine ass along. And secondly, Drue and I have a complicated situation.”

“You’re making it complicated. There aren’t any laws that say—”

“Oh my God! He said the same thing this morning.”

“Great minds think alike. I take it Drue wasn’t happy about your breakfast date.”

“Not at all, and he didn’t like my reasoning for agreeing to go.”

“Which was?”

“What if the only reason we fell for each other is because over the past year, we’ve spent so much time together?”

“You think y’all should date other people to test out that theory?”

“I don’t know. Maybe.”

“I’m not so sure about that, Si-Si. Do you think it’s fair to get other people involved? Like Ethan, for instance. He seemed to be feeling you, and I’d hate for him to catch real feelings only for you to break his heart.”

“Now that you put it that way, I guess not. But how am I supposed to know if what I’m feeling for Drue is real and not something that our circumstances created?”

“I think you know the answer but won’t allow yourself to embrace it, and believe me, I understand your hesitance.”

“Dani, you couldn’t possibly understand the guilt I’m dealing with. Drue is my...”

“I know, Si-Si. This situation isn’t ideal, but you need to make a choice and stick with it. You can’t even keep your legs closed long enough to make a decision.”

“Fuck you, Dani.”

“I’m just playing, but I’m serious. It’s barely been forty-eight hours, and y’all have had sex more times than I have in two months.”

“Don’t hate because your vagina ain’t getting no love. Drue is persistent as hell and sees nothing wrong with what we’ve done.”

“What do you think will happen if you and Drue run off into the sunset and live happily ever after?”

“People will judge us.”

“What people? I’m your only friend, and I think you should go for it. Drue ain’t got but a few friends and niggas don’t care about shit like that. Hell, they’ll probably be asking what took him so long to make his move or mad they didn’t make a move themselves.”

“There’s still his mom and the rest of his family.”

“His mama probably peeped this a long time ago. Mamas be knowing every damn thing. I bet when she finds out, she won’t be the least bit surprised. And you know how family is. They’ll smile in your face and talk shit behind your back. Who the fuck really cares what they think?”

“I care.”

“Maybe you should stop caring and live your life how you see fit. Do what makes you happy, Si.”

“Oh my God. Did you talk to him today? It’s like you’re his little parrot.”

“I told you, great minds think alike. I gotta go, but I got one more question before I hang up. Did you cover up all those hickies before you met up with Ethan? I’ll talk to you later.”

Dani ended the call while Siyanna dropped her phone and ran to her bathroom. That morning before she went to breakfast, when she turned the shower on, she didn’t look in the mirror. She left the bathroom while the water warmed, and by the time she returned, the mirror was covered in steam. Siyanna washed her face and brushed her teeth in the steam-filled mirror before stepping into the shower. When she finished bathing, all that was left was to run her fingers through her hair and get dressed. Since she didn’t wear makeup, she didn’t even look in the mirror.

“Oh my God! Ethan probably thinks I’m a hoe or something. *God*, I hope he didn’t notice.”

Once she got over the delayed embarrassment, she covered the red marks Drue left on her neck and shoulders with makeup. The last thing she needed was Cherie asking questions about where they came from and who put them there.

Siyanna then went to her desk and turned on her laptop. It had been a few months since she looked at the business plan her and Summer wrote. The last few times, she reread it to see if it would inspire her to move forward. So far that hadn’t happened, but today, she was feeling hopeful.

A few hours passed, and Siyanna found herself immersed in the business plan. Ideas were flowing, and for the first time since Summer died, and she was excited...even inspired. The only reason she stopped working was because she heard the front door open. Although she managed to keep herself busy and not have a nervous breakdown while they were gone, she missed her boys.

Slamming her laptop closed, Siyanna almost tripped over her feet, trying to get down the stairs. Dylan and Dash looked her way when they heard the commotion, and their eyes widened with excitement.

“Ma-Ma! Ma-Ma!” both boys cooed as they reached for her.

“Hey, my babies! Mommy missed you so much.”

“Siyanna Hendrix! You cut your hair. I love it!”

“Thank you,” she said, barely acknowledging the compliment because she was so excited to see the boys.

She grabbed them from Cherie and hugged them tightly. The best part was when they put their little arms around her neck and hugged her right back.

“Aww, my babies missed me, too.”

She alternated planting kisses over each of their faces.

“Well, hello to you,” Cherie greeted with a smirk. “You would think I had them for a year, and it was barely forty-eight hours.”

“It seemed like a year,” she mumbled with her mouth against Dash’s cheek.

She carried them into the family room and put them on the floor, then sat down with them.

“Where’s Drue?”

“In his office.”

Cherie left Siyanna in the family room with the boys and went in search of her son. She thought it was odd that he hadn’t greeted them along with Siyanna.

“Hey, you,” she said when she entered his office.

Drue turned around in his chair to see his mother standing in the doorway.

“Hey, Ma.”

He got up and approached her for a hug. Cherie could sense something was wrong with him and made it her business to find out exactly what it was.

“How was your weekend?” she asked as she followed him into his office.

He returned to his seat, and she sat on the couch that was a few feet away.

“Good. It was weird without the boys here.”

“Just good? Nothing interesting happened?”

Drue sensed his mother was fishing for something, but he didn’t take the bait.

“Not really. I hung out with Joseph on Friday night, and me and Si grabbed a bite to eat last night. Been doing a little writing today.”

“Oh, you’re writing? That’s great to hear, son. Are you working on something new?”

“Something like that. How was your weekend with the boys?”

“Those babies are truly angels. We had a ball, and I think I want to get them at least one weekend a month.”

Drue chuckled. “You’re really trying to get on Si’s bad side, huh?”

“Siyanna will be alright. She got through this weekend, didn’t she?”

Drue had a flashback of some of the things Siyanna did to help her get through her first weekend without their sons and couldn’t help but smile.

“Yeah, she got through it,” he eventually replied.

“What’s that look for?” Cherie inquired.

“Huh? What look?”

“You looked kind of, I don’t know, spaced out, I guess.”

“You’re seeing things, Ma. Let me go see if you got my boys back to us in one piece,” he joked.

“Negro! You and your brother made it out of toddlerhood in one piece. Don’t question my skills.”

They left Drue’s office and found Siyanna still in the middle of the floor in the family room playing with Dylan and Dash.

“I guess they don’t give a damn about my ass,” Drue announced.

His deep voice got their attention and caused them to look his way. He squatted down to their level and extended his arms in their direction. Dylan looked at him and turned back to Siyanna, but Dash reached for him as he waddled his way.

“At least I’m getting some love from one of my boys,” Drue said as he picked Dash up. “Did you miss Daddy?”

Dash babbled something and began to giggle when Drue tickled his belly.

“Si-Si, what did you do to keep yourself busy this weekend?”

“Ma, I already told you—”

“Excuse you! I’m talking to Siyanna,” Cherie let him know. “*Siyanna*, they say a woman who cuts her hair is about to change her life. Is this new haircut the beginning of something?”

“I don’t know...maybe. After I called Dani to complain about you kidnapping my babies, she barged in and made me leave the house. We went to the spa, Drue gave us his black card—thank you for that, by the way—and we went shopping. Our final stop was to the salon, and you see what happened there. Later that night, I went on a date with the guy who cut my hair. Satur—”

“Hold on! You went on a date? Is that where those marks on your neck came from?”

Siyanna gasped while touching her neck.

“Are you sure you’re ready for that?”

“Umm, it’s not what you think, Mama. I think I got bit by something,” she lied.

Drue grunted as he tried to hold in a laugh, causing them to look in his direction. He played it off by giving his attention to Dash.

“Something bit you alright. Anyway, it’s not my business unless you want to tell it. What did you do Saturday?” Cherie prodded as she side-eyed her son.

“Oh, umm, Drue and I went to dinner, and that was really it.”

Drue cleared his throat this time, and Cherie decided to find out what his problem was.

“Son, are you okay? Do you need some water?”

“I’m fine. A man can’t clear his throat?”

His tone was a bit abrasive, but Cherie let him slide. She had an idea of what may have been his problem.

“Well, I’m glad you were able to get out and enjoy yourselves. It’s a good thing I’ll be taking the boys one weekend every month.”

“You what? We never talked about that,” Siyanna whined.

“We’re talking about it now. I think the separation was needed. Both of you look rested and refreshed. Well, at least you do, Si-Si. I don’t know what’s up with Mr. Grumpy over here.”

“You forgot to mention the breakfast date,” Drue commented, ignoring his mother’s comment.

Siyanna looked at him with a frown, then rolled her eyes.

“Breakfast date?” Cherie asked.

“Yeah, it was no big deal,” Siyanna replied.

“Where’d you meet this guy?”

“It was the same guy from Friday. His name is Ethan.”

“Oh, okay. You must like him if you let him bite all over your neck *and* you went out with him again,” Cherie assumed.

“Mama, stop. It wasn’t like that, but he’s nice and definitely easy on the eyes.”

“Interesting,” Cherie said, keeping her eyes on Drue.

From his body language, tone of voice, and demeanor, Cherie knew they were hiding something. She could tell that her son didn't like that Siyanna went on a date.

"I guess it's time for me to get home. The busybodies kept me going this weekend, but I can't wait until next time."

"I can. Maybe next time, you can stay here with us," Siyanna suggested.

"There's no fun in that. I'll talk to y'all in a few days."

"Bye, Mama. Even though I was opposed to it, thank you for bringing my babies back in one piece," Siyanna said.

She stood with Dylan, put him on her hip, followed Drue, who had Dash on his shoulders, and Cherie to the front door. After saying their goodbyes, Cherie left, and Drue and Siyanna went back to the family room with the boys.

"Are you still mad?"

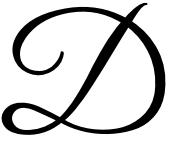
"I'm good, Si."

"You're lying, but it's fine. You can go back to your office. I got the boys," she said, dismissing him.

"Of course, you do. That's why you're here, right?"

Drue put Dash on the floor next to Dylan, kissed them both on the top of their heads, then disappeared to his office.

"What should I do?" she whispered to herself.

Drue couldn't wait to see Dr. Miller. His anxiousness caused him to drive beyond the speed limit, making a fifteen-minute drive only five minutes. He paced back and forth outside her office while he waited for her to welcome him inside.

"Mr. Hendrix, are you okay?" Glenda, Dr. Miller's assistant, asked.

"Huh?"

"Are you okay? You've been pacing since you walked in. Can I get you some tea or—"

"No, thank you. I'm good."

"Dr. Miller should be finishing up her appointment any minute."

Dr. Miller's office door opened, and a woman walked out with Dr. Miller following her. They exchanged a few words in a low tone before the woman confirmed her next appointment and left. He was still on his feet, waiting for Dr. Miller to head back to her office so he could start his session.

"Drue, go ahead and wait in my office. I'm just going to use the restroom."

Drue did as she said, and about five minutes later, Dr. Miller entered her office and took a seat in her cushy chair.

"I can already tell from your energy you have a lot to get off your chest today."

“A lot has happened since my last session.”

“The floor is yours.”

“I’m in love with Siyanna.”

“Oh, umm, okay. Did you just realize this, or is this something you’ve known for a while?”

“I was in denial and had been suppressing my feelings for some time. We had a moment...a couple of moments, about six months ago, and—”

“What do you mean by a couple of moments?”

“One night, we bumped into each other in the hallway and almost kissed. The next day, we finished what we started, and had my mother not come back when she did, we would have done a lot more than kiss.”

“What happened after those two incidents?”

“Nothing. We never talked about it, and nothing ever happened again until this weekend.”

“Tell me what happened.”

Drue did his best to summarize what’s been brewing between him and Siyanna. Dr. Miller listened intently, nodding and writing in her notebook.

“After the first time we kissed, I felt guilty as hell. I assume she did, too, because she started avoiding me. I had never in my life looked at any of my brother’s girlfriends sexually, and especially not his wife. When I started seeing Siyanna differently, I tried to ignore it, but it was damn near impossible.”

“For the most part, the two of you already operate as a couple, and the only thing missing is the romantic element.”

“We had sex multiple times over the weekend and confessed our love for each other, but as far as us being in a full-blown relationship...she won’t consider it.”

“Alrighty, then. You’re dropping bombs all over the place today. Give me a second to process.”

Dr. Miller quickly jotted some things down in her notebook before speaking again.

“You said she won’t consider a relationship with you, yet she had sex with you and told you she loved you?”

“Pretty much. She said she didn’t mean to fall in love with me. Hell, I didn’t mean to fall in love with her either, but the internal struggle was killing me.”

“Do you understand Siyanna’s hesitation?”

“How could I not? I feel guilty as hell for falling for my brother’s widow, who also happens to be my deceased wife’s sister. I pictured them turning over in their graves at the betrayal. I beat myself up about it for months but can’t fight it anymore.”

“Why didn’t you ever talk to me about it?”

“Because I was embarrassed and ashamed. I tried to pretend it wasn’t happening.”

“What was it that made you push all of that to the side and succumb to your feelings?”

Drue chuckled.

“A visit to Drae and Summer’s gravesite.”

“Oh, really? Continue.”

“You know, I’m not a very religious person. I believe in God, and I’m spiritually grounded, but I don’t go to church. I take notice of people’s vibe and energy. I look at things that happen in the atmosphere as signs and signals for how I move if that makes sense.”

“Of course.”

“It was a couple of weeks ago and the first time I’d been to the cemetery since their funeral. I sat there for hours, pouring my heart out, talking to them as if they were sitting right in front of me. The last time I cried that much was at my father’s funeral when I was eleven years old, and the only time I talk as much is during my sessions with you. But the whole experience was... freeing.”

“Was that the first time you cried over their deaths?”

“Not at all. I had to be strong for my mother, Siyanna, and the boys, so I did my crying in the shower.”

“What did you talk to them about?”

“What didn’t I talk to them about would be a better question. I told them everything that’s happened in the world, and our lives, since they died. Mostly I talked about the boys.”

“Did you share your feelings for Siyanna?”

He nodded. “I laugh every time I think about it, but I legit thought Drae would rise up and choke the shit outta me while Summer tried to separate us so she could smack me silly.”

Dr. Miller laughed. “Obviously, that didn’t happen.”

“No, but I’d been holding on to that for months, and it felt good to release it. Then, the strangest thing happened.”

“What was that?”

“A cricket landed on my leg. They can’t bite through our skin, so they don’t usually bother us. I looked up what they symbolize, and they are the bearers of happiness and love in your life.”

Dr. Miller wore a huge smile on her face as she nodded.

“Yes, that’s so true. Drue, you are a good man who’s suffered unimaginable trauma. Many people would’ve used that as an excuse to say, and excuse my French, fuck the world. But you’re doing the work needed to handle your trauma properly, and I believe your happily ever after will come.”

“Thank you. I know a relationship between Siyanna and I is taboo, but I truly believe we would be happy together.”

“Something being taboo is a matter of opinion. Let me tell you this. If Drae and Summer were alive and you came in here telling me you were in love with your sister-in-law, this session would be going a lot differently. However, they’re not, and as unfortunate as that is, it’s your reality.”

“She thinks the reason we developed feelings for each other is because of our lack of interaction with the outside world for the past year.”

“There could be something to that. You’re familiar with each other, have a shared trauma, have spent an enormous amount of time together, and two little angels think of you as mommy and daddy. As unexpected as your confession was, I wasn’t at all surprised.”

“You agree with her?”

“I don’t agree or disagree. I believe your feelings are genuine; Siyanna’s too. What you must understand is mentally, you’re in a different space than Siyanna. You’re not fighting your feelings for her anymore, and you no longer feel guilty or ashamed. You’re ready to jump right into this, but she’s still at square one.”

“What should I do?”

“The only thing you can do...wait. Don’t try to force it because you’ll push her away. Keep being who she fell in love with, and she’ll eventually come around.”

AFTER DINNER LATER THAT EVENING, Siyanna cleaned the kitchen while Drue handled the boys and their nightly routine. Since she decided to wean them from her breasts, she knew bedtime would be hard for the three of them and was grateful Drue stepped in.

As she swept the floor, Drue returned to the kitchen and snaked his arms around her waist, then kissed her neck. Dr. Miller advised him not to force anything on Siyanna, and he planned to take her advice, but it was a challenge keeping his hands to himself.

Siyanna stopped sweeping to enjoy a moment of closeness with Drue. The past few days, there had been some tension between them, and she didn’t like it. He’d been spending a lot

of time in his office, coming out only to spend some time with the boys, cook a meal, and eat.

“What was that for?” she asked since he’d been keeping his distance.

“I need a reason?”

“I mean—I thought—I guess not.”

He chuckled as he released her and took the broom from her hand.

“I’ll finish in here,” he told her. “Go chill and find a movie.”

She looked at him suspiciously but did what she was told. When Drue came into the family room about fifteen minutes later, Siyanna had *Belly* cued and ready to start. He tossed her a bottle of water and opened a beer for himself as he made himself comfortable in the recliner.

“You’re sitting over there?” she asked.

“Yeah,” was all he said in reply.

Drue could feel her eyes on him and knew she wanted to comment, but instead, she started the movie. He’d always thought *Belly* didn’t get enough praise. In his opinion, everything about the movie, from the cinematography to the message, and yes, even the acting was superb. The sex scenes had his dick hard and caused him to shift in his seat, but he’d have to take a cold shower or beat his meat to relieve himself.

Siyanna was on the couch, suffering in silence as well. The crotch of her panties was soaked as she squeezed her thighs together in an attempt to relieve the pressure. Drue noticed how antsy she was and would have loved to go over and help her out, but he was committed to his decision not to force it.

When the movie ended, Siyanna turned off the television and stood. As she fanned the blanket in the air preparing to fold it, Drue got a whiff of her scent, and her pheromones were screaming his name. After she folded the blanket, she lifted her arms to stretch, exposing her stomach. The shorts she wore

covered very little, and of course, Drue's eyes zeroed in on her prominent camel toe that was on full display.

“Shit! I’m going to bed.”

Drue shot up from the recliner and made a beeline for the stairs, not waiting to see if Siyanna was behind him but hopeful she might follow him to his bedroom. He could only stand so much, and he was at his limit for the night.

December

The next two months dragged by, with Drue and Siyanna tiptoeing around each other. He was happy she didn't go back to avoiding him, and she refused to admit the disappointment she felt that he'd distanced himself, at least sexually, anyway. They continued to take care of the boys and each other but kept things on a friendly level which had Siyanna questioning if that was what she wanted.

She'd given Drue her blessing to move forward with his new book. Since then, the words flowed effortlessly onto the pages. He'd planned to send the first draft to his publisher in the next few days, but he wanted Siyanna to read it first.

Siyanna hadn't told Drue, but she'd been working with a commercial real estate agent to find the perfect building for the boutique. She hadn't seen anything that spoke to her yet but was hoping that would change today.

"Drue, I'll be gone for a couple of hours. Will you be good with the boys?" she asked when she found him in the kitchen.

"You ask me that every time you leave and when you get back, they're still alive. Where have you been going anyway? You looking for a job or something?"

"No. I'll see you when I get back," she told him, dismissing his questions.

Drue grabbed her by the wrist before she could get too far away. His touch caused her to shiver, and she hoped he didn't notice.

"Wait, Si. I asked you a question."

She turned to face him, and his hands ended up on her waist. Her weak attempt at avoiding his eyes failed when he slipped his index finger under her chin and lifted her head.

"What's been up with you? For the past couple of weeks, you've been dipping out a few times a week for a couple of hours. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad you're getting out more, but would it hurt for you to tell me where you're going?"

"I didn't want to tell you until things were more solidified," she admitted.

Drue frowned because the first thing that came to his head pissed him off.

"Is this about that nigga Ethan? Y'all made it official or some shit?"

"Ethan? No, we haven't made anything official."

"Then who are you sneaking off to see all the time?"

"I'm looking for a building for the boutique."

His eyes widened in surprise while his hands continued to rest on her waist. He pulled her body to his, then into an embrace.

"That's great to hear, Si. Why would you keep that from me?"

When they were face to face again, Siyanna was hesitant to tell him why she hadn't shared it with him. As soon as she tried to look away, he cupped her chin and stopped her from doing so.

"What's up, Si?"

She moved his hand away from her face so she could talk.

"I didn't want to say anything and get you all excited just in case I chickened out. I wanted to at least have a few places

in mind before I said anything.”

“It’s not going well?”

“I wouldn’t say that. I just haven’t fallen in love with anything yet.”

“Who’s your realtor? Have you explained to them in detail what you’re looking for?”

“Ethan referred her and—”

As soon as he heard Ethan’s name, he released the hold he had on her, then turned and walked away.

“What’s wrong?”

“How the fuck that nigga know your plans, but you ain’t told me?”

Siyanna looked at him with confusion written all over her face. She didn’t understand why he was so upset.

“Since when do I have to tell you everything?”

“Nobody said you had to tell me everything, but this is huge, and I thought you would want my help.”

“I do want your help, Drue. I planned to have you help me decide when I’d narrowed it down to a few locations.”

“It’s cool, Si. Let me know when you need my help. I’ll see you when you get back.”

He kissed her forehead before leaving her in the kitchen, baffled about the entire exchange. She didn’t have time to figure it out, so she grabbed her keys from the hook and left, hoping Drue would be in a better mood by the time she returned.

Twenty minutes later, Siyanna arrived at the first of the three locations she’d be looking at that day. The realtor that Ethan had connected her with, Audrey, was walking up to the building as Siyanna pulled in next to her car. She waited for Siyanna before going inside.

As Siyanna approached the entrance, she knew right away she wouldn’t choose that location. *Passion 4 Fashion* would

be an upscale boutique, and the site was in a plaza with a Little Caesar's Pizza on one side and a laundromat on the other.

"Good Afternoon, Siyanna."

"Hey, Audrey. Good to see you again."

"You too. I'm hoping you'll see something you like today."

Siyanna entered behind Audrey with an open mind. Audrey remained near the door while Siyanna walked further inside. The space itself wasn't horrible, but it was smaller than she preferred. There was carpet on the floor that would need to be removed and replaced. She gasped when she entered the bathroom because it would need to be completely gutted. Without taking the time to look any further, she headed back toward the entrance.

"You don't like it?" Audrey asked as if she didn't know the place wouldn't fit the bill.

"No, it's not quite what I'm looking for. I'll meet you at the next location."

As Siyanna walked past Audrey to exit, she could have sworn she saw Audrey's lips curl into a smirk. Not letting it weigh too heavily on her mind, she continued to her car.

On her way to location number two, Dani's name popped up on her dashboard screen. She pressed the button on her steering wheel and connected the call.

"Hey, Si! What are you up to?"

Siyanna released a frustrated groan. "I'm out with Audrey looking at locations for the boutique."

"Doesn't sound like it's going well."

"We've only looked at one place today, and I'm headed to the second place now. I am a tad bit annoyed, though."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It's been a few weeks, and she's probably shown me twelve places. Not one of them has been anything like what I told her I was looking for."

“Really? Are you being picky, or is she that far off?”

“The place I just left was in a plaza between a Little Caesar’s and a laundromat.”

“Oh, umm, okay. How’d it look on the inside?”

“Like it was between a Little Caesar’s and a laundromat. The boutique is supposed to be upscale, and most of my target market wouldn’t even come to that area.”

“How have all the other places looked?”

“Some were better than this one but not much. Then, just now, when we were leaving, I swear that heffa smiled when I told her I didn’t like it.”

“What? That doesn’t make any sense. This has the potential to make her a nice chunk of change. I would think she’d be bending over backward trying to find the perfect place.”

“Yeah, well, that’s not happening. I’m here, though. I’ll call you on my way home. I gotta tell you about Drue’s crazy ass.”

“Uh oh! Okay. Later.”

Siyanna ended the call with Dani and checked her surroundings. The location was better than the one they’d just left, so she was feeling hopeful. Exiting the car, she met Audrey at the entrance. This space was also in a plaza with what looked to be medical offices.

“I think you’ll like this one,” Audrey said as she opened the door.

Stepping inside, Siyanna wanted to backhand Audrey. She walked into what looked like a small warehouse, and it was like they left one extreme and had arrived at the next. There was no way she could use the space in which they were currently standing.

“What exactly did you think I’d like about this one?” Siyanna asked without turning to face her.

“The size and the location.”

Siyanna walked further inside, not to get a better look at the place because she knew she didn't want it, but to get away from Audrey.

"The location is okay, but this space...Audrey, do you remember my requirements?"

"Of course, I—"

Siyanna turned to face her. "Nothing you've shown me is even close to what I'm looking for," Siyanna interrupted.

"And you may not find exactly what you're looking for. I'm showing you what's available. It's not my fault—"

"You know what? You can scratch that last showing. I'll let you know if I still need your services."

"Hold on a sec. I told Ethan I'd help you, so that's what I plan to do."

"I'll let him know it didn't work out." She would have walked out, but Audrey was standing in front of the door. "Excuse me," said Siyanna.

Audrey folded her arms across her chest and adjusted all her weight to one leg.

"What's going on between you and Ethan?"

Confused, Siyanna replied, "How is that your business?"

"Because before you came into the picture, we were friends with some very nice benefits. Now, all of a sudden, he puts me on ice and all he talks about is you. I only agreed to help you because of who he is to me."

It all made sense now. Ethan connected her with one of his fuck buddies, and her jealousy caused her to slack on her job.

"Real estate agents are a dime a dozen in Vegas, sweetheart, so I didn't need you or Ethan to do many any favors. Audrey, I'm not a violent person, but if you don't get your desperate ass out of my way so I can leave, that's going to change."

Audrey looked Siyanna up and down, debating on whether or not she wanted to test her. Being a petite woman, she

decided against it, then moved out of Siyanna's way.

"Ethan always finds his way back to my bed, so whatever you two got going on, it won't last long," Audrey said to Siyanna's back.

Never in her life had Siyanna ever fought over a man, and today wouldn't be the day she started, especially for a man who wasn't hers. But admittedly, she wanted to go back and slap the taste out of Audrey's mouth for wasting her time these past few weeks.

Once she was in her car, she called Ethan. When he picked up, she didn't give him a chance to greet her.

"I can't believe you, Ethan."

"Well, hello to you too, beautiful."

"Don't try to charm your way back to my good side. Why the hell did you connect me with your fuck buddy? For the past three weeks, she's been showing me these whack-ass locations, wasting my damn time."

"Slow down, Siyanna. What are you talking about?"

"Oh, you wanna play dumb now? Audrey's crazy ass thinks we're screwing and made sure to let me know you always find your way back to her. Why would you refer me to her?"

Ethan laughed on the other end of the line. "I'm sorry, Siyanna. I didn't think referring her would be a problem since you and I are only friends and not sleeping together. Although, anytime you want to change that, let me—"

"Seriously? The slim chance you might have had has gotten even slimmer."

"But there's still a chance?"

"Ethan! I'm pissed off right now, and you're joking around. Maybe you should lose my number because—"

"Okay, okay, okay. My bad. I'm done playing with you, and I apologize for Audrey's lack of professionalism. I'll talk to her and—"

“Don’t talk to her on my behalf. I’m done with that hoe. I’ll find my own realtor.”

“I’m sorry, Siyanna. I didn’t think she would play with her money like that. We haven’t slept together in a few months because I’ve been trying to get serious about finding my future wife. I explained all of that to her before you were even in the picture.”

“Well, somehow she thinks I’m the reason you won’t give her the dick. I don’t care anymore, but don’t bring her ass around me.”

“You forgive me? I don’t think I’ll make it through the day knowing you’re upset.”

“Whatever, Ethan. I forgive you, though.”

“Does that mean you’ll let me take you to dinner?”

Siyanna sighed. Since she and Ethan decided to keep things platonic, they’d seen each other a couple of times outside of Siyanna getting her hair done. Each time, Drue thought she was out with Dani because she didn’t want to cause more tension between them.

“I guess. Let me check my schedule, and I’ll let you know. Since I have to find another realtor and start my search from scratch, I may be too busy.”

“Laying it on thick, I see. I understand, and again, I apologize.”

“Mmm-hmm. I’ll talk to you later.”

Ending the call, she shook her head in frustration. The whole ride home, she dreaded telling Drue the outcome of the day’s search. After the way he blew up earlier, she knew there would be an ‘I told you so’ moment.

She made it home and found Drue in the family room with the boys. They were so engrossed in watching Blaze and the Monster Machines, they barely acknowledged her when she kissed their chubby cheeks.

“Hey,” she said to Drue, who was typing away on his laptop.

He looked up at her as if he had just noticed her. “Hey. You weren’t gone very long. How’d it go?”

She sat next to him on the couch, close enough that their shoulders touched.

“Not good. I fired her.”

“You fired the realtor?” Siyanna nodded. “Did something happen, or was she that bad?”

“Both. None of the places she showed me was anything close to what I was looking for. She did that shit on purpose.”

“I’m confused, Si. Break it down.”

“Apparently, her and umm...her and Ethan got something going on, and—”

“Stop. I don’t need to hear anymore. Your new boyfriend referred you to—”

“He’s not my boyfriend, Drue.”

“That nigga wants to be. He referred you to a realtor that he’s fucking? What kinda lame ass shit is that?”

“They’re friends with benefits, but he said—”

“Whatever he told you is a lie, Si. I don’t even wanna hear it. So, this woman was sabotaging your search. Is that what you were about to tell me?”

“Pretty much.”

“Hmm. That’s too bad.”

He went back to typing on his laptop. She watched him for a moment before saying, “I know you want to say I told you so. Just say it.”

“I don’t want to say anything. You live, and you learn. If you need my help, let me know.”

“That’s all you have to say?”

“What more is there to say?”

