

The Art of Sinsse

A close-up profile of a woman with her eyes closed, looking upwards. She has her hair styled in a dense, textured braided crown. She is wearing a thick, multi-strand necklace of gold and white beads. The background is dark with numerous small, bright white stars. The title text is overlaid on the image in a mix of white and gold cursive fonts.

*Don't
Touch My
Crown*

It's Timeless Publications

Charae Lewis

**Don't Touch My Crown 3:
The Art of Finesse
By: Charae Lewis**



If you missed book I & II, click image to be taken to Amazon.



**“And I know you don’t believe in niggas.
But do you have faith in me?”**

~Fabolous~

Dear readers,

I placed a secret coded sentence inside the book. Once you locate it, email me (charaelewis@yahoo.com) the sentence along with proof of your review for your chance to win a Kindle fire.

Good luck!

Charae

Previously in Don't Touch My Crown 2...

Sky sat in the corner as she watched Ryker put the baby's crib together. She glanced down at her protruding belly and smiled. She was in her last trimester and preparing for the birth of her baby girl. Ryker wasn't too thrilled about getting another daughter, but he eventually came around.

"You think you're a pro, huh?" she teased.

His smoldering brown eyes landed on her. He licked his darkened lips and smirked. "I've been doing this daddy shit for three years now. I am a pro."

She chuckled. "So, did you decide on her name yet? I really like Shiloh."

"And I like Raine."

"So, we have to come to an agreement."

"We can use both but Raine has to be the first name."

Sky rolled her eyes at the sneaky smirk on his face. Before she could negotiate with him, her doorbell rang.

"I'll get it."

She stood from her seat and waddled to the front door. She peeked out the small window but couldn't see the person's face. Sky opened the door and gasped at the person who stood on her doorstep. Her eyes watered immediately as she placed her hands over her mouth.

“Hey, baby girl. They finally let me out,” Malik said in a deep baritone.

Sky jumped in his arms and sobbed. For years, she dreamed of this moment and to see her father actually standing there without wearing his prison jumpsuit made her heart explode.

“Dad,” she whimpered. “I can’t believe you’re home,” she cried in his ear.

Malik rubbed her back in a soothing motion. “I know, Sky, but I’m home and I promise to never leave you again.”

The two stood in their position for a while. Sky couldn’t seem to let him go. She felt like once their bodies parted ways that she would eventually wake up from a dream. Malik was the first to step back. He peered at her belly and smiled.

“You’re almost there, huh?”

Sky chuckled and wiped her wet face with her hands. “Yes, and I’m so excited. Come in so you can meet Ryker.”

The two walked in the house and Sky closed the door. “Ryker, come here!” she yelled.

Seconds later, Ryker emerged from the room and ambled to the living room. He eyed Malik suspiciously before looking at Sky.

“This is my dad, Malik. Dad, this is my honey, Ryker.”

Malik extended his hand. “What’s up, man? It’s nice to meet you.”

Ryker gripped his hand. “You too. How long were you down?”

“For twenty-three years.”

Ryker whistled. “Damn, that’s a long time.”

“It was but I’m so happy you’re home, Dad. You came just in time for me to have the baby,” Sky gushed.

Malik hugged her shoulders. “I can’t wait either. I feel like I can get a second chance with this baby.”

Sky smiled at his sweet words. “So, where are you staying? You know I have room for you here.”

Malik sucked his teeth. “You know I’m straight, baby girl. I would never need to come stay with you.”

Sky felt her phone vibrating in her pocket. She was hoping it was Finesse, so she could tell her the good news. Her eyebrows furrowed when she saw an unfamiliar number flash across the screen. She was curious and wanted to see who it was, so she answered.

“Hello?”

“Aye, uh is this Sky?” a guy asked.

“Yes, but who is this?”

“This is Quest.”

“Quest?” she whispered. “Aren’t you Finesse’s friend?”

“Yeah and that’s why I was calling.”

Sky’s heart galloped inside her chest. Something didn’t feel right to her and his eerie phone call had her on the edge.

“What’s wrong?”

“Man... I think somebody snatched her up.”

Chapter One

“What do you mean someone snatched her up?” Sky shrieked with her palm resting on her chest. “Is this a damn joke? What the hell are you talking about?”

Malik’s skin seemed to form chill bumps as his almond-shaped orbs flashed over to her distraught plea. The alarming tone in Sky’s voice couldn’t be disregarded. Malik’s eyes wandered to Ryker, who displayed a muddled expression on his face. When Malik’s peepers landed back on Sky, he noticed that she had tears pooling on the brims of her eyes. He quickly stepped into her personal space and gently grabbed her elbow.

“What’s wrong?” Malik asked with urgency in his tone.

“It’s Finesse,” she confessed, with rocky vocal chords. “This guy on the phone said that someone snatched her up.”

Malik swiftly snatched the phone out of Sky’s hand and held it up to his ear. He gritted his teeth as his heart leaped inside his chest.

“Who the hell is this?!” he demanded, feeling an eerie sensation fill his spirit.

“Listen, I’m just tryin’ to tell y’all what I think happened. I don’t need to talk to everybody in the family,” the annoyed tone spat on the other end of the phone.

Malik's nose crinkled as his brows lowered. "Who the fuck is this and where the hell is my daughter?" he boomed with irritation.

"This is Quest and I think somebody snatched Finesse up."

Malik gripped the phone tightly in his hand. "How the fuck do you know that?!"

"Because I ain't heard from her since last night and I got a text from her phone demanding money for her. I don't know who it is, but I don't think they're playing because when I called her phone, some nigga answered talking about he wants his money. I don't know what the fuck she got herself into, but the shit doesn't look good. I just wanted to let y'all know just in case she's in danger. I gotta go."

A beeping noise suddenly sounded in Malik's ear. He pulled the phone back and peered at the screen.

"I know this mothafucka didn't hang up on me," he seethed through clenched teeth.

"What did he say?" Sky asked in a worried tone.

"He said some bullshit about Finesse being snatched up." He shook his head, attempting to process the actuality of his daughter missing. "Do you know anything about that Quest guy?"

Sky blinked her glossy eyes and swayed her head back and forth. "All I know is that he's the guy that helps her set men up. He would be the person who knows who snatched Finesse up."

“Fuck!” Malik gritted and plowed his foot into the floor. He nibbled on his bottom lip as his eyes descended to the hardwood.

“Can y’all track her phone?” Ryker asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe we should call the police, Dad,” Sky suggested. “They’ll know what to do.”

“An adult has to be missing for forty-eight hours before they will even file a report,” Ryker added. “When’s the last time ol’ boy heard from Finesse?”

“He said last night,” Malik muttered.

“Which means they won’t even file a report. Okay, well, let’s go to Uncle Johan. I’m sure he will know what to do,” Sky recommended.

Malik snapped out of his overwhelming daze. “Yeah, yeah, let’s go. I swear I’m going to go back to jail if something happens to Finesse.”

“Dad, I don’t want that to happen,” Sky glumly said. “Just calm down for a minute and let’s think this through.”

Malik peered down at Sky’s somber face and shook his head. He had only been out for twenty-four hours and now he had to deal with the fact that his daughter was possibly missing. Going back to prison wasn’t something he wanted to do, but now that Finesse was potentially in danger, he would do it all over again.

“I gotta go,” he announced and headed for the door.

Sky followed after him. “Wait, where are you going?”

“To Johan’s. I’ll call you when I know something,” he quickly confirmed, twisting the doorknob.

Sky snatched her purse and keys from the table. “Hold on. I’m going with you,” she said.

“You want me to come with you?” Ryker offered, staring into her eyes.

Sky shook her head. “No that’s okay. Can you stay here just in case Finesse shows up?”

Ryker nodded his head. “I got you.”

Sky kissed Ryker’s lips before following Malik out the house. His mind was racing with thoughts of Finesse’s whereabouts. He had heard all about her extracurricular activities when he was locked up. He desperately wanted to warn her about the lifestyle she was living but getting in contact with her was an extremely hard task. He hadn’t spoken to his oldest child in years. When she turned eighteen, she stopped coming to see him, as well as conversing with him.

“I really hope she’s okay. Maybe we should stop by her condo before we go to Uncle Jo’s house. Who knows if that Quest guy is telling the truth?”

Malik was so consumed with his thoughts that he didn’t even hear what Sky had said. She pulled on his arm before they got inside the car.

“Dad, did you hear me?”

He blinked his eyes rapidly. “Nah, my bad. What did you say?”

“I said we should stop at Finesse’s house before we go to Uncle Jo’s. Quest is shady, and he could be lying about her missing.”

“Do you have a key?” he quizzed.

“Yes, I do. There’s a huge chance that she’s there. As a matter of fact, let me call her phone.”

Malik watched as Sky shakily dialed Finesse’s number. Again, his heart rate had skyrocketed to a dangerous speed while he stared at her. He held his breath hostage as she put the phone up to her ear. Her almond shaped eyes darted anxiously, causing Malik’s already-rapid heart rate to rise even higher.

When Sky released a deep breath and ended the call, Malik felt like his heart had stopped.

“She didn’t answer,” she uttered.

“Fuck that. Let’s go to her house,” he commanded and jumped in the driver’s seat of the car.

Sky quickly followed suit and slid into the passenger’s seat. Malik started the engine and sped hastily out of the driveway.

“Do you know where she lives?” she questioned.

Malik nodded. “I have an idea but you’re gonna have to show me her exact building.”

“Dad, I’m so scared,” she confessed. “What if someone has Finesse?”

Malik blocked any thoughts of Finesse being in danger and prayed that she was at home. He felt like he had to stay

positive for Sky since she seemed to be an emotional wreck.

“She’s probably at home, baby girl. Don’t worry, okay?”

She timidly tipped her head and sat back in her seat. Malik found it difficult to believe his own words, but he had to remain strong for Sky.

Sky stuck the key inside the door and twisted the knob. She and Malik trudged into the quiet condo, hoping that Finesse would pop up.

“Finesse!” Sky called out.

Nothing but silence permeated the room. Malik was still hopeful, so he traveled through the living room and headed down the hallway of closed doors. He opened the first door and saw what looked to be a closet with shoes and clothes lined up everywhere.

“Come on, Finesse,” he mumbled.

He swiftly shut that door and opened the next door which was a bathroom.

“Her dog isn’t even here. Did you check her bedroom, Dad?” Sky asked.

“I haven’t gotten there yet. Hopefully this is the door,” he said and twisted the knob to the last door in the hallway.