He paused from typing briefly and looked at her, waiting for her to reply.

“Nothing, I guess. I’m going to change.”

Siyanna got up and kissed the boys again before leaving the family room. Before she got too far away, he said loud enough for her to hear, “That’s what you get for trusting some nigga that wasn’t me with your plans. Bet your ass won’t do that shit again.”

“I knew he wasn’t going to let it go,” she whispered.

*L*ater that evening, after the boys were asleep, Drue went in search of Siyanna. He was ready for her to read his manuscript and hoped she was open to it. As he approached her bedroom door, he overheard her talking on the phone with Dani on speaker.

“Girl, I couldn’t believe that shit when she said it. Ethan must have some good dick if she’s settling for the scraps he’s offering and then have the nerve to try to check me about him.”

“Well, if you hadn’t friend-zoned him, you might know what that dick do, but you’re in love with Drue, so that wouldn’t be right,” Dani teased.

Drue knew he shouldn’t have been eavesdropping, but after hearing what Dani said, he had to hear Siyanna’s response.

“Don’t remind me. As hard as I’m trying to ignore my feelings for him, they seem to get stronger by the day. And what his dick does is no mystery to me, so my ass over here in heat, struggling, trying not to attack him whenever we’re in the same room.”

Dani laughed. “I can’t even feel bad for you because that’s your own doing.”

“I know, but I—”

She stopped talking when Drue knocked on the door.

“Let me call you tomorrow. Drue’s at my door.”

“Okay. Maybe you can slip and fall on his dick before the night is over. Later.”

She hung up before Siyanna could respond.

“Come in,” Siyanna shouted toward her bedroom door.

“You busy?” Drue asked when he entered, his eyes roaming over her body.

Siyanna had on a thin white T-shirt and a pair of short, loose-fitting shorts. It didn’t matter what she wore, she always looked good to Drue.

Just as he was checking her out, Siyanna allowed her eyes to roam Drue’s body. He’d just gotten out of the shower and only wore a pair of basketball shorts, and his chest glistened from the body moisturizer he used. She had to tell her pussy to behave.

“Not really. I was just updating Dani on what happened today.”

“She knew you were looking for a spot too?”

“Oh my God, Drue. Yes, I told Dani. Why are you making such a big deal about this? I explained to you why I didn’t tell you right away.”

“It’s cool, Si. I didn’t come here to argue. Would you do me the honor of reading my manuscript before I send it to Patrick?”

“You want *me* to read it?”

“That’s what I said. I’d like to know what you think.”

“Oh...okay. I’d love to.”

Drue walked over to the bed sat down next to Siyanna. After opening his laptop and navigating to the document, he handed it to her.

“You don’t have to read it all tonight, but I’d like to send it to Patrick by tomorrow evening.”

“Okay.”

“Thank you.”

He leaned into her and kissed her forehead before leaving her room then closing the door behind him. On his way to the family room, the doorbell rang. He wasn't expecting guests, and since Siyanna hadn't mentioned anything, he assumed she wasn't either.

Cautiously, he opened the door and was confused when he saw an unfamiliar man on the other side. He was holding a bouquet of roses and a bottle of wine.

"Can I help you?" Drue asked.

"Shit. I think I may be at the wrong house."

The man stepped back to get a better look at the house.

"Who are you looking for?"

"Does Siyanna live here?" the man asked.

"Who wants to know?" Drue questioned.

"Ethan. Ethan Denning. Does she live here or not, bruh?"

"Drue, who's at the door?" Siyanna asked on her way down the stairs before he could lie to Ethan about her residence.

"It's for you," Drue said before walking away, leaving the door open.

"For me? I'm not—Ethan? What are you doing here?"

"Who is that?" Ethan replied, ignoring her question.

"Don't worry about who I am, nigga," Drue yelled from the kitchen.

"Drue, please! Why are you here, Ethan?"

"I wanted to apologize in person, so I thought I'd surprise you with some roses and a bottle of wine. But, I see you have company, so—"

"Naw, nigga, you're company. This my damn house," Drue shouted as he continued to linger in the kitchen.

"Drue! Will you please be quiet? Ethan, I'm sorry. This isn't a good time. Can we meet for lunch tomorrow?"

“I need to check my schedule to see if it’ll work around my appointments. But umm, take the flowers and the wine.”

Ethan extended his arms, and Siyanna took the roses and wine from him.

“Thank you. Send me a text with your availability for tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” Ethan responded dismissively.

Siyanna didn’t close the door until Ethan had driven away, not because she was concerned for his safety, but because she didn’t want to face Drue. She finally shut the door and leaned her back against it, closing her eyes and releasing a deep breath.

“Make sure you lock up,” Drue said on his way up the stairs, startling her.

“Wait, Drue. I didn’t invite him here.”

“Okay. I’ll see you in the morning,” he said without turning to face her.

Siyanna thought Drue was pissed at her, and he may have been if he hadn’t overheard her talking to Dani. Knowing she put Ethan in the friendzone and hadn’t had sex with him gave Drue some comfort. What pissed him off was Ethan’s audacity to pop up at their home uninvited.

Instead of dwelling on Drue’s attitude, Siyanna put the wine on the table next to the door then secured the house. In the kitchen, she found a vase, filled it with water, then carefully placed the roses inside. After grabbing a wine glass, she retrieved the bottle from the table and returned to her room.

As Siyanna read Drue’s manuscript, there were moments in which she cried uncontrollably, laughed hysterically, and grinned from ear to ear. The sex scenes caused her pussy to pulse, her nipples to harden, and her body temperature to rise.

She couldn’t find the proper words to describe the beauty he’d written on those pages, even if some of it was painful to read. Each word filled her with hope for what the future held.

By the time she finished reading, the wine was gone, and so were her reservations about what seemed to be inevitable. Drue wrote the perfect happy ending to their tragic story.

A little more than tipsy, Siyanna crept out of her room and into Drue's. The television was on, but he was asleep. Lying on his back with one arm resting on his stomach and the other folded above his head, he looked at peace.

Siyanna's eyes traveled down to his waist, where the sheet began, then zeroed in on the enormous dick print. Her pussy did a cartwheel as she thought about the things he could do with it. Walking to the foot of the bed, she stripped out of her clothes and was hit by the scent of her arousal.

Slowly, she lifted the bottom of the sheet then crawled underneath it. It didn't take long for her to be face to face with what she was looking for. Her mouth began to water as she took Drue's dick in her hand. He stirred briefly, adjusting his legs, causing Siyanna to freeze momentarily.

Once she thought it was safe, she leaned forward and ran her tongue along the length of his semihard dick. It didn't take long for it to stiffen even more, and as soon as it did, Siyanna took as much of him as she could in her mouth.

As she bobbed her head, Drue began to lift his hips up and down in a deliberate motion. His hands gripped Siyanna's head at the same time she heard him groan.

“Fuck, Si! Suck that shit,” he growled.

The encouragement he offered turned her on, and she did her best to fit his whole length in her mouth. The head tapped her tonsils, causing her to gag, but Drue was too lost in pleasure to care. He was about to blow, and that was all he could focus on. Siyanna hung in there, though. The extra spit from her gagging gave exactly what it needed to give, and before she could prepare, Drue shot his kids down her throat.

“Bring your ass up here,” he demanded.

Without a second of hesitation, Siyanna crawled up Drue's body, and he grabbed her by the waist and slammed her down on his dick.

“Umm, shit!”

“Fuck!”

The feeling overwhelmed them. Drue kept his hands on her sides, and she was unable to move. When their eyes connected, he asked, “Why are you here, Si?”

She looked away because his gaze was too intense.

“Naw, baby. Look at me. Tell me why you’re here.”

Her eyes made their way back to his, and the longing in his was apparent.

“I don’t want to fight it,” she finally whispered.

“Fight what?”

“This. You. Us. My heart was conflicted, but I can’t deny I’m in love with you, and I don’t want to fight it anymore.”

It felt like he’d been waiting all his life to hear her say those words. He sat up and covered the back of her neck with the palm of his hand, bringing her face to his. When his mouth connected with hers, they tongued each other down as if they needed one another to breathe. Siyanna began to rotate her hips while Drue held her with his free hand, trying to control the pace. Although they had sex before, something about that moment felt different, and he wanted the feeling to last forever.

Siyanna felt it too, and it was so overwhelming it brought tears to her eyes. When they fell down her face, Drue could feel the moisture seeping between their faces, and it caused him to tear his mouth away from hers.

“Baby, why are you crying?”

“Because...”

She tried to bury her face in the groove of his neck, but Drue wouldn’t let her.

“Tell me why you’re crying, Si. Am I hurting you? Is it too deep?”

She shook her head.

“This feels so good. I’ve never felt anything like it, and my emotions are all over the place.”

“This dick bringing you to tears, baby?” She locked her legs underneath his, held onto his shoulders, then let her head fall back. “That’s it, ride yo dick.”

Drue’s hands returned to Siyanna’s hips as he enjoyed the view. Her sex faces turned him on, and he had to close his eyes to gain control of the nut that was brewing.

“Drue, baaabbyyy, I’m cummin’!”

“This pussy choking the shit outta my dick. You gon’ make me bust.”

“Mm,” she moaned.

“You want me to cum with you, Si?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“Shit! Fuck! Got dammit, this pussy is—aargh!”

Drue’s release was timed perfectly, and his hot semen collided with Siyanna’s sticky juices. Their breaths were in sync as they used the strength of one another to remain upright.

“That was—” Drue began.

“Everything,” Siyanna completed his thought.

A few minutes passed before they repositioned themselves to lay on the bed. Their bodies were sweaty, and they didn’t bother cleaning up the mess between them. Siyanna laid on her side and rested her head on Drue’s chest, throwing her top leg over his.

“Siyanna, are we doing this?”

She felt like she could count on one hand the number of times Drue had called her by her full name since the day they met. He only did that when he was serious about something or trying to prove a point.

“Yes.”

“Are you sure? Because—”

“I’m positive. I decided to follow my heart, and it leads me to you.”

“That’s it?”

“Fighting my feelings was exhausting. Then, after reading your book...”

Siyanna’s words faded as she got her thoughts together.

“After reading my book, what?”

“I was able to see things for what they are. Before, a part of me wondered if I was just a replacement for Summer. I was a witness to your love for her, and I questioned if you could love me the same way.”

“I couldn’t love you the same way if I tried. You have to understand that this isn’t a competition. You speak to my heart in ways that Summer didn’t, and that’s why I fell in love with you. If I hadn’t lost Summer, loving you this way wouldn’t even be an option. The only love I would’ve entertained with you would’ve been strictly a platonic, brother/sister love. I wouldn’t have allowed my mind to venture anywhere beyond that because I only had eyes for my wife.”

“I understand what you mean because I feel the same way. I loved Drae with everything in me, and he still has a huge piece of my heart. But the way I loved him, the reasons I loved him, are not the same for you. Yes, there are some basic qualities that I require of a man that you both embody, but I fell for you because of who you are to me and for me.”

“So, you’re all in?”

“I’m all in.”

Since Christmas was approaching, and some of Drue's family would be in town visiting from Chicago, they decided to wait until then to tell everyone they were a couple. In the weeks prior, they privately enjoyed the new level of their relationship.

Siyanna didn't think the sex between them could get any better, but as soon as Drue knew she was all in with him, he elevated his sex game to new heights. It wasn't abnormal for them to have sex three or four times a day. Morning sex was Siyanna's absolute favorite. She couldn't think of a better way to wake up than with Drue's head between her legs or him slipping into her from behind.

They openly expressed their love in front of the boys, and although they were only a little over a year old, it seemed as if they could tell that something had changed. Dylan didn't hide the fact that he didn't like when Drue was affectionate with Siyanna. If he happened to see them, he didn't waste any time trying to move Drue away from her.

Dash, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy the love between his parents. When Drue and Siyanna were seated on the couch or floor next to each other, he'd use his tiny hands to bring them together and force them to kiss. As soon as they did it, he'd giggle himself into exhaustion.

The only person aware of the developments in their relationship was Dani. Siyanna didn't waste any time sharing the news with her, and Dani was excited for her friend.

Drue sent his manuscript over to the publishing company. After Patrick read it, he was in awe and assured Drue it would be another bestseller. Once Patrick handed it off to his bosses, he didn't contact Drue until over a week later, and Drue wasn't happy with what he had to say.

When Drue sent the manuscript to Patrick, he told him it was loosely based on his life, but he didn't want to package it as an autobiography. Drue wanted the book to be classified as fiction under the genre of Black Romance. Although he was a very successful, well-known author, he managed to keep a low profile and his private life private.

Patrick didn't think the powers that be would go for it once they read it, and he was right. The project was at a standstill because they couldn't come to an agreement, which basically meant Drue wouldn't give in to their demands.

Siyanna continued her search for a location for the boutique, this time with the help of Drue. He talked her out of hiring another realtor, convincing her that he had her covered. The first few places they visited had her looking at him sideways. However, she didn't panic, and now she had three possible spaces.

“Are the boys ready?” Drue asked as he entered their room.

“Almost. Dash took a shit, and it came out of his diaper. I had to bathe him again, and Dylan fell asleep, or I would've had to tie him down while I cleaned Dash up,” Siyanna updated him.

“My bad, baby. I didn't mean to be gone that long. The restaurant was packed, Dani was late, there was an accident, and traffic was backed up.”

“It's cool, Si. I can handle my kids alone.”

Drue kissed her forehead before heading over to Dylan's crib. He expected to find him sleeping but was surprised that he was lying there with his eyes open.

“What's up, son? You over here pretending like you sleep? You got an attitude or something?”

Drue and Siyanna always spoke to the boys as if they were tiny adults, never using baby talk. Dylan shook his head from side to side, answering his father like he understood every word that was said. When he stood to his feet, Drue lifted him out of the crib and carried him across the room.

“You know Ma has everything she needs at her place. She should be here any minute. Let’s go downstairs.”

Siyanna lifted Dash from the changing table and adjusted him on her hip.

“Why are you in such a rush to get rid of my babies?” she questioned him.

“Because we haven’t been alone since you stopped playing with my emotions.”

“And? That hasn’t stopped you from trying to rearrange my insides every chance you get.”

They’d made it downstairs to the family room and put the boys on the floor with their toys.

“You damn right, but there’s something about having the house to ourselves that’s gon’ take that pussy to the next level.”

He grabbed her by the waist and pulled her close, burying his face in her neck.

“I got some things I want to do to you that’s gon’ make you scream like never before,” he mumbled with his lips brushing against her skin.

“Should I be scared?”

“Maybe,” he replied before leaving a kiss then releasing her.

The thought of what Drue had planned for her caused Siyanna’s imagination to take over, but the doorbell pulled her out of her thoughts.

“Ma’s here,” Drue damn near sang as he hurried to answer the door. “Why didn’t you use your key, woman?”

“Because this ain’t my house, and that key is for emergencies only. Plus, I ain’t trying to walk in on something I ain’t ready for,” Cherie said.

Siyanna was still in the family room but could hear what was said. She could have passed out from Cherie’s last comment. *Did she know something?*

“What are you talking about, Ma? Ain’t nothing going on here. You can use the key any time you want,” Drue quickly said.

“Yeah, okay. Are my grandboys ready? We got big plans this weekend,” Cherie shared with excitement.

Drue laughed as he led her to the family room. “Exactly what kinda big plans you got with two one-year-olds?”

“Mind your business, son. This is between me and my grandbabies. Hey, Si-Si.”

“Hey, Mama.”

The women hugged and kissed each other’s cheeks.

“Your mood has gotten better each time I pick them up,” Cherie teased.

“I know, I know. I’ve been praying about it, and God is good. They gotta grow up some time, right?”

Siyanna tried to keep her tone cheerful, but as she spoke, her voice trembled.

“Oh, damn. Let me get these boys outta here before you get emotional on me.”

Dylan and Dash were so engrossed in playing with their toys, they hadn’t noticed their grandmother come in. When she got their attention by calling their names, the boys dropped what they had in their hands and quickly waddled in her direction with excitement. Cherie kneeled to their level and opened her arms, embracing them tightly when they reached her.

“You guys ready to party like some rock stars with Nana? We’re about to get junk food wasted all weekend,” she

promised the boys.

Dylan and Dash probably didn't understand what Cherie said, but they acted as if they did.

"You're really gonna pump them with sugar and take them off their sleep schedule, then drop them back off to us on Sunday?"

"I sure am, dear daughter, and we're gonna have a ball." Siyanna didn't bother arguing with Cherie, but she shook her head in response to her grand plans with the boys. "Si-Si, have you slowed down on your workouts? Your face is looking full."

"Umm, no. Not really. I probably need to change them up some."

"It looks good on you. You're looking more like the Siyanna Drae fell in love with."

Hearing Cherie's words caused a pang in her chest. It was like she took a knife and stabbed Siyanna in her heart, then twisted it. It felt real enough for Siyanna's hand to shoot up to her chest as she attempted to massage away the pain.

"You good, Si?" Drue asked when he noticed her skin was a bit pale.

Siyanna took a moment to gather her thoughts and clear her mind before saying, "I'm fine."

Fortunately, Cherie was occupied by the boys and didn't notice anything. Once the boys had their jackets on, everyone exited the family room and went to the front door. Siyanna picked up Dylan and kissed him all over his cheeks, then passed him to Drue before picking up Dash and repeating the same actions. Cherie took Dash from her arms, and the four of them went to her car while Siyanna remained in the house.

"Make sure they have their favorite stuffed animals," Siyanna said before they closed the door.

"We got 'em," Drue told her.

A few minutes later, he came back inside and found Siyanna staring in the mirror they had in the hallway. She

rubbed her cheeks, then turned to each side, taking in her profile.

“What are you doing?” he asked her.

“Does it look like I’ve gained weight? I don’t think I have but—”

“You look fine, Si. Why are you letting what Ma said get to you?”

“Because I like my new look. Does my face look chubby to you?”

“No, baby. Maybe the short hair makes her think your face is fuller.”

“What about my body? Does it look like I’ve gained weight?”

“Not at all, but so what if you have? It doesn’t matter to me.”

He stepped behind her, wrapped his arms around her waist, then rested his chin on her shoulder. They admired their reflection in the mirror for a moment.

“You’re beautiful and perfect, baby. I never thought you were one to stress about your weight. You and Summer were always very confident with your bodies. What’s up?”

“Nothing. I was just kinda surprised by what she said.”

Drue kissed her neck while his hands eased into her leggings.

“Forget everything she said.” He kissed her neck again. “We’re alone.” Another kiss. “With no kids until Sunday.”

Siyanna relaxed in his arms, reaching up to grab the back of his neck. As Drue’s tongue made continued contact with her skin, her pussy juices were summoned, allowing his fingers to slip right inside.

“I’m gon’ make you cum right here before I eat your pussy from the back.”

“Mm,” she moaned.

“Look at your sex faces in the mirror, baby. My fingers make you feel good?” he asked as he dipped in and out of her wet hole.

Siyanna nodded because she was too focused on the trembling building in her stomach to respond verbally. Drue’s tongue worked its magic, hitting all the right spots on her neck. It didn’t take long for his hand to be covered in her essence.

He slowly removed his hand from her leggings, putting his fingers directly in his mouth. Siyanna was trying to catch her breath, but Drue didn’t care. He wanted to drink from her fountain.

“Take those pants off and put your hands on the wall.”

Without objection, she did as he said even though her legs were weak. Siyanna couldn’t see him, and the moment she felt Drue’s tongue on her pussy, her legs damn near gave out.

“Oh shit,” she panted, wishing there was something she could hold onto for support.

He showed her no mercy, and it was only the beginning of what he had planned for the weekend. Before they made it to the bedroom they now shared, Drue made her cum a total of four times.

“ARE you seriously trying to stay in bed the whole weekend?” Siyanna asked after they’d both come down from an orgasm high.

As she laid naked in his arms, she couldn’t remember how many rounds they’d gone.

“You got a better idea?”

“I wouldn’t say it was a *better* idea, but I was thinking maybe we can have our friends over.”

“You have one friend, and you know Dani’s always welcome. But does it have to be this weekend?”

“It’s gonna be nice out tomorrow. I was thinking you could barbecue, I could make some sides, and we could invite people over.”

“Are you trying to play matchmaker or something? Because you know my friends ain’t shit when it comes to women. I don’t even want to set Dani up like that.”

“If I were trying to set her up, Dani’s a big girl and can handle it. Anyway, she’s not looking for anything serious. I think it would be fun.”

Drue thought about it for a few minutes, and he honestly didn’t want to share her this weekend.

“You know if we have people over, I have to pretend like your pussy ain’t mine. I don’t know if I can do that.”

“Oh my God, Drue. It’s not like I’m gon’ bust it wide open while company is here. You’re being silly.”

“Fine. If you want to do something, it’s cool. But our friends may find out we’re more than friends before our family knows, and I’m okay with that.”

“You can’t keep your hands to yourself for a few hours, Drue? Besides, my pussy needs a break.”

“A break? Already?”

Siyanna was already wrapped in his arms, so Drue shifted her on top of him. She spread her legs, straddling him before sitting up and looking down at him. He kept his hands locked on her waist, resisting the urge to caress her full breasts while she rubbed his bare chest.

“Drue, we’ve been at it since Mama left with the boys. At some point, she needs to recover.”

“Have I been too rough?” he asked, concerned.

“Not at all.”

“Good. I’ll let your pussy rest, but there are plenty of other things we can do.”

She raised her brow. “Like what?”

Just the thought of what he was about to do to Siyanna caused his dick to stiffen underneath her. Her eyes widened when she felt his nature come alive.

“Sit on my face,” he demanded.

She did as he asked, using the headboard to brace herself. Drue didn’t give her time to prepare and immediately covered her pussy with his mouth.

“Ooh, damn.”

His tongue dipped in between her folds, leaving nothing untouched. He used one hand to grip her ass cheeks, lifting her enough to swipe his tongue up her ass crack. With his free hand, he used his fingers to apply the perfect amount of pressure to her clit. The feeling was sensational, and her center responded by covering his face with her juices.

“Get on all fours and toot that ass up,” he commanded, smacking it for emphasis.

Siyanna was weak from her orgasm, but she followed his command. She felt his tongue playing with her asshole, and then his hand cupped her pussy. His fingers plunged in and out of her soaked walls, then slipped up and around her asshole.

After ensuring his point of penetration was lubricated, Drue gently pressed his thumb inside. He felt Siyanna become tense when she realized what he was doing.

“Relax, baby. I promise it’ll feel good.”

“But Drue, I’ve never—”

“I know, Si. I gotchu. Now, relax.”

She took several deep breaths and relaxed. As he slid his thumb into a place no one’s ever been, with his free hand, Drue reached around her body and used his index and middle finger to massage her clit. The shit felt better than good, it felt amazing, but Siyanna knew his dick was much bigger than his thumb.

Before entering this sacred place with his manhood, he used her nectar to wet his dick, sliding his hand up and down

his entire length. Once it was good and slick, he removed his thumb and pressed the head of his dick against her asshole.

“Relax, Si, but if it’s too painful, let me know, and I’ll stop.”

“Okay,” she replied nervously.

He entered centimeter by centimeter until his head was fully covered.

“You good?” Siyanna nodded. “Naw, baby. I need to hear it.”

“I’m good, Drue. Keep going.”

He continued to press his way into her untouched haven, and when he was halfway in, he gripped her shoulder and pulled her back against his chest. Firmly, he enclosed his hand around the front of her neck and leaned into her ear.

“Tell me how it feels,” he whispered before licking her earlobe.

“I like it.”

Drue licked and sucked from her shoulder blade to her neck, along her jawbone, up to her cheek, before ending at her ears. At the same time, he stroked her asshole with slow and measured movements while squeezing her neck and massaging her nub.

“Oh my God, Drue!”

“You don’t love it, Si?”

“Mm, yes! I love it, baby.”

Siyanna couldn’t understand what was going on with her body. The buzzing, vibrating, trembling, and shaking she was doing made her vision blurry and her mouth dry.

“Drue—I—what—oh my—I can’t—my God, I’m about to—Drueeee!”

Siyanna’s asshole was tight, and Drue knew he wouldn’t be able to hold onto his nut for very long. He was grateful her release came quickly because he exploded into her hole

seconds after her. Unable to remain upright any longer, they collapsed on the bed.

Girl, I can't believe you've never had anal sex. The orgasm from that double penetration will have you watering grass in the rain," Dani said.

It was early the following morning and Drue was already up getting the grill ready and ensuring the yard was presentable. Siyanna was already up and out, headed for her hair appointment.

"I had no idea it would be that damn good. Every dude that's ever suggested we try it got shot down before the sentence was fully formed."

"Even Drae?"

"Even Drae. But you know, Drue didn't even ask. His slick ass just segued his dick into my asshole before I could process what was happening."

Dani laughed. "Aren't you glad he did?"

"Hell yeah! Ain't no telling what else this nigga got up his sleeve. But anyway, I just pulled up at the shop. I'll see you at about three, right?"

"Yep. Oh, and is it cool if I invite my mentee? We were supposed to hook up today since we've both been so busy lately."

"Of course, that's fine. I'm looking forward to meeting her."

"Okay. I'll see you later. Let me know if you want me to bring anything besides liquor."

“Will do. Bye.”

Siyanna ended the call and tossed her phone into her purse before going inside the salon. When she laid eyes on Ethan, she was reminded of his beauty. Although she had no desire to be romantically involved with him, she wasn’t blind.

“Good morning,” the receptionist greeted.

“Good morning. I have an appointment with Ethan at eight a.m.”

The receptionist looked at her computer screen and pressed a few buttons before speaking again.

“I have you all checked in. Ethan will be with you shortly. Would you like some coffee or tea?”

“No, thank you. I’m good.”

“Okay. You can have a seat right over there and he’ll be out soon.”

“Thank you.”

Siyanna went to the waiting area and pulled out her phone. She had a message from Drue.

Drue: Can I have some pussy when you get back?

Siyanna: No. We have to go to the grocery store.

Drue: I'll be quick.

Siyanna: You're never quick. Sex with you is a whole production and we have guests coming.

Drue: Fuck them people. I wanna make you cum.

“Good morning, beautiful,” Ethan said, gaining her attention.

“Hello, handsome.”

She dropped her phone into her purse, not bothering to reply to Drue, and stepped into Ethan’s outreached arms. When he released her from the hug, he took a step back, keeping his hands on her shoulders as he stared at her.

“What?” she asked when he didn’t say anything.

“Nothing. You’re just fine as hell and a nigga kinda hurt you don’t wanna be my woman.”

“Ethan,” she whined, pushing him in the chest. “You make it sound so bad. You know it’s not even like that.”

“I don’t know how it is,” he told her as he led her to the back of the salon. “What I do know is I tried to surprise you —”

“Meaning you popped up at my house uninvited,” she reminded him.

“I did, and that was my bad. But we were supposed to meet for lunch the next day, which was your suggestion by the way, and you kept dodging me. Since then, all I’ve gotten is dry ass texts from you. So, tell me. What’s really going on?”

Siyanna was a bit stunned as she sat in the chair in front of the sink. Ethan wrapped a towel around her neck before doing the same with the salon cape. When she leaned back and adjusted her head on the edge of the sink, he kept his eyes on her, waiting for a response.

“I feel like you’ve been waiting to get that off your chest.”

“Not really, but I have been wondering who the nigga was that answered your door.”

“That was Drue.”

“And Drue is?”

“My sister’s widower.”

“Oh, was he there visiting with your nephew?”

Siyanna knew he was fishing for information.

“We, umm, we actually, umm, live together. After everything happened, it was the easiest thing to do.”

Ethan looked at her suspiciously, recalling the marks on her neck the morning they met for breakfast.

“Really? How’s that working out?”

“It’s fine. Actually, can we get started? We invited some friends over and I gotta get to the grocery store.”

“Cool. What time should I be there?”

“Huh?”

“You heard me. Y’all invited friends over. I’m your friend. What time should I be there?”

“Oh, I uhh, any time after four should be good.”

“That’ll work. My last client today is at three. Now, what are we doing to your hair today?”

“WE IGNORING TEXTS NOW?” Drue griped as soon as Siyanna entered the house.

“Hey, Si! How was your hair appointment? Your hair looks good,” Siyanna teased.

“My bad, Si. You do look good. Now answer my question.”

“I didn’t ignore your text. Ethan and I were talking and—”

“You sure you can’t find someone else to do your hair? I can already see he’s gonna be a problem.”

“Whatever, Drue. I’m not looking for another stylist because Ethan is the best. By the way, he’s coming to the barbecue. Are you ready to go to the store?”

Siyanna had entered the house through the garage and hadn’t made it past the kitchen before Drue began questioning her.

“You invited him to my house?”

“I thought this was *our* house?” She reminded him and folded her arms across her chest to wait for his reply.

“You know what I mean, Si. Why’d you invite that nigga when you know he wants to fuck?”

“Ethan and I agreed to be friends a while ago. He knows what’s up. Can we leave now so I can get back and start making the sides?”

“Man, Si. If he comes over here on some bullshit, I can’t take responsibility for how I react.”

Rolling her eyes at him overreacting, she headed back out of the door she’d just entered. Drue followed her and didn’t say anything until they were in route to their destination.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yes, Drue, I heard you. Not sure how you want me to respond because I’m not about to uninvite him. I don’t know what you’re expecting to happen anyway. Ethan and I are just friends, and as far as everyone but Dani are concerned, you and I are just coparents.”

“Do you really expect me to act like there’s nothing going on between us in front of these people?”

“We agreed we would tell our family before we told everyone else,” she reminded him.