Malik held his breath as the door swung open. His eyes immediately fell in disappointment when he noticed that she wasn’t in there. His head hung to the floor as his eyelids shut. An aching sensation emerged in his throat as he swallowed

hard. He wanted to scream, shed a tear but he didn't have time to immerse himself in his distress. When he opened his orbs, her king-sized bed was neatly made up as if she hadn't slept there. There was no indication that Finesse had been home.

Sky began to pace back and forth while fanning her face with her hands. Her chest heaved up and down as tears glided down her cheeks. Malik stared at her wondering if he was really equipped to deal with this dilemma. He had one daughter who was damn near having a panic attack while his other daughter was missing.

“Oh my God!” Sky cried. “I hope she's not in danger.”

He pulled her into his strong arms and rubbed her back to soothe her. “Don't worry, Sky. I'm going to handle it.”

“I'm just scared that her ways have finally caught up to her.”

“It's going to be all right,” he assured and pulled out his phone.

He dialed Johan's number, hoping that he would have the connections to try and locate Finesse.

“What's going on?” Johan answered.

“Some lil' nigga called and said that he thinks Finesse was snatched up by somebody.”

Silence filled the other end of the phone. Malik looked down at Sky who was still sniffing on his chest.

“Did you hear me?” Malik hissed.

“What nigga? When's the last time anyone has spoken to Finesse? How the fuck do we know that he's telling the

truth?” Johan growled.

“Well she’s not answering her phone and she ain’t here at her house. We need to get on this shit because she could be in real danger.”

“I’m so sick of this shit,” Johan huffed. “Meet me at my house.”

“A’ight.”

“Come on, Sky. We need to go to Johan’s house, so we can come up with a plan to find Finesse.”

“Dad, I don’t want anything to happen to her. I know she does her dirt, but I would never want to see her harmed.”

Malik’s heart shattered into pieces as he peered into Sky’s misty eyes. He was finally home from his long bid and all he wanted was to get reacquainted with his daughters. He hated to see his baby girl so dispirited by this uneventful news. He hadn’t anticipated being blindsided by the news of Finesse being MIA, but he was going to ensure that he found her.

“I promise she’s going to be all right. Let’s go, okay?”

Sky nodded and stepped out of his embrace. The two walked out of the condo and headed for Johan’s house. Malik said a silent prayer that he would have a plan, because in that moment, the only planning he was doing was setting the city on fire if Finesse didn’t show up.

Johan paced back and forth, pinching his bottom lip between his index finger and thumb. Malik had just given him and the family, the entire rundown and he seemed to be

unusually calm. Johan had been silent for five grueling minutes and the entire family was on edge. Malik sat on the couch with Sky and Kitty while Mafia and Kano sat on the other sofa.

Johan finally spoke, “Sky and Mafia, what do you know about this Quest guy?”

Sky cleared her throat. “Not much. I know that he’s supposedly a friend of Finesse’s who helps her set up guys.”

“He’s bad news,” Mafia added. “His reputation in the streets is terrible. He’s always getting shot at and he stays robbing people.”

“Do you know where he lives or where he be at?” Malik asked.

Mafia nodded. “I remember one time when Finesse had me take her over to one of his houses, off of Good Hope road. I guess you can try there.”

“Kano, I want you to come with me,” Johan ordered. “He knows more than what the fuck he’s saying, so we need to go over there and see what we can get out of him.”

Kano nodded. “I got you.”

Johan then turned to Malik. “I need you to sit this one out.”

Malik’s face warped into a menacing scowl. “What the fuck you mean sit this one out? I’m not a fucking kid and that’s my fucking daughter who’s missing. I need to be involved in seeking her whereabouts!”

“Listen, you just came home from a *twenty-three-year bid*, plus you’re on parole. I don’t want you getting into any trouble and going back,” Johan explained.

Malik shot up from his seat and waved his hand. “I’m not tryin’ to hear that bullshit! I’m goin’ with you to see about this nigga!” he declared.

Sky grabbed his hand. “Dad, maybe you should listen to Uncle Johan. I wouldn’t want you caught up in a situation that could lead you right back to jail.”

“Yeah, Malik just sit here and wait with us until Johan and Kano come back,” Kitty pleaded.

Malik was pissed that Johan was bringing his prison stint into the conversation. He angrily cut his eyes at Kitty and Sky and reluctantly took a seat. He had developed self-control over the years, and he felt like he could handle the situation. However, since he didn’t feel like arguing with anyone, he decided to just sit this one out.

“A’ight, as soon as I figure things out, I’ll call you,” Johan promised Malik. “Let’s go, Kano.”

Johan and Kano quickly exited the house. Malik was trying his best to control his anger, but it was proving to be a difficult task.

“I’m going to try and see if I can track her phone,” Mafia announced before standing and walking out of the room.

“Are you okay?” Kitty asked Malik.

He nodded his head so that they could leave him alone and then abruptly stood from the couch. He was highly

annoyed and didn't feel like speaking. He walked out of the house and stood on the porch. He wished that he had a cigarette because his nerves were overactive.

“How do you think she was caught up?” Ro asked Quest.

Quest shrugged and took a pull from his blunt. “Shit, I don't know. They must've followed her home or some shit.”

Quest scrolled to the text message that had been sent from Finesse's phone and shook his head.

Finesse: You better give the rest of my money back or this little bitch will be cancelled.

“You called her people, right?” Ro questioned.

“Yeah, and they were getting on my fuckin' nerves,” Quest huffed. “Asking me all those fucking questions and shit. You know Finesse is my homie and I don't want to see nothing bad happen to her. That's why I reached out to her family, so they could handle it; but I'll be damned if I give that money back. Shit, they gon' have to kill me.”

“She probably gave them your address and shit.”

“I know, and that's why I sent Tata and the baby out of town for a little while. I can't afford to have them running up on my family and shit.”

When the doorbell rang, Quest and Ro glared at each other with furrowed brows. Quest quickly snatched his gun from the wooden table. He stood and tiptoed toward the front door with his heart thumping rapidly inside his chest. He

carefully peeked out the peephole and smacked his lips when he spotted Johan with three other men.

“Fuck,” he whispered.

“Who is it?” Ro asked in a hushed tone.

Quest shook his head and stuck his gun in the waist band of his shorts. He turned the lock and twisted the knob. He swung the door open and glowered at Johan and his men.

“What?” he scoffed.

Johan smiled. “I think we should talk. Can we come in?”

Quest knew his question wasn't an actual question but more like a demand. Quest move to the side to allow them access to his home. The men trudged inside and remained standing as he closed the door. Quest eyed Johan in his tailored suit and wing tip shoes. His hair along with his salt and pepper goatee were lined to perfection. Johan looked like money and smelled like success. Quest couldn't understand how Finesse came from a wealthy family but decided to set men up to steal their money.

“Listen, I don't like small talk, so I'll cut right to the chase. I need to know who has my niece and why?” Johan intertwined his fingers and rested them in front of his abdomen.

Quest scratched the back of his neck. “I don't know.”

“You know, Quest, I don't like you very much.” Johan smiled. “You're a jack boy who takes from people and I hate niggas like you. Luckily, you've never crossed me, but I bet if I killed you right now, the city would be rejoicing. Now, I

didn't come here to play with your ass. Give me the fucking name or else you die mothafucka."

Quest swallowed hard and eyed Ro. He didn't appreciate Johan coming to his spot belittling him in front of everyone. Quest wasn't the least bit scared of him, but he was outnumbered and if giving up a name to the person that had Finesse was going to get Johan out of his face, then he didn't mind telling him what he wanted to hear.

"It's some dude named Azai. That's all I fuckin' know."

"Do you have a number?"

Quest rocked his head back and forth. "Nah, but he has her phone because earlier he sent a text to my phone."

Johan nodded. "Did you get her involved in this shit?"

"Nope," Quest lied.

"Well, how do you know who has her?"

"The streets talk," he shrugged.

Johan looked at the dark-skinned man that was standing next to him and tipped his head toward the door. Without saying another word, the three men walked out of the house. Johan was the last to leave, but before he passed through the threshold, his fist connected to Quest's jaw. Quest immediately dropped to the carpeted floor in a daze. The pain he was experiencing was enough to make him lose consciousness.

Johan kneeled with maniacal pupils. "You stay the fuck away from Finesse. You're no good for her and if I hear you

that you contacted her I'm going to kill you and that bitch of yours. Your precious baby boy will grow up without parents and that's my word."

"Fuck you!" Quest spat with bloody spittle seeping from his busted lip.

Johan smirked and swung his fist again only this time he punched him in the eye. Quest felt his orbital bone shift instantly as his head fell back. His vision became blurred as he held his hands over his eyes. The front door slammed, and Ro rushed over to Quest.

"You good, bro?" Ro asked with urgency.

Quest nudged him away with his leg. "Man, get the fuck away from me," he gritted.

His entire face was in excruciating discomfort while he struggled to stand. Once he was up, he staggered to the bathroom and peered at his reflection. His eye had already begun to swell, and his lip was hanging with a nasty cut. He didn't care about Johan's demand to stay away from Finesse. He honestly couldn't care less about not seeing her. The only thing that gave him satisfaction was knowing that he had gotten forty-one thousand dollars out of their last scam.

He chuckled and dabbed some tissue on his bloody lip. "Fuck that bitch. I'm still paid."

Chapter Two

After leaving Quest's apartment, Johan, Kano, Cannon, and another man went to one of their warehouses. They tried calling Finesse's phone but were greeted by the voicemail. On the outside, Johan appeared calm but internally, he was irate. Finesse had been embarrassing him as well as the family for years now. There had been numerous times where he intercepted her being murdered by a guy she had stolen from. She behaved recklessly without an ounce of guilt and he was done with rewarding her terrible decorum.

"I got some information on ol' boy," Kano announced. "He's a promoter for the clubs. My people just sent me his number. You want it?"

Johan dipped his head and pulled his phone out. "What is it?"

"414-555-3957."

Johan rose from his seat and walked outside. He dialed the number and waited anxiously for an answer.

"Who is this?" a male voice answered.

"Azai, you have something that belongs to me," Johan stated, avoiding pleasantries.

"Who the fuck is this playing on my phone? I don't have shit."

“Yeah, you do. You have my niece hostage and you better have a good fucking reason why,” Johan seethed.

“Oh, her,” Azai chuckled. “Her ass took over eighty-thousand dollars out of my safe and she only gave me back half. I’m not letting her ass go until I get the rest of my fucking money.”

Johan pinched the bridge of his nose and pushed out a heavy breath. “I want you to meet me, so we can resolve this shit. I’ll text you the address.”

“Aye, I don’t know about all that shit. I’m not trying to be walking into no bullshit. I just want my damn money.”

“Just meet me at the location I’m going to send you,” Johan spat, before hanging up the phone.

He sent the text and stood outside for a moment in deep thought. He didn’t want the stress of the street life anymore. He was supposed to be retired and enjoying his life, but he somehow found himself being pulled back in. He turned around to go back inside the building, but his phone rang. He saw that it was Malik and answered.

“Yeah.”

“What did you find out?” Malik asked.

“I’m about to meet with the guy who has her. She took money from him and he’s not going to release her until he has all of it.”

Malik sighed. “Let me come talk to him. I wanna make sure she’s not hurt.”

“I’m going to handle it, Malik. I really need you to fall back, so I can resolve this shit.”

“Why the fuck are you trying to keep me in the dark when it comes to my daughter? I don’t like all this ‘fall back’ shit, when I could be out here helping to see how we can get Finesse back.”

“Listen to me,” Johan gritted. “You just got out of jail and I don’t wanna see your ass go back. Just chill your rowdy ass the fuck out.”

“I’m not about to be on no hostile shit. I just wanna find Finesse.”

“Malik, you’re a hot-head and I’m not going to put you in a position where you could possibly kill someone. Please let me handle it.”

“You’re on some bullshit,” Malik spat before hanging up.

Johan shook his head and headed back inside the warehouse. He took a seat at the table and looked at Kano.

“He’s on his way. Apparently, Finesse stole over eighty-thousand dollars from him.”

“Damn,” said, Cannon, Kano’s right-hand man.

Kano shook his head. “Finesse’s ass is a piece of work. People get killed over five-hundred dollars these days. I can’t believe she hit that nigga for eighty stacks.”

“She only gave him back half which means that mothafucka Quest has the rest. Once I finish with Finesse, I’m going to have him murked,” Johan declared.

“Do you think this Azai dude did something to Finesse?” Kano asked.

“He better not have, or that’ll be his ass.”

They continued to converse until a knock at the door halted their conversation. Cannon got up and opened the door. A tall brown-skinned man walked through the door. His eyes cautiously roamed the room as he ambled toward the table. His eyebrows lowered as he stood with his hands tucked into his pockets.

“Have a seat,” Johan ordered.

Azai pulled out the chair and sat down. His stare was pensive, as Johan peered at him.

Johan intertwined his fingers on top of the table. “How much do you want?”

“I just want my forty stacks and you can have her ass. I’m not into this kind of shit, but when it comes to my money, I’m willing to do whatever to get my shit back.”

Johan nodded in agreement. “You haven’t touched her right?”

Azai shifted in his seat. “I’m not gon’ lie, I slapped her ass when I found out she took my money. Other than that, I haven’t touched her.”

Johan couldn’t fault him for laying hands on Finesse. If he was in the same position, he probably would’ve done the same.

“The money isn’t a problem. I’ll have that to you by the end of the day, but I need you to do something for me.”

Azai's forehead creased. "What is it?"

"I want you to keep Finesse for a while."

Kano spun his head and narrowed his eyes. "Why would you do that?"

"Because there's a lesson to be learned. She needs to see that I'm not going to always save her ass from the bullshit that she pulls. This is going to stop her from scamming people out of their money."

Kano rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, but how do you think the family is going to react, especially your brother?"

"I'll handle them," Johan assured and then landed his eyes on Azai. "You make sure she's properly fed and clothed, but don't let her out until I give you the okay. Scare her ass a little. Make her believe that she's not going to go home. I'm going to have my men coming by to check on her just to make sure she's getting the best care."

Azai shook his head. "Man, I'm not trying to do all that shit. I just wanted to get my money and that's it. I don't want to keep her ass hostage."

Johan cut his eyes at Azai. "Listen, that shit wasn't a request. Handle this and I may add more to what Finesse owes you. Now give us the address to where she is and then you can go."

Azai sat back in his chair and sighed deeply. "She's at my spot on 46th and Meinecke. My little nephew is there with her now."

Johan nodded. “A’ight I’ll have someone go and check on her. I’ll call you later tonight, so you can get your money.”

Azai stared at Johan for a moment longer and then reluctantly stood from his seat. He walked out of the warehouse and closed the door. Johan knew that the family wouldn’t like his decision, but he didn’t care. He needed something to get through to Finesse and he felt like this was the best way. She needed tough love and he was certain that this would get the job done.

Kano chuckled. “You’re about to have the family pissed.”

Johan shrugged. “I don’t care. I’m the leader of this family, so they’re just gonna have to deal with the decision I made.”

“You did what?” Malik blared and jumped from his seat.

Johan stroked his goatee with his index finger and thumb and leaned back in his office chair. He had finally gotten back to his house to break the news to the family about his plan for Finesse. He was fully aware that they were going to contest his decision, but Johan wasn’t going to budge on his choice.

Kitty seethed with her arms folded tightly over her chest. “Johan have you lost your mind?”

“This is going to be beneficial for Finesse. I’m positive that it’s going to stop her from this scheming shit,” Johan explained.

“Fuck that!” Malik slammed his fists on the table. “You don’t know that mothafucka. Therefore, he could be doing all kinds of crazy shit to her! How the fuck are you just going to leave my daughter with some random-ass nigga?”

Kitty shook her head. “Johan, you’re gonna have to call this bullshit off. I know that Finesse does a lot to get on your nerves but leaving my baby in the hands of some stranger isn’t going to work for me.”

“Daddy, I ain’t feeling this,” Mafia groaned.

“*Please*, Uncle Johan, you can’t do Finesse like this,” Sky pleaded. “I can only imagine the fear that she’s going through.”

Johan stared at Sky’s saddened almond eyes. “I’m sorry baby girl, not even you can get me to change my mind.”

Kitty scoffed before standing from her seat and storming out of the office. Her high heeled sandals slapped against the marble floor loudly as she mumbled obscenities under her breath.

“I’ll go check on her,” Mafia offered, and ran after her mother.

Malik pointed at Johan with squinted eyes. “You’re on some bullshit and I’m almost certain you wouldn’t do Mafia this way.”

The veins in Johan’s neck bulged as his thick brows furrowed. He stood from his seat and stalked into Malik’s face. Heated breaths were exchanged as they stood toe to toe.

“Don’t you dare come at me with that bullshit ever again. I’ve never played favoritism between the girls.

Whatever Mafia got Sky and Finesse did too. And you're right; I wouldn't do Mafia like this nor Sky. They're not out here setting people up to be robbed. Fuck outta my face with that bullshit."

"Can you two please calm down," Sky begged with worried peepers.

Malik swallowed hard and sucked his teeth. "This shit ain't right and you shouldn't get to decide what kind of lesson Finesse needs to learn without my input. She's my damn daughter."

"That may be so, but I raised her. She hasn't put you through wondering if she will be killed because she set up someone. I've been cleaning up Finesse's shit for years and its time her ass deals with the consequences of her actions. Now she's going to remain where she is until I say so," Johan spat with finality.

"Fuck you!" Malik retorted and rushed out of the office.

Johan loosened his tie and sat back in his seat. He rested his forehead on his clenched fists and inhaled a heavy breath. He didn't mean to spew the fact that he had raised Sky and Finesse to Malik, but he didn't like him insinuating that he showed Mafia favoritism. He always treated the girls fairly, but Finesse had always been a problem child. He looked up at Sky who was staring at him with misty eyes.

"I don't wanna hear it, Sky. You all can be mad at me but I'm not changing my mind."

“I just wish it was another way you can teach her a lesson,” she spoke softly. “I don’t want anything to happen to her.”

“She’ll be safe,” he assured. “I’m going to have my men over there watching over her. I would never place her in a dangerous situation, Sky.”

She nodded. “Can you at least let Dad know where she is, so he can have some peace of mind?”

Johan nodded but he had no intentions of telling Malik, Finesse’s location. He knew that he would rescue her the minute he found out, and he needed Finesse to be stripped of her awful conduct.

“You should go get some rest. I’ll text you later with an update on Finesse.”

Sky nodded and rose from her seat. “Bye, Uncle Johan.”

“Bye, sweetheart.”

Sky waddled out of the room and closed the door. Johan pulled his phone out of his drawer and texted Kano.

Johan: I told them, and they’re pissed. Send one of your guys over tonight to see how Finesse is doing. Oh, and if Malik calls you trying to get Finesse’s location, don’t give it to him.

Finesse sat on the dingy, carpeted floor and folded her arms over her chest. She had been in a rundown duplex for over twelve hours now, and she was ready to go. Her stomach

grumbled, reminding her that she hadn't eaten anything all day. Her bladder felt like it would burst from all the urine she had been holding; but Finesse refused to use the toilet that looked as if it had seen many asses.

"I'm so fucking ready to go," she muttered, kicking a shoe that was lying in the middle of the floor.

Finesse attempted to remain calm, but she was fearful. She had never been captured by anyone that she had set up. The most her victims had done was make threats which wouldn't cause her any panic, because she knew Johan would take care of it.

When the door abruptly swung open, Finesse jumped to her feet with widened eyes. Her heart galloped in her chest as she wrapped her arms around her quivering body. The guy she had stolen from, glared at her with a crinkled nose and curled lip. He was intimidating, and she couldn't deny the terror-stricken sensation that traveled through her body.

I may have taken money from the wrong person.

He stood tall, with a little weight on him. His head was covered in an olive skull cap that hovered over his thick brows. His mocha-toned skin was blemish free with light brown eyes that lit up the room. A thick goatee encompassed his uneven, but ample lips. He sported a white graphic T-shirt, camouflage jacket, blue distressed jeans and Nike boots. If Finesse had met him under better circumstances, she would've taken his number.

She gulped down a deep breath as he stomped toward her. His minty breath tickled her nose while his eyes bore into her.

“It looks like all of your ‘Get-out-of-jail-free’ cards have just about run out,” he smirked.

Finesse’s arched eyebrows furrowed in confusion. “What are you saying? Did you call Quest like I told you to?”

“Yeah, I called him,” he chuckled. “And his ass ain’t fuckin’ with you. He said you’re lying and he doesn’t have the rest of my money.”

She gasped and placed her hand on her chest. “He’s a fucking lie! He’s the one I gave half the fucking money to. I wouldn’t lie to you about that shit!”

“Your conniving ass is lying,” he pointed. “I don’t believe shit that comes out of your thieving-ass mouth.”