“That was before you decided to have a damn party. I was cool in our little bubble with me, you, and the boys. But we’re about engage with a group of people that know us fairly well, Si. They’ll figure out something is up before the day is over.”

“If you can’t behave yourself, I’m sure they will.”

Their shopping trip took longer than necessary because Drue couldn’t keep his hands to himself. Every chance he had to touch Siyanna, he took. She had never experienced so much affection while in a public place, and pretended to be annoyed, but she loved every minute of it.

Drue had disappeared to another part of the store, leaving Siyanna to peruse the aisles alone. Not long after they separated, an older woman approached her. When they made eye contact, a chill went through Siyanna’s body causing her to shiver.

“Is that your husband?” the woman said.

Siyanna looked around to confirm if the woman was talking to her, when she saw no one else in the aisle she replied.

“Umm, no ma’am.”

“He should be. I can see the love he has for you in his eyes. Never mind the fact that he couldn’t keep his hands off you.”

“Oh, wow. Thank you...I guess. We umm—”

“Why are you holding back?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, why are you holding back? The love you have for him isn’t flowing as freely as his for you. Why is that?”

Who is this woman?

“We—our situation is...complicated.”

“Uncomplicate it. That man is your soulmate and it’s rare that someone is blessed enough to find theirs.”

“I—”

“Uncomplicate it,” she repeated before turning and walking away.

Siyanna stood there stunned for a moment, not coming out of her daze until Drue returned and dropped some groceries in the cart.

“Why do you look like you saw a ghost?”

“Huh? Oh, I—this lady—did you pass a lady wearing all white coming down the aisle?”

“No. Only person in this aisle is you, baby. What’s up? Did something happen?”

“This lady came up to me and asked if you were my husband.”

“Did you know her?”

Siyanna shook her head. “She said—she said she could tell that you loved me and...”

“And what?”

Siyanna shook her head, unsure if she wanted to share the woman’s words with Drue.

“And the whole thing was kinda weird.”

“Oh, well, whoever she was, she’s right.”

“Right about what?”

Drue pulled her into a hug and looked down into her eyes.

“I love you.” Blushing, she pushed away from him and grabbed the cart. Before she could move, Drue stopped her. “You don’t love me back?”

“You know I do, Drue. I’ve told you before, but I’m not about to get all mushy in this grocery store. Let’s finish up before we’re behind schedule.”

Drue smiled when Siyanna pressed past him and switched down the aisle. They had already confessed their love for each other, so it didn’t bother him that she didn’t say it back. However, he wondered why the exchange with the woman had her acting weird. Instead of pressing the issue, he followed her down the aisle.

Siyanna was grateful for Dani's early arrival because she'd been a bit out of sorts since the encounter with the strange woman at the grocery store and was itching to talk to someone about it. As soon as she was sure Drue was out of earshot, she began talking at lightning speed.

"Hold on, Si-Si. Slow down."

"My bad. I've been so anxious since it happened."

"Start from the beginning."

As Siyanna described her meeting with the woman, she got chills and couldn't shake the eerie feeling.

"Do you know her?" Dani asked when she finished.

"I don't think so. You know I don't go anywhere and you're my only friend."

"Maybe she's someone from your past. You said you lived with a few foster families."

"Could be, but why wouldn't she mention that she knew me?"

"I don't know. Is what she said bothering you?"

"Kind of. She said my love for Drue isn't flowing as freely."

"Well, is that true?"

Siyanna didn't answer because she was afraid it was true. Although she loved Drue and told him she was all in, a part of

her was still unsure about their future together.

“How would she know if we’re soulmates?” Siyanna asked, avoiding Dani’s previous question. “Even if she did know me in the past, she wouldn’t know me well enough to say something like that.”

Dani shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know, but everyone has one.”

“Yeah, but how can I be Drue’s soulmate if he fell in love with Summer?”

“The person we fall in love with isn’t always our soulmate, and that doesn’t mean we can’t or won’t have a happily ever after with that person. Sometimes, our soulmate isn’t the person we choose to have a romantic relationship with. But if you’re lucky enough to find love with your soulmate, you’re one lucky ass person.”

Drue entered the kitchen, cutting their conversation short. He looked back and forth between them and said, “I thought y’all were supposed to be cooking or something?”

“Don’t worry about us. We got this,” Dani told him.

JOSEPH WAS the first to arrive a little after four, and even with all the talking they did, Siyanna and Dani had everything ready when the doorbell rang. Drue let him in, and they all went straight to the patio. Typically, December weather in Las Vegas was in the high fifties and low sixties. They were lucky to get an unseasonably warm high of seventy, although the temperature would drop drastically at sunset.

The back wall of the screened-in patio lifted, allowing the area to extend outside but still offering shade when needed. Drue set up a long table with chairs, so there was plenty of room for everyone.

“What’s up, Siyanna? It’s good to see you with a smile on your face,” Joseph commented when Siyanna stepped onto the patio.

Siyanna was wearing a pair of royal blue leggings with a matching long-sleeved fitted crop top. Joseph's eyes roamed the length of her body, and by the time he reached her face again, he was licking his lips.

"Hey, Joseph. It's good to have something to smile about."

"Oh, do you have some good news to share?" he asked as continued to take in her body, licking his lips and rubbing his hands together.

She continued toward him with the pan of macaroni and cheese, and he finally snapped out of his daze, taking the pan from her.

"Nothing in particular. Thank you. Just put it on the table with the rest of the food. I'm going to get some serving spoons."

Siyanna turned around to head back inside, and Drue caught Joseph checking out her ass.

"Pick your damn mouth up, bruh," Drue told him.

"Man, Si-Si looking real good. All I need is one night—"

"Chill, Joe," Drue warned him again, bumping him with his shoulder as he walked by.

"How are you living with that fine ass woman every day, who is the spitting image of your wife, and not knocking down her walls every chance you get?"

Drue wanted to respond with the anger he felt brewing, so instead of replying like he wanted, he said, "Shut the fuck up, Joe."

Fred and his date were the next to arrive, followed by Ethan. Dani led the three of them to the patio, and Siyanna trailed behind them with the serving utensils. After placing one next to each dish, she addressed the guests.

"Do we need to do formal introductions, or can y'all handle those yourselves?" Siyanna asked loud enough for everyone to hear.

Nobody responded so she decided to go ahead and do it. She started with Ethan since he'd found his way next to her.

"Okay, so, everyone, this is my new friend and hairstylist, Ethan. I met him through my girl, Dani, who just went back inside to answer the door. Dani was one of the neonatal nurses for my son, Dash. That's Joseph over there. This is Fred and..."

"Anya," the woman said.

"What a pretty name. Nice to meet you, Anya. Oh, here's Dani, and with her is—"

"Natalie?" Drue blurted out before Dani could introduce her. "What are you doing here?"

Everyone's eyes went from Drue to Natalie, then back to Drue.

"You know her?" Siyanna asked him.

"You know him?" Dani asked Natalie at the same time.

"I, umm, I wouldn't say—I mean, we've met," Drue stammered.

"Naw, I don't know him for real," Natalie replied, rolling her eyes.

Joseph recognized Natalie from the strip club and couldn't stop himself from smirking. He never did find out why Natalie smacked him and had a feeling the night would be very interesting.

The awkwardness didn't go unnoticed, but Torrence stepping out to the patio smoothed over the moment. When everyone looked in his direction, he said, "What? The door was open, so I came in."

Siyanna wanted to know how Drue and Natalie knew each other but didn't want to ask him about her in front of their guests.

"I think everyone is here. Drue, you want to bless the food?"

"Yeah, ba—ahem, Si."

Siyanna caught Drue's slip of the tongue but hoped no one else heard him. He said a quick blessing over the food and thanked everyone for accepting their last-minute invitation. Once hands were washed or sanitized, plates were made, and about ten minutes later, stomachs were being filled. Joseph was itching to start some shit, so he was the first to speak.

"Natalie, is it?" Joseph asked.

"Yes."

"You look familiar to me. Where did you say you met Drue?"

"I didn't."

"Hmm. I swear I've seen you somewhere recently. Where do you work?"

Drue cleared his throat, trying to get Joseph's attention, but his friend wouldn't even look his way.

"I'm a full-time nursing student at UNLV, but I strip at the most popular strip club in Vegas a few times a week. Maybe you saw me there."

"Is that where you met Drue?" Joseph asked.

Drue cleared his throat again and shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"Why are you giving this woman the third degree?" Anya asked. "Mind your business."

"Anya, I told you if I let you come with me—" Fred began.

"Let? Nigga I drove my own damn car *after* you asked me to come with your ass. Don't try to front around your friends."

Joseph shook his head, feeling bad for Fred, so he stopped his instigating.

"Siyanna, I hope you don't mind, but I invited Audrey," Ethan informed her.

"How the hell you a guest inviting guests? Make that shit make sense, bruh," Drue cut in before Siyanna was able to

respond.

“Look, man, I came over here to meet some new people and have a good time. What’s your beef with me?”

Drue didn’t hesitate to let Ethan know why he had an issue with him.

“We can start by you recommending your realtor and fuck buddy to Si, wasting her time, showing her a bunch of shitty ass properties because she thought her spot in your life was at risk.”

Ethan put his hands up in surrender as he said, “You got me there, and that was my bad. Audrey is a good-ass realtor, and I’ve recommended her to several people. She’s never done that before, and I already apologized to Siyanna. Can we squash this shit now, or is there another reason you have an issue with me?”

“What the hell kinda soap opera am I watching?” Torrence mumbled with a mouth full of food.

“If she’s not coming here to apologize to me, she can stay her messy ass at home,” Siyanna said, ignoring Torrence.

“She knows what’s up.”

“Then I guess it’s cool.”

While that conversation occurred, Dani and Natalie were having an intense one of their own in a hushed tone. Siyanna looked in their direction and her eyes connected with Dani’s, who then nodded her head toward the house.

“Umm, I’ll be right back. Does anyone need anything from inside?” Siyanna asked as she stood and picked up her plate.

Everyone replied they were good, and she scurried into the house with Dani right behind her.

“Giirrrlll! You ain’t gon’ believe this,” Dani exclaimed as soon as the patio door was closed. “Well, you might, but I sure as hell didn’t. I don’t know if I was more surprised by Drue’s actions or Natalie’s actions.”

“Dani! Tell me what the hell you’re talking about.”

“So, Natalie met Drue at that little 24-hour restaurant not too far from here.”

“Okay.”

“It was the middle of the night, and she stopped there after work, something she often does, and he walked in looking like he’d lost his best friend. She ended up inviting herself to eat with him, and they talked for a while.”

“And?”

“Well...that’s where it gets good. She said she pretended like her car wouldn’t start, and he gave her a ride home. She could tell he was attracted to her, so she shot her shot and invited him inside.”

“Is there more?”

“Yeah, but I ain’t so sure you want to hear it.”

“Dani, stop playing, girl.”

“She was down to fuck, but she only ended up sucking his dick. After he nutted down her throat, he put his dick back in his pants and jetted up outta there.”

It took a minute, but Siyanna put two and two together and started laughing.

“Oh my God. Was this like, a year ago?”

“Not sure, but she did say it was a while ago. Why are you laughing?”

“Because I remember when that happened. Drue was so distraught, he summoned his mama all the way from Chicago.”

“What? I’m confused.”

“It happened the night before I saw you at the mall,” Siyanna began.

As she told Dani about what led him to ultimately end up with his dick in Natalie’s mouth, they both laughed about it.

“Natalie was pissed about him running out on her like that. They exchanged numbers at the restaurant, but when she tried

to call him to cuss him out, she was blocked.”

“Damn, that’s cold.”

“Hell yeah. Then, not too long ago, he showed up at the club where she works, and she said she slapped the shit outta him before she went on stage.”

“I don’t blame her. He deserved it.”

They laughed more about the incident before Drue came inside to be nosy and sneak a few minutes alone with Siyanna.

“Dani, can I get a minute with Si? And can you keep everyone outside for me?”

Dani looked at him with a frown, pretending she was upset with him.

“What?” he asked, confused.

“You’re foul, that’s what!”

She shook her head at him as she went back outside. Siyanna could barely contain her laugh.

“What did I do to her?”

Siyanna turned and busied herself with organizing things on the counter.

“Nothing,” she replied, holding in her laugh. “But what did you do to Natalie?”

“Baby, come upstairs with me right quick.”

Drue grabbed her by the waist and pulled her in the direction of the stairs. Siyanna continued to act as if she didn’t want to be bothered with him. He lifted her over his shoulder, carrying her up the stairs and into their bedroom. Once he put her on her feet, he closed the door behind him.

“Baby, let me explain what happened with Natalie.”

“Do tell,” she encouraged, folding her arms across her chest, still trying to keep from laughing.

“She’s the one Ma was talking about.”

“When?”

“When she popped up in Vegas that time.”

“Oh, are you talking about that time you left me with two crying babies to get your dick sucked?”

“Man, Si. That ain’t why I left, and you know it.”

“But that’s what happened.”

“I know, and I still feel bad about it. I never talked to or saw Natalie again until Joe and I went to the strip club. She must have still been pissed about me letting her suck my dick then leaving because she slapped the shit outta me.”

“Well, wouldn’t you be mad if you thought you were about to get some pussy, but she changed her mind after cumming all over your face?”

“Probably, but I wouldn’t resort to violence.”

“Hell, I’d want to slap you, too. But I’m not sure why you feel like you need to explain all this to me.”

“Because she’s in our house, and I don’t know...shit’s kinda strange.”

Siyanna shrugged her shoulders. “Maybe for you, but it doesn’t bother me. We weren’t involved back then, anyway.”

“True. So, we’re good?”

“We’re fine, Drue. Now, let’s get back to our guests.”

Siyanna tried to move him from in front of the door, but he put his hands on her waist and walked them back until they fell on the bed, him on top of her, wedging himself between her legs.

“Drue, we need to get back downstairs before they start suspecting something.”

“You know I don’t give a damn.”

He covered her mouth with his, and Siyanna didn’t put up a fight. Instead, she relaxed and gave him what he wanted. She didn’t pull her mouth away until she felt his dick stiffen against her center.

“Baby, if we keep this up, you know what’s gonna happen,” she told him.

Drue ignored her, leaving a trail of kisses from her cheek down to her neck, where he began to suck. It felt so good that Siyanna didn’t think about him leaving his mark on her fair skin.

“Drue, you need to get up.” Using all her strength, she pushed him off her and hurried off the bed. “Now I have to change my panties,” Siyanna complained.

“I guarantee you if you come up out those clothes right now, you gon’ have to do more than change your panties,” Drue warned as he adjusted his dick.

“You expect me to walk around with wet underwear?”

“You expect me to walk around with a hard dick?”

They stared at each other for a second before Siyanna shook her head and headed for the door. Drue was right behind her and stopped her in the middle of the stairway.

“Hey, gimme another kiss before we have to go back to pretending.”

“Aww, are you pouting?” she teased as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Hell yeah, I’m pouting. I can’t show my woman no affection because she’s—”

“Nope! We’re not about to rehash this. I don’t care about them knowing, but we should tell your family, especially Mama before our friends know.”

“I get it, baby.”

Drue leaned down and connected his lips to hers. Before they had a chance to get carried away, they heard the front door close. When they disconnected, Audrey was staring up at them.

“Oh, I’m sorry, the door was open.”

Unsure of how much she’d seen, Siyanna tried to play it off and hurried down the rest of the stairs. While she dealt

with Audrey, Drue went back to the patio. He knew Audrey had seen them kissing but figured he'd let Siyanna handle that how she saw fit.

"It's fine. Ethan mentioned he invited you. Did you have something you wanted to say to me?"

"Yes, umm...I just wanted to apologize for my behavior. Ethan has recommended my services to many people, many of them were women, and I'm always professional. With you, there was something different about the way he talked about you, and when I saw how beautiful you were, I got jealous and territorial. Ethan and I aren't in a relationship, but until he gets serious about someone else, he's mine."

"Thank you for your apology. I assure you Ethan and I are just friends, and I am not a threat to your situation."

"I see you have your own thing going on, and I—"

"Excuse me?"

"Oh, I just assumed you and that guy—"

"I'm not sure what you're thinking, but don't make assumptions."

Siyanna turned and entered the kitchen and continued out the patio doors, not waiting to see if Audrey had followed her but knowing she did.

"Everyone, this is Audrey, Ethan's friend," Siyanna announced as she returned to her seat at the table.

They greeted Audrey, and she smiled uncomfortably.

"Feel free to make yourself a plate. All the food is on that table," Siyanna told her.

While Audrey did that, the conversation they were having before the interruption continued.

"Drue, what did you say was the hold with your book?" Torrence asked.

"Oh, yeah. My publisher wants to classify it as an autobiography, but I want it to be classified as fiction. We've been going back and forth and can't come to an agreement."

“From what you’ve told me about your agent, he doesn’t seem like he would go hard on your behalf. How long is your contract with them?” Joseph asked.

“Patrick means well, but he’s soft as hell,” Drue agreed. “My contract is for three books, and under normal circumstances, I would have already fulfilled it. When I was considering publishing companies, Creative Minds offered the best deal, and it’s black-owned with an almost all black staff. This is the first issue we’ve had, but I think they’ll let me have my way eventually.”

“Is the book an autobiography?” Fred asked.

“Somewhat. It’s loosely based on my life beginning when I met Summer.”

“Wait, who’s Summer?” Natalie asked.

“My deceased wife,” Drue replied solemnly.

“Oh, so you’re his new wife?” Natalie asked Siyanna.

“No,” was all she said in reply, leaving Natalie confused.

“Why don’t you want to promote it as an autobiography?” Joseph asked.

“A few reasons, but mainly because I prefer to keep my personal life private. So far, I’ve been able to do that.”

“But damn, bruh, you’re a bestselling author, and you’ve been on multiple bestseller lists. At some point, your fans will want to know more about you,” Torrence said.

“That’s real talk. I don’t know how you’ve managed to avoid all the gossip blogs all this time,” Fred added.

Shrugging his shoulders, Drue said, “I don’t know either, but I’d like to keep it that way forever, or as long as I can. Y’all know I’m not one for the limelight and attention. That was Drae’s wild ass.”

“True. Y’all couldn’t be more different,” Joseph commented.

“While I appreciate the conversation, some of us aren’t privy to all the details. Who is Drae?” Anya inquired.

“My deceased husband,” Siyanna answered.

“And Drue’s twin brother,” Fred added.

“And Summer was Siyanna’s twin sister,” Torrence said.

Audrey was mid-drink, and when she heard that, she choked on the liquid draining down her throat. Her coughing spell gained everyone’s attention, and Ethan stood and went to her rescue, continuously patting her on the back.

“You good?” Ethan asked her when she seemed to have caught her breath.

“Yeah, umm. My drink went down the wrong pipe,” she said, looking back and forth between Siyanna and Drue.

Ethan sat back down, and the conversation continued with Anya directing questions to Drue and Siyanna.

“Wait a sec. Drae was your twin and your husband. And Summer was your twin and your wife.”

“Yep,” Drue replied while Siyanna got nervous about where the conversation was headed.

“What happened to them? I mean if you don’t mind me asking,” Anya asked cautiously.

“Now here you go being nosy,” Fred said. “How about we change the conversation because it’s not something any of us like to talk about.”

Siyanna was relieved Fred interjected, but Drue fucked that up.

“Naw, it’s cool,” Drue said. “Summer died minutes after giving birth to our son, and the shock of losing her twin sister caused Siyanna to go into labor a month early. At the same time all that was happening, Drae got into an argument with some white guys at a Raiders game. One of the dudes shot him in the parking garage after the game.

“Damn!”

“Wow!”

“I’m so sorry!”

Natalie, Audrey, and Anya expressed their shock. Although Siyanna had shared some details with Ethan, it was still hard for him to hear again.

“Drae Hendrix? I remember reading an article about the shooting. Wow! That’s umm, that’s terrible, and you both have my condolences,” Audrey said.

“We appreciate it.”

“Thank you.”

Drue and Siyanna responded at the same time.

“Y’all mind if we change the subject now?” Dani suggested, everyone agreeing immediately. “Y’all got any games?”

The hosts looked at each other before shaking their heads.

“We can go old school and play Truth or Dare,” Anya suggested.

“Good idea,” Dani agreed. “And if you don’t want to tell the truth or perform the dare, you have to take a shot.”

Groans were released throughout the group, but everyone agreed to play. Drue went to retrieve the liquor, and Siyanna followed him inside to get the shot glasses.

“You good?” he asked before they went back outside.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just didn’t expect the conversation to go that way.”

“I didn’t mean for that to happen, but I figured it was best to curb their curiosity and get it out of the way. I’m sorry if I made you uncomfortable.”

“I’m good, baby. Let’s get back out there.”

She gave him a quick peck on the lips before they went back to the patio. Drue had a bottle of Hennessy and a bottle of Patron, while Siyanna had the shot glasses.

“Aww, shit. We ’bout to get this party started,” Dani cheered.

“*J* got brown and clear for those that have a preference. Just make sure you stick with what you start with,” Drue announced. “Our boys are gone and we ain’t trying to clean up nobody else’s vomit.”

Everyone laughed as he put the bottles in the middle of the table while Siyanna gave everyone a shot glass. They took their seats and since the game was Anya’s idea, she gave them the instructions. Once that was out of the way, it was time to get started.

“Oh, and feel free to add your own twist to any of the questions that come up. You know, to make the game more interesting. I’ll go first. Y’all ready?”

The group responded with some form of yes, and then it got quiet. Anya looked around the table, pretending as if she hadn’t already decided she would choose Fred.

“Fred, truth or dare?” she challenged.

“I knew your petty ass would pick me first. Give me the dare.”

“Okay. I dare you to pretend like the neck of that beer bottle is a dick and demonstrate giving head.”

The ladies all gasped while the men barely contained their laughter.

“The fuck?” Fred spat with a look of disgust on his face.

“I said—”

“I heard what the fuck you said, A. I ain’t doing that shit. I’ll take a shot. Hell, I’ll take several shots before I do that shit.”

Fred reached for the bottle of Patron at the center of the table and snatched it up, pouring himself a shot before throwing it back.

“Give me that damn phone,” Fred demanded.

Anya handed it to him, still laughing about his reaction to her dare. Fred looked around the table to choose his victim.

“Joe, you’re up, bruh. Truth or dare?”

“I’ll take my chances with the truth. You ain’t about to have me out here doing dumb shit,” Joseph said.

Fred looked at the app and read the question that came up.

“If you could choose one person at this table to fuck right now, who would it be?”

“Oh, shit that’s easy. Siyanna,” Joseph replied with no hesitation, looking at her like she was his next meal. “I would bend your fine ass over this table and fuck the shit outta you.”

Siyanna gasped, taken aback by his words.

“Why the hell would you say some shit like that?” Drue shouted. “You one disrespectful ass nigga.”

“I chose *truth*, my nigga, and I spoke my truth.”

“Well, it ain’t gon’ happen, so you can erase that shit from your mind,” Drue told him.

“That’s not for you to say. Siyanna’s a grown woman, ain’t that right, Si-Si?” Joseph teased.

“Umm, I’m not interested, Joseph,” she told him, disgusted by his words.

“You breaking my heart, beautiful,” he feigned, putting his hand over his heart. “But you never know what the future holds.”

“She told you she ain’t interested. It’s your turn,” Drue said between clenched teeth.

The tension was beyond thick as Fred passed Joseph the phone. Joseph's eyes traveled around the table before they landed on his victim.

"Natalie, truth or dare?"

"Dare," she replied.

"I dare you to give Drue a two-minute lap dance," Joseph said with a smirk.

Siyanna smacked her lips loudly, glaring at Joseph with a frown. Out of all Drue's friends, he was the messiest and she liked him the least.

Natalie took a moment to decide if she wanted to accept the dare or take a shot. She looked at Drue and followed his line of vision. He was laser-focused on Siyanna, who seemed to be avoiding his eyes. Siyanna happened to look up and caught Natalie's eyes on her, and when Siyanna rolled her own, Natalie made her decision.

"Somebody play "Dance for You" by Beyoncé."

Everyone cheered except Drue, Siyanna, and Dani, since she was the only one that knew the two were in a relationship. Natalie rose from her seat and took off the denim shirt she had on over the crop top she wore with a pair of leggings, then slid out of her gym shoes. Her dancer's body gained everyone's attention, especially the men. While Joseph searched for the song, Natalie sauntered over to Drue. He refused to give her his eyes, but she'd have all his attention in a matter of seconds.

"Move your chair back," she told him.

"Natalie, you don't have to do this," he told her, finally looking at her.

"I'm good. Move your chair away from the table and turn it this way."

Begrudgingly, he moved his chair back and turned it, so he was facing Natalie. It felt like Siyanna's glare was burning through his cheek, and he wouldn't dare look her way now. His gaze was focused on the ground until Natalie used her index finger to lift his head.

“Keep your eyes on me,” she whispered boldly.

The music began and Natalie slightly bent her knees as her hips swayed slowly. Her hands glided up her thighs, then her torso, before caressing her breasts. Seconds later, Beyoncé’s voice serenaded them, and Natalie blocked out everything but the music and Drue. As far as she was concerned, they were alone.

When the bass dropped, she turned around, put her hands on the back of the chair that she’d positioned there, and aggressively moved her ass in a circular motion. Whipping back around, she lifted one leg and placed it on Drue’s thigh, positioning her pussy in close proximity to his face. Her hands went behind his neck and she leaned forward, rubbing his face against her breasts.

As Beyoncé sang the chorus, Natalie straddled him and locked her legs around the back of the chair. Her hands roamed from her hair to her breasts, down her stomach, and stopped between her legs. She simulated playing with herself and could feel Drue’s dick stiffening beneath her. Sitting up, she was now face to face with Drue, reciting the lyrics along with Beyoncé. His eyes were locked on her lips as his chest visibly moved up and down from his deep breathing.

Across the table, Siyanna was fuming. The more Natalie gyrated in front of and grinded against Drue, her stomach turned. When she couldn’t take it anymore, she heard herself shouting, “That’s enough! Your two-minutes are up!”

Natalie was in a zone, and she’d taken Drue with her. Neither of them heard Siyanna’s plea.

“Joseph, it’s been more than two minutes. Stop the music,” Siyanna demanded.

“Naw, baby girl, you see this shit? I’m gon’ let the song play out,” he told her with a wide grin plastered across his face.

Siyanna refrained from saying much more because she didn’t want to cause a scene. However, everyone else at the table had peeped her little outburst and it had them thinking.

As the song neared its end, Siyanna tried to focus on something else, but it was impossible. Natalie was now sitting on Drue's lap with her back against his chest, her head resting on his shoulder, and her hands behind his head as the song played its final note.

"Well, got damn! I think I need a cigarette," Joseph proclaimed.

"How much for me to be up next?" Torrence asked, digging in his pocket, and pulling out a wad of cash.

"I'm off the clock but come down to the club and I gotchu," Natalie told Torrence as she tied her denim shirt around her waist.

"Bet! You work tomorrow night?"

"I'm actually headed there when I leave here," she said, winking at him before taking her seat.

"I tell you what," Anya began. "I'm strictly dicky and I'm considering meeting you at the club for a lap dance."

"I swear," Audrey agreed, then her and Anya high-fived each other.

Siyanna gave a hard eyeroll to them that Dani caught, and she knew her girl was in her feelings about what had occurred.

"All are welcome. Is it my turn to choose?"

By the time the phone made its way across the table and into Natalie's hand, Siyanna felt the urge to vomit.

"I'll be back," she blurted out before pushing her chair away from the table and rushing into the house.

Dani made eye contact with Drue, and he discreetly lifted his chin in the direction of the house, urging Dani to go check on her.

"Hey, Si-Si, where you at?" Dani called out once she got inside.

Siyanna didn't respond but she heard her in the powder room then headed in that direction.

“Si-Si, you good?”

The door was cracked, so Dani slowly pulled it open and saw Siyanna leaned over the toilet.

“Damn, you really are in love,” she commented.

“What?” Siyanna gasped before she gagged again.

“I said, you really are in love. Just seeing Natalie all over Drue like that got you throwing up your insides.”

Siyanna’s vomiting stopped her from replying right away. When she felt like all the food she’d eaten that afternoon had come up, she flushed the toilet then stumbled over to the sink. After washing her hands, she cupped one of them underneath the running water. Leaning down, she filled her mouth with the cold liquid, swooshing it around before spitting it out. After doing that a few times, she splashed the cold water onto her face, then turned off the water. Dani handed her a paper towel which she used to dry her face.

“You good, now?”

“I’m fine. I must have eaten something that didn’t agree with my stomach.”

“You sure that’s what it is?”

“What else would it be?”

Dani raised her eyebrows. “Watching Natalie give Drue that lap dance had to be hard.”

“I didn’t like it but I’m not sick about it. It had to be the food. I haven’t eaten that much in a while.”

“If you say so, my friend. But remember, this is all for fun and games. Try not to take anything seriously.”

“Yeah. I’ll be out in a minute. I’m gonna go brush my teeth.”

They parted ways with Dani going back outside, and Siyanna heading upstairs to brush her teeth. As she brushed, she felt her phone vibrating in the pocket of her leggings.

Drue: You okay?

Siyanna: Yes

Drue: You coming back out?

Siyanna: Yes

Drue: I'm sorry. You mad?

Siyanna didn't bother replying to the last text. She wasn't mad, per se, because as Dani said, it was all for fun and games. But knowing the history between Drue and Natalie did make watching the lap dance uncomfortable for her.

When she got back to the patio, Ethan had the phone in his hand. The sneer that appeared on his lips when he saw her made her nervous.

“Perfect timing,” he said as she sat down.