“I’m telling you the fucking truth!” Finesse belted, with her arms flying in the air. “If you don’t believe me then let me call him myself.”

He shook his head. “That’s a negative. You’re not calling shit.”

“Okay, well, did you call my uncle like I told you to? He’ll get you straight as far as your money.”

“Did that already,” he grinned. “He didn’t answer, so it looks like your ass is going to die in this room.”

Finesse’s jaw descended as her glossy eyes expanded in shock. She covered her mouth with trembling hands and fell to the floor. She had never been faced with death before. Finesse had always had confidence in her shady dealings because she knew Johan would bail her out if need be. Now that she was in a situation that could possibly end her life, she was regretting all of her decisions.

“Can we just work this out? Listen, I have money and I can get you the rest of what I took from you. Just let me go to my house and get it out of my safe,” she pleaded.

He stared at her for a moment and rocked his head back and forth. Finesse prayed that he would take her offer because she didn’t have anything else to convince him to let her go.

“Nah, I’m good on that,” he muttered and exited the room, locking the door behind him.

Finesse hopped to her feet and ran to the door. She twisted the knob in an attempt to open it.

“Let me out this bitch!” she yelled, banging her fists against the door.

When her pleas went unanswered, Finesse reluctantly slid on the floor in defeat, and covered her eyes with her hands.

“What the fuck did I do?” she mumbled with tears pooling in her eyes.

Finesse hadn’t shed a tear in years, but she couldn’t help but allow her liquid pain to flow freely down her cheeks. She had nobody to call. She had nobody to help her out of this predicament, and it was all weighing down on her mentally. Hearing that Quest wasn’t trying to help her had Finesse infuriated. He had been the one to set up the entire ordeal, and for him to deny having the money caused a rumble of anger to wash over her.

“I swear if I make it out of here alive, I’m going to have his bitch-ass killed,” she fumed.

Finesse laid back on the floor and gazed up at the popcorn ceiling. Her ways had finally caught up to her. She wished that she had listened to her family when they told her the life she was living was a dangerous one. She was so addicted to getting money the fast way that she disregarded her family's warning. Now she was laying in regret wishing she had taken heed to their cautionary advice.

Chapter Three

One week earlier...

Finesse sipped on her drink as she swayed to the sounds of Chris Brown's "Sensei," blaring through the speakers. She was enjoying a night out at the club with Quest. She looked over at him and smirked at his cool demeanor as he bobbed his head to the music. A snap back sat halfway on his head, exposing his crisp lining. Cartier shades shielded his hooded eyes and a diamond grill covered his bottom row of teeth.

Finesse thought Quest was sexy with his pecan skin and neatly-trimmed beard. She would never go there with him, though, because he was a ladies man; and while Finesse dabbled with her few guys, she never wanted to be added to Quest's list.

"You see ol' boy over there?!" he yelled in her ear.

Finesse followed his hand and spotted a young guy rapping animatedly with bands of money peeking out his pockets.

"What about him?"

Quest grinned sneakily. "That's who we're going to hit next."

Finesse smirked at the guy who looked like he had just exited high school. She could sense that he was trying to stunt

because he quickly began to throw money in the air.

Amateur-ass dude.

“He probably doesn’t even have no real money!” she fussed and sipped on her drink.

“You’re right...but his uncle does. He’s the one that runs this club and be putting together all the big parties. I know he’s the one with the real bread and his young-ass is going to lead us right to it.”

Finesse chuckled and took one more glance at the young boy. She could see that he was going to be an easy hit.

“So, what do you want me to do?”

Quest licked his lips. “Do what your sexy-ass always do. Put that fucking spell on his ass.”

Finesse rolled her eyes and stood from her seat. Since her target was seated close to the bar, she decided to get another drink. She adjusted her white bralette and sauntered to the bar. She kept her eyes glued on the young guy. Just like she had envisioned, his droopy eyes landed on her as she traveled through the crowd of people. Finesse made sure to wink at him as she approached the bar.

Come on, young boy. Let me sink my teeth in you.

“What can I get you?” the bartender asked.

“Let me get a vodka tonic.”

The bartender nodded and walked away. Finesse surveyed the crowd while she waited anxiously. She glanced down at her Rolex and noticed that the time was approaching for the club to close.

“You gotta tell me how you got that fat ass in these jeans, baby.”

Bingo!

Finesse’s eyes roamed over to the young man she had been eyeing. One side of his mouth was curved with a toothpick hanging from his lip.

“Excuse me?” she sassed in a flirty voice.

He licked his lips and grinned. “I’m saying, though. These jeans look like they were painted on. I know that ass gotta be real because they match your thighs.”

Finesse chuckled and shook her head. “Well, if you must know; yes, my ass is real, and you don’t need to know how I got my jeans on. If you’re lucky, I may show you how I take them off.”

His brows lifted as a wide smile stretch across his face. “Word? Shit, what you doing after the club?”

“I’m not sure yet, but you can put your number in my phone.” She grabbed her phone and handed it to him. “What’s your name by the way?”

“It’s Kirby.” He swiftly punched his number in and made sure to dial his phone so that he could save her number. “What’s yours?”

“Finesse.”

“Finesse, huh? Well, I’ma be waiting for you to call me, a’ight.”

“I know you will. Just make sure you answer, okay?” she flirted.

He nodded. "I got you," he assured and took one more look at her body before heading back to his section.

"Here you are," the bartender said, handing her the drink.

Finesse quickly grabbed it and handed her a twenty-dollar bill. After, she sauntered back to her seat with Quest clapping his hands.

"Stop being so fucking annoying," she fussed and took a seat.

"What? I'm just giving your slick-ass your props. As soon as he saw your ass, that mothafucka looked like he was being pulled to the bar by a magnet."

Finesse giggled. "This ass gets them every time. He's going to be easy as hell. All I gotta do is let him eat my pussy and I'll have what we need. Now are you sure he's going to lead us to some major bread?"

Quest scowled at her. "When have I ever come to you with some bullshit? I'm telling you that his uncle is paid, and his young-ass lives with him. I know the stash is at the house so all you gotta do is get inside and see where it's at."

"I got you. I'm surprised Tata let your sneaky-ass out tonight," she teased, referring to his leading lady.

"She doesn't *let* me do shit. I'm my own damn man, Finesse. So, don't come at me with that bullshit."

She giggled. "You know Tata wears your nuts as earrings."

Quest rolled his eyes and chuckled. “One day somebody is going to slap your ass for that reckless-ass mouth of yours.”

“Yeah right,” she scoffed and sipped on her drink.

The two chatted until the club closed. Quest walked Finesse to her car and opened the door to let her in.

“Aye, keep me up-to-date when ol’ boy calls you. Are you going to get up with him tonight?”

She shook her head. “Nah, I don’t want to be that thirsty.”

“A’ight, cool. I’ll talk to you later.”

Finesse slid in the driver seat and closed her door. She cranked her engine and made her way to her condo. As soon as she walked through the door, she kicked her heels off and took off her bralette.

“My fucking titties were suffocating,” she mumbled.

Her entire house was decorated in white, her favorite color. Her living room consisted of a huge white sectional couch, custom white curtains and white carpet. Recessed lighting was placed diagonally in the ceiling and a seventy-inch TV was mounted to the wall. Her open kitchen also had white cabinets with stainless steel appliances.

Finesse’s English bulldog ran up to her feet and began to jump up her leg. “Girl calm your ass down,” she ordered, before picking her up.

The dog happily licked Finesse’s chin as she traveled to her bedroom. Her room also had the white theme, but her

furniture was mirrored.

“Lexi Pop, you better not have gotten into my closet because if you chew another shoe, I’m sending your ass to the Chinese restaurant.”

Finesse put the dog down and took off her jeans. She quickly hurried to the bathroom, so she could shower. Since she hated silence, she turned on the Bluetooth, so she could listen to Rihanna’s “Kiss It Better,” croon through the speakers.

“What are you willing to doooo?” she sang off-key, as she washed her body.

After showering, Finesse got out and wrapped her body in a towel. She then walked out the bathroom and moisturized her skin with a scented lotion. When her phone buzzed, she grabbed it and saw that Kirby was texting her.

Kirby: What’s up, Finesse? I’m tryna see you tonight.

“Shit, I’m about to go to bed,” she laughed and texted him back.

Finesse: Sorry boo, but something came up. How about I come see you tomorrow?

Kirby: That’s cool just hit me tomorrow.

Finesse: Okay cool.

She placed her phone on the charger and grabbed the pill bottle from her nightstand. She took the top off and swallowed two pills that aided her in falling asleep faster.

“Please kick in right away,” she whispered and turned her TV on.

Finesse climbed her naked body into her king-sized bed and snuggled under the covers. She twiddled her thumbs, her eyes trained on her painted glittered ceiling. The Golden Girls intro song sounded through the room as she laid in silence.

“Come on pills. I wanna go to sleep,” she groaned.

She sat up on her elbows then reached into her nightstand drawer for her headphones. She plugged them into her phone and turned on an app that provided rain sounds. Finesse had used this feature often when she wanted to fall asleep faster. She laid back and closed her eyes, hoping she didn’t have to deal with her thoughts for a minute longer.

Within minutes, her heavy eyelids were sealed shut, falling into a deep slumber.

The following evening, Finesse sat in her car waiting on Kirby to pull up. He had requested to see her earlier and she happily obliged. Her phone vibrated, she noticed that Quest texted her. She picked it up and read his message.

Quest: Where did he have you meet him?

Finesse: A house in Brown Deer. It’s nice too.

Quest: That’s gotta be his fucking uncle house. Aye, we’re getting his ass tonight. Try to see where the safe is and text me the address.

Finesse: A’ight, I got you.

She spotted headlights in her rearview mirror. The car pulled up behind her and parked. Kirby hopped out the driver's seat with his pants hanging off his ass. Finesse scoffed and rolled her eyes. He strolled up to her window with a bright smile on his phiz. She rolled the window down and smirked.

“Don't have me waiting anymore,” she sassed in a flirty voice.

“My bad, baby. I had to run a couple errands. Let's go in the house.”

Kirby opened the door as Finesse grabbed her purse and got out. She smoothed down her multi-printed mini dress with flared sleeves. The fabric hugged her body tightly and made her ass poke out even more.

“Girl you're tryin' to kill me wearing this dress,” he groaned and closed her door.