“Are you okay?” Anya asked. “Dani said you had an upset stomach.”

“I did but I’m good now. Thank you for asking.”

“Siyanna, truth or dare?” Ethan asked.

Siyanna mentally prepared to take a shot because she refused to do anything crazy, nor would she offer the truth if it wasn't something she felt comfortable with sharing.

“Truth.”

Ethan sat the phone on the table and said, “I won’t be needing this. I got my own question for you.”

“Okay.”

“Is the real reason you friend-zoned me because you’re fucking your brother-in-law?”

“Excuse me?” came from a shocked Siyanna.

“What the fuck did you just say?” blasted from Drue’s mouth as he shot out of his seat.

Everyone else observed in astonished silence.

“I think both of y’all heard me very clearly. I’ve been noticing shit all night and everything I’ve seen leads me to

believe y'all fucking. So, answer the question, Si-Si, or take a shot. Either way, I'll have my answer."

"Nigga!" Drue shouted as he reached across the table and pulled Ethan out of the chair.

Before anyone knew what was going on, Drue had dragged Ethan's body across the table and punched him in the face. Thankfully, Fred, Joseph, and Torrence acted fast and were able to separate the two before they tore up the whole enclosed patio. The table was already damaged, along with some of the dishes that were on it.

"Chill, Drue," Joseph said as he bear-hugged Drue and pushed him into the far corner of the backyard.

"If y'all fucking just say that shit, nigga," Ethan yelled in Drue's direction.

"Bruh, shut the fuck up. If he gets loose, we might not be able to stop him next time," Fred warned.

"I wasn't sure," Audrey began. "But I thought I saw them kissing on the stairs when I got here."

"Damn! That's some foul shit. Did y'all wait until their bodies were cold?" Natalie added.

"Really, Nat? That was insensitive and unnecessary," Dani said with disappointment.

"But a valid question," Audrey said.

"I definitely wasn't expecting this," Anya said to herself, but loud enough for everyone to hear.

While everyone added their two cents, Joseph kept Drue in the corner and tried to calm him down. Siyanna sat in shock, not knowing what to say or do. What she did know was the party was over.

"It's time for y'all to go," Siyanna said.

"Everybody? Or just—" Torrence inquired.

"Everybody!"

"Can we make a to-go pla—"

“Torrence, just get the fuck out, please. And take everybody else with you.”

“Alright! Y’all heard the woman. It’s time to go.”

Without any more drama or fanfare, everyone left except Joseph and Dani. In silence, their friends helped them clean up and put away the food. About an hour later, Dani left, promising to call Siyanna the following day. Siyanna thanked Joseph before going upstairs, leaving Drue with his friend.

“How long?” Joseph asked.

“How long have I had feelings for her? Or how long did it take me to act on those feelings?”

“Shit, bruh, whatever you want to tell me. I’m still trying to wrap my head around the shit.”

“We’ve had feelings for each other for a while, but only recently decided to stop fighting them.”

“Drue, this is Drae’s wife, man.”

“First of all, nigga. Don’t stand up here and act like you didn’t just say you wanted to fuck her.”

“I mean, yeah, but I knew she wouldn’t be down for no shit like that. I was just playing...mostly.”

“Yeah, okay. Playing my ass. You know damn well if she offered you wouldn’t hesitate.”

“You right, but Drae ain’t my fucking twin brother. Y’all niggas shared the same womb.”

“And you don’t think I’ve thought about that? I ain’t never looked at none of Drae’s girlfriends in a sexual way, not even Siyanna and she looked just like my wife. Neither of us planned this. It happened and it is what it is at this point.”

“I ain’t gon’ even lie to you, Drue. This breaks all the codes but you my boy and I’m gon’ keep rocking with you.”

“I appreciate that, man, but if you couldn’t rock with me, we’ve had a nice ride,” Drue told him as they gave each other dap.

“Oh, damn. It’s like that?”

“Straight like that. Siyanna’s mine and that’s not changing for nobody. Once we go public, judgment will come from all directions, so we definitely don’t need any judgment from our friends.”

Joseph nodded in agreement. “I guess I can understand why you don’t want your book classified as an autobiography.”

“Honestly, I’m ready for whatever and don’t give a fuck what strangers think about my life. Siyanna, on the other hand, ain’t ready for the battle and it’s my job to protect her.”

“Well, the ending was unexpected, but thanks for the invite. Let’s hook up in the next few days because I know Torrence and Fred got questions.”

“We can do that.”

After securing the house, Drue went to his bedroom to find it empty. He then went to what used to be Siyanna’s bedroom, and it appeared to be empty as well. Confused, he headed back to his bedroom as he called out for her.

“Si, where you at, baby?”

When he entered the en suite and she wasn’t there, his confusion increased. He was sure he saw her go upstairs, so he went back to her old bedroom to see if she was in that bathroom.

“Si, where you... Didn’t you hear me calling you?” he asked.

She was in the bathtub, surrounded by suds, with her eyes closed.

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you answer me?”

“I figured you’d find me eventually. Did you want something? I’m trying to relax.”

By the tone of her voice, Drue knew something was up. Putting the toilet lid down, he sat down, resting his elbows on

his knees, and his head in his hands.

“Siyanna, what’s the problem?”

She had yet to open her eyes, but when Drue called her by her full name, she looked at him.

“I don’t have a problem. Today was overwhelming and I’m trying to relax.”

He looked up and was annoyed that she seemed to be bothered by his presence.

“Why are you using this tub instead of ours? It’s bigger and it has jets.”

“I figured you’d want to take a shower and I needed some space.”

He lifted his head and looked at her.

“Space? You needed some space away from me?”

“Yes, Drue. Is that a bad thing?”

“Hell yeah, it’s a bad thing. We’ve been a couple for two minutes and you’re saying you already need space.”

“I just told you today was a lot. Can I have a damn minute to myself to process?”

“If you can’t handle a handful of people, who don’t matter, knowing our situation, how are you gonna handle when we tell our family?”

“I’ll worry about that when the time comes. For now, can I finish my bath in peace?”

She closed her eyes and rested her head against the back of the tub, effectively dismissing Drue. Deciding not to make matters worse, he gave her the peace she requested.

After he took a quick shower, he went to bed alone, assuming Siyanna would join him after her bath. He fell asleep and a few hours later, her side of the bed was still empty. Sighing, he went in search of his woman and found her asleep in her old bedroom.

Shaking his head, he approached the bed, pulled back the comforter, and scooped Siyanna up bridal style. She woke up startled and started swinging.

“Chill out, Si. It’s me.”

“What are you doing?”

“Bringing you to bed. You’ve had enough space.”

“S*i-Si, are you still dating your hairstylist?” Cherie asked her as they lounged around in the family room.*

It had been about an hour since Cherie had brought the boys home, and Drue had taken them upstairs to put them down for a nap while the ladies put the final touches on the menu for Christmas dinner.

“Huh?”

“Girl, if you can huh, you can hear.”

“I thought I told you we decided to keep things friendly?”

“Oh, so you’re seeing someone else?” Cherie continued prodding.

“Huh?”

“Do you need to clean out your ears or something?”

“No, I’m a little, umm, distracted. I’m not seeing anyone else. Why do you ask?”

“Because this is the second time I’ve seen hickies on your neck, and don’t give me that mess about something biting you.”

“What are you in here fussing about, Ma?” Drue asked as he entered the family room.

“Siyanna in here acting like I’ve never been young. I know what hickies look like. I’ve had and given plenty of them in my day.”

“Ugh. Ma, please.”

“I’m just saying. If she gon’ let the man suck all over her neck, she needs to come clean.”

“Hello! I’m right here, you know,” Siyanna said, waving her arm.

“Oh, you can hear now?” Cherie griped. “Tell that man you’re too old to be walking around all marked up. If he gotta do all that to prove you’re his, maybe he should move on.”

Glaring at Drue, Siyanna said, “I don’t know what his problem is.”

Drue smirked and shrugged his shoulders in response to Siyanna’s glare, and Cherie saw their secret communication.

“Sooner or later, you two are gonna have to come clean,” Cherie told them.

At first, her words didn’t register, but when they did, the two pretended to be clueless.

“What are you talking about, Mama?”

“Clean about what?”

“I don’t know when it started, and I certainly don’t know why you’re hiding it.”

Neither of them said a word for at least a minute, and Cherie waited patiently for them to admit what she already knew to be true.

“We planned to tell you today,” Drue finally confessed.

“How long has this been going on?”

“Not long, Ma.”

“Well, why the secrecy?”

Joining Siyanna on the couch, he took her hand in his.

“We weren’t sure how you’d feel about it,” Drue told her.

“What do my feelings have to do with anything?”

“Come on, Mama. Do we need to break it down?” Siyanna asked.

“Please do,” Cherie encouraged.

“I’d rather not,” Siyanna replied with an attitude.

“Look, Si-Si. People are always gonna have something to say about everything. Would I have guessed that the two of you would end up falling for each other? Not at all. But was I surprised when I saw it happening? Not in the least.”

“What do you mean when you saw it happening?” Drue asked.

“At first, I thought I was imagining things, maybe even a little hopeful.”

“Hopeful?” came from Siyanna.

“Yes. After losing the person you love, being left alone to raise the child you created with that person, I desperately wanted you both to find love again. You two leaned on each other during the hardest time of your life and managed to create a beautiful friendship. In the beginning, it was out of necessity, but little by little, I saw how the dynamics of your relationship changed.”

“And you didn’t think it was a disaster waiting to happen?” Siyanna wanted to know.

“Why would I? Because you were married to each other’s siblings?”

“Uhh, yeah.”

“I would give anything to have them back, but the reality is, they’re gone. Now, under *any* other circumstances, this would be foul, and I would disown you both. But I lost the love of my life and, although I tried, I never found love again. So, if y’all found love in each other, who am I to stand in the way?”

Since the night before, after that disastrous game of Truth or Dare, Siyanna had been in her feelings. Drue prayed she wasn’t having second thoughts about their relationship.

After Cherie expressed her feelings, Siyanna and Drue turned to look at each other.

“You were having second thoughts?” Drue asked.

“A little but having Mama’s blessing helps.”

“Good,” he said before planting a kiss on her lips.

“HEY, S! WHERE YOU AT?” Drue called out as he entered the house.

“We’re in here,” she replied from the family room.

It was a couple of weeks after they went semi-public with their relationship. Things had been smooth since then, aside from Siyanna’s unsuccessful search for someone to maintain her haircut.

“Guess what?” Drue said, swooping Dylan into his arms and kissing his forehead, then doing the same with Dash.

“What?”

“My publisher finally agreed to classify my book as fiction. My release day is the first of January, and we’re starting my promo right away.”

“Really?” She hopped up from the couch with excitement.
“That’s great, baby. Congratulations!”

After a brief hug and kiss, Drue continued.

“Thank you. Melody told me to stick to my guns and they’d eventually give in.”

“And she was right. I haven’t met her but from what you’ve told me about her, she seems to have your best interest at heart.”

“I believe she does, which is why when I signed on with Creative Minds, I declined the use of their publicist.”

“So, what’s next?”

“There’s a lot that needs to be done in a short amount of time. Then, once the book releases, I’ll be doing a small book tour.”

“That’s exciting. Why don’t you sound excited? This is what you do, right?”

“Yeah, but it’s been a while since my last book was released.”

“And?” Siyanna pressed, a bit confused by his demeanor.

“You good with me leaving you with the boys for a few weekends?”

“Is that what you’re worried about?” He nodded. “We’ll be fine. Plus, I have Mama and Dani if I need help.”

“Oh, okay. I guess it’ll be cool.”

Drue still didn’t seem to be excited about his news.

“Is there something you’re not telling me?”

“I was thinking...maybe you could come with me,” he said hesitantly.

“Umm, I don’t know about that, Drue. Traveling with toddlers is at the bottom of my list of things I want to do.”

“Who said anything about bringing them?”

Siyanna stepped back and looked at him like he had horns growing out of his head. She just knew he wasn’t asking her what she thought he was asking her.

“What are you saying, Drue? You want to leave the boys and—”

“Yes, Si. We can leave the boys a few times for a couple of days.”

“Absolutely not.”

She tried to move past him because the conversation was over as far as she was concerned. Drue stepped in front of her and grabbed her by the waist.

“Baby, can we at least talk about it? You don’t have to come every weekend, but I think it’ll be nice for us to get away and spend some time alone.”

“You know how I feel about being away from them. Mama already—”

“I know, and I’m proud of you for loosening the reins a bit, but I thought it would be nice for us to get away together.”

“What cities are you visiting?” she asked.

“First stop is Chicago, you know I gotta show my hometown some love first. Then Atlanta, LA—”

“LA?”

“Yeah,” he replied with a big smile. “We can stay there an extra day if—”

“No. I’m good on LA.”

“Really? You don’t want to go to Hollywood and—”

“I said I’m good. Let’s take it a trip at a time and see how it goes,” she suggested. “But I’m definitely not going to LA.”

Drue didn’t understand her aversion to Los Angeles, but he was glad she agreed to traveling with him sometimes. He smiled from ear to ear as he pulled her into a hug.

“Thank you, baby. I’ll make sure it’s worth it,” he promised.

Before they knew it, the new year had arrived, and Drue was preparing for the first trip of his book tour. Christmas dinner with his family had gone well, and for the most part, everyone accepted Drue and Siyanna's union. Only one of his female cousins had something negative to say, and Cherie shut her up quick.

Drue's book had been released a few days prior and hit number five on the New York Times bestseller list. The reviews were positive, and he was excited about the book tour.

Siyanna, on the other hand, was a nervous wreck for a few reasons. Of course, leaving the boys for three and a half days was at the top of the list. She was also concerned about being seen with Drue in public. He wasn't famous in such a way that people approached him on the street, but avid readers of Black Romance knew D. Blackmore well.

"Baby, you ready? The car is outside," Drue shouted as he waited for her at the bottom of the stairs.

"Give me a minute," she yelled back.

"I've given you thirty minutes already, woman. If you aren't down here in thirty seconds, I'm coming up."

Siyanna looked around their bedroom to make sure she had everything. Their bags were already downstairs, so she grabbed her purse and headed for the door. At the last second, she spotted Dylan's favorite teddy bear. Picking it up, she rushed down the stairs.

"Drue, Dylan doesn't have his teddy bear."

She held it up for him to see, and he immediately knew it was about to be a problem.

“It’s okay, Si. He’ll survive a few days without it,” Drue reasoned.

“He will not! You know how they are about their bears. We have to drop it off on the way to the airport.”

Tears began to well in Siyanna’s eyes, and he knew he wouldn’t win this battle, but they were running late, so he had to try.

“Baby, we’re already behind schedule. Ma’s house is not on the way, and we don’t have time—”

“But he needs it, Drue,” she cried. “He won’t be able to sleep without it.”

Siyanna was in a full-blown cry at this point, and Drue had to think of something quick so they could be on their way. He took out his phone and called his mother.

“Hello, son. Is everything okay?”

“It’s fine, Ma—”

“No, it’s not,” Siyanna whined.

“What’s wrong with her?” Cherie asked when she heard Siyanna in the background.

“Dylan doesn’t have his bear and we don’t have time to drop it off. Can you come by and pick it up?”

“Well, I didn’t plan on leaving back out. He has some—”

“No, Mama. Dylan needs his favorite bear,” Siyanna interrupted, still crying as if the world was ending.

Cherie heard the desperation in Siyanna’s voice and decided to tell her what she wanted to hear, although she had no intention of following through.

“Okay, Si-Si. We’ll come and get it now. Leave it on the table by the door, so I won’t have to look for it.”

“Thank you, Ma. We love you. Gotta go.”

Drue ended the call and grabbed Siyanna's hand, pulling her to the door.

"Leave it there," he told her, nodding toward the table. "You heard Ma. She's coming to get it."

As soon as she placed the bear on the table, Drue activated the alarm, opened the door, and damn near yanked her outside.

"Our bags," she said, her voice cracking.

"The driver already put them in the car. Let's go."

He pulled her along until they reached the car his publishing company had sent over. The driver was waiting for them with the passenger side back door open. Drue let Siyanna get in first and slid in next to her. He didn't relax until they were on the highway headed to the airport.

"Are you mad at me?" Siyanna asked softly.

"No."

"Why aren't you talking to me?"

"Because I've been praying we don't miss the flight. I'm not mad. Just a little anxious."

"I'm sorry. Leaving them is hard for me."

"I know, baby. It's cool, and we're good."

The rest of their ride was quiet, both of them lost in their thoughts. The next time someone said something, it was the driver.

"Mr. Hendrix, we're here."

The driver got out and retrieved their luggage from the trunk, putting it on the sidewalk before opening the door for them to exit the vehicle.

"Thank you," Drue told him as he dug in his pocket for a tip.

"That's already taken care of, sir. Enjoy your trip."

“THIS VIEW IS EVERYTHING,” Siyanna admired as she looked out of the floor-to-ceiling window in their hotel suite.

They landed at O’Hare airport a few hours prior. It took them over an hour to get from the airport to the hotel in downtown Chicago.

“There’s nothing like the Chicago skyline. Have you ever visited?” Drue asked.

“Nope. This is my first time.”

“Wow. I didn’t know that. Winters in Chicago are brutal, so I’ll definitely have to bring you back to experience summertime in the Chi.”

“With the boys?”

Drue laughed because he already knew they’d be bringing their sons.

“Of course. I gotta bring them to the city that raised me. C’mere.”

As soon as they entered their room, Drue got out of his travel clothes and put on some sweats. Siyanna still had on the leggings and hoodie she traveled in.

“And take that shit off,” he demanded.

As she made her way to him, she stripped out of her clothes. By the time she reached the foot of the bed, she was only in her black lace panty and bra set.

“You look good in this, but I want you naked.”

She came out of her bra and stepped out of her panties while Drue slid out of his sweats. His dick was already hard, and as they stared each other down, he wrapped his hand around it and stroked up and down. Watching him pleasure himself had her pussy leaking, and it was all the foreplay she needed.

“You wanna sit on your dick?” With hooded eyes, she nodded. “Tell me.”

“I want to sit on my dick.”

He stopped stroking and put his arms behind his head.

“Sit on it then.”

Slowly, she swung her leg over his waist and climbed on top of him. Placing her hands on his firm chest, she eased down on his erection, not stopping until his entire length was inside her.

“My pussy wet,” he groaned.

“Always for you.”

Drue’s length and girth were a lot to handle, and each time they made love, Siyanna had to give herself time to adjust.

“Can you handle being up there?”

He always asked her that same question when she was on top.

“I don’t know, you tell me,” she replied with the same answer every time.

“I think you need some help.”

Drue’s hands went to her hips, and he took over, fucking her from the bottom. Siyanna loved when he took control, thrusting his dick into her chest.

“Mm, shit, baby. You gon’ make me cum,” she whimpered.

“That’s always the goal, Si. Give it to me.”

Sex with Drue was an experience like none other. It was hard for her to admit it at first, and she still hated to think about it. Their bodies and minds seemed to always be in sync, and their souls spoke to each other in ways she couldn’t explain. The truth was, Drue was the best she’d ever had.

“Give it to me, baby,” he repeated.

Siyanna couldn’t hold it any longer, and her pussy coated his dick with her essence. Drue continued to stroke her until she begged him to stop. He only heeded to her pleas long enough to flip her over, switching their positions. Putting her legs on his shoulders, he got right back to work.

“Shit, Drue!” she screamed.

“This my pussy, Si,” he stated.

Siyanna thought he was asking a question and replied, “Yes, baby, it’s yours.”

“That wasn’t a question, baby. I know this pussy mine.”

Cocky ass! But he spoke facts.

Drue wanted her to cum again before he filled her with his seeds. He stroked her slow, then fast, then slow again, rotating his hips when he knew he was on her spot.

“Oh, damn! I’m cummin’, baby.”

That was his cue to let loose, and they came simultaneously. After a minute or so, Drue rolled to the side of her, breath still labored.

“We need to shower and get dressed, so we don’t miss our dinner reservation,” he said.

“Can’t we just order room service? I’m tired.”

“I didn’t bring you with me so we could stay locked away in our suite.”

“I know, but I’m exhausted. We can go out tomorrow,” she told him with a yawn before rolling onto her side.

Drue couldn’t argue with her because, within seconds, she was asleep.

MORNING CAME QUICK, and Drue had two book signings that day. Luckily, they were both in the hotel’s conference room, and there were a few hours between them. After having breakfast in their room and making love in the shower, they dressed in coordinating colors and made their way to the conference room.

“Maybe I should stay in the suite,” Siyanna said when they got on the elevator.

“Why would you do that?”

“I don’t want to be in the way.”

He kissed her on the temple before saying, “You won’t be. I promise.”

The elevator opened, and Drue took her hand as they exited. The hotel was huge, and it took them about five minutes to find the conference room. When they arrived, Patrick and a couple of other people from the publishing company were there.

“Hey, Drue. I hope you’re well-rested. Both signings are sold out,” Patrick informed him.

“Good morning to you too, Patrick. This is Siyanna. Baby, this is Patrick.”

“Nice to meet you, Patrick,” Siyanna greeted as she offered her hand.

“Siyanna, it’s nice to meet you, too.”

Patrick looked back and forth between Siyanna and Drue, and she could see the exact moment the light bulb went off. Drue had already begun conversing with someone else on his team and didn’t notice.

“Today should be very exciting. Drue’s fans have been waiting a long time for this release,” Patrick said when he realized Drue’s attention was elsewhere.

“This book was well worth the wait.”

“I agree, and I think I understand why he gave us so much shit about the genre classification.”

Siyanna gave him an uncomfortable smile before excusing herself.

“I’m gonna use the restroom.”

She turned and walked toward the entrance to the conference room, and Drue noticed her leaving.

“Baby, hold up. Where you going?”

“To the bathroom. I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll come with you,” he said, taking her hand.

“No, baby. Go get ready. I’ll only be a minute.”

She pecked his lips and hurried out of the conference room. There was already a line forming in the hallway, which made her nervous for some reason. She found the bathroom and quickly took care of her business. When she came out, there was a woman at the sink washing her hands.

“I love your hair,” the woman complimented.

“Thank you,” Siyanna replied as she washed her hands.

“What shop do you go to?”

“Oh, I’m not from around here.”

“Damn, it figures. Are you here for the book signing with D. Blackmore?”

“Umm, yeah. I am.”

“Have you read the book? I think it’s his best one yet. He hit all my emotions with this one. I laughed, cried, was angry, and even side-eyed the main characters. But in the end, I realized you only live once, and you can’t help who you fall in love with. Even more, you can’t deny who your soul connects with. It was the most beautiful love stories I’ve ever read.”

“Wow! You got all of that from his book?”

“Yes! You didn’t?”

“I mean, now that I think about it, I guess so. I didn’t think about it that deeply.”

“Well, honey, you should reread it so you can get the full effect. I’m surprised it didn’t hit number one. It’s still early, though. I think it’ll get there.”

“I hope so. He deserves it.”

“He truly does. It’s hard to find out anything about him, but I heard he was married. If he treats his wife anything like the male characters treat their women in his books, that is one lucky woman.”

“Yeah, I’m sure she is,” Siyanna agreed absently.

“Oh, I’m Gina, by the way.”

“I’m Siyanna. It was nice meeting you.”

They shook hands as Gina said, “It was nice meeting you, too.”

Gina left the bathroom, and Siyanna gave herself a quick once over in the mirror. She chose to wear a black fitted sweater dress with black lace tights, red booties, and accessories. As she exited the bathroom, her phone began to vibrate. Pulling it out of her purse and saw Drue’s name on the screen.

“Is everything okay?” she answered.

“Yeah, I was checking on you. Are you headed back?”

“Yes, Drue. I’m on my way.”

“Hurry up. We’re about to open the doors.”

“I’m coming.”

A few minutes later, she heard someone calling her name as she approached the conference room.

“Siyanna, come this way,” Patrick summoned as he waved her in his direction. “Hurry.”

As soon as she reached him, he looped his arm through hers and led her to where Drue stood.

“Here she is, safe and sound,” Patrick said, and Siyanna could swear she heard some sarcasm in his voice.

“Thanks, Patrick. Baby, here’s where you’ll be sitting,” Drue said, taking her hand and leading her to a chair that was behind his and off to the right a little.

“Drue, I can sit in the back or with the audience.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Because people are gonna be taking pictures and posting them all over social media.”

“The only pictures and recordings allowed at my book signings are from my camp, so we can control what’s put out. You don’t have that to worry about,” he told her.

She sighed before saying, “I’d still rather not be up front.”

Siyanna had to be the most stubborn woman he’d ever met. Although he wanted her close, he agreed to let her sit where she felt most comfortable.

“Fine but sit in the front row.”

He kissed her lips then smacked her on the ass as she walked away. Right after Siyanna was seated on the end of the front row, someone announced that the doors were opening.

There were no assigned seats, so it was every man or woman for him or herself, and of course, the front filled up first. It took about fifteen minutes for the crowd to get settled.

“Before we get started, I’d like to thank everyone for coming. I know it’s been a while since my last release, and I appreciate your patience and support. I’m glad you all didn’t forget about me and were anxious to read this one.”

He paused briefly, and the crowd clapped and praised him.

“I had a hard time choosing what passage I wanted to read, so I narrowed it down to five and put it in the hands of my fans. I bet you’re wondering which one got the most votes?”

Cheering came from the audience.

“I’d like to do something I’ve never done before. I’m going to choose a member of the audience to read the female parts.”

You would have thought he’d proposed to every woman present with the way they hollered and waved their hands in the air. Once they settled down some, Drue looked over the crowd even though he already knew who he was gonna choose.

“You, in the front on the end,” he said, pointing to Siyanna.

She looked to her left, even though no one was seated next to her. Then she turned to her right, and the person seated there was looking right in her face.

“He’s talking about you,” the woman said, nudging her.

Siyanna's eyes landed on Drue's, and she shook her head from side to side. When the audience began to encourage her, she knew she had no choice. So, begrudgingly, she joined Drue at the front of the conference room.

“Hello, beautiful. What’s your name?” Drue asked, wearing a smirk, taking her hand in his and leading her to a stool.

“Siyanna.”

“Thank you, Siyanna, for agreeing to read with me.”

I didn’t agree to this, but whatever, she thought as Drue kissed the back of her hand.

“The excerpt we’re going to read is from chapter nine when Amaury and Ziana finally succumbed to their feelings for each other,” Drue announced.

Siyanna thought back to the night she read the manuscript. She couldn’t remember what chapter it was, but she recalled how Drue described the couple’s first sexual encounter. He was able to capture the essence of how Siyanna felt in real life, and she couldn’t help but wonder how she would get through the reading without messing up her underwear.

After she sat on the stool that was provided, someone from Drue’s team gave her a copy of the book, already opened to chapter nine.

“You ready?” Drue asked.

“As I’ll ever be.”

BY THE END of the reading, Siyanna was hot and bothered, with wet panties and hard nipples. She couldn't wait to get Drue alone to give him a piece of her mind for putting her on the spot, then let him fuck the shit out of her.

While they waited for the applause to end, Siyanna avoided looking in Drue's direction but could feel the heat from his gaze on her. Finally, the clapping slowed, and Drue addressed his fans.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you. Let's show Ms. Siyanna some love."

The applause grew loud again, causing her to blush. As it died down once more, she slipped back to her seat. As soon as her butt hit the seat, the woman to her right hugged her with excitement.

"That was hot! The chemistry between the two of you was off the meter. You're even wearing matching colors," she raved.

"Oh, umm, thank you."

"Girl, you did so well, he might hire you to come to all his signings."

Siyanna smiled uncomfortably and cringed at the thought of him tricking her into reading another excerpt. She would definitely have a conversation with him about it.

"I'm sure you all have some questions, so before we answer the questions that were sent in from my social media pages, I'll take some from the audience," Drue said.

Typically, Drue would only answer the questions from his Facebook and Instagram pages. His team would go through them and choose what they thought was appropriate. Patrick suggested he change it up and choose a few questions from the audience. He also was the one who suggested Drue have Siyanna read with him. Drue thought both were great ideas and took Patrick's advice.

"There are some microphones stationed at the front of each aisle. If my boy Patrick chooses you, feel free to approach the mic," he continued.

After the audience members Patrick selected were lined up at two different mics on opposite sides of the room, the question-and-answer session began.

“Oh my God! I can’t believe I’m actually talking to D. Blackmore,” the first woman cooed.

Drue smiled. “Thank you for being here today. What’s your name and question?”

“I’m Terri, and I have a comment and question. I’ve read all your books, and every single one of them is amazing. This one, though, seems a lot more...personal. I was wondering what inspired the storyline and characters?”

“That’s a great question, Terri. All my books are inspired by life. Sometimes it’s my life, and sometimes it’s the life of someone I’m close to. One thing you can always count on is my storylines will be relatable and realistic. I’ll always write about things that could happen to anyone.”

Drue gave his attention to the group standing at the mic on the right.

“Thank you for being here today. What’s your name and question?”

“Hi, D. My name is Wanda, and I just have a comment. Under no circumstances would I consider hooking up with my sister’s ex. I don’t care if she’s alive or dead. I really wanted to be mad at Amaury and Ziana for breaking the code. I swear I looked at them sideways for a long time, but their connection was so genuine and pure, and the love they had for each other poured from the pages. Ultimately, I ended up rooting for them to get their happily ever after because you completely changed my stance on that. Great work!”

“Thank you. I appreciate that. I wanted my readers to recognize the struggles the couple had when they began to acknowledge their feelings for each other. The decision to follow their hearts wasn’t easy for either of them.”

The next person approached the mic on the left, and right away, Drue got a bad vibe from her.

“My name is Krystal. I heard from a very reliable source this book is a true story, based on your life.”

Drue cleared his throat, and his body became tense as his eyes briefly connected with Siyanna’s.

He chuckled before saying, “Don’t believe everything your reliable sources tell you. If you don’t hear it from me, don’t believe it. Did you have a question?”

“I honestly just want to know if you fucked your sister-in-law before or after you buried your wife and brother.”

“Security!” Drue shouted, but it didn’t stop Krystal from talking.

“Ask him who Siyanna really is to him. He set y’all up. It was all staged!” Krystal continued shouting as two men took her by the arms, lifted her, and carried her to the nearest exit.

The audience began to whisper, but it slowly grew into a quiet roar. Drue announced the question-and-answer session was over, and he would be signing books for the remainder of the time.

While his team instructed the audience to line up in an orderly fashion, Drue went to Siyanna and guided her to the corner of the conference room that was blocked off by dividers.

“You okay?” he asked.

“I’m fine, but who was that woman? Do you know her?”

“Never seen her before in my life, but I knew she was on some bullshit. I could feel her bad vibes when she stepped to the mic.”

“Who could she have gotten that info from?”

“Who knows?” he replied as he shrugged his shoulders.

“I think for the next signing, I should stay in the suite. I probably should head up there now.”

Drue didn’t want her to be stuck in their suite, but he agreed it might be for the best.

“Let me walk you up.”

“No, baby. You have a hundred fans to greet and books to sign.”

He knew she was right, so instead of making a fuss, he cupped her face in his hands and planted a gentle kiss on her lips.

“Text me when you get upstairs, and don’t go anywhere else. If you get hungry, order room service.”

“Okay. Go be great. I love you,” she told him before stealing another kiss.

“I love you, too.”

He watched her exit through a side door before heading to the table his team had set up for him to sign books. Usually, signing books was his favorite part of the tours, but the episode with Krystal had him wishing he was anywhere but there. However, he wouldn’t let one sour apple ruin the experience for him, so he put on a smile and got to work.

WHEN SIYANNA ARRIVED BACK in the suite, she sent Drue a text on her way to the bedroom, slid out of her booties, and collapsed on the bed. For some reason, she was exhausted... and starving. It was almost noon, and it had been a few hours since she’d eaten. After lying there for a few minutes, she changed into some leggings and a hoodie, ordered a cheeseburger, fries, and a Sprite from room service, then channel surfed until she heard a knock on the door.

“Who is it?” she called out as she approached the door, assuming it was her food.

“Room service,” came from a female’s voice on the other side of the door.

Siyanna barely had the door open when she heard, “Smile pretty for the camera.”

Flashes temporarily blinded her, but she was able to knock the camera out of the culprit's hands. When her vision cleared, she was shocked to see Krystal, the woman who'd just been put out of Drue's book signing.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"No worries, sweetheart. I got what I needed," she replied before running off with the camera in hand.

Angry at the intrusion of this stranger and concerned about why she seemed determined to cause problems, she slammed the door and went back to the bedroom of the suite.

"What's her deal?" she wondered aloud.

Before she could make it back to the bed, there was another knock at the door. This time, Siyanna looked through the peephole to see who it was before she opened it. After confirming it was her food, she opened the door.

"Hi, I have a cheeseburger, fries, and a Sprite for—" the man began.

"Yes, thank you."

He tried to roll the cart into the room, but after what just happened, Siyanna stopped him.

"I got it. No offense, and thank you again," she said with a strained smile.

About thirty minutes later, Siyanna was done eating and had thoroughly enjoyed her meal. However, as she headed back to the bedroom, she suddenly felt nauseous. Luckily, she was passing the bathroom and made it to the toilet before her meal came up.

"What is wrong with my stomach?" she whispered after catching her breath.

Standing at the sink, she brushed her teeth then splashed water on her face. Before leaving the bathroom, she looked at herself in the mirror for an extended amount of time, examining her face.

“Maybe it does look a little fuller,” she said, patting her cheeks.

Stepping back, she pulled the bottom of the hoodie above her stomach and studied it for a moment, turning to the side.

“Oh my God. I couldn’t be. Could I?”

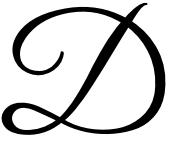
Erasing the thought from her mind, she decided a nap would do her some good. After stripping down to her underwear, she closed the floor to ceiling drapes, lowered the volume to the television, and buried herself under the comforter.

The next time she opened her eyes, Drue was hovering over her, calling her name.

“Si, wake up, baby.”

Before she could sit up all the way, her stomach started to rumble. She shoved Drue out of her way and made a beeline to the bathroom. After vomiting earlier that afternoon, her stomach was empty, so she dry-heaved herself to tears. Once she felt it was safe, she moved away from the toilet and put her back against the wall.

“Do I need to take you to the E.R.?”

Drue pressed a cool towel against her forehead. He was concerned that she may have caught a bug and hoped it wasn't the flu.

"No, I'm fine," she replied between slow, measured breaths.

"You aren't fine. Do you remember me being here a few hours ago?"

"No."

"I know you don't. I came back here after the first signing, and you were asleep the entire time."

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

"Because I assumed if you were napping you were tired, but I wasn't expecting you to still be asleep when I came back this time. I definitely wasn't expecting you to get sick at the sight of me."

"It wasn't you that made me sick. I ordered a burger and fries and after eating, I got nauseous, and it all came back up."

"So this is the second time you've thrown up today?" he asked, his tone filled with worry. Siyanna nodded. "Do you think you caught something? Maybe the flu? Was it the burger? Let me call the restaurant and—"

"No, Drue. The burger was fine, delicious actually."

"If you say you're fine and it wasn't the burger, what could it—"

He paused and looked at her inquisitively, as if something had just dawned on him.

“You don’t think—could you be pregnant?”

“We’ve been so reckless, Drue. I’m not on any birth control and you’ve never wrapped up.”

“You think you’re having my baby?”

“I don’t know but it’s possible. How would you feel if I were?”

“Shit, happy, I guess.”

“You guess?”

“I would be happy.”

Siyanna still wasn’t convinced.

“When we get home, I’ll make an appointment to find out for sure,” she told him. “That should give you enough time to decide how you feel about it.”

She eased up from the floor and when he tried to help her, she snatched her arm away. For the third time today, she brushed her teeth, then returned to bed.

“I said I’ll be happy. How about I have someone from my team go grab a test from—”

“No, I’d rather no one else knows about this, especially since it could be a false alarm.”

“I can go get one myself,” he offered.

Instead of answering, she changed the subject.

“That Krystal woman from earlier was up here.”

Confused, he asked, “What do you mean, up here? In our suite?”

“No, she knocked on the door and said she was room service. Since I was waiting for my food, I opened the door, and she snapped a picture before I knew what was happening.”

“I guess they only put her out of the conference room and not the hotel. How the hell did she find our room? You think

she followed you?”

“I don’t think so. No one was on the elevator when I came up. What the hell is her obsession with us and who is feeding her information?”

“The only people that know our room number is my team, and what would they gain from talking to her?”

“I have no idea, but it’s obvious someone is talking.”

Drue thought about the people he worked closely with from the publishing company. None of them seemed like the type to leak information. However, since he didn’t allow them to bully him in to publishing his latest release as an autobiography, he’d noticed some tension. Sooner or later, everything done in the dark comes to light. Hopefully, the mole would be forced out of hiding sooner rather than later.

“What are you thinking?” Siyanna asked when she noticed him in deep thought.

“Nothing for you to worry your pretty little head about. And don’t think I didn’t notice how you avoided answering me about going to get a test.”

“If I’m pregnant, it’s not going to change between now and Monday.”

“I guess we can wait. Are you hungry? We were supposed to—let me get this. It’s Patrick. Hello?”

Drue answered his phone, putting it on speaker.

“Have you been online?” Patrick answered.

“Umm, not in a few hours. Why? What’s up?”

“Go to the Zeewiththetea Facebook page.”

Siyanna hated social media and didn’t engage. So, she watched Drue as he maneuvered to the page Patrick mentioned.

“What the hell is this?” he griped. “How did this information get out?”

“I don’t know, Drue, but since it posted your book sales have skyrocketed.”

“Are you fucking serious? I don’t give a fuck about book sales. You know how I feel about keeping my private life private. I’ve been writing for over ten years, and this is the *first fucking time* my given name has been put out there.”

“Drue, I know this upsets you, but—”

“Ain’t no fucking but, Patrick. This changes everything about how I need to move from this point forward. If I find out someone from Creative Minds put my shit out there, it’s gon’ be called Hendrix Publishing.”

Drue ended the call before Patrick could respond, tossing his phone to the other side of the bed.

“What happened?”

Releasing a deep, anger-filled breath, he shook his head.

“Don’t worry about it, baby. I’ll take care of it.”

“Drue, I’m a grown ass woman. Tell me what’s going on,” Siyanna demanded.

“One of the gossip pages posted some shit they should know nothing about.”

“What was it?” she pressed.

Before Drue could reply, his phone rang again. He reached across the bed to get it, and when he saw it was his mother, he quickly answered, putting it on speaker again.

“Hey, Ma. What’s up?”

“Hey, Mama,” Siyanna sang.

“Hey, Si-Si. Drue Hendrix, you tell me what’s going on. Why are folks from Chicago calling to tell me about you being all over the internet?”

“Because your family and friends are messy as hell.”

“No, sir! You’re not about to play my family and the people I call friends like that. Two things I never played about

was you and your brother. People know not to call me with no nonsense when it comes to y'all."

"What'd you hear, Ma?"

"Why didn't you tell me what this new book was about?" she asked, answering his questions with a question.

"I rarely talk to you about my books, Ma. Why would this one be any different?"

"Because apparently, it's about out your life and since I gave you life, I feel like you could have mentioned it."

"Is that what you heard?" Drue asked, trying to get her to answer his original question.

"Don't matter what I heard, son. All I know is whatever you wrote in that book got people all up in your business. I know how you feel about your privacy, and I wanted to check on you to see how you were handling everything."

"I'm pissed."

"Well, you kind of stirred the pot with the book. All it takes is one person to start digging. There's no way someone was able to connect your pen name to your given name, whoever's been running their mouth is on the inside."

"I was thinking the same thing, and when I find out—"

"Don't even say it, son. You know the Feds be listening to our calls."

That made Drue and Siyanna laugh.

"Here you go with that mess," Drue teased. "It's awfully quiet there. Where are the boys?"

"I'm about to wake them up from their afternoon nap. I'll FaceTime y'all before I put them to bed tonight."

"Alright, Ma. We love you."

"Love y'all, too. Later."

Drue calmed down while talking to his mother, although he was still upset about the situation.

“So, you think it was someone from the publishing company?” Siyanna asked.

“They were adamant about me promoting this book as an autobiography, and when I refused, they were in their feelings. I believe they thought I’d give in eventually and when I didn’t, they found another way.”

“Wow! That would be messed up if it was them.”

His phone notified him of a text message. He picked it up to see it was Melody.

Melody: I know you’re pissed and I’m already on it.

Drue: Thank you

“Who was that?” Siyanna asked.

“Melody. She’s already trying to figure out how to fix this.”

“I’m starving but now I ain’t so sure about going out.”

“I’m content right where I am. I actually don’t have an appetite, so going to a restaurant would be a waste of money.”

“Room service it is, but you gotta eat something.”

“What’s the point if it’s just gonna come back up?”

“The point is, if my daughter is growing inside you, she needs her nourishment.”

“You couldn’t even say you were happy about the possibility, Drue. Let’s not—”

His lips on hers shut her up. Just as she relaxed into his kiss, he pulled away.

“Listen to me, Si. I would be more than happy if you were pregnant with my child. It took me a second to process and I apologize if my response made you think I’d be anything but happy.”

“Really?”

“Yes, Siyanna. I love you, and I love our family. The only thing that will make me happier is if you’d agree to marry me.”

“Marry—are you serious?”

“As hell.”

“Drue, I don’t know what to say.”

“We don’t have to do it right away, but I want you to know I plan to make you my wife.”

Siyanna was somewhat relieved to know Drue didn’t want to get married any time soon. She was still coming to terms with them being in a full-blown relationship. Marriage wasn’t on her radar.

She didn’t know how to respond to his promise, so she distracted him with a kiss. By the time they came up for air, Drue was no longer expecting a response.

“Let’s go get a test. There’s a pharmacy not too far from here,” he suggested.

“You want me to go out in that freezing weather? Plus, I don’t want someone to see us.”

“Freezing? Woman, this weather is mild for January in Chicago. We’ll be bundled up and nobody will be able to see our faces. Come on.”

He got out of the bed and pulled her along with him. After she was dressed in the leggings and hoodie she had on earlier, she bundled up in the coat and boots Drue bought her specifically for that trip.

“It’s not even that cold out,” he teased.

“Let’s go before I change my mind.”

They held hands and remained silent on the elevator ride down to the lobby. Both of their minds filled with thoughts of the possibility of Siyanna being pregnant and nervous about what it could mean.

As they stepped off the elevator and rounded the corner, they were bombarded by people with microphones and flashes.

“Mr. Blackmore, is it true you’re really Drue Hendrix?

“Was Drae Hendrix your twin brother?”

“Was *Conflicted Heart* about you and your sister-n-law?”

“Are you now in a relationship with your dead twin brother’s widow?”

The questions were coming fast and from every direction. Drue made sure the reporters didn’t get near Siyanna and was grateful they were able to get right back on the elevator. One of the reporters tried to get on the elevator with them, but Drue was able to stop him from doing so. When he pushed the man back, his camera fell inside the elevator, and Drue snatched his arm back inside, just before the doors closed.

“Fuck!” Drue shouted, then kicked the camera into the wall, causing it to shatter and Siyanna to cower into the corner.

When Drue noticed, he immediately pulled her into his arms.

“I’m sorry, Si. I had no idea they would be posted up here. This is crazy.”

The elevator stopped on their floor, and they rushed to their suite. Siyanna held her breath until they were safely inside.

“I didn’t sign up for this, Drue.”

“Baby, you know I keep a low profile and my life has never been put on display. Nothing like this has ever happened and I know for a fact, this was all by design.”

“What do you mean?”

“Creative Minds is behind this bullshit.”

“Why would they—”

“Did you hear Patrick when he called? Talking about my book sales had skyrocketed. Never mind the fact that shit I never planned for the world to know is now public knowledge. All he was concerned with were my book sales. They didn’t want this book to be fiction, remember? And they probably only agreed because they had cooked up this plan to expose me. Bitch-asses!”

“I don’t know, baby. That all seems kind of...”

“ Fucked up is what it is.”

“ Well, before you go off on them, be sure, Drue. You don’t want to ruin the relationship you have with the company based on an assumption.”

“ I got this, Si.”

“Can you stop by a pharmacy?” Drue asked the driver once he and Siyanna had settled into the back seat.

“Of course,” the driver replied.

“Drue, I told you my appointment is on Wednesday.”

“I’m not waiting two more days when I can find out today.”

Siyanna smacked her lips and rolled her eyes. Her mood had been up and down since the elevator incident, and it didn’t go unnoticed by Drue.

“Mama’s probably already at the house with the boys,” Drue continued in an effort to keep her talking. He refused to let her moodiness get to him.

“Good.”

“I think three and a half days with them might have worn her out.”

“She’ll be glad to know I’m not going to the next signing.”

Drue was determined for day two of his book signing to go well. He knew the likelihood of his fans reading the blogs was high, so he didn’t take questions from the audience. Patrick tried to convince him to address the information the media was reporting, saying it would give him control of the narrative and keep the momentum going, but Drue refused because he wanted to wait and see what Melody came up with. Siyanna remained in the suite just in case things got out of hand again.

“As much as I want you with me, I agree you should stay home. This weekend turned out nothing like I expected, and I hate you had to be there to experience the madness.”

“I don’t think it would have been as maddening had I stayed at home. Part of the reason everything happened was because of my presence.”

“No, this shit happened because somebody was running their damn mouths. Every time I think about that shit, I get pissed off.”

“All you can do now is damage control.”

“I’ve already started thinking of some things I could do, and Melody is working on it, too.”

Melody had been Drue’s publicist since the first time he ranked on the New York Times bestseller list. She popped up in Chicago on the second day of his tour, and had remained in constant contact with him since everything hit the fan.

She informed him that a few Instagram and Facebook talk show hosts had reached out and invited him to their shows. He hadn’t mentioned it to Siyanna yet, but he was considering accepting an invitation or two.

When the driver pulled up at Walgreen’s, he got out and opened Drue’s door. As he moved to exit the vehicle, Siyanna stopped him by touching his arm.

“You don’t have to get out,” she told him.

Ignoring her, he got out and extended his hand to her. She took it and eased out of the car.

“I don’t need a chaperone to buy a pregnancy test, Drue.”

“No one said you did.”

He opened the door to the store and let her walk in first.

“I already know it’s positive because your ass is spreading.”

She gasped, stopping in her tracks. “Are you serious?”

“I am, and it looks good.”

They found the aisle with the pregnancy tests, and Siyanna took a minute to decide which one she wanted to get.

“It can’t be that hard, Si. They all do the same thing,” Drue said as he snatched up five different tests.

“Drue, wait!”

She followed him to the refrigerated area and watched him grab a tall bottle of water. A few minutes later, they were back in the car, and Drue gave Siyanna the water.

“Drink this so you’ll be ready to pee on these tests as soon as we get home.”

“Bossy much?” she said before twisting off the lid and taking a sip.

About fifteen minutes later, the driver parked in their driveway, next to his mother’s car. He got out to get their luggage and take it to the front door while Drue and Siyanna lingered inside the car for a few minutes.

“I’m surprised you didn’t jump out of the car before he put it in park trying to get to the boys.”

“What if I’m pregnant?”

“What do you mean? If you’re pregnant, we’re having a baby,” Drue replied, obviously confused.

“But what about the boys?”

Still confused, Drue said, “They’ll be big brothers. I’m not sure where you’re going with this.”

“They won’t be my babies anymore, and I’ll have to share my time.”

“That’s what parents of multiple children do. We won’t be the first.”

“What about the boutique?”

“Siyanna, tell me what you’re worried about because I’m confused right now.”

“How am I gonna run a boutique and take care of three kids, all under the age of three?”

“The same way you would run a boutique and take care of two kids under two. I’m not following you.”

“Drue!”

Shifting his body to face her, he took her hands in his.

“Baby, women, especially Black women, do shit like that all the time, and you have me, Ma, and Dani for support. But if you want to postpone opening the boutique, it’s up to you. I’ll support whatever decision you make.”

“I just...Being a good mother is important to me. Summer and I didn’t have that, and we always said if we were blessed with children, we would be all in, you know?”

“I understand, but you can be a great mother and run a business at the same time if that’s what you want to do. If you only want to focus on motherhood, that’s fine, too, baby. Money isn’t an issue, and when you’re ready, you can open the boutique.”

Siyanna sat in silence as she processed Drue’s advice. It wasn’t something she had to decide at that moment, but it had been heavy on her mind since the possibility of her being pregnant entered her mind. She wanted to do it all; be a great partner to Drue, a great mom, and a great business owner. However, she wasn’t sure she’d be able to juggle everything all at once.

“I don’t have to decide today, so I’ll give it some more thought before I make a decision. Now, can you put those tests in your backpack, so Mama isn’t giving us the third degree?”

He nodded with a chuckle. “Most definitely. She’s already in our business enough.”

When they entered the house, the boys giggling was music to Siyanna’s ears. She dropped her purse and ran to the family room.

“Look at my babies!” she shouted with joy.

As Dylan and Dash ran to her, she kneeled to their level, opened her arms, and scooped them into a hug when they reached her.

“Oh, I think somebody missed mommy, too.”

The boys showered her with kisses then tried to talk to her in their one-and-a-half-year-old language. Siyanna could only decipher some of what they communicated, but she smiled and nodded her head anyway.

“Hey, Ma,” Drue greeted before he kissed his mother’s cheek.

“Well, it’s good to see that one of y’all has manners. I’m glad you had a safe trip back home.”

“You know Si has tunnel vision when it comes to those boys. How were they?”

“I told y’all every time you called that they were fine. They wore me out, though, but I loved every minute of it.”

“We appreciate you, Mama. I won’t be traveling with Drue anymore, so you won’t have to keep them as long again.”

“You know I don’t mind, but I understand why you aren’t going with him anymore,” she told Siyanna before addressing Drue. “Have you figured out how you’re going to deal with all this?”

“Melody gave me a few ideas, and I have some of my own. My main goal is to find out who from Creative Minds has been running their mouths.”

“The way those people hounded you to convince you to sign with them, I have a hard time believing they’re going to the blogs with all your business,” Cherie reasoned.

“At the end of the day, their main goal is to make money. If they think telling the world about my personal life will sell books, I wouldn’t put it past them. It can’t be anyone but them, Ma.”

“It makes sense, but I’m hoping you’re wrong. How was everything otherwise? Si-Si told me a little about how you set her up.”

“Oh my God, Mama. He was so wrong for that,” Siyanna chimed in.

They talked about the book signing for a while before Cherie decided it was time for her to head home.

"I thought y'all might be tired from traveling, so I made dinner. Baked chicken breasts, mashed potatoes, and asparagus. It's on the stove, and the salad is in the fridge."

"Thanks, Mama. Lord knows all I want to do is cuddle with my babies," Siyanna admitted. "Cooking dinner is the last thing on my mind."

"We appreciate you, Ma. Let me walk you out."

A few minutes later, Drue returned from seeing his mother to her car. He picked the boys up from the floor where they were playing with Siyanna and went to sit on the couch.

"Why'd you do that?" she asked Drue.

"Because I missed them just as much as you did, and you got five sticks to pee on."

"Oh, I forgot all about that."

"Well, I didn't. Now go," he demanded.

Before going to the powder room, Siyanna went to the kitchen to get a paper cup, then retrieved the pregnancy tests from Drue's backpack. Once inside, she relieved herself in the paper cup and put it on the counter. After wiping herself and washing her hands, she opened the first test and dipped the tip into the cup until it was covered in her urine. She repeated the same steps with the other four tests, sitting each on the counter without looking at them and leaving the bathroom.

As soon as she entered the family room, Drue's eyes connected with hers. She knew he expected her to say something, but she kept quiet and sat on the couch next to him and the boys. His eyes remained on her as he waited for her to give him some indication of what she found out in the bathroom. When she didn't, he spoke up.

"Siyanna, what the hell did the tests say?"

"I'm not pregnant."

"What? Are you sure?"

She shrugged her shoulders. “Go see for yourself.”

He shifted Dylan and Dash from his lap to the couch and did what Siyanna suggested. The sticks were laid out on the counter, and he picked the one closest to the edge up first. It took him a minute to decipher what lines meant what, but when he did, he put that one down and moved on to the next. The last two tests gave the results in words which left nothing to question.

After finding out what he needed to know, Drue marched back into the family room. Siyanna looked at him anxiously as she waited for him to speak.

“Why are you playing with my emotions, Si?”

“What do they say?”

“You didn’t look at them?”

“No, I was too nervous.”

He took a few steps toward her and got on his knees, using his body to open her legs and inserting himself between them. The boys had slid off the couch and were occupied with their toys.

“We’re having a baby,” he whispered.

“Are you serious?”

“I wouldn’t play with something like this, unlike you. You’re pregnant. *We’re* pregnant.”

“Wow! This is...this is unexpected. I mean, I know we weren’t careful, but I was so caught up in dealing with my feelings for you, I didn’t think about precautions.”

“I can’t lie, I thought about it for half a second, but it never crossed my mind again after that. Once I hit it raw, wrapping up wasn’t even an option, anyway.”

“How do you feel about it? How do you *really* feel about it?”

“Si, I have to be honest. I’m man enough to admit the thought of you giving birth scares me. After the doctor told me Summer was gone, then minutes later, I saw them putting you

on a gurney and wheeling you away, I almost lost it. Two security officers tossed my ass in a room and calmed me down. All I could think was, they'd already taken Summer from me, and I didn't want something to happen to you and cause my brother the pain I was feeling.”

“Is that why you reacted the way you did in Chicago?” He nodded. “Drue, I wish I could promise you nothing will happen to me, but I can’t. All we can do is pray that all goes well when that time comes.”

“I know, but the thought of losing you scares the shit out of me, and I can’t handle another loss like that.”

“We can’t focus on that.”

“I know, baby, and I’ll do my damnedest not to. How do you feel about it?”

Siyanna sat quietly for a moment, considering her words.

“I love you, Drue, and I’m in love with you. But I have to be honest, this adds another layer to an already complicated situation.”

“Si, if you’re about to say some shit about what other people will think, save that shit because I don’t wanna hear it. Tell me how *you* feel about having my baby.”

A smile graced her face, and a wave of relief washed over Drue.

“I’m happy. I’m excited. I’m a little nervous about having three under three but being a mother brings me joy. I couldn’t be happier.”

The whole time she spoke, Drue’s smile got wider and wider. They kissed for the first time since he confirmed her pregnancy, but it didn’t last long. As soon as he noticed them, Dylan made his way over and jammed his little body in between them, using all his strength to push Drue away from Siyanna.

“I’m gon’ put your little cockblocking ass out if you keep this up, son,” Drue said before picking him up and tickling him into a laughing fit.

Dash joined them and called himself helping his brother, but instead, Drue began tickling them both at the same time. Siyanna watched and couldn't help but smile at the visual and hope the joy she felt in that moment would remain forever.

A

few days later, Siyanna's doctor confirmed she was ten weeks pregnant. They were able to hear the baby's heartbeat and get an ultrasound. It was too early to determine the gender, which they weren't expecting to find out anyway.

As soon as they left the doctor's office, she texted Dani, asking her to stop by when she finished her shift. Dani replied, questioning if everything was okay, and Siyanna assured her friend it was.

"When are we telling Mama?" she asked Drue as he drove them to the pharmacy to pick up some prenatal vitamins.

"I wouldn't be surprised if she already knows, but we can tell her whenever you're ready."

"She did notice my weight gain before either of us did."

"Let's tell her before I leave for my signing this weekend."

After picking up her prenatal vitamins, they took the boys to the park for a little while, and when they returned home, Dani was parked in front of their house. She got out of her truck as they pulled into their garage and waited for them to get Dylan and Dash from the back seat.

"You know I just worked a sixteen-hour shift and gotta be back in ten. This better be good, and it better be fast."

"Hello to you too, Dani," Drue greeted with sarcasm.

"My bad, Drue. What's up?"

“I promise it’ll be worth losing thirty minutes of sleep,” Siyanna told her with a giggle.

Once everyone was inside, Siyanna and Drue put the boys down in the family room to play with their toys. Drue left the women with the boys and went to his office.

“So, what couldn’t you tell me by text or phone call?”

“Well, I didn’t think you’d want to find out you’re about to be a Godmother through text,” Siyanna exclaimed.

“Hold on! What? You’re pregnant?”

“Ten weeks, to be exact.”

“Oh my God, Si-Si. Congratulations! I knew something was up with you.”

The two embraced for a brief moment before sitting on the couch.

“I think I knew it, too, but was in denial.”

“You been letting Drue hit it raw?”

Siyanna nodded, feeling slightly embarrassed.

“Shit, it was bound to happen. How do you feel about it?”

“I took five tests when we got back from Chicago, so I’ve had time to process.”

“And?”

“I’m excited but a little nervous.”

“And Drue?”

“He’s happy but has some real fears because of how Summer died.”

“That’s understandable. I can’t imagine how he, well, both of you, might feel. I’ll be praying from this day forward that everything works out fine. Y’all are about to have three kids, all under three years old. Whew, chile.”

“That’s the same thing I said. I don’t know what I’m gonna do about the boutique.”

“What do you mean?”

Siyanna shared her concerns about whether or not now would be a good time to open the boutique. Although she didn't have a family, Dani understood her concerns.

"Listen, Si-Si. I know the boutique is a dream you and Summer shared, and it means a lot to you. If it's something you want to do, go for it. However, you don't have to do it now. Do it when you're ready."

"That's the same thing Drue said. I don't know what I want to do right now. I have three locations I need to decide between before I lose all of them."

"Do you want my honest opinion?"

"Always."

"Doing both is possible, but the fact that you feel like you have to decide between the two lets me know you'd rather not do both, at least not right now. This decision is tormenting you because you want to open the boutique in honor of Summer's memory, and I get that. However, motherhood is what brings you the most joy. I think you should focus on that...*for now*."

"I think so, too."

"Summer would understand. If she could see the way you love Dylan as if you birthed him, it would mean more to her than opening the boutique."

A tear fell from Siyanna's eyes, and she quickly wiped it away.

"See, that's why I needed to talk to you face-to-face. You always know what to say, and you get me right together. I appreciate our friendship more than I could ever show you."

"I know you do, Si. I'm honored you've allowed me in your space. Now, I need to go get my ass in the bed, or I won't be no good to these patients in nine hours."

The women stood and embraced for a few moments before Siyanna walked her to the door. She felt much better about everything after her talk with Dani.

IT HAD BEEN a full day since Drue left for Atlanta, the second stop on the book tour. Before he left, they shared the pregnancy news with Cherie, and just like they thought, she already suspected it. They made her promise not to tell anyone until they were ready for the world to know, to which she happily agreed.

This was the first time since Siyanna moved in with Drue that he'd been gone overnight. Before she went to bed the night before, she checked the locks on the doors and windows several times, along with making sure the alarm was activated. She also let the boys sleep in the bed with her because she wanted them close.