Finesse offered him a one-sided smile as he grabbed her hand and led her to the door. When they walked inside the house, she was impressed at the traditional-style décor. A black sofa sat in the middle of the living room with black and white printed pillows resting on the arms of the couch. A white ottoman and a mirrored tray were placed in front of the sofa. A black chandelier hung from the ceiling while a painted black wall held several pictures of different people.

“Your house is nice,” she complimented.

“Thanks, but this is my uncle's house. I just moved here from Florida.”

Finesse raised her brow. “Oh really? What made you come here?”

He shrugged. "I wasn't getting along with my mom, so my uncle invited me to stay. I start school in the fall, so I'm tryin' to party hard before I get my head in the books."

This nigga is a baby.

Finesse sauntered to the couch and took a seat. Her meaty legs seductively crossed providing a peek of upper thigh. She immediately recognized the look of lust in Kirby's eyes as he gazed at her legs. He licked his lips and shook his head.

"So where is your uncle now? And how old are you?"

Kirby sat his phone along with his keys on the ottoman and took a seat next to her. "He's out of town and I'm twenty-one."

Finesse scoffed. "You're a baby. I think you're a little too young for me baby boy," she feigned disappointment.

He jerked his neck back and wrinkled his nose. "That age shit doesn't mean nothing. Shit, how old are you?"

"I'm twenty-seven."

"You ain't that much older than me. Plus, I can handle your thick ass." He gripped her thigh with his hand and kissed her cheek.

"We'll see about that," she smirked. "Where do you work?"

"I don't have a regular job, but I get money, though."

"How is that if you don't have a job? What if I want to go shopping? Do you think you can provide the funds for me?" she teased.

Kirby snickered and pulled out three knots of money. He threw them in her lap and sat back with much confidence.

Rookie ass boy! This shit is going to be easier than I thought.

“Boy this ain’t no damn money,” she fussed and tossed the bands back to him. “I’m talking about real money, not no gas money.”

“*Man,*” he drawled. “You’re really trying to treat me like a sucka right now. Trust me, it’s more where that came from. As a matter of fact, let me show you something.”

Kirby grabbed her wrist and led her down a dark hallway. Since Finesse didn’t know where he was leading her to, she grasped her clutch tightly in her hand just in case she had to pepper spray him. He turned on a light and the two entered a bedroom.

“Is this your room?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he muttered and pulled her into a walk-in closet. When Finesse observed a safe on the ground, she wanted to jump for joy. Instead, she remained calm while Kirby kneeled down.

“Aye, you gotta turn around while I put in the code,” he demanded.

“Sure.”

Finesse turned her back on him and discreetly pulled out her phone. She sent Quest a quick text alerting him that she had found the safe.

“Aight, you can turn around.”

Finesse slowly rotated on her heels and grinned. Kirby was holding several bands of money in his arms. Her eyes quickly roamed down to the safe and noticed that there was still cash inside.

She laughed. "I guess I may have spoken too soon."

He grinned. "Hell yeah. I always have money and that lil' shopping spree that you mentioned ain't nothing to me. I can take care of your ass; now the question is can you take care of me?"

She lifted a brow and twisted her mouth. "You're not fucking with an amateur. I can take care of you in ways you never imagined."

He nodded eagerly. "That's what I like to hear." He put the money back in the safe and closed it.

Finesse stepped to him and laid her palms on his chest. He wrapped his arms around her waist and gazed down at her.

"How about we start off with a drink and a movie?" she purred.

"Yeah, that's cool," he agreed, guiding them back to the living room.

Finesse sat back on the couch as Kirby busied himself at the wet bar. She pulled out her phone and read the message Quest had sent her.

Quest: We're taking that shit tonight. Did you get the pills?

Finesse: Yes. He's making me a drink right now. He also said his uncle is out of town, so we won't have to

worry about someone walking in on us.

Quest: That's what's up. Send me the address so I can come through.

Finesse: 5522 N Grandview Dr.

She quickly slipped her phone back in her purse when she observed Kirby making his way toward her.

Kirby handed a glass to Finesse. "I hope you like Patron."

She sipped on the liquor and nodded. "Actually, I do."

Kirby sat his glass on the end table and grabbed the remote. He turned on the Netflix app and sat down next to her.

"Can you grab me a napkin?"

"Yeah," he got up and went to the kitchen.

Finesse reached into her bra and grabbed a pill. Her heart thumped violently as she dropped the pill in Kirby's drink. Her eyes darted back and forth between the kitchen and the tablet that was dissolving in the alcohol. Kirby suddenly emerged with a napkin in his hand.

I hope the pill hurry up and dissolve.

"Here. Now what do you like to watch?"

Finesse slid her manicured hand up his leg and stopped at his manhood. She rubbed him through his pants and licked her lips. "I would love to watch you sliding in and out of my pussy, but we can start off with an action movie, I guess."

He moaned and kissed her lips. "Damn, girl, why are you teasing me?"

Finesse allowed their lips to wrestle for a bit before she pulled back, abruptly. “Down boy. Let’s watch a movie, and then I can show you what this mouth do.”

Kirby’s eyes were centered on Finesse’s juicy lips as his hands roamed her hips. “A’ight, I’ll chill for a minute.”

He grabbed his glass and took a huge gulp. Finesse smiled on the inside while watching him finish the entire drink in two swallows. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and sat the glass down.

“You’re a drinker, huh?”

He chuckled and scratched his scalp. “Yeah, I can drink with the best of them. What about you?”

“I drink, occasionally.” She threw one of her legs on his lap. “I bet when that liquor gets in your system, you’re a beast in the bedroom.”

He grinned and licked his lips. “You’ll see once this movie goes off.”

Kirby picked up the remote and chose a Netflix original movie. Finesse wasn’t the least bit interested in the film because she was too busy watching how the effects of the medication was taking over his body. An hour into the movie, Kirby had finally dozed off into a deep sleep.

“Kirby,” Finesse called out.

He didn’t respond, so she nudged his body roughly to ensure that he was knocked out cold. She picked up his arm, held it in the air and dropped it. When Kirby didn’t wake up, she inched closer to his ear and kissed it.

“Thanks for making this easy for me,” she whispered.

Finesse reached into his pockets and took the money that was in there. She stuffed it in her bag and grabbed her phone. She saw that Quest had sent her a text alerting her that he was outside. She quickly responded to him.

Finesse: I’m about to open the door.

She got up, strutted to the door and unlocked it. Minutes later, Quest snuck inside with his cologne quickly filling the room. He looked at Kirby whose head was slouched over the arm of the couch.

He laughed. “Damn, that shit got to him fast.”

“I know, right? Let me take you to the safe.”

Finesse ushered Quest to the bedroom where the safe was. He bent down and twisted the knob.

“Why does your fool-ass act like you know the combination?” she fussed.

“Man, shut up. I was just checking some shit out.”

“Now, how are you going to get this open?”

“I got somebody who’s going to do it.” Quest picked it up and secured it in his arms. “This mothafucka is heavy. I’m going out the back door.”

She nodded and followed him through the kitchen. She unlocked the door and opened it for him.

“Okay. Make sure nobody is watching you. I’m about to leave out right now,” she assured him.

“A’ight.”

Finesse closed the door and headed back into the living room. Kirby was still sleeping peacefully, as she grabbed her purse. The clutch slipped from her hand and dropped to the floor, prompting all of the contents from her bag to fall out.

“Shit,” she fussed and bent down to stuff everything back in her bag.

When the doorbell rang, Finesse froze in place. Her heart raced as she stared at the door.

“The fuck?” she whispered.

Finesse couldn't afford to be caught, so she quickly grabbed her clutch and made a beeline for the back door. Her heels clicked against the floor as she hurried out the door. The night air enveloped her shaky body as she ran to the front. She stopped abruptly and peeked her head around the corner of the siding. She saw a woman standing with her hands on her hips. Finesse hid behind a bush that was located on the lawn. Rapid breaths escaped her lips as she continued to watch the woman. After one stressful minute, the woman walked away and got inside a car. When she drove off, Finesse ran to her car and hopped inside. Her adrenaline was rushing through her body like a deadly disease. She had never been so frightened in her life, so she cranked her engine and sped away.

Chapter Four

The next morning, Finesse stood over the sink and spit out the mouthwash she had been swishing inside her mouth. She rinsed her mouth once more before grabbing a towel and wiping the excess water off. Finesse grabbed her robe and covered her naked body. Lexi Pop jumped at her feet as she entered her bedroom.

“You hungry?” Finesse asked. “Let’s go.”

She traveled to the kitchen and poured some dog food in a doggie bowl. Just as she was putting the food away, there was a knock at the door. Finesse padded over and took a look out the peephole. She opened the door for Quest and walked back over to the kitchen.

“Damn, no breakfast?” he joked.

“Do I look like that baldheaded-ass girlfriend of yours?” she quipped.

“Aye, she’s baldheaded by choice. Don’t come for my lady.”

“That’s what her lying-ass keeps telling you, huh?” she chuckled. “She knows her hair don’t grow past her ears. She needs to quit jackin’.”

“Fuck you,” Quest laughed and placed a bag on her island.

Finesse grabbed it and peeked inside. She smiled brightly when she saw stacks of money wrapped in rubber bands.

“This better be all of it, Quest.”

He smacked his lips. “Don’t even play me like that. I wouldn’t cheat you out of your bread. You did good last night.”

“Man,” she whined. “I almost got caught last night after you left.”

His brows furrowed. “How?”

“Somebody rang the doorbell, so I ran out the back. When I looked to see who was at the door, it was some lady. She left right away but I was scared as fuck when that doorbell rang.”

“Damn, I wonder who that was. You didn’t leave no evidence behind, did you?”

She shook her head. “Nah, I’m good. He’s probably losing his mind now that the safe is gone, but I blocked his ass from calling. He was such a fucking rookie. He showed me the money like he had known me for years,” she cackled.

“Aye, that shit worked out for us, but listen, I’m having a party at The Eight tonight. You should come through.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Aight, I’ll get up with you later.”

The two hugged before Quest walked out the house. Finesse grabbed her phone and dialed her sister, Sky’s, number.

“Hey Finesse. What’s up?” Sky answered.

“Nothing. Are you still pregnant?”

Sky giggled. “Uh, yeah. I would’ve told you if I had the baby.”

“Am I going to be the first person you call?”

“No, it’s going to be Ryker.”

“Okay, then I’m next, right?”

“Sorry, Auntie Kitty is next in line.”

Finesse scoffed. “Okay, well, I know I’m after her, right?”

“Umm... no. It’ll probably be Mafia.”