Dani was off for the next two days and agreed to spend the night. Siyanna was excited because it made her think of when she and Summer lived together. When their work schedules matched up and they both had the same days off, they would stay up all night, eating junk food. She would force Summer to watch nineties movies with her, and Summer would force her to listen to mumble rap music by these new so-called rappers.

Just as she was headed out of the garage to take the boys on a walk, her phone rang. She pulled her phone out of the side pocket of the leggings she was wearing and looked at the screen. When she saw that Drue was FaceTiming her, she couldn't hide her smile.

"Hey, baby!" she answered with excitement.

She propped her phone up on the stroller before continuing out of the garage.

"Damn, I miss your beautiful ass. Where are you going?"

"I miss your fine ass, too. I'm taking the boys for a walk. We may stop at the park, but I'm not sure I can handle these two alone. You know Dash will run off as soon as he's loose."

"His name ain't Dash for no reason," Drue joked. "What time will Dani be there?"

“In a few hours after her shift ends. How’s everything going?”

“The first signing went okay. I decided not to choose an audience member to read the excerpt with me, and we only answered questions from my social media accounts that had been vetted. Everything was controlled, so it was fine.”

“That’s good. Why don’t you sound happy?”

“Because I wish you were here with me.”

“Aww, you’re pouting.”

“Maybe.”

“Once things die down a little, we can revisit me traveling with you. Does that make you happy?”

Drue smiled. “You know it does.”

“Good. Now stop acting like a brat. You wanna say hi to the boys?”

“Of course.”

Siyanna had walked at least a block since they’d been on the phone. She stopped and went to the front of the double stroller and squatted in front of it.

“Dylan, Dash, you wanna say hi to Daddy?”

“Da-da,” they both sang as they reached for the phone.

“No, Mommy will hold it,” she told them.

Drue talked to the boys for a few minutes and listened to them babble about their day. After ending the call, Siyanna finished her walk, deciding to take them to the park tomorrow, when Dani would be with her.

As she rounded the block, she saw a familiar car parking in front of their house. When she got closer, she saw it was Joseph.

What is he doing here? Doesn’t he know Drue is out of town?

When she made it to the driveway, Joseph got out and met her in front of the garage door.

“Hey, Joseph. What are you doing here?”

Joseph didn’t answer her right away because he was too busy eyeing her body. The leggings she wore fit her like a glove causing his eyes to pause at the apex of her thighs.

“Joseph,” she called out. “What are you doing here?”

“I was out running some errands and thought I’d come chop it up with my boy. He home?”

“Umm, no. He didn’t tell you he’d be out of town this weekend for a book signing?”

“Oh, shit, my bad. It slipped my mind. You must have worn the boys out. They’re sleeping good as hell.”

“We just went for a walk, but it’s their nap time, so...”

“Okay,” he said with a nod but didn’t look to be preparing to leave. “Drue told me about all the shit that went down at his last signing. Social media can be brutal, too. Is that why you didn’t go this time?”

“Partly.”

“What are you doing to keep yourself busy while he’s gone? Maybe we can—”

“I have two toddlers to chase around, so I have plenty to keep busy. But Dani’s on her way, and she’s gonna hang with us until Drue gets back.”

The way Joseph kept licking his lips as his eyes continued to travel the length of her body, staring at certain areas longer than others, made Siyanna uncomfortable. She wanted to make sure he knew she wouldn’t be home alone, so she lied about Dani being on her way. Her shift didn’t end for a couple more hours.

“Ahh, a girl’s night in. Is that what you ladies call it?”

“Yeah. Mama is coming by, too,” she added for safe measure.

“Sounds like you’ll be more than occupied. I’ll give Drue a call later to catch up with him. My bad for popping up on you like that.”

“No problem.”

Neither of them moved at first. Siyanna wanted to be sure he was gone before she went inside, and Joseph wanted to sneak a peek at her ass. It became awkward quickly, so he headed to his car. She opened the garage and waited for it to open before pushing the stroller inside.

Just as she opened the door to enter the house, she heard her name. When she looked up, Joseph was jogging over to her.

“Aye, you think I can use the bathroom right quick?”

Siyanna had only interacted with Joseph a handful of times, and she'd never been alone with him. There was something about him she didn't like, but it wasn't until the barbecue last month that he'd ever said anything disrespectful. Her gut didn't feel good about his presence, but she convinced herself she was overreacting.

“Uh, sure. You know where the powder room is.”

“Preciate you,” he told her before going inside.

Siyanna decided it would be best to stay in the garage until Joseph left, so she began moving stuff around to make herself look busy.

Inside, Joseph walked through the kitchen on the way to the bathroom. He could have waited until he got home to relieve himself but he wanted to extend his time in Siyanna's presence. Asking to use the bathroom was all he could think of to make that happen.

After relieving himself, he washed his hands and went back through the kitchen. When he was almost at the door, something caught his eye that caused him to pause. Picking up the bottle, he whispered to himself.

“Prenatal vitamins? Drue done got this bitch pregnant? Hell, naw!”

For some reason, that made Joseph angry. He'd always thought Summer and Siyanna were beautiful and was envious of Drae and Drue. The women were regulars in his fantasies

when he pleasured himself. He'd never done or said anything disrespectful to either of them off the strength of his relationship with his boys, but that didn't stop him from lustng after them.

After Drae died, the thought of pursuing Siyanna crossed his mind a time or several, but he wanted to give her ample time to mourn. Anytime he asked Drue about how she was doing in the months following Summer and Drae's death, he always made it seem like she was barely hanging on and only focused on being a mother to their boys. Joseph had no idea the whole time, Drue was making a move on her.

Siyanna and Drue being in a relationship went against every man-law and bro-code that existed. Her being with one of Drae's friends was bad as well, but his brother...his *twin* brother... was far worse. Joseph was definitely willing to take any backlash he would've received had he pursued Siyanna, but now, he knew it would be even harder to woo her with Drue in the picture, especially if she was carrying his child. He hoped he'd come up with a plan sooner rather than later.

When he went back outside, Siyanna looked to be cleaning up. He watched her for a while, noticing the fullness of her face, and the width of her ass. She looked to have gained back some of the weight she'd lost, and the thought pissed him off.

"You still working out a lot, or just walking with the kids?"

The way Joseph's eyes studied her body made her extremely uncomfortable, and she wanted him gone asap.

"Both," she said, barely loud enough for him to hear her.

"This weight looks good on you. It's perfect."

"Umm, thank you."

"I'm not trying to offend you. If—"

"It's fine, Joseph. I need to get inside."

"I won't hold you any longer, but it was good to see you. Have a good one," he told her as he exited the garage.

As soon as Joseph was out of the garage, she pressed the button to close it. Once it was closed, she released a breath she

didn't know she was holding.

"Ugh. He's such a creep."

*I*n Atlanta, Drue finished up the second and last book signing for the day. Things went well, and he was pleased. He refused to let the shit show that happened in Chicago happen again. It was still beyond him how things went left so quickly, but he'd been on a mission to find out.

He finished up a conversation he was having with one of his readers that had been lingering around. Since he didn't get a bad vibe from her, he engaged when she spoke to him. The conversation was pleasant, and he was glad he didn't brush her off.

Picking up his backpack that he put on the floor next to his leg, he swung it around onto his back and adjusted it for comfort. The hotel he was staying in was in the heart of downtown and about a block away from the bookstore where the book signing was held.

After saying goodbye to the owners and thanking them for their hospitality, he waved to his team members that were still standing around talking and headed out the door. On his walk, he was tempted to call Siyanna again but figured he'd let her enjoy her time with Dani and call her later.

Entering the hotel, the aroma of food invaded his nostrils. He'd had a light lunch, but that was long gone, and his stomach growled. Instead of going straight to his room and ordering room service like he planned to do, he made a beeline to the restaurant.

It was still a bit early, so there wasn't a wait, and he was seated immediately in a booth. He liked the restaurant's ambiance because even though it was still relatively light outside, it was dim. The booths had very high backs and separated you from the people on the other side, providing a bit more privacy, which Drue liked.

However, a few minutes after his order had been taken, he became annoyed. With the way the booths were made, he saw no reason why he should be able to hear the person behind him talking. He wasn't sure if the person was abnormally loud or if the booth wasn't as private as he initially thought. He tried to tune the man's voice out until it began to sound familiar.

"Listen, Natalie. I tried to help you out, and I'm sorry the results weren't what you expected."

Then there was a brief silence on Patrick's end while Natalie responded.

"Drue has always kept a low profile, and I thought his personal life being put on display would shake him a lot more. But he simply doesn't give a fuck, and I don't know what you expect me to do."

More silence.

"Come on, Natalie. I thought we had a deal? Why would you bring my wife into this when I followed your plan?"

This nigga!

"You sought me out and lured me into this shit. Not the other way around. You can't change our original agreement because your plan didn't work out. I did everything you asked."

I knew he was a bitch!

"Fine! When I get back in town, we can meet up and come up with something else, but that pussy needs to be wet and ready before we talk."

Lame ass!

"Okay, okay. I'll be there as soon as we touch down."

Before his food came, Drue discreetly slid out of his seat and went to the bar. After telling the barhop to tell his server to have his food delivered to his room, he quickly left the restaurant before Patrick saw him.

AFTER DOING SOME DIGGING, Joseph found what he was looking for. He used social media as much as the next man, but he didn't follow all the gossip sites. It took him about an hour of looking on his Instagram explore page to find the blog that seemed to be the most interested in D. Blackmore.

He sent a direct message to [@zeewith_thetea](#) and anxiously waited for a response, and thankfully, he didn't have to wait long. After the person behind the page gave him the third degree, he almost said fuck it. However, once he sent her proof that he and D. Blackmore were best friends, she ate up everything he had to say.

SIYANNA HEARD a knock on her bedroom door followed by Dani's voice.

"Umm, Si-Si. You might want to take a look at this."

"We're up. Come in," she told her friend as she situated the boys on the bed with the iPad playing cartoons.

When Dani entered her bedroom, the look on her face caused Siyanna to immediately become concerned.

"What's wrong?"

Without saying a word, Dani handed Siyanna her phone. It was open to a post on Facebook from the gossip blog [ZeeWITHthetea](#).

"Damn! What now?"

"You should read it for yourself," Dani urged.

I'm warning you now, this is a long one. Black Romance author D. Blackmore, whose mama named him Drue Hendrix, has been in the blogs a lot lately. If you're a fan, you know he typically keeps his nose clean. His latest book, "Conflicted Heart," was released earlier this month and right before this post was ranked number two on the New York Times bestseller list, where it debuted at number five. The book is classified as fiction but is rumored to be based on his life.

Last night, I spoke with a source close to Blackmore/Hendrix, and the source confirmed the book is not fiction but an autobiography that he wants to pass off as fiction to keep his fans out of his business. If you haven't read this page-turner, stop reading now because I'm about to ruin it for you.

If this rumor is true, Drue Hendrix is romantically involved with his widow's twin sister, who also happens to be his deceased twin brother's wife. Yep, you read that right. May they both rest in peace, but if this is how their siblings are out here living, they're probably turning over in their graves. Now, I didn't make this tea, I'm just serving it, and I got a shot of Hennessy to go with it. Siyanna is pregnant!

You heard it here first! Don't forget to comment, like, and share.

When she finished reading, she continued to scroll to the comments.

"Damn, that's some sick shit."

"They were probably fucking before their siblings died. You never know with people."

"That book was good as hell, but there's no way it's real life."

"This don't surprise me at all because women are so trifling."

With every word she read, Siyanna felt sicker and sicker. Drue made a point not to show Siyanna what had previously been said about them, so this was the first time she'd seen it for herself, and she regretted it. There was only one thing in

the post that hadn't already been publicized, and she knew only a select few had that info. Her eyes lifted to Dani's, who wore a look of sympathy.

"How could you?" Siyanna whispered, her voice filled with disbelief, giving Dani back her phone.

"I thought you should know what was being said," Dani answered innocently.

"How much did they pay you?"

Now, confusion filled Dani's face. "Pay me? What are you talking about?"

"You and mama are the only people that know I'm pregnant, and I know she didn't go running her mouth to the blogs."

"Si-Si, are you serious? I would never do that."

"Who else could it be?" Siyanna shouted, startling the boys enough to have them look at her.

"I don't know, but it wasn't me. Maybe Drue—"

"Get out!"

"Si-Si, I swear—"

"Get out!" she repeated.

For a moment, Dani looked like she wanted to say something else but changed her mind. She went to the guest room to gather her things, and five minutes later, she was gone.

Siyanna remained in her room with the boys replaying the horrible things she read. She couldn't imagine how quickly this information would spread and how many people would feel the need to voice their opinions. Everything happening was exactly what she was afraid of, and she didn't know what to do.

DRUE WAS MORE quiet than usual on the plane right back to Las Vegas. Patrick continuously tried to engage him in conversation, but Drue wouldn't bite. It took everything in him not to choke the shit out of Patrick. Eventually, his agent took the hint and went his ass to sleep.

The flight was almost five hours, and all Drue could think of was running up on Patrick and Natalie. He couldn't understand why Natalie had it out for him. Yes, what he did was bogus, but it wasn't like they were in a relationship and he ghosted her. She'd already slapped the taste out of his mouth. *What more did she want?*

Natalie's beef with him was irrelevant in the big scheme of things, but the fact that Patrick was somehow working with her to bring Drue down was mind-blowing. He hoped that his agent had a lot of money saved up because not only was he about to lose his job, but his name would be mud in the literary world as well. Not to mention his wife would probably divorce him. *All that over some pussy that was probably ran through and mediocre at best.*

Drue and Patrick's cars were in the same parking garage, so they were headed in the same direction once the plane landed. Patrick again tried to strike up a conversation as they walked.

"Are you bringing Siyanna to Cali next week?" he asked Drue.

Before replying, Drue thought about Siyanna's reaction when he mentioned Los Angeles.

"No. Why?"

"I was thinking about letting my wife tag along, but I don't want her in my face the whole time. Maybe her and Siyanna can hang out."

Drue just looked at him but didn't respond.

"I knew you weren't much of a talker, but I had no idea you were damn near a mute."

Drue chuckled. "I talk to my friends and people I like."

It took a second for that to sink in, and when Patrick realized that was a dig, he replied, “The fuck did I ever do to you besides help you become a bestselling author?”

Drue’s head popped up quick, and he took an aggressive step toward him.

“Nigga, I was a bestselling author before I met your bitch-ass. Don’t get this shit twisted.”

After staring at him angrily for a moment, daring him to say a word, he walked away. He didn’t want to get to Natalie’s house before Patrick, so he didn’t leave right away. He decided to kill a few minutes with a phone call to Siyanna.

“Hey, baby. We landed safely, and I’m in the truck,” Drue greeted.

“Good,” she replied, sounding a bit standoffish.

“You okay. The baby got you feeling sick?”

“No. I’m fine.”

Drue didn’t believe her and wanted to see her face. He FaceTimed her and waited for her to connect the call.

“Why are you FaceTiming me? I told you I’m fine.”

“Connect the call, Si,” he demanded.

“I gotta go, Drue.”

She ended the call before he could respond and was baffled by the whole exchange. When he tried calling back, it went straight to voicemail.

What the hell is going on?

As he pulled out of the parking garage, he told Siri to call his mother. She picked up on the second ring and sounded flustered.

“Yes, Drue?”

“Damn, what the hell is wrong with the women in my life today?”

In the background, he heard what sounded like Dylan and Dash.

“Are those my boys?” he asked Cherie before she could answer his first question.

“Yes. Siyanna dropped them off this morning. They were only supposed to be here for a couple of hours, but it’s been several. When I called her, she didn’t pick up but texted me saying she’d be a while.”

“What? I’m confused as hell, Ma. Last night when we talked, she was fine. My flight was early, so I didn’t bother her this morning. What could have happened between then and now?”

“Didn’t you tell me Siyanna didn’t have any social media pages?”

“Yeah. She’s not into it.”

“Hmm. Are you sure she didn’t create an account after what happened a few weeks ago?”

“She didn’t mention anything. Why, Ma? What’s going on?”

“I take it you haven’t seen the blogs.”

“I haven’t. I turned my notifications off when that other stuff went down and never turned them back on.”

“One of the blogs leaked that Siyanna was pregnant,” Cherie told him.

“What? Who? Nobody knows except you and her friend Dani, and I know damn well it wasn’t you.”

“It’s killing me, but I haven’t told a soul.”

“That only leaves one person, but I honestly don’t think Dani would do that either.”

“What about one of the nurses at the doctor’s office?” she suggested.

“Possibly, but I don’t even think anyone there would care enough to go to the blogs. I’m not that well-known, Ma.”

“I can’t tell, son. Your name seems to be all over the place these days.”

“What good would leaking that info do anybody? Ain’t nobody paying to hear shit about me.”

“Well, I think Siyanna somehow became aware of it getting out. I could tell something was wrong when she dropped the boys off but assumed she was tired, and the baby was giving her the blues.”

“Do you know if she’s home?”

“I don’t know, but when you find out, let me know. I’ll keep the boys as long as you need.”

“Okay, Ma. I love you.”

“I love you, too, son.”

“BRING your ass in here before someone sees you,” Natalie griped as she pulled Patrick into her home.

“Who cares? I don’t know anyone in this neighborhood.”

He followed her upstairs to her bedroom, stripping out of his clothes along the way. Natalie had on a satin robe, and Patrick prayed she was naked underneath.

“Drue doesn’t live too far from here. Are you sure he didn’t follow you?”

Patrick shook his head. “He was still in the parking garage when I left, and why would he follow me anyway?”

“Stranger things have happened.”

“I guess so. Like your Inspector Gadget ass hunting me down and convincing me to help you get revenge.”

“You weren’t hard to convince.”

“Good pussy can get a man to do just about anything,” Patrick told her as he pulled the belt to her robe.

It fell open, revealing a perfect naked body underneath.

“Just good?”

“Your pussy is outstanding, Nat.”

By that time, he was naked, and he picked her up and sat her on his dick. Her pussy wasn’t as wet as he liked, it never was, but it was ten times better than his wife’s. Who was he kidding? Since their second child was born, Patrick barely knew what his wife’s pussy felt like. She hated having sex with him, and to appease him, she sucked his dick as often as he requested.

While that was great, nothing could replace the feel of a woman’s pussy wrapped snugly around a man’s dick, snatching a nut from him. That was the main reason why it was easy for Natalie to convince him to take part in her shenanigans against Drue, although he’d never really liked that man anyway.

“You’re on the pill, right?” Patrick growled when he realized he went in bare.

“Hell yes,” she replied as her walls tightened around his dick.

That was all Patrick needed to hear before releasing his kids inside of her. About ten minutes later, he was dressed in his underwear, undershirt, and the socks he hadn’t taken off. Natalie was wrapped in her robe again, and they were seated at her kitchen table.

“So, what’s the plan?” he asked her.

“You haven’t been online?”

“I slept the whole plane ride, and I didn’t want to turn my phone on just in case my wife is tracking my location,” he confessed.

Natalie raised her eyebrows. “If she ever shows up at my place, she’ll get the ass whopping she’s looking for.”

“No worries, Nat. What’s the plan?”

She picked up her phone and pressed a few things. When she found what she was looking for, she handed the phone to Patrick.

“We may not need a plan. Looks like someone beat us to the punch,” she told him with a broad smile.

At first, Patrick didn’t see any new information and wondered why Natalie was acting as if they’d hit the jackpot, but he continued to read, though unimpressed. It wasn’t until he reached the end of the post and read some of the comments that he realized the shit had hit the fan.

“Damn! She’s pregnant? So, how are they gonna explain this to the kids they already have? This new baby will be the brother or sister to them both...”

“And their cousin, too?”

They sat quietly, trying to make sense of it before their eyes met, and they both burst out laughing.

“If that ain’t some *Flowers in the Attic* type shit,” Natalie joked.

“The comments I saw under the post are not kind, but this won’t do anything but push his book to number one.”

“I don’t care about that shit. It’s his personal life that I’m trying to ruin. Nigga had me suck his dick then ran outta here like a bitch. Every time I think about it, it pisses me off. Then had the audacity to block my number.”

Natalie sprung up from the chair and untied her robe, letting it fall to the floor.

“Do you see this body?” she asked as she did a three-sixty turn with her hands on her hips.

Patrick’s dick was hard, and he was drooling by the time Natalie faced him again. He was so stuck he couldn’t even respond.

“He is the only man that’s ever rejected me, and he will pay for making me feel like I wasn’t shit. Siyanna will read all those comments and hopefully see the error of their ways, and break Drue’s little heart.”

Patrick didn’t give a damn about Drue and Siyanna anymore. All he wanted to do was bury himself inside

Natalie's walls. So he swooped her up and sat her on the counter, then pushed his underwear down.

"Who cares about Drue? You got me," he told her as he entered her.

WHILE NATALIE and Patrick fucked each other to oblivion, Drue was right outside the kitchen window, recording it all. When he'd had enough, he walked around to the front of the house, still recording, and banged on the front door like he was the FBI. He could hear them whispering and scurrying around, probably trying to find clothes. He pounded on the door again until he heard Patrick's voice.

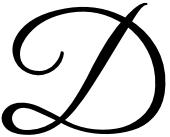
"Drue, what the hell?"

Before opening the door, Patrick looked through the peephole as Natalie hid behind him. She wasn't expecting anyone, and the way the person pounded on the door scared the shit out of her.

"Patrick, unless you want your wife to see this video of you fucking Natalie, you'll open the door."

Without hesitation, the door opened. Natalie appeared from behind Patrick, and he flung his arm around her shoulder in a protective manner. Drue snapped a few pictures as his phone recorded, then turned and walked away. Before he got too far away, he turned back around to warn him.

"I expect Charles to call me tomorrow morning to inform me about your resignation. If you try to get a job at another publishing company, this will be sent to your wife and every blog out there."

Drue felt slightly victorious as he drove home. It wouldn't be a complete win until Patrick resigned. Although he discovered the mole, he still had no idea who informed the blogs of Siyanna's pregnancy.

He pulled into his driveway, and his stomach sunk when he didn't see Siyanna's truck. It had been about an hour since he'd spoken with his mother, and he'd called Siyanna several times on his way to Natalie's house. Every call was sent to voicemail, and Drue prayed she would be home when he arrived. Before getting out of his truck, he called his mother.

"Hey, Drue. Did you hear from Si-Si?"

"No, not yet. I wanted to see if you'd heard anything."

"Nothing since that last text. She's not home?"

"I'm in the driveway, and her truck isn't in the garage. Where could she be?"

"Have you reached out to her friend Dani?"

"No. She sent me a text a long time ago, but I never saved her number. I hope it's still in my phone."

"Don't worry yourself too much, Drue. Siyanna won't do anything crazy. She probably just needed some time to herself."

"I hope so. I'll call Dani and see what she knows."

"Okay. Keep me posted."

Ending the call with his mother, he let out a frustrated groan.

“Damn, Si. At least send me a text to let me know you’re okay.”

Before leaving his truck, he looked through all the texts he had from unknown numbers. When he found the text from Dani, he called her.

“Hello?”

“Dani, this is Drue.”

“Hey,” she replied. Drue could tell something was a bit off.

“I’m looking for Si. She’s not answering my calls or replying to my texts. Is she with you?”

“No. Siyanna put me out of your house hours ago after accusing me of going to the blogs about her pregnancy.”

“Are you saying it wasn’t you?”

Drue did his best not to sound accusatory, but he had to ask.

“No, Drue. I would never betray Siyanna’s trust that way.”

“How did she find out? Did she make a Facebook or Instagram page?”

“I showed it to her because I thought she had a right to know her business was out there and what was being said about her.”

“Damn, I wish you hadn’t done that.”

“Hell, me too. I had no idea she would react the way she did. I haven’t talked to her since I left. Drue, I promise you I haven’t breathed a word to a soul. That’s not the kinda bullshit I’m on, and I hope Siyanna will come to realize that.”

“I believe you, Dani. If you hear from her, can you let me know?”

“Of course, and you do the same. I just want to know she’s safe.”

“Will do. Thanks.”

He ended the call more frustrated than he was a few minutes ago. Siyanna only had one friend, and if she wasn't with Dani, he had no idea where she could be.

AFTER DROPPING the boys off with Cherie, Siyanna went to the cemetery. She needed some quiet time to think, and that's where her spirit was led. Thankful for the blanket she kept in the car, she spread it out in front of Drae and Summer's headstones.

For the first hour, she sat in silence, reflecting on the memories she had with her sister and husband. As the second hour approached, she couldn't contain the sadness she felt from their absence and cried a river of tears. No words escaped her lips until hour number three, and by the time she got up to leave, she knew what needed to be done.

Once she left the cemetery, she made a few other stops before heading home. She wasn't sure how the conversation with Drue would go, so she decided it would be best to leave the boys with Cherie. When she saw Drue's car in the driveway, her heart began to race. He'd been texting and calling her for hours and she knew he was probably worried about her well-being. Before she put her truck in park, he was pulling open the door.

"Baby, what the fuck?" he asked, relieved she was okay.

He helped her get out of the truck and wrapped her in his arms. Unwelcomed tears gathered in her eyes, and when he released her, the tears fell down her cheeks.

"Let's go inside so you can tell me why you disappeared and why you're crying."

Taking her by the hand, he led her inside. Siyanna sat on the couch in the family room, and Drue kneeled in front of her between her legs.

"I know you're upset about what the blogs are saying, but they would've found out eventually," he reasoned.

“I thought Dani was my friend, and she betrayed me.”

“You really think it was her?”

“Who else could it be? I have a hard enough time trusting people, and then she goes behind my back and does this.”

Drue wanted to defend Dani because he didn’t believe she was the one who leaked their business to the blogs, but at the moment, he had bigger fish to fry.

“Why weren’t you answering my calls and texts?”

She tried to look away from him, but he used his index finger to gently bring them face to face.

“Talk to me, baby.”

“I found a place, and I can move in this weekend.”

Confused, Drue replied, “A place for what? The boutique? Because I know damn well you’re not talking about a place to live.”

“I’m not talking about the boutique. I—”

“That’s what the fuck you should be talking about.”

He stood to his feet and began pacing back and forth.

“Against my better judgment, I gave you my blessing to publish the book. Now, everything I was afraid of has come true. Strangers, all in my business, judging me.”

“That wasn’t my intent, Si, and you know that. I did what I could to make sure we maintained a certain level of privacy. Shit happened that’s outta my control and—”

“I’m not blaming you, Drue. I’m just letting you know this ain’t what I signed up for. It’s hard enough dealing with my own guilt about us, and I don’t need everyone on social media adding their two cents.”

“You don’t even use social media, so you wouldn’t—”

“That’s not the point!” she shouted.

“Why do you care so much about what people you don’t know think of you? All this shit will die down as soon as

someone more interesting than me does something gossip-worthy.”

“Maybe so, but not forever. At some point, you’ll be back in the blogs, which puts me right back there with you. Someone will always be judging our decisions and relationship.”

“You’re exactly right, Si. People will always have something to say, but none of those people matter. I don’t understand why—”

“I’ve made my decision. We’re moving—”

“We’re?”

“You expect me to leave without the boys?”

“You expect me to let you take the boys?”

“Drue—”

“Naw, fuck that, Si. My boys ain’t leaving. If you wanna go, I can’t stop you, but the boys stay.”

She shot up from the couch.

“But—”

“Ain’t no fucking but!” Drue shouted in Siyanna’s face. “Just because you’re not woman enough to follow your heart and love whoever the fuck you wanna love doesn’t mean I’m willing to let you break my family apart. I already lost too much to let your lack of backbone fuck up the only good thing I have left.”

“Drue? I can’t—”

“I said what the fuck I said, Si. My boys ain’t leaving.”

Siyanna couldn’t believe the way Drue was talking to her. He’d barely ever raised his voice with her.

“Dash is *my* son, and he goes with me,” she spat.

He frowned, shocked by her words.

“To have your way, you would do that?” he whispered in disbelief. “You’re selfish enough to separate them?”

Guilt washed over her. The boys hadn't been separated since Dash came home from the hospital, and the mere thought made her sick.

"They don't have to be separated if you let them come with me," she pleaded.

"They don't have to be separated if you stay," he countered.

Falling back on the couch and covering her face with her hands, Siyanna began to weep. Drue was so angry, her tears did nothing to soften him. What he wasn't about to do was continue arguing with her, so he left her crying in the family room.

*T*t had been a few days since Drue returned from Atlanta. All he wanted to do was lay up under Siyanna and rub her belly, which showed no signs of pregnancy yet. Instead, they were sleeping in separate bedrooms and ignoring one another unless it had something to do with the kids. The tension between them was so thick, even the boys were feeling it. Their crankiness was at an all-time high.

After their argument, she packed up everything she'd moved to Drue's room and took it back to her old bedroom. He hadn't had a chance to tell her about Patrick and Natalie because they weren't speaking. He wanted to let her know she was behaving unreasonably but didn't want to say anything to make her change her mind about not moving out.

"Si, we can't keep this up," he told her as they sat down to have breakfast.

In an effort to keep some normalcy in the house, they continued to eat meals together. However, they didn't interact with each other and kept their focus on the boys.

"If you let me get my own place—"

"I'm not stopping you from moving if that's what you wanna do."

"You know I'm not leaving without the boys. Since you want to be an ass about it, this is how it'll be."

"*I'm* being an ass? You're the one that's giving up on us because of the opinions of some muthafuckas we don't know. I

know you aren't a fan of therapy, but you need that shit."

"All I need is for my life to go back to normal without all your nosy ass fans in my business."

He chuckled even though he didn't find anything funny.

"You know, Summer would've ate this up and found a way to capitalize off this shit."