“You really like her more than me,” Finesse rolled her eyes and grabbed a bottle of water out the fridge.

“Why do you think that?”

“Because you do. You treat her more like your sister than me. I should be the first person you call because that is going to be my damn niece.”

“Okay, this conversation has gone left. Why do you feel like everyone doesn’t like you? I don’t understand where you got that impression.”

“You know it’s true,” she bickered. “You all have always treated me different. You traded me in for Mafia when I’m your real sister. We have the same fuckin’ parents, so our bond should never be broken.”

“Are you talking about the parent you don’t speak to? You can’t bring dad up when you haven’t spoken to him in

years.”

“Fuck him. I’m talking about you. Why are you trying to avoid the subject of you liking Mafia more than me?”

“Girl you must didn’t get any sleep last night. Why don’t you come to the studio today? I’m teaching a yoga class and I’m sure it’ll brighten your somber mood.”

“No thanks. I’ll pass.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I have to go. Bye.”

Finesse hung up and dropped her phone on the island. She propped her chin on her palm and stared out of the ceiling to floor window. Finesse often felt alone, but she rarely expressed it to anyone. She kept her feelings locked away because she felt like no one would understand the mental torment she went through on a daily basis. Instead of dealing with her unwanted thoughts, Finesse carried on with her guard up. She knew that being defensive wasn’t going to cure whatever she was going through, but that was the only way she knew how.

Later that night, Finesse stood in front of her floor-length mirror, surveying her appearance. She had made the decision to go to Quest’s party and she wanted to ensure that she looked her best. She sported a black, mesh dress that hung off her shoulders. The hem stopped mid-thigh and tied at the bottom. Her brown legs were moisturized in a bronzing lotion which created a glowing effect. Her white toes were balanced in high heels that laced up her ankles. Finesse wore a long

weave that cascaded down her back in a bone-straight style. Diamond studs decorated her ears and her makeup was applied naturally. She knew that she was going to turn heads and she was prepared to see who her next victim would be.

She looked down at her dog who was lying near the mirror. “All right, Lexi Pop, I’ll be back later.”

Finesse grabbed her black clutch and walked out of the room. She took one more glance at the mirror near her door and walked out of her condo. She strutted to the parking garage and got inside her car. Before she could close the door, she noticed that the hem of her dress was snagged on her seat.

“Shit,” she fussed, ripping the hanging fabric.

Without warning, her passenger door swung open and a man with a gun hopped inside. He put the burner up to her head and glared at her.

She gasped. “Oh shit!”

Finesse attempted to run from her side of the car but was blocked by none-other than Kirby. He peered down at her with narrowed eyes and a clenched jaw. His fists were balled so tightly that his knuckles turned white.

“Get your hoe-ass back in the car,” Kirby ordered.

Finesse’s chest heaved up and down as she slowly slid her leg back in the car. Her heart felt like it had jumped to her throat as the pulsating sensation multiplied. The man in the passenger seat snatched her closer to him by her hair and pressed the gun into her temple.

“Where the fuck is my money?” he commanded.

She winced from the pain of her hair being pulled. Speech had escaped her at that moment. She didn't know what to tell this man that seemed to be ready to pull the trigger and end her life.

He gripped her tresses tighter. "Bitch did you hear what I said? Where the fuck is my money?"

"All right!" she yelled. "It's inside my house."

"Where?"

"Man, Unc, that bitch is probably lying," Kirby instigated. "I don't believe shit that comes out of her mouth."

"I'm not lying, okay," she pleaded. "It's upstairs in my house but... I only have half of it."

Suddenly, Finesse felt a hand swipe forcefully across her cheek. Her eyes instantly watered from the impact of the slap.

"Where's the rest of my fuckin' bread?"

She held her aching cheek in an attempt to soothe the stinging sensation. "Someone else has it."

"Who?"

"The guy that helped me."

The man released his grip from her hair and pushed her head away. Her shaky hands rubbed the back of her sore head as Kirby snatched her keys off her lap.

"Tell him where my money is at in your fuckin' house!"

Finesse timidly looked at Kirby who held a smirk on his face. “It’s inside my closet. I have it tucked away in my Gucci tote.”

“What’s your apartment number?” Kirby quizzed.

“Eight,” she mumbled.

When Kirby walked away, the other guy got out the car and hurried to Finesse’s side. He pulled her out by her arm and pushed her. Finesse stumbled to the ground, scraping her knee against the concrete.

“What the fuck?!” she yelled in pain.

“Get your ass up,” he ordered. “You’re coming with me.”

“No, no, please,” she begged, scooting backwards.

He didn’t utter another word and grabbed her by her hair again. He dragged her toward a Tahoe truck and opened the back door. Finesse braced herself before he shoved her in the back. Her face fell into the leather seat as he slammed the door. A panic-stricken feeling consumed her body instantly. She sat up and tried to open the door. When it wouldn’t budge, she scooted to the other door and pulled on the handle.

“Fuck,” she gritted.

Finesse stretched her leg to the front seat but stopped abruptly when the guy opened the door and hopped in the driver’s seat.

“Get your stupid-ass back! You’re not going nowhere bitch!”

With expanded eyes, Finesse slid back toward the seat and stared at the guy. Her heart was beating so erratically, she thought it might burst.

“If you think you’re about to get away when half my fuckin’ money is gone, bitch you must be crazy.”

What the fuck did I get myself into? How did they find me?

Finesse pinched the bridge of her nose and swayed her head back and forth. She willed herself not to cry but failed miserably when a tear cascaded down her cheek. Her body jumped when Kirby snatched the door open. He was holding the money in the same bag that Quest had delivered it to her.

“I got it, but half is missing,” Kirby alerted.

“That’s cool. We’re about to torture this bitch until I get the rest of my bread.”

Finesse’s face immediately contorted into a sullen expression as her head fell back. Tears rushed from her eyes, causing a whimper to escape her lips. She had never been in this kind of predicament, and she couldn’t deny the terror that had hijacked her body.

Quest better come through for me.

Chapter Five

Present...

Finesse laid on the floor feeling as if death was knocking at her door. It had been day two since she had been captured by Kirby and his uncle, and she was on the verge of a mental breakdown. The stench of her unclean body seeped into her nostrils causing her to gag. She had finally released her full bladder, but she made sure to squat over the toilet. Finesse tried to flee the room from the window but was terribly disappointed when she noticed that it was boarded up. Being alone with her thoughts for two whole days was like mental agony. Every time she closed her eyes, memories of her mother and childhood would surface. Finesse never wanted to reflect on her past, and she couldn't stop her mind from racing even if she tried.

When the door opened, Finesse lifted her upper body and tugged on the dress she was still wearing from two nights ago. Kirby rolled his eyes at her and threw a McDonalds bag to her.

“Wait,” she stood and ambled over to the door. “Can I talk to your uncle? Is he here?”

“Nope,” he spat and tried to close the door, but Finesse grabbed it before he could.

“Please. I need to talk to him.”

Kirby smacked his lips. “Is it about his money?”

Finesse nodded eagerly. “Yes.”

“Aight, I’ll tell him when he gets here.”

Before she could utter another word, Kirby slammed the door in her face. She lowered her saddened eyes and padded back to the spot she was lying in. She grabbed the bag of food and stuffed some fries in her mouth. Normally, she didn’t eat McDonalds, but she was so hungry that she didn’t mind the greasy food that was sliding down her throat.

Finesse chewed rapidly and rested the back of her head on the wall. She eyed the bag of clothes and body wash on the floor. She had been instructed to take a shower, but she refused. She even refused to sleep on the full-sized mattress that was in the room. Out of nowhere, tears immediately pooled in her brown eyes. She missed her family so much it hurt. She was sure that they were probably going crazy trying to figure out where she was.

“I’m so ready to fucking go,” she cried, throwing the burger back in the bag.

Her appetite had vanished quickly. She just wanted to escape this nightmare alive and unharmed. She wanted to talk to Sky so she could see how her pregnancy was going. She desperately wanted to argue with Mafia about things that didn’t matter. Finesse could smell the sweet scent of her Aunt Kitty and yearned to be in her presence. Most of all, she missed the man that had raised her.

“I’m going fucking crazy,” she whimpered.

When she closed her eyes, images of her parents surfaced. She despised thinking about them. Finesse didn’t

want to be reminded of the life she could've had. The pain of her mother being gone had been buried a long time ago, and she refused to allow her current dilemma to stir up the part of her that had died years ago. She laid down on the carpet and willed herself to sleep. She prayed that when she awoke, someone would come and rescue her from the misery she had been summoned to.

Azai studied Kirby as he exited the room Finesse was in. He rolled his eyes and brought his attention to his phone. Kirby approached him with a humorous smirk on his face which instantly fumed Azai.

“Aye, Unc, ol’ girl wanna talk to you.” Kirby pointed toward the door.

Azai ignored him and finished sending a text to his girlfriend. Once he was done, he glared at his only nephew.

“I booked you a flight back home for the morning. You need to go to the crib and pack your shit.”

Kirby’s jaw dropped as his eyes widened. He shook his head slightly with his hands held in the air. “Come on, Unc. For what?”

“You know for what?” Azai seethed. “Your green-ass let that lil’ bitch steal my shit. I told you when I went out of town that I didn’t want nobody in my fuckin’ house. You don’t follow directions and I’m not about to babysit your ass.”

“That was just one time,” Kirby argued.

Azai stepped in his face scowled at him. “One time too many. I don’t let nothing come between me and my fucking

money. I don't give a damn who the fuck you are.”

Kirby rubbed his hands down his face. “A’ight, I fucked up and I’m sorry, but please don’t send me back to Florida, Unc. I’ll do whatever to make the shit right.”

Azai shook his head. “Nah, you’re a fuckin’ liability. My mind is made up so go pack your shit and hurry back, so you can sit with her ass.”

Kirby groaned and stomped out of the kitchen. Azai had no remorse for sending him back to Florida, because he had given him thorough instructions on what to do when he was out of town. Azai didn’t want anyone at his home because he didn’t want to take the risk of getting robbed. When he found out a woman was behind his safe being stolen, Azai lost it. They wouldn’t have had any way of finding Finesse if it wasn’t for her ID that was lying on his living room floor. When Azai found it near the couch, he wasted no time in snatching her up.

Truthfully, kidnapping people wasn’t his thing. He wasn’t a killer nor was he a criminal. He was just a man that wanted what belonged to him. Azai had no idea that Finesse was Johan’s niece. He found it quite disgusting that she was going around setting up robberies when she came from one of Milwaukee’s wealthiest families. Johan held a lot of respect in the streets, but Azai was willing to hurt Finesse if he didn’t get his money. When Johan proposed that he keep her, Azai didn’t want to be a part of it. His main mission was to obtain his money, but Johan insisted that he keep her and while Azai didn’t want any parts of the scheme, he did appreciate Johan sending him an extra ten thousand dollars for his trouble.

Azai slid his phone into his pocket and headed to the room. He twisted the lock that was located on the outside of the door and opened it. Finesse was laying on the ground, but when her eyes popped open, she stumbled to her feet and pulled the hem of her dress down.

“Why haven’t you taken a shower?” Azai questioned with squinted eyes.

She picked at her fingers. “I...uh...I don’t feel comfortable.”

“Whatever. So, what did you want?”

She timidly crept over to where he stood. “If you haven’t gotten your money, I can give it to you. Please just let me go. I feel like I’m going crazy in here,” she pleaded.

Azai couldn’t understand how someone so beautiful could be so grimy. Finesse was naturally gorgeous with almond-shaped brown eyes. Her deep brown skin was blemish-free, and her pierced nose was the perfect shape. Her cheekbones were high and defined. Pink, pouty lips accompanied by a narrow chin, completed her face. Azai could honestly see how Kirby was able to fall for her spell, but he was too seasoned to allow Finesse to try and play him.

“How the fuck is that my problem?”

Finesse rubbed her eyes. “Okay, listen, I know I stole from you but I’m willing to give you the other half of your money. You can go to my house and get it yourself. I’ll even give you the combination to my safe.”

Azai shook his head. “Nah, I’m not doing that. I’m good.”

“Please,” she grabbed his arm. “I just wanna go home. I miss my family.”

Azai curled his lip and slapped her hand away. “You think I give a fuck about you missing your family? I was out of town visiting my son when I had to rush home because your scamming-ass took my money. I don’t have no sympathy for your deceiving ass.”

Azai slammed the door and locked it. He couldn’t stand to hear anymore of her pleas when she had brought this on herself. A small part of him felt bad for her because she appeared as if she was suffering; but again, this was all from her own wrongdoings.

Azai grabbed the remote to the TV and sat down. He didn’t want to leave her alone, so he waited until Kirby came back, before he left to go handle business.

Later that night, Kano and Cannon walked up the stairs and into the upper unit of the duplex. Cannon knocked on the door and twisted the knob. The men shuffled inside and headed to the living room where they saw Kirby posted on the couch with his headphones in his ear.

“Anybody can run up on his ass,” Kano muttered.

“Right,” Cannon agreed and nudged Kirby.

Startled, Kirby jumped up from his seat with furrowed brows. When he noticed that it was Kano and Cannon, he seemed to breathe a sigh of relief.

He pulled the earphones out and asked, “What?”

“We came to check on Finesse. Did y’all feed her today?” Kano questioned.

Kirby nodded. “Yeah, my uncle brought her some food before he left.”

Kano leaned closer to Cannon’s ear. “Aye, go check on her for me.” he said in a hushed tone.

Cannon scrunched his face. “Nigga why you whisperin’ and shit?”

“Because I don’t want Finesse to hear my voice.”

“Oh,” Cannon chuckled. “That’s right.”

He ambled down the hall and stopped at the door. He twisted the lock and turned the knob. When he opened the door, he found Finesse sitting on the floor with her elbows rested on her knees. Her face was sullen, and her eyes were trained on the dingy gray carpet. He stood there for a moment, wondering if she would acknowledge his presence. Seconds later, her peepers finally traveled over to him. She bore into him with glossy eyes and a pout.

Cannon cleared his throat and asked, “Aye, you good?”

She slowly swayed her head back and forth. “I wanna go home.”

He exhaled slowly. “I can’t help ya with that. I just wanna make sure ya straight.”

Finesse didn’t respond. Instead she smacked her lips and covered her eyes with her hands. Cannon quickly shut the door and locked it. He didn’t want her to start crying on him because he truly couldn’t help her out of her situation. He

voyaged back to the front room where Kano was talking to Kirby.

“You got her clothes and soap and shit right?” Kano asked.

Kirby twisted his face and kissed his teeth. “Yeah, nigga. Stop asking me all these questions.”

Kano and Cannon looked at each other and burst out laughing. Kirby looked on with a curled lip and waved his hand.

“You must still be bothered that you got finessed?” Kano teased.

“Yeah, I think that shit got to him that he let a gal play him out his money. Oh wait, that wasn’t even ya bread,” Cannon laughed.

Kirby jumped in Cannon face with his bottom lip tucked between his teeth. “Aye, mothafucka, you better watch your fuckin’ mouth and stop playing with me.”

Cannon lifted his palms in the air and smirked. “Aye, bruh, I’on want no trouble.”

Kirby tipped his chin. “That’s what I thought.”

In one swift motion, Cannon punched Kirby in the throat. His hands held his neck as he gasped for air. Kirby’s face was beet red with veins bulging from his forehead. Cannon looked on in satisfaction as he began to cough violently.

Kano chuckled. “Talking all that shit.”

Cannon pointed his index finger at Kirby who was still struggling to breathe. “Young boy, I’ll break ya pussy-ass.”

“Man, let’s go,” Kano suggested.

The two left a choking Kirby and walked out of the house.

“I see why Finesse got his ass. He’s an easy target.” Kano laughed.

“Hell yeah. How long you think Johan gon’ keep her here?”

Kano shrugged. “Ain’t no telling with his ass. He wants her to stop this bullshit, so it could be a while.”

Cannon shook the image of her somber face from his psyche. Finesse appeared to be suffering and while he felt like she deserved it, he couldn’t help but empathize with her current situation.

“Say, mane, you think ol’ boy hit that?” Cannon asked, opening the car door.

Kano chuckled and opened the driver’s door. “He’s a fuckin’ fool if he didn’t.”

“On God.” Cannon laughed and got inside the car.

“A’ight, this shit stops today. It’s been three days and I feel like Finesse has learned her lesson. Go get my child, Johan,” Malik demanded and cracked his knuckles.

Johan glanced at him and returned his stare back to his phone. “What makes you think she’s learned her lesson?”

“Because it’s been three fucking days and she is probably going through it. And I don’t want to hear shit about having people go and check on her. I want Finesse home *today* and I’m not bullshittin’ with you.”

“She’s not going to learn unless she feels like her back is against the wall. What I’m doing right now is going to benefit her in the long run. Hopefully, she’ll turn her life around,” Johan reasoned.

Malik slapped the picture of Johan and Kitty off his desk and scowled at him. “I don’t give a fuck about what you’re talking about. Bring my fuckin’ daughter home and I’m not playing.”

Johan chuckled. “You’re still a hothead I see, but you better calm your ass down, knocking shit off my desk. I don’t give a damn how angry you are. Have some fucking respect.”

“Kiss my ass,” Malik shot coolly, and sat back in his seat. “I want the address now. Shit, I’ll go get her myself.”

“You know what?” Johan grabbed his phone and threw it at Malik. “Here’s the fucking address. When her ass does it again, you’re going to be the one to take care of it. I’m done coming to her fucking rescue.”

“Fine by me,” Malik agreed, screenshotted the address and sent the image to his phone.

“And I want you to let her know that I was the one that ordered her to stay where she is. Hopefully, when she thinks about setting up another man, she’ll think about her ass being kidnapped again.”

Malik rolled his eyes and stood from his chair. He sat Johan's phone back on his desk and quietly left out of his office. He hadn't been able to sleep knowing that Finesse was being held against her will. Malik understood completely what Johan was trying to do, but as a father, it wasn't sitting well with him. He couldn't help but think they were beating on her or better yet, raping her. His spirit had been unsettled about the entire set up, and he declared that today was the day that Finesse came home.

Malik got inside of his car and cranked the engine. He drove toward the destination with a million thoughts racing through his psyche. His hands gripped the steering wheel as he nibbled on his bottom lip. He hadn't seen Finesse in almost ten years and he was becoming extremely anxious.

Will she be happy to see me, or will she reject me?

Malik had dreamt of this day for over twenty years, and while he was excited to see his oldest daughter, he was fearful that Finesse would continue to shun him out of her life. Malik stopped at a stop light and rubbed his sweaty palms down his jogging pants. He grabbed a face towel that he kept in the car and dabbed sweat beads that rested on his forehead.

The light turned green and Malik continued his destination to Finesse. Ten minutes later, he pulled up to the address Johan had given him. He eyed the grungy house and shut off the engine. After spending a minute visualizing how his reunion with Finesse would turn out, Malik exited the car and strolled up to the front door. He knocked twice and waited anxiously for someone to answer.

Seconds later, a guy dressed in all-black answered the door with a snapback hovered over his eyes. He looked Malik up and down and asked. “Who are you?”

“I’m here to get Finesse.”

He nodded and stepped out of the way. Malik hiked up the stairs and surveyed the house that was barely furnished.

“She’s in the first door on the left,” the man informed, pointing to a closed door.

Malik tipped his head, ambled to the room and inhaled a deep breath. He didn’t know what this moment would become, but he couldn’t renounce the feeling of joy, knowing that he would be seeing Finesse within a matter of seconds. Malik turned the lock and carefully opened the door.

His heart beat was so thunderous that it felt like it was connected through surround sound. He stood frozen for a moment as he took in Finesse. She was more beautiful than the last time he had laid eyes on her. She sat Indian style while picking at her nails. Her hair was unkempt and stringy. The dress she was wearing had lint balls and pieces of paper stuck to the fabric. When her attention finally landed on him, she gasped and covered her mouth with her hand. Malik wasn’t sure if her reaction was due to shock or disdain, so he stayed with his feet planted to the floor.

No words were spoken as they exchanged gazes. His anxiety was growing rapidly by the second since Finesse still had yet to utter a word. He didn’t want to make the reunion more awkward than it already was, so he decided to break the thick ice in the room.

Malik cleared his throat. "I've come to take you home."

Finesse scrambled to her feet and grabbed a pair of heels that were lying in the floor. Her eyes roved around the room for a second, before she hurried over to Malik. When she grabbed his hand, Malik felt his heart melt. Being deprived of affection, as well as attention from Finesse, had left him dejected for years.

"You ready?" he asked.

Finesse offered him a fervent nod.

Malik ushered her out of the room and bypassed the guy on the couch.

"I hope you learned to stop stealing mothafuckas' money," the guy snapped.

"Aye, chill out," Malik warned and opened the door.