As soon as he said it, he knew he was wrong, but he was so annoyed by the whole situation. The hurt in Siyanna's eyes almost made him apologize, but she spoke up before he was able.

"If that's what you think, you didn't know your wife as well as you thought. And Drae never would have let this happen in the first place. He would have protected me and my feelings at all costs, unlike you. Every time something is in the blogs, your book sales skyrocket. For all I know, you're your own fucking mole."

He couldn't believe his ears. The last thing a man wanted to hear was that he didn't protect his woman.

"The fuck are you saying, Si? You think I put my business out there for book sales, knowing how you..."

The more he spoke, the angrier he became, and the louder he spoke. Dylan and Dash felt the hostility between their parents and began to cry, interrupting their father's response.

"You see what you did? Don't talk to me unless it's about us leaving," she spat.

She took Dash out of the highchair to console him, while Drue did the same with Dylan. However, the boys began to cry even more as they reached for the opposite parent. After exchanging the two, the cries grew softer, and they were able to finish breakfast.

Later that afternoon, Drue hid in his office while Siyanna and the boys took a nap. When the doorbell chimed, he went to see who was visiting their home uninvited.

"What's up, bruh? Is it a bad time?" Joseph asked when Drue pulled the door open.

“Naw, come on in.”

He stepped back and let his friend inside. Joseph followed Drue to the kitchen, where Drue grabbed a couple of glasses and a bottle of Hennessy. Once on the patio, Drue poured them each a glass, downing his before Joseph had a chance to pick up his drink.

“Damn, it’s still early. It’s like that,” Joseph asked, lifting his drink.

“It’s worse.”

“I saw some shit in the blogs and been hitting you up. When you didn’t reply, I thought I’d just come through.”

“Yeah, shit’s been kinda crazy since I got back from Atlanta, but I don’t feel like talking about it.”

“Cool. How was your signing?” he asked his friend.

“Drama free.”

“That’s good. You seen Fred and Torrence? It’s been a minute.”

“I ain’t seen them, but we’ve talked or texted every few days. I think Fred might be more serious about Anya than he’s telling us.”

“She’s fine as hell, I tell you that. I don’t know why he don’t lock her down,” Joseph commented.

“She seems cool, and she don’t put up with his shit. That’s the kind woman his ass needs.”

They sat in silence. After downing his first drink, Drue babysat the second, and Joseph was now on his third.

“What’s been up with you?” Drue asked.

“Shit. Just working. You ready to talk about what’s got you drinking this early in the afternoon?”

“I found out it was my agent that leaked my personal information to the blogs. Somehow, he hooked up with Natalie, and she used her pussy to convince him to do it.”

Joseph was relieved when he realized someone else would be blamed for his underhandedness.

“Natalie? That stripper chick?”

Drue nodded.

“Damn, man! She really got it out for you. Are you sure all you did was ghost her?”

“I’m positive. She sucked my dick, and I dipped then blocked her number.”

“She took that shit to heart. How’d you find out it was them?”

Drue told Joseph about how he made his discovery, still in disbelief himself.

“I didn’t catch exactly how they connected, but I assume Natalie contacted him through Creative Minds. I mentioned Patrick and the company name that night we had you guys over.”

“That some desperate shit,” Joseph commented.

“When I caught their asses, Patrick knew I wasn’t playing with him. Charles called me the next day telling me Patrick resigned and he’d have to pair me with a new agent.”

“Who’s Charles?”

“One of the owners of Creative Minds.”

“I’m glad you figured all that shit out. It doesn’t fix the damage that’s already been done, but at least you got rid of his ass.”

“Yeah, but Patrick and Natalie didn’t start the pregnancy rumor.”

“Oh?” Joseph answered, feigning surprise. “It’s not true?”

“That’s neither here nor there. It wasn’t them who put it out there.”

“I saw her prenatal vitamins when I stopped by the other day...” *Shit*, Joseph thought.

When he realized he told on himself, his mind began to race as he tried to cover his fumble.

“The other day? When was that?”

“Oh, I meant the last time I was here before you left for Atlanta.”

Drue leaned forward and placed his glass on the table. After resting his elbows on his thighs, he firmly clasped his hands together.

“The last time you were here, Siyanna didn’t have any prenatal vitamins. Get your story straight before you lie to my face again.”

“My bad, Drue. I got shit mixed up. I forgot you were in Atlanta and stopped by.”

“Nigga, I talked to you a few times while I was in the A. How the hell you forget?”

Drue was on his feet, leaning over the coffee table that separated them.

“I was just out driving and—”

Reaching over the table, he used both of his hands to grab the front of Joseph’s shirt and pull him to his feet. Joseph was a pretty boy and had never been good with his hands. He talked a lot of shit but couldn’t back it up to save his life.

“Nigga, I distinctly remember talking to your bitch-ass after talking to her, and you ain’t mention shit about stopping by my shit.”

Joseph’s hands went to the outside of Drue’s fists as the grip on his shirt tightened.

“It slipped my mind, bruh. I ain’t on—”

“I swear to God, Joe, if you don’t make this shit make sense, I’m fucking you up.”

“What’s going on? Drue, what are you doing?” Siyanna yelled when she stepped onto the patio.

“You let this nigga in here when I was gone?” Drue asked, releasing Joseph and forcefully pushing him back into the chair, causing Joseph and the chair to tip over.

“What’s the big deal?” Siyanna responded, confused.

“Because he knew I was out of town, but he brought his ass here anyway.”

Siyanna looked at Joseph and frowned. She thought it was strange that he came over while Drue was gone but thought he was honest when he said it slipped his mind.

“You know I don’t fuck with Joseph like that. He caught me when I got back from my walk, but we were outside the whole time. He asked to use the bathroom before he left, and I waited for him in the garage.”

Drue looked at Joseph, who was on his feet again.

“You accused Dani of going to the blogs, and it was this grimy muthafucka the whole time,” Drue told her.

“What? You told him about the baby?”

“Tell her how you found out she was pregnant then ran to the blogs like a lil gossiping ass bitch,” Drue demanded.

“That’s not—I didn’t say—it wasn’t me, alright?”

Before Joseph could react, Drue had him hemmed up again. As Siyanna looked on, she didn’t know how Drue got to Joseph so fast but knew things were about to get bad.

“I’ve known you for damn near twenty fucking years. You don’t think I know when a nigga lying to me?”

“Hold up, man. It ain’t even like that. I—”

Drue punched him in the mouth before he could lie again.

“Drue!” Siyanna yelled when the second punch landed in Joseph’s stomach.

“Get the fuck outta my house, and don’t bring your ass around here again. I swear I’ll beat your ass like a nigga off the street.”

Drue dragged his former friend to the yard and pushed him until they reached the side of the house. Joseph didn't argue, nor did he put up a fight which confirmed his guilt in Drue's eyes.

When he returned to the patio, Siyanna gently took Drue's hands and looked at his fists. One of them was bruised and already starting to swell. Going back inside, she went to the freezer to get an ice pack then wrapped it in one of the dry towels they kept in a kitchen drawer.

"Put this on your hand," she told him when he entered the kitchen.

He took the ice pack from her and sat on the stool at the breakfast bar.

"What just happened here?" she asked him.

"He basically told on himself. You were here alone, Si. Why'd you let him in?"

"I told you I didn't let him in until he asked to use the bathroom. Why are you friends with him if you don't trust him?"

"I don't put nothing past any man when it comes to my woman. You need to call Dani and apologize."

Done with the conversation, Drue tossed the ice pack on the counter and left Siyanna in the kitchen. Although they found out who went to the blogs about her pregnancy, things between them hadn't changed for the better.

“*D*r. Miller, I’m at my wit’s end with this whole situation. I’m starting to think her feelings for me were never that deep if she could cut me off like that.”

Drue had been in his therapy session for about fifteen minutes, and the entire time he’d only spoken about what was happening between him and Siyanna.

“It’s apparent to me that something else is going on with Siyanna, and unfortunately, I can’t say what it is because I’ve never spoken to her. You only have control over your words and actions, and since you’re my client, I will advise you to be careful what you do and say.”

“Do you know how hard it is being in that house with her like this? I’ve tried—”

“From what you’ve shared with me, you haven’t tried. You have started every argument you’ve had with her. If she doesn’t want to talk to you, why are you trying to engage her?”

What Dr. Miller said was true. Things had gotten worse since the day Joseph had come over. Every argument was more intense than the previous one, and Drue was sick of it all. He was leaving the following day for Los Angeles, and although he was afraid he might come home to an empty house, he was looking forward to the stress-free environment.

“My intent is not to argue with her.”

“I can’t tell. You compared her to your deceased wife, which happens to be her twin sister. Those facts are part of the catalysts as to why she was so hesitant about being with you in the first place.”

“She said I couldn’t protect her like Drae,” he countered, sounding like a brat.

“Not until you mentioned Summer. That was low of you, and I’m sure it hurt her to hear. Her response was in retaliation.”

Drue knew Dr. Miller was on point but was in his feelings.

“Look, I want us to work this out. I love Siyanna with everything in me, and I believe she’s my soulmate. I can’t lose her.”

“Do you believe she loves you, too?”

“I honestly don’t know anymore. What I do know is our home has become toxic, and it’s not just affecting us, it’s affecting the boys, too.”

“I know you don’t want to hear this, but you may have to let her go. If she loves you as much as you love her, she’ll come back.”

The rest of the session was a blur. Drue couldn’t fathom giving Siyanna permission to leave and take their boys with her. It made him sick to think of it, but he wondered if Dr. Miller was right.

Before heading home, he stopped by his mother’s place to pick her brain. She’d done a great job minding her business, but he hoped she’d be open to sharing her thoughts about the ordeal.

“Wow, son. I haven’t seen you look so down since...come in and talk to me,” Cherie said when she answered the door.

Because Drue was her son and she loved Siyanna as her daughter, Cherie didn’t insert herself into their problems. If they asked for her help or her advice, she’d do her best to remain neutral.

“You want something to eat? I made some chili last night.”

“Naw, I don’t have an appetite right now. Maybe I can take some home for later.”

Drue followed his mother into her living room, and they both sat on the couch.

“What’s up, son? I left your house a little while ago, and Siyanna was sitting around looking just like you do now.”

“Shit is bad, Ma. Si wants to move out and take the boys.”

Cherie knew there was some tension between the two after the pregnancy news had been leaked. However, she didn’t realize how bad it was.

“Move out?”

Drue nodded. “She said she didn’t sign up for all this.”

“All what?”

“Everything that’s been happening on social media.”

“She doesn’t even use social media, so why does she care?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I said the same thing. It doesn’t make any sense to me. She blames me for everything.”

“Maybe I can talk to her.”

“You can try, but Si has never been comfortable with our relationship. I think she tried, and I get it because it took me a while to accept my feelings for her. But she’s so worried about how it would look to everyone, I don’t think she was ever all in.”

Even though she said she was, he recalled.

“You think she’s using this as an excuse to end everything?”

He nodded again. “Absolutely. Ma, once I decided I would pursue her, I was prepared to deal with whatever came with it. If she’s ready to leave at the first sign of adversity, maybe her feelings don’t match mine.”

“I don’t think that’s the case. There must be something more going on.”

“My therapist said something along those lines. I wish I could get Si to talk to her. I don’t want to ambush her, but—”

“No, you don’t. I’m positive that wouldn’t end well. Listen, son, Siyanna’s feelings are justified. Your...situation is unique, and that’s putting it mildly. Maybe with all that’s happened, she’ll be open to seeing a therapist. I’ll talk to her.”

“Thanks, Ma.”

“Now, what’s this I read about you and a new agent?”

“Where’d you read that?”

“Where else?”

“Social media,” they chimed simultaneously with a laugh.

Drue had been so caught up with everything happening between him and Siyanna, he never told Cherie about catching Patrick and Natalie red-handed or why his friendship with Joseph had come to an end.

“You might need a glass of wine for this, Ma.”

IT HAD BEEN a few days since Siyanna found out that she wrongly accused Dani of sharing the news of her pregnancy with the blogs. She’d finally gotten the nerve to call Dani and invite her over so she could apologize to her in person.

After putting the boys down for a nap, she whipped up a bowl of chicken salad, got some crackers and a bottle of wine, then waited for Dani. When Siyanna heard the doorbell, she was a little nervous, but she had to right her wrongs. She pulled the door open, and her heart almost stopped.

“Hello, Siyanna. It’s been a long time.”

The person standing before her was a blast from the past. Someone she’d stored in the recesses of her memory and tried to forget existed. Immediately, her eyes searched for something she could use as a weapon, and they landed on the vase on the table next to the door.

“Leon,” she whispered.

“So, you haven’t forgotten me, I see. I haven’t forgotten you either. You or your sister, may she rest in peace.”

“What do you—why are you here?”

“You cut your hair. You know that was what I loved most about you and Summer. It was so easy to grip as I shoved my dick down your throat. Why would you do that?”

She didn’t want to make any sudden moves because although about twelve years had passed, Leon looked to still be in great shape.

“Do you hear me talking to you, Yanna?”

Hearing the nickname Leon used for her all those years ago made Siyanna sick to her stomach.

“Leon, please leave and don’t come back. I have a family now and—”

“Yeah, I saw that. With Summer’s husband at that. I remember when I asked you and Summer to ride the same dick...*my dick*, as a matter of fact. You fucked me over and now you’re doing it willingly.”

“That’s not what this is, Leon. I’ve moved on, and so should you.”

“You owe me the money you stole, plus over twelve years of interest.”

“After what you did to me and Summer? After what you *forced* us to do over and over again? I don’t owe you shit!”

“Yanna, I will make your fucking life a living hell if you don’t pay me what you owe. Don’t try me!”

“Hey, Si-Si! Who’s your friend?” Dani said as she approached the door.

Siyanna was so shocked by Leon’s appearance, she didn’t even notice Dani park in front of the house. Before Siyanna could answer Dani’s question, Leon seemed to have vanished into thin air.

“Si-Si, are you okay?” Dani asked when she didn’t move from the doorway.

Siyanna stepped outside, looked up and down the street, and saw no signs of Leon.

“Where’d he go?” she asked, turning to Dani in a panic.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost. Come inside.”

Dani took her by the arm and gently pulled her into the house. After Dani closed the door, Siyanna yanked away from her and secured all the locks and the security alarm. Then she went to the kitchen and checked the door leading to the garage then did the same to the patio.

“Siyanna, you’re shaking, sweetheart. Let’s go sit down so you can tell me what’s wrong.”

In the family room, they sat on the couch, but Siyanna couldn’t speak until she calmed down, and that took a few minutes.

“When Summer and I were sixteen, we had to leave the family we’d been with for almost two years. At what was going to be our final session with our therapist, we told her we were going back to the group home until they could find another family for us. Since we were so old, there was a good chance they wouldn’t find a family to take us. Our therapist claimed she didn’t want to see us uprooted again, and by the following week, we were being placed in her home.”

Tears were flowing down her face, and she stopped to take a few deep breaths.

“Take your time.”

“Dr. Crosby had one son named Leon.”

“Was that the guy at the door?”

“You saw him?”

“Yeah, but when he saw me, he took off like a bat outta hell. What was he doing here?”

“He was actually here? That wasn’t my imagination? Oh my God. I have to get out of here. Now that he knows where I

am, he won't leave me alone.”

“Siyanna, please, calm down. You're gonna have a panic attack.”

“You don't understand, Dani. Leon is a horrible man. He-he—he—”

“Just breathe, Si-Si. You can tell me about him later, okay? I need you to focus on your breathing.”

While Dani did what she could to calm Siyanna down, she took out her phone and sent Drue a text, urging him to come home ASAP. He texted back that he was five minutes away but would be there in three.

“Dani, if I'm here when Leon comes back, he'll...he...”

“Drue won't let anything happen to you, Si-Si. I promise you that. I don't know what Leon did, but he won't do it again. You're safe with Drue.”

“I knew he would find me!” she shouted. “I knew he would find me sooner or later.”

Dani didn't know what to do, so she wrapped her arms around her friend, hoping to calm her nerves until Drue arrived. She could feel Siyanna's heart pounding at a rapid pace, her breathing remained heavy, and her tears continued to fall on Dani's shoulders. With the way Siyanna reacted to seeing Leon, Dani wasn't looking forward to finding out what occurred.

Drué had no idea what caused Dani to text him that urgent message. In the three minutes it took him to get home after receiving the message from Dani, his mind went in a few directions, none of them good.

He pressed the button to open the garage as he whipped into his driveway. When he hopped out of the car, he raced to the door and almost broke his nose trying to let himself in because he wasn't expecting the door to be locked.

"Si, baby! Open the door," he yelled as he shook the doorknob.

The door opened, and Dani was standing on the other side.

"Where is she?" he asked, brushing past her.

"The family room," Dani replied, following right behind him.

"Baby, what happened? Why are you crying?"

"Drue!" Siyanna wailed as she ran to his arms.

"Talk to me, Si. Tell what's got you like this," he coaxed.

She wanted to tell him, but the words wouldn't come. When he realized she wasn't going to talk, he asked Dani what she knew. Dani told him what little she knew, starting with the man she saw at the door when she arrived then what Siyanna had shared with her. Moving Siyanna away from his chest, he lifted her face forcing her to look at him.

“Who is this Leon guy? What did he do to you that has you so afraid?” he questioned.

Siyanna shook her head and buried it back in his chest. Drue looked at Dani with frustration because he needed more information, but Siyanna wasn’t in the frame of mind to tell him what he needed to know.

“Can you sit with her for a minute? I’m gonna check on the boys.” Dani nodded. “Si, baby. I’m gonna go check on the boys, and I’ll be right back.”

Her body shook as she nodded and sat on the couch. Dani sat next to her and pulled her into her side, allowing Siyanna to rest on her shoulder.

Drue raced up the stairs to check on Dash and Dylan. He wasn’t sure how long they’d been napping but was thankful they were still asleep. Before heading back downstairs, he called his mother.

“Hey. Is everything alright?”

“Can you come over right now?”

Cherie could hear the urgency in his voice.

“On my way now, but, Drue, is anyone hurt?”

“No, Ma. Be careful and let yourself in.”

Ending the call, he immediately searched for Dr. Miller’s number. When the call connected, her receptionist gave her usual greeting.

“Hi, Glenda. This is Drue Hendrix. Is Dr. Miller available? This is an emergency.”

“Oh, umm, I believe she’s in her office having a late lunch. Hold on.”

Not even a minute later, Dr. Miller was on the line.

“Drue, is everything okay?”

“I know this is asking a lot, but I wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t important.”

“What do you need?”

“Can you come to my house ASAP? Something happened with Siyanna, but she’s not talking to me, and she almost had a panic attack when she tried to tell her friend.”

“Let me have Glenda clear my schedule for the rest of the afternoon, and I’ll be right there.”

“Thank you. I really appreciate it.”

When he made it back to the family room, Siyanna still had her head resting on Dani’s shoulder, staring off into space. As soon as he sat on the other side of her, she climbed onto his lap and buried her face in his neck. Seconds later, sniffles could be heard.

“I want to help you, baby, but if you don’t talk to me, I don’t know what I can do.”

“He won’t leave me alone until he gets what he wants,” she mumbled into his shoulder.

“Who is he, and what does he want?”

She lifted her head, and it broke Drue’s heart to see her puffy red eyes, nose, and cheeks.

“Can we move? Please, Drue, get me out of here. Take me somewhere safe.”

“You gotta tell me what you’re running from,” he told her.

Cherie entered the room while Drue waited for an answer from Siyanna.

“Si-Si, sweetheart, what’s wrong?” Cherie asked.

Dani got up and moved to the loveseat, allowing Cherie to sit next to her son and daughter-in-law.

“She hasn’t shared much. I asked Dr. Miller to come over because I have a feeling she’ll need some support getting through whatever she ends up telling us.”

Siyanna knew Dr. Miller was Drue’s therapist, and she wanted to be angry at him for inviting her into their home. She didn’t have the energy to fight with him about it because she was filled with fear. Something in her spirit told her he’d done the right thing by calling her.

A few minutes later, the doorbell chimed, causing Siyanna to tremble in Drue's arms.

"It's okay, baby. That's probably Dr. Miller."

Cherie had gone to answer the door and came back with the petite Black woman. Right away, Siyanna felt a welcoming aura surrounding Dr. Miller, and she understood why Drue found her easy to talk to without her speaking a word.

"Hi, Siyanna. I'm Dr. Rochelle Miller. Pleased to finally meet you."

"It's nice to meet you," Siyanna managed to say.

"Dr. Miller, this is my mom, Cherie, and our friend Dani."

"Yes, your mother and I met at the door. It's nice to meet you, Dani. Now, who wants to tell me why I'm here?"

"Dani, would you mind sharing with Dr. Miller what—"

"No, I can do it," Siyanna asserted.

Now that Drue was by her side and she'd had some time to calm down, Siyanna felt strong enough to share something that her and Summer hadn't told a soul.

Drue went to the kitchen to get a chair for Dr. Miller that he placed close to the couch. Everyone else took a seat where they were seated before, and Siyanna began to speak.

"Until we were sixteen, Summer and I lived in one or another of the suburbs of LA, but our last foster family actually lived in the city. We had a therapist named Dr. Ellen Crosby. She offered to take us in when the family we'd been with for almost two years couldn't afford to take care of us any longer. She was white, and her ex-husband was black but him and their son could both pass for white. Her son had just moved back home from college."

"Leon?" Drue asked.

She nodded before continuing.

"At first, Leon treated us like younger sisters, but that didn't last very long. We always made sure we were covered up around him because we were built like grown women at

sixteen. Eventually, the baggy sweats and hoodies weren't enough to stop Leon's wandering eyes. One night, Summer and I were up late watching movies, and he came home with one of his friends. They were drunk and saying inappropriate things, but we brushed it off to them being drunk. We didn't want to be around them, so we went to bed, making sure we locked our door."

Her heart began to race as her palms became sweaty. She took a few deep breaths before recalling the first time her and Summer were violated.

"Take your time, Siyanna. Slowly, breathe in and out," Dr. Miller coached. "Don't speak again until you're ready."

A minute or so went by with Dr. Miller holding her hands and Drue rubbing her back.

"What we didn't know until later that night was Leon had a key to our bedroom...to all the rooms in their house. We were awakened by him and Gino standing over our beds, stroking themselves. We, umm...they, umm made us—"

The thought made Siyanna gag, and she shot off the couch to the powder room, emptying her insides into the toilet. Drue was right by her side, rubbing her back and whispering soothing words. After going upstairs to brush her teeth and splash some cold water on her face, she returned to the family room.

"Siyanna, if this is too much, you don't have to continue," Dr. Miller assured her.

"No. I've been holding this in for a long time. Once we got away, Summer and I never talked about it, not even with each other."

"Just take your time, baby," Drue told her.

"Leon and Gino made us..." She cleared her throat. "Give them blow jobs, forced us to swallow their semen, then umm, switched partners."

Drue was holding her hand, and the more she spoke, the tighter his grip became. Siyanna had to remove her hand from his before he unintentionally broke her fingers.

“I’m sorry this happened to you and your sister. Did he threaten you to keep quiet?”

“Yes. He told us we were poor, no one wanted us, and the state didn’t care what happened to us. Summer and I didn’t want to end up on the street or go back to the group home and possibly be separated. We had a year and a half left of high school and at least wanted to finish before we struck out on our own. When the time came, we didn’t even stick around for the graduation ceremony.”

“You and your sister endured his abuse for a year and a half?” Dr. Miller asked, receiving a nod in response. “Is there more?”

Siyanna nodded, then went on to share with them more about the abuse she and Summer suffered at the hands of Leon Crosby. After six months of forcing her and Summer to provide oral pleasure for only him and Gino, he began pimping them out. Leon’s friends paid upwards of a hundred dollars to get blowjobs from the girls.

It wasn’t until they turned seventeen that Leon took their virginity. For some reason, he was obsessed with Siyanna and kept her for himself while his friends paid him to have sex with Summer, forcing Siyanna to watch. They got the courage to tell Dr. Crosby, but she was well aware of what was going on and offered them no solace. From that point on, therapists were added to their list of people never to fuck with again.

As a gift to himself for his twenty-fifth birthday, he wanted to have a threesome with the twins. It was the last day of their senior year of high school, and Leon rented a fancy hotel room. When the girls overheard his plans a month prior, they began plotting their escape. They’d found out where Leon kept his stash of cash and had been stealing unnoticeable amounts for weeks, patiently waiting until the right time to clean him out. That money and all the money they made from their part-time jobs went into a joint account.

The night of their escape arrived, and before heading to the hotel, the girls took every dollar in Leon’s private stash. Once at the hotel, Leon got so drunk he didn’t know if he was

coming or going and eventually passed out. They sent Gino a text from Leon's phone with a detailed message describing what sexual acts Leon wanted Gino to do to him, with the name of the hotel and code to enter the room.

Siyanna and Summer had always suspected Leon and Gino were bisexual and fucking each other. They prayed their suspicions were correct as they waited in the adjourning room for Gino to show up. When he did, they waited until the men were in the middle of fucking to creep out of the other room as they recorded them in action. The men were so engrossed in each other, they didn't notice someone else was in the room until it was too late.

The girls got out of there as fast as possible and went straight to the train station with only the clothes on their backs and a backpack filled with thousands of dollars. They forwarded the videos they took to three different email addresses and Leon's phone, warning him not to come after them, or he and his boy toy would be exposed. Before hopping on the train, they destroyed and trashed their phones.

"And that's how we ended up in Vegas," Siyanna concluded. "He wants me to give him the money we stole plus interest."

Drue pushed out an angry breath. "You ain't giving that nigga shit!"

I t all made sense.

After Siyanna described the traumatic events that she and Summer suffered during their teenaged years, everything made sense to Drue. Although Summer was more outgoing than Siyanna, she wasn't a fan or user of social media either, and neither of them had friends. Drue and Drae didn't think much of it and assumed the women simply preferred their privacy.

For the past couple of months, Drue thought Siyanna was concerned about how their relationship would be viewed, but in reality, she was trying to stay under the radar. He took all the blame for Leon reappearing in her life and would do whatever he needed to do to keep her safe. However, Leon wouldn't be getting a dime out of her.

Drue canceled his book signing in Los Angeles, promising his readers it would be rescheduled. Nothing could pull him away from Siyanna and the boys right now. As he sat up in bed, he looked to his left and watched Siyanna as she slept. The light from the walk-in closet hit her face, allowing him to see every emotion that graced her face as she slept, and there were many during her restless sleep.

Dr. Miller spoke some words of encouragement to Siyanna, and Siyanna surprised everyone when she agreed to make an appointment with Dr. Miller. Drue wasn't sure why she had a change of heart, but he was pleased. However, agreeing to therapy was only a small part of what needed to be done. Siyanna wouldn't feel safe until Leon was dead or

locked up, and Drue wasn't sure how he could make either of them happen. He was unsure if Leon was a physical threat or if he only wanted his money back. Whichever it was, Drue didn't want to risk him getting close to Siyanna again.

She began to moan and wrestle with the sheets. Seconds later, she called his name.

"Si, baby, I'm right here," he whispered calmly, pulling her into his arms.

"Drue, I'm scared."

"As long as you got me, you don't have to be afraid."

"But—"

"Sssh. No matter what you think, I'll always make sure you're protected, okay?"

She nodded as her body trembled and her tears dampened his chest. After she dozed off again, Drue fell into an uneasy slumber, with his mind filled with thoughts of protecting his family.

"Do you think we should call the police?" Cherie asked.

For safety reasons and because he didn't know what Leon was capable of, Drue asked Cherie and Dani to stay with them until they figured out what to do. The three of them were in the kitchen eating breakfast.

"I asked Torrence to come by when his shift ends. I'm sure he'll be able to give us some guidance."

"How is she?" Dani inquired.

"Okay, I guess. She's not talking much."

"I can't believe her and Summer went through so much. I can see why she doesn't trust therapists and shies away from social media," Cherie said.

Cherie was on the verge of tears, thinking about the terrible things Summer and Siyanna endured.

“If I lay eyes on him, he’s a dead man,” Drue assured them.

“Son, I understand you’re upset, but you can’t take matters into your own hands. You’ve got to let the authorities handle this,” Cherie pleaded with him.

There was no need to go back and forth with his mother. He knew if he had an opportunity to take Leon’s life, he would do it without a second thought.

“Someone is coming to upgrade the alarm system on Monday. I’m gonna have them add cameras around the perimeter of the house. We’ll also have monitors in each room that will show what’s on each camera.”

“They can’t come any sooner than Monday?” Dani asked.

Drue shook his head. “That was the earliest opening.”

The doorbell rang, and Drue left the ladies in the kitchen to answer the door. He returned with a medium-sized envelope.

“A delivery?” Cherie questioned.

“Yeah, but it’s not marked.”

Just as he was about to open it, Dani stopped him by grabbing his arm.

“Wait! Did you see who left it?” she asked.

“No one was at the door.”

“Don’t open it until Torrence gets here,” she suggested.

“Why?”

“It could be something dangerous.”

He nodded, then looked at his watch. “Good point. He should be here—that’s probably him now.”

He disappeared again to answer the door and returned with Torrence, still in uniform. Once all the pleasantries were done, everyone sat down.

“Torrence, are you hungry?” Dani asked. “I can make you a plate,” Dani offered as he nodded and grinned.

“Oh, where are my manners?” Cherie fretted. “I didn’t even think to offer.”

“It’s okay, Mrs. Hendrix. I got it.”

While Dani busied herself making Torrence a plate, Drue told him why he asked him to come over. He didn’t go into all the details, but the information he shared with Torrence was enough for him to know this was a serious matter.

Dani placed the plate of food in front of Torrence, and he damn near inhaled it while Drue spoke.

“I’ve done a little research on Leon. He and his mother, Ellen Crosby, went into practice together at some point. When Ellen died from cancer, Leon had to run the practice independently, and within six months, it was shut down. He was accused of administering drugs to his minor patients during their visits and having sex with them. One of the parents suspected something was going on but couldn’t prove anything because the kid couldn’t remember. He ended up losing all his clients and, ultimately, the business.

“That man is certifiable,” Cherie commented. “I can’t imagine the number of people he’s violated.”

“Maybe that’s why he’s asking for money,” Dani added.

“Yeah, and I’d be willing to bet he’s been getting away with shit—excuse my language—his whole life.”

“No doubt,” Drue agreed.

“Where is Siyanna now?” Torrence asked.

“Upstairs with the boys. Recounting the details of that time in her life took a lot out of her, emotionally and physically. With her being pregnant—”

“Oh, yeah. Congrats!” Torrence acknowledged.

So much had been happening over the past week, Drue hadn’t connected with Torrence or Fred to update them about Siyanna’s pregnancy. He was sure they’d seen the blogs but

knew not to ask him about anything from social media. He also hadn't told them about Joseph's bitch-ass.

"Thanks, bruh. But yeah, her being pregnant probably magnifies everything she's feeling."

"From what you've shared, she's dealing with a lot. I have a few connections in Cali, and I'll see what I can find. Give me a few hours."

Torrence was about to get up to put his plate in the sink, but Dani got to him before he stood. He thanked her and returned his attention to Drue.

"Right before you got here, this envelope was left at the door."

Drue pushed the envelope across the table to Torrence. After putting on a pair of leather gloves, he picked it up, shook it, then wiggled it with both hands.

"I'm ninety-nine percent sure there are pictures inside. Do you mind if I open it?"

"Please," Drue offered, passing him the scissors.

Torrence cut the top of the envelope and peeked inside. As he thought, there were several photos inside with a folded piece of paper on top.

After unfolding the paper, he read aloud, "You have two days to give me one hundred thousand dollars. The clock starts now, Yanna."

Looking inside the envelope, he pulled one of the pictures out, his eyes bucked, and he snatched his head back before pushing it back inside.

"What is it?" Drue, Cherie, and Dani asked in unison.

"I'm positive y'all don't want to see this," he replied.

Drue tried to snatch the envelope from Torrence's hand but wasn't quick enough.

"Bruh, I promise I'm doing this for your own good. I'm gonna take these down to the station and see if we can find any prints."

Torrence wasn't sure if it was Siyanna or Summer in the picture, but he knew seeing either of them with a man's penis shoved in their mouth would hurt Drue to his core. Drue wanted to challenge him but would trust his friend's judgment.

"Okay, T. Thanks for stopping by on short notice. Keep me posted."

"Will do."

The men gave each other some dap, then Torrence hugged Cherie and gave Dani a head nod before Drue escorted him to the door. As Torrence stepped outside, he got a call on his radio.

"Damn, I forgot to turn this shit off," he griped. "Can you repeat that?"

"Are you still in the Arbors?" the voice said over the radio.

"Yep. What's up?"

"Someone called to see if we could do a wellness check. The woman that called says she hasn't been able to reach her parents for a few days. I know you're off duty—"

"It's cool. What's the address?"

The address given caused Drue and Torrence to look at each other, then at the house across the street.

"I got it," Torrence offered.

"Mr. and Mrs. Clifton live there," Drue told him.

"Have you seen them lately?"

"Earlier last week, I stopped by to talk to Mr. Clifton when I got the mail. Haven't seen either of them since then."

When Torrence headed across the street, Drue was right behind him.

"I don't think this is a dangerous situation, but you gotta stay back," Torrence told his friend.

Drue ignored him and continued right behind him. When they reached the sidewalk, Torrence stopped and turned around.

“Bruh, just stay right here and let me do my job. I’m gonna knock on the door, and if nobody answers, I’ll walk the perimeter and look in the windows.”

Drue nodded but had no intention of listening. Torrence approached the front door and pressed the doorbell then knocked on the door. When he got no answer, he repeated his actions before going to the side of the house.

Being hardheaded, Drue went to the opposite side of the house. As soon as he turned the corner, he was barreled down by a body equal to his size, putting him on his back and the perpetrator on top of him. They made eye contact and immediately recognized each other.

“You muthafucka!” Drue shouted with rage.

Drue’s hands went around the man’s neck, and he flipped them over so that he was on top. He continued to apply pressure to the man’s neck with one hand and used the other to punch him repeatedly in the face. By the time Torrence came around to that side of the house, Drue had beaten Leon to a pulp.

“Drue!” Torrence yelled. “Drue! Ease up, man, before you kill him.”

When Torrence was able to see the man’s face, he realized why Drue was in such a rage and let him punch Leon a few more times. Finally, Torrence grabbed Drue by the shoulders to pull him away, but Drue’s grip was too tight.

“Bruh, let go before I have to shoot your ass!” Torrence warned.

Drue released his victim, but before he walked away, he kicked Leon in his ribs repeatedly. Torrence damn near had to tackle him to get him to stop.

“A squad car is on the way. If you don’t want to end up in the back of it, chill the fuck out.”

“He needs to die.”

Torrence nodded his head in agreement before turning Drue around to face the house.

“Agreed, but I can’t allow you to do that. I hate to do this to you, but it’s for your own safety. I need to go check the house, but I can’t trust you won’t kill that nigga,” Torrence told him as he put his friend in handcuffs.

“If I get my hands on him again, he’s dead,” Drue warned.

“I know.”

Before going inside, Torrence turned Leon over. The chance that he could get up was very slim, but he handcuffed him anyway. Sirens could be heard nearby, and minutes later, a squad car stopped in front of the house. Two officers approached the side of the house with their guns drawn.

“Be easy, guys. I’ll explain this later,” Torrence told his coworkers, referring to Drue and Leon. “You stay here and make sure he doesn’t kill him. You come inside with me.”

The one officer followed Torrence to the back entrance of the house where Leon hightailed it from. Once inside, they went their separate ways searching for Mr. and Mrs. Clifton. Although Torrence wasn’t sure they’d be needed, an ambulance had already been dispatched.

“I got something! Bring the paramedics!” Torrence shouted.

Torrence found who he assumed to be the Cliftons tied up in the corner of the walk-in closet in one of the bedrooms. The stench almost knocked him off his feet when he entered the closet.

“Fuck!” he grimaced, covering his nose. Kneeling, he felt for a pulse.

“I got two pulses,” he called out just as a paramedic entered the small space.

“Ugh!” the paramedic gagged when the odor reached her nose. “I wonder how long they’ve been in here.”

“My guess is a few days. I hope they can pull through,” Torrence commented as he left the paramedics to do their job.

Later That Night

“*T*hat was Torrence,” Drue announced as he put his phone in the pocket of his sweats. “Mrs. Clifton didn’t make it.”

“Oh, nooo!” Cherie cried.

“I was hoping she’d pull through,” Dani added solemnly.

“Me, too,” Siyanna almost whispered as tears welled up in her eyes.

“Mr. Clifton is alive, but he’s still in intensive care,” Drue continued.

Drue sat next to Siyanna on the couch and draped his arm across her shoulders. She rested her head on his chest, closed her eyes, and released a deep, trembling breath. The past twenty-four hours almost broke her, but she was grateful it hadn’t.

“For the first time in my adult life, I feel like I can breathe. It breaks my heart that Mrs. Clifton lost her life, and Mr. Clifton is barely hanging on because of someone who had it out for me, but it’s such a relief knowing I don’t have to worry about him anymore.”

Everyone sat quietly for a while, processing Siyanna’s words and the events of the day. The Cliftons were a Black couple who’d been married for almost fifty years. Both were

retired and enjoying life until Leon appeared out of nowhere and ruined it.

After the Cliftons were rushed to the hospital, Leon was arrested, and the police took a statement from Drue. Leon had a laundry list of charges, but now that Mrs. Clifton had passed away, the most serious of the charges would be murder.

“I hope he’s tortured and shown no mercy in prison. He deserves to suffer the way me and Summer suffered.”

“I guarantee you he will,” Dani said. “A pretty boy like him is sure to become somebody’s bitch on day one. Excuse my—”

“No need to apologize, sweetheart. I hope he gets fucked in the ass by the biggest dick on the yard,” Cherie announced.

“Ma!”

“Mama!”

“Well, damn!”

“What? It’s the truth. Now, I’m going to bed. This day has been almost more than I can bear, and I need to rest my mind.”

Cherie hugged and kissed the three of them and retired for the night.

“Do you mind if I extend my stay another night? I know we’re no longer—”

“Dani, you’re family. You’re welcome to stay as long as you’d like,” Drue offered.

“Thank you. I’m still a little shook up by everything that’s happened. It helps not having to be alone.”

As Dani got up to leave, Siyanna remembered that she never apologized to Dani for accusing her of going to the blogs.

“Wait, Dani. I’ll come up with you.”

When she tried to get up, Drue held her in place. Siyanna looked up at him, and he kissed her lips.

“I love you, Si.”

“I love you, too.”

They still had a lot to work out, but their love for each was still present.

Siyanna followed Dani upstairs to the second guest bedroom. They sat on the bed facing each other and were both crying before exchanging a word.

“I’m sor—”

“You don’t have to apologize, Si-Si,” she interrupted.

“Yes, I do. I asked you to come over yesterday so I could apologize, and I never got a chance. So, I’m sorry, Dani. Our friendship might not have a deep history, but I know you well enough to know you’d never betray my trust. Instead of thinking logically, I let my emotions get the best of me, and flew off the handle. I sincerely apologize.”

“I understand, and I accept your apology. We may not have a deep history, but you’ve been a better friend to me than people I’ve known almost my whole life. You’re my girl.”

They leaned forward and hugged each other tightly.

“Had you not shown up, there’s no telling what Leon would’ve done to me.”

“I’m glad he didn’t have a chance to hurt you again. You’ve been through so much already because of him. I know it’s a touchy subject, but I pray you’re considering therapy. It doesn’t have to be—”

“I am. It was hard talking about what happened, but it also felt like a heavy weight was lifted. Once Summer and I escaped, we never brought it up, and she took it to her grave.”

“I imagine you wanted to forget it...well, as much as you could.”

Siyanna nodded. “I won’t hold you any longer. Thank you for not tossing my ass to the curb.”

They laughed as they hugged one last time before Siyanna left. Before making her way back to Drue, she looked in on the boys, who were sleeping peacefully. When she reached the

bottom of the stairs, the sound of Torrence's voice caused her to pause.

"I could lose my job for telling you this shit, so don't say a fucking word. Especially don't tell Si-Si," Torrence said.

"Okay. What do you think I'm gonna do, put it on Facebook?"

"This is serious, Drue."

"I know, bruh. Stop tripping and hurry up and tell me before Si comes back down."

"His phone was filled with pictures and videos of Siyanna coming and going, walking with the boys, and some other random shit, dating back four days ago. There were a couple of you pulling in and out of the driveway and checking the mail. I don't know what he was planning, but I'm glad we caught the fucker before he could do more damage than he already did."

"He's psycho."

"That's not even half of it," Torrence spat before taking a brief pause to gather his words. "That muthafucka raped Mrs. Clifton."

Siyanna gasped much louder than she intended. Before she could make it back up the stairs, Drue and Torrence were standing at the bottom.

"Shit," Drue muttered. "You heard that?"

Siyanna nodded as tears flowed from her eyes. Drue opened his arms, and she fell into his embrace.

"I'm sorry, Si-Si. I didn't mean for you to hear that," Torrence apologized.

"I feel like this is all my fault," she cried. "If I..."

"Don't do that, baby. None of this is your fault. Leon is a crazy muthafucka and the only one to be blamed."

"Drue's right. The sad part is he's probably hurt a lot of people, and we'll never know about them if they don't come

forward. The road ahead is long, but I'm here if you need anything," Torrence offered.

Torrence left, and after Drue secured the house, he and Siyanna retired for the evening. Once in their bedroom, Siyanna went straight to the bathroom and started the shower. After the water reached her desired temperature, she removed her clothing and stepped inside.

As soon as she immersed herself under the powerful spray, she couldn't control her emotions. She cried so hard her body shook. Moments later, she felt a cold draft, and Drue entered the shower behind her, wrapping her in his arms.

"It's okay, baby. Let it out."

She turned to face him and buried her face in his chest. Her tears continued to flow, mixing with the water. She cried for the teenaged Siyanna and Summer, who were too afraid to speak up when they knew something was wrong, and she cried for the twenty-something Siyanna and Summer, who were too scared to live their lives freely. She cried for Mr. and Mrs. Clifton and their children, who were innocent victims of a crazy man's obsession.

"None of this is on you, Si. Don't carry that burden."

She nodded but wasn't sure if she believed his words. As if he could read her mind, Drue took a step back, and she looked up at him.

"I'm serious, baby. I don't want you to blame yourself."

"That's easier said than done. Leon wouldn't have been anywhere near the Cliftons if—"

Drue silenced her with a kiss. Upon contact, Siyanna was resistant, but she relaxed into the kiss when he slid his tongue between her lips. Because they hadn't been on great terms, it had been several days since they'd had an intimate moment. Siyanna's pussy took notice and became moist as their mouths made love.

He wasted no time pinning her against the wall, and she followed suit by wrapping her legs around his waist. His dick toyed with her entrance, making her cum before penetration.

When he pushed into her domain, it sent her into another orgasm.

“Shit, baby,” she moaned when she came up for air.

Drue had missed Siyanna’s warm, wet, snug pussy and knew it wouldn’t be long before he released. As the pace of his stroke quickened and the depth deepened, he confessed his love for her.

“I love you, Si. Don’t make me live this life without you.”

He hadn’t forgotten about the state of their relationship. It was at the forefront of his mind, and his greatest desire was to get back to showering her with more love than she could stand.

“Promise me you won’t make me live without you by my side,” he pleaded as his dick began to throb.

“I—I—pro—promise,” she stuttered in the midst of her third explosion.

Those words were music to Drue’s ears, and the explosion that entered Siyanna’s womb was filled with the hope of a future filled with love and happiness.

One Week Later

“Siyanna, thank you for trusting me. I know this is hard for you, and I understand why you’ve been hesitant.”

“Yeah, my experience with therapists, even before Dr. Crosby, wasn’t positive. Dr. Crosby just took away my trust completely.”

“Well, I don’t want to dwell on the negativity. If at any time I’m making you feel uncomfortable, don’t hesitate to let me know.”

“Okay.”

“First things first, how do you feel today?”

Dr. Miller picked up a notebook and sat back in the chair.

“I feel better than I did a week ago. Each day has gotten a little better, but...”

“But what?”

“I feel guilty about what happened to Mr. and Mrs. Clifton. Thank God, Mr. Clifton is out of the woods, but his life won’t be the same without his wife.”

“Siyanna, the only person responsible for what happened to the Cliftons is Leon.”

“My head knows that, but...it’s just hard.”

“Let’s unpack that.”

“THANK you for meeting me for lunch,” Siyanna greeted Dani as they hugged before being led to a booth.

“I’m glad I was available. Sis, what are you planning to do with your hair?”

“Oh my God, Dani! Does it look that bad? I need to find another hairstylist ASAP because Ethan is not fucking with me.”

“You’d be crazy to let him cut your hair again with the way he acted at your gathering.”

“You mean like a bitch. Ugh, I just wanted to smack his ass.”

“Drue got him for you.”

Siyanna could laugh about it now, but at the time, she found no humor in the disastrous gathering.

“Whew! I’m starving,” Dani commented as she looked at the menu.

“Me too. Thank goodness I haven’t had a lot of morning sickness. With Dash, I was sick for a full three months.”

“Maybe this one’s a girl.”

“I’m just praying it’s not twins at this point.”

They laughed, but having twins was a genuine concern of hers, as it was when she was pregnant with Dash. Carrying two humans wasn’t something she took lightly, not to mention she already had two toddlers. The server arrived, took their drink and food orders, then left them alone to converse.

“I had my first therapy session today,” Siyanna confessed.

“Really? How’d it go?”

“Good, I guess. I mean, it’s therapy, so it got ugly.”

“I’m sure it did. You have a lot to release.”

“Hell yeah. I need to be going every day,” she joked, although she was kind of serious.

“I’m just glad you’re going. How’s everything with you and Drue since everything happened?”

“We’re good now, but I forgot to tell you we were beefing before all this shit with Leon went down.”

“Beefing? Why?”

“The same reason we were beefing. By—”

“First of all, *we* weren’t beefing. Your ass was mad at me for something I didn’t do.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Siyanna jokingly brushed off. “*Anyway*, by the time he came home from Atlanta, I’d found an apartment to lease and everything.”

“Si-Si! Are you serious?”

“As a heart attack. All the shit being said about me in the blogs got to me. Plus, I was even more paranoid about Leon finding me.”

A solemn look fell upon Dani’s face before she said, “Damn, Si. I still don’t have the words to express how much what you’ve been through hurts my heart. Thank you for trusting me enough to share. It explains so much about your feelings and reactions to certain things.”

“It does, but it’s time for me to let all that shit go.”

“So, wait. Are you moving?”

“Hell no. I mean, I no longer want to, but Drue nipped that shit in the bud anyway.”

Siyanna went on to tell Dani about the tense arguments her and Drue had about her leaving and taking the boys. Dani found it humorous that Siyanna thought Drue would let her leave with the boys in the first place.

“If you’re gonna be in a relationship with Drue, you can’t have second thoughts every time there’s an obstacle,” Dani advised.

“I know that, but I didn’t know being with him would be so public.”

“He’s an author with hundreds of thousands, probably millions of fans. You had to know there was a chance you might end up in a blog or two. Even if he hadn’t written that book based on your lives.”

“I thought because he had a pen name and did such a good job with keeping his personal life private, I’d be able to stay off the radar. It would have worked had it not been for his agent teaming up with Natalie. Then, out of nowhere, Joseph did some grimy shit.”

The server returned with their food, placing it on the table in front of them, then ensuring they had everything they needed.

“Hold on. What did I miss?” Dani inquired as soon as the server walked away.

Dani felt like she was completely out of the loop after only a few days of not talking to Siyanna. Once Siyanna told her about the trio and their crazy antics, she was in literal shock.

“Wow! Now that’s crazy. I can’t believe his own agent went as far as planting someone in the audience to expose him. And I haven’t talked to Natalie’s ass since that shit happened at your house, and she’s no longer my mentee.”

“People are crazy, girl. Drue beat Joseph’s ass good, too. I never did like him.”

“Me either. He gave me creep vibes.” Dani shivered at the thought of Joseph before continuing with, “Now that Leon is behind bars and will likely be there until he shrivels up and dies, or someone inside kills him, you don’t have to worry about him appearing out of nowhere. I’m glad Drue put his foot down and let you know what was real.”

Siyanna rolled her eyes. “Girl, I was pissed and slightly turned on at the same time. My petty ass moved all my shit back to my old bedroom, though.”

Dani cracked up laughing. “Yeah, that was petty, but Drue gets the last laugh because now you gotta move it right back.”

They laughed at the truth of that statement.

“Even though it wasn’t a long time, I missed you while we weren’t speaking. I was like damn, I lost my only friend, and she ain’t even do shit.”

“No, you didn’t. I planned to give you a week or so to cool off. Then I was gonna force your stubborn ass to talk to me.”

“I’m not stubborn at all.”

“The lies!”

The ladies enjoyed the rest of their lunch before parting ways, promising to connect again soon.

“HEY, are the boys still with Mama?” Siyanna asked when she entered the kitchen, where Drue was seated at the breakfast bar.

Drue nodded before saying, “She’s bringing them home before dinner. How was your lunch with Dani? Y’all good?”

“It was nice, and yes, we’re good. I didn’t realize how much I missed her ass when we weren’t speaking.”

“You mean when you weren’t speaking to her?”

She giggled. “You sound just like her. I said what I said.”

“Okay. How was your therapy session?”

“It was good, I mean as far as therapy sessions go. I cried a lot, of course, but it was cleansing.”

“You wanna talk about it?”

She sat next to him at the counter before she began to share what she took away from her therapy session.

“She suggested some ways for me to cope with my guilt.”

“About the Cliftons?”

“Yes.”

“What did she recommend?”

“The first thing she told me is never to forget who’s actually to blame for the events that occurred. Leon was the cause of Mrs. Clifton’s death, and I had nothing to do with it. And, it’s okay for me to grieve Mrs. Clifton, even though I didn’t know her very well. If I don’t allow myself that, I’ll be focused on the guilt and may never be able to move beyond the trauma.”

“Does what she said make sense to you?”

“Of course, it does. I’ll need to remind myself of those words when I feel overwhelmed with guilt, but it makes total sense. We also talked about us.”

His eyebrows rose in surprise. “Us as in me and you?”

“Who else, silly?”

Siyanna couldn’t stop herself from grinning. Drue’s apparent nervousness was adorable to her.

“Are you gonna tell me what was said?”

“Do you wanna hear her exact words?”

He nodded.

“Before she started, she asked if I minded if she took off her therapist hat for a few minutes.”

Drue chuckled. “That means she was about to talk to you like a homegirl.”

“And she did. She said, and I quote, if you can’t love Drue with your whole heart, don’t love him at all. He deserves all of you just like you deserve all of him. If that’s not possible, figure out a way to co-parent the boys and the new baby, and allow him to detach his heart from yours.”

“She went easy on you.”

“That’s not all. She said, either be in or be out but going back and forth is not acceptable. You’ve got to be ten toes down and stand strong in your love for him. Grow some thick skin or learn to ignore the things said about you, but you can’t punk out when things get rough.”

“Did she really say ten toes down?”

“She did, and that shit hit me in my gut.”

“She was still kind of easy on you. My question is, do you understand?”

Siyanna slid off the stool and stood between Drue’s legs.

“Ask me.” She wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Ask you what?”

“Ask me to give you my whole heart.” She kissed his lips.

“Baby, will you give me your whole heart? I promise I will cherish it, forever and always.”

“Yes, baby. My heart is yours to cherish, forever and always.”

After sealing it with a kiss, Drue turned her around and put her hands on the back of the chair. He lifted her dress and felt for her panties.

“Damn it, Si, no fucking panties?” he growled as he guided his dick into her hole. “Fuck, this pregnant pussy stay wetter than wet.”

Drue reached in front of her and put his hand gently around her neck, bringing her back against his chest.

“I need you to cum for me because this pussy got me on the edge. Give me that juice, Si.”

She wasn’t ready to cum, but her pussy no longer belonged to her, and she responded to Drue’s command. They reached their peak at the same time Cherie used her key to let herself inside. When they heard the door close and the pitter-patter of the boys’ shoes, panic set in. They scrambled to make themselves presentable before they were caught with their asses out...literally.

“Use your key, they said. We ain’t doing nothing, they said. Then I walk in on you with your pants around ankles and your dress around your waist,” she fussed.

“Hey, Ma!”

“Hey, Mama!”

“Don’t *hey* me. Go clean yourselves up so I can get home. I got a date to get ready for.”

“A date?” Drue questioned with concern.

“Yes, son. A date. You know, when two people—”

“I know what a date is, Ma. I just don’t know how I feel about you going on one.”

“Boy, don’t nobody care how you feel. Get outta my face with your nasty behind.”

Drue and Siyanna hurried upstairs to wipe off the remnants of their quickie. As she headed out of the bedroom, Drue gently grabbed her wrist and pulled her into his chest. He wrapped her in his arms, and she looked into his eyes.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, her voice filled with concern. He didn’t answer right away, which made her nervous. “Drue _____”

“I love you,” he finally said.

“I love you.”

“Are you all in...for real this time?”

Siyanna paused for a moment to make sure her head and her heart were on the same page.

“I’m all in.”

After suffering an unimaginable heartbreak, Siyanna and Drue never thought their hearts would heal. Their attraction to each other was unexpected and caused their hearts to be conflicted. Over time, they realized their love couldn’t be denied and embraced what their souls already knew to be true. Siyanna and Drue deserved an unwavering and steadfast love, and although there were some obstacles, they found it in each other.

EPILOGUE

Almost Six Years Later

“*D*ylan, Dash, come here. We want to talk to you,” Siyanna shouted.

It had been seven years since the death of Summer and Drae. Although they were truly missed, and some days were more challenging than others, Siyanna and Drue learned to cope with their absence. Today was Dylan and Dash’s birthday, and they were headed out to dinner, but before they left, there was something the boys needed to know.

After they were married three years ago, Drue thought it was time to break their silence. With every book release, the history of their relationship was brought up by messy fans. His publicist, Melody, finally convinced him to make an appearance on Zeewiththetea’s new talk show. When he brought the idea up to Siyanna, she shocked him by not only agreeing to appear on the show with him but suggesting the whole family make an appearance.

At the time, Dylan and Dash were four years old, and Baby Summer had just turned two. Drue’s fans instantly fell in love with their family, so much so that rarely did anyone bring up the way their love story began anymore.

With Leon in prison for the rest of his natural life, Siyanna had never felt freer. It saddened her that she and Summer weren’t able to experience the freedom together, but she knew that Summer’s spirit and soul were experiencing the ultimate freedom.

“Mommy, do you want me to come, too?” Baby Summer asked.

“Yes, baby, you can come, too. All of you have a seat on the floor. When Daddy comes down with Baby Drae, we have something we want to tell you.”

“Oh, God! I bet she’s having another baby,” Dylan exclaimed.

“Mommy, are you pregnant?” Dash asked.

“First of all, both of you, mind your seven-years-old business.”

“That would be the worst birthday gift ever!” Dash griped.

“What would be the worst birthday gift ever?” Drue asked when he entered the family room.

“If Mommy had another baby,” Dylan said.

Drue laughed at his sons’ obvious annoyance. Dylan and Dash were so spoiled when Baby Summer came along, it took some time for them to warm up to her.

“Y’all are coldblooded,” he told them as he shook his head and gave Siyanna a knowing look.

“Everyone’s here,” Dash announced. “What’s the news?”

After much discussion, Siyanna and Drue decided to tell the boys about Summer and Drae. Dr. Miller offered to be there for support, as well as Cherie, but the couple wanted it to be a private moment. They sat on the couch with the big kids seated on the floor facing them, and eight-month-old Baby Drae on Drue’s lap.

“When I was born, I had a twin sister that grew inside my mommy’s tummy with me,” Siyanna announced. “And what’s even cooler is, Daddy had a twin brother.”

“Oh, cool. Like Dash and me?

Siyanna and Drue never told the boys they were twins, but they also never corrected anyone when it was assumed that they were.

“Umm, yes. We both are twins,” Siyanna confirmed.

“Where are they? How come we never saw them?” Baby Summer asked.

“Well, because they both passed away,” Drue replied.

“Passed away? Does that mean they died?” Dash asked.

His parents could see his little mind processing what he’d just learned.

“Yes, that means they died.”

“How’d they die?” Dylan wanted to know.

This is the part they dreaded. Telling the boys how one of each of their biological parents died. Siyanna was already crying, so Drue took the lead and told the boys about Summer and Drae. They had special photo albums made to give to the boys. It was a hard subject to talk about, but it was heartwarming as well.

Dylan and Dash were mature for their age and very receptive to what they’d learned. They asked a lot of questions and were excited to look at the pictures. Baby Summer was equally excited to know more about the person she was named after.

“Your faces are exactly the same,” Dylan commented.
“Only your hair is different than my first mommy.”

Siyanna found a new hairstylist and maintained her short haircut, and even experimented with several colors over the years.

“Yeah, I can’t tell if this is you or my other dad,” Dash agreed.

Thankfully, the boys were too young to understand how the love their parents shared began with a conflict of the heart. The only thing they’d ever witnessed was how much Siyanna and Drue loved each other and showered their children with that same love. And to their little hearts and minds, that was all that mattered.

“We’re lucky we have one mom and dad here with us to help us be strong and good men and one mom and dad in heaven to watch over us.”

Drue had been doing a great job of keeping it together, but when Dash said that, he lost it. Tears of pride and joy poured from his eyes as he smiled at his sons.

“Wait! We forgot to tell you the best birthday news,” Siyanna announced, winking at Drue.

“Oh, yeah. Y’all wanna hear it?” Drue chimed in.

“Are we going to Disney World?” Baby Summer asked.

“Nope. I think we’re going to Jamaica,” Dash said with a smug smile.

“Jamaica? Boy, you are seven years old. What do you know about Jamaica?”

“Enough,” he replied.

“Can you just tell us, please?” Dylan said impatiently.

“Mommy is having twins!” Drue shouted with excitement.

The look on Dash and Dylan’s faces were priceless, but eventually, they joined their parents and sister in the celebration.

“Can the twins be the last kids, though?” Dash asked.

“Yeah, can they?”

“I guess you two will have to wait and see!” Siyanna told them.

She still planned to fulfill her and Summer’s dream of opening an upscale clothing boutique, but she had no solid plans for when. Her life was full, her soul was happy, and her heart was no longer conflicted.

THE END

A F T E R W O R D

Dear Readers,

I hope you all enjoyed Siyanna and Drue's story. But whew! This book put me all the way through it. I felt some type of way about them being together because they were in-laws. However, their love was genuine, and ultimately, they won me over. Making the decision to be together was not easy for either of them. Drue accepted his feelings for Siyanna early on. However, Siyanna needed more time.

As always, I appreciate your continued support. If you could please leave a review on Amazon and/or Goodreads, I would greatly appreciate it. Until next time.

Kay Shanee

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