He and Finesse exited the house and headed to the car. He opened the door and watched her slide in the passenger's seat. Malik then got in on the driver's side and shut the door.

"When did you get out?" she mumbled with her eyes lowered to the floor.

"A couple days ago. Where do you want me to take you?"

She licked her dry lips. "Home."

Her dingy dress caught his attention again. "They didn't let you take a shower."

"I didn't want to," she mumbled.

Malik didn't respond. Instead, he started the engine and pulled away. The drive to Finesse's condo was a quiet one. She stared out the window in complete silence. As much as Malik wanted to converse with her, he also didn't want to force himself on her either. He always wanted their bond to progress naturally.

Once he pulled into her parking garage, he found a space and parked the car.

"How did you know where I lived?" she asked with her head still turned toward the window.

"Sky showed me how to get here when we found out you were taken."

She spun her head in his direction. "How did you find out?"

"That dude Quest called Sky and told her."

She shook her head bitterly and mumbled something under her breath. She abruptly opened the door and got out of the car. Malik wasn't sure if he should get out and follow her because she hadn't technically invited him inside. Before she closed the car door, Finesse crouched down and peered at him.

"Can you come in with me?" she asked softly.

Without a second thought, Malik dipped his head and turned the car off. He got out and followed her to the elevator. The ride up to her condo was another quiet one. The only noise that sounded through the small space was the chime of the elevator when they arrived on her floor. With bare feet, Finesse shuffled to her door and lifted up the welcome mat. She picked up a single key, stuck it in her lock and opened the

door. As soon as they entered the house, a foul stench attacked Malik's nose. He waved his hand in front of his face and shut the door.

“Lexi Pop!” Finesse called out, dropping her heels on the ground.

“Who is that?”

She glanced at him. “My dog.”

Malik did remember Sky mentioning that she had a dog. He didn't remember seeing one when he first came to her apartment. He took a seat on the sofa as Finesse disappeared in the back. He surveyed the room and admired the black and white paintings on the wall.

“Oh My God!” Finesse screeched.

Malik hopped from his seat and rushed to the only door that was open. He walked inside the bedroom and stopped in his tracks when he saw Finesse in the ensuite on the floor. Next to her was a stiff dog, lying lifelessly near the shower. The odor was much more pronounced with a couple of flies buzzing around the room.

“He killed her!” Finesse wailed with her face buried on the floor.

Malik planted his hands on top of his head as he listened to the heartrending cries from his daughter. He was speechless. He didn't know how to comfort her while watching her body quiver with each tear that fell.

I'm not equipped to deal with this shit.

“That young-ass fuck boy killed my dog!” she screamed with a wet face.

Malik carefully kneeled down and beckoned her with his fingers. “Come here.” He grabbed her shoulders. “It’s going to be okay, Finesse. Just come to me”

“Not it’s not!” she bellowed. “This was my best friend. She didn’t deserve this!”

Malik pulled her closer to his chest and held her tightly. Her whimpers sounded through the room causing a surge of sadness to encompass him. He rocked her gently as she sobbed in his arms. He loved the feeling of her being in his embrace, but he hated that she was in pain. He despised seeing Finesse so aggrieved and he wished that he could carry the agony for her.

“It’s going to be all right. Don’t cry, okay?” he assured.

“It’s all my fault,” she sobbed on his hoodie. “I shouldn’t have taken the money. I did this to her.”

“Now, don’t go blaming yourself.”

Finesse looked up with drenched eyes and snot running from her nose. “It is on me, Malik. They killed Lexi because of me.”

He hated that Finesse had referred to him by his first name. He made a mental note to check her once she calmed down.

“Listen, I’m sorry this happened to you, but we need to get this dog out of here because her body is decomposing. You wanna come back to my house with me?” he asked with hopeful eyes.

She shrugged one of her shoulders. “Where do you live?”

“In a house, Finesse. Why don’t you clean yourself up while I handle the dog? I’m going to call animal services to come collect the body.”

She wiped her eyes and nodded, somberly. Malik helped her to her feet and walked her out of the bathroom. With tears still falling from her eyes, she grabbed some clean clothes out of her dresser and exited the bedroom.

He then grabbed a throw blanket that was laid across her bench and wrapped the deceased dog inside. He had never handled a dead animal but because Finesse was so distraught, he felt like he had to step in and take care of everything for her.

Chapter Six

Teardrops fell on Finesse's T-shirt as she dabbed her eyes with Kleenex. Her heart was truly shattered knowing that her dog was gone. Lexi Pop was a part of her family, and she hated herself for putting her puppy in the position to be killed. Malik had tried his best to comfort her with his words, but Finesse knew that the ache deep within her heart would never heal.

Malik handed her two pills and a bottle of water. "Here is some Advil and water."

Finesse gladly took the pills and swallowed them down. She had developed a serious headache from the cathartic weeping she had been doing since she discovered Lexi Pop.

Malik sat down on the loveseat and stared at her. She returned the same gaze and finally had the chance to take in his mature appearance. She hadn't physically seen Malik since the age of eighteen and she did note that he looked slightly different. His skin was a smooth shade of pecan with a couple of blemishes decorating his left cheek. A few grey hairs sprouted from his low cut. The only facial hair he wore was a salt and pepper goatee that framed his full lips. Malik possessed the same eyes as Finesse, only his eyes were a lighter shade of brown.

Finesse found it hard to believe that her father was actually out of jail, and that she was posted at his house. She had so much to question him about, but she was consumed with so much grief, that she didn't have the energy to converse with him.

“I called Sky and Mafia over. I figured you could use their company.”

Finesse remained silent and looked down at the balls of tissue in her lap. Life had smacked her hard within the last week. Nothing would be as difficult as the death of her mother, but being captured and having her dog killed, made her want to wave the white flag.

“Who set this up for you?” she muttered, referring to the four-bedroom house.

He leaned back and stretched his arms on the couch. “Johan, set it up for me. I told him I wanted to live close to you and Sky, so this is what he purchased.”

Silence pervaded the room.

“I have a lot of issues with you,” she blurted out.

He tipped his head. “I know that, Finesse. What I want more than anything is for us to work through our issues.”

“I don't wanna talk about it,” she sniffled. “I'm just not mentally ready to go there right now.”

“I understand, but I'll...”

Midway through his statement, the doorbell rang. Malik got up and opened the door. Finesse turned around to see Sky and Mafia enter the home. Sky rushed over and

hugged Finesse tightly. She was so overwhelmed by the love of her sister, that Finesse began to cry again.

“Are you okay?” Sky asked and cupped her face. “I’ve been so worried about you.”

Mafia sat next to Finesse and grabbed her hand. Those two rarely showcased affection for one another, but Finesse did appreciate the love Mafia was offering.

“I haven’t been able to sleep since we found out you were snatched up,” Mafia revealed.

“Me either,” Sky chimed in. “I had to cancel some classes because I just wasn’t in the mood to do any yoga.”

“They killed my dog,” Finesse whined.

Sky’s mouth dropped, and her eyes widened. “Oh, sis, I’m so sorry to hear that.” She gave Finesse a tight hug.

“That’s some weak-ass shit,” Mafia hissed. “You wanna go handle their asses?”

“Y’all are not about to handle shit,” Malik interjected. “We don’t need more drama.”

Finesse glared at him and rolled her eyes. “But it was okay for them to kill my innocent dog though, right?”

“Nah, it wasn’t okay, but Finesse you have to realize that you violated someone and instead of being killed, they just so happened to take your dog out. I’m not saying that it was right, but in the streets, it’s always an eye for an eye.”

“He got his money, so killing her dog wasn’t necessary,” Mafia quipped.

“It wasn’t but it happened.” Malik shrugged.

“Wait a minute; so, Quest gave him the money?” Finesse questioned.

“No, my daddy did?” Mafia responded.

Finesse huffed with flared nostrils. “I can’t wait to see Quest’s ass. I got something for his bitch-ass.”

Sky shook her head. “Yeah, Uncle Johan went to his house to see where you were. I told you to leave that man alone a long time ago. I knew he would leave you high and dry when your back was against the wall.”

Finesse was trying to piece together what may have happened for her to be released from Azai’s house.

“So, Uncle Johan must’ve paid him today then, right?” Finesse quizzed.

Sky’s eyes nervously roamed to Mafia and then Malik. The energy in the room had shifted and it wasn’t sitting well with Finesse. She didn’t like the silence that had suddenly permeated the room.

“What?”

“Well,” Mafia licked her lips. “My daddy paid on the first day you went missing.”

Finesse’s brows corrugated in a scowl. Her cheeks were suffused in redness. “So, he knew where I was? Why the hell am I just now getting home?” Finesse clipped.

“It’s because he told the man that had you hostage to keep you for a while,” Sky disclosed. “He felt like you needed to learn a lesson.”

“What?!” Finesse yelled.

“We tried to get him to change his mind, but he wouldn’t budge,” Mafia explained.

Finesse cut her eyes at Malik who was peering at her with a relaxed gaze. “Aren’t you supposed to be my father? How could you let him make a decision like that about me?”

“He wouldn’t tell me anything about your whereabouts, Finesse,” Malik reasoned. “We got into a huge argument because he wouldn’t tell me where you were.”

Finesse jumped out her seat and slid her feet into her Fenty slides. “Y’all don’t give a damn about me. I don’t care what he wouldn’t tell y’all. This all could’ve been avoided. You don’t know what I was going through in that funky-ass house.”

“We didn’t make the fucking decision. How the hell are you going to be mad at us, as if we told that man to keep you?” Mafia retorted.

Malik swayed his head back and forth. “He wanted you to learn a lesson. You can be mad all you want to, but hopefully you’ll think twice about setting up another man.”

“Hopefully, you’ll continue to stay out of my life now that your home!” Finesse snapped at him.

Sky gasped. “Finesse that was mean. You need to quit getting mad at everyone and recognize your role in this too.”

“I’m done with y’all. I don’t want no one to contact me. You all really let me down.”

Finesse stormed out of the house and walked down the street. She had no phone and she didn’t drive her car over to Malik’s place. She couldn’t bear to spend another second with

her so-called family. They had truly disappointed her and she vowed to never speak to Johan again. Finesse had suffered through mental hell, and it was all in the name of teaching her a lesson.

What truly had Finesse completely dismayed, was that her father didn't come to her rescue right away. She was saddened that he would stand by and allow Johan to make such a crass decision. Now that she knew Malik really didn't have her best interest at heart, she was going to continue to give him her ass to kiss.

“Do you see what we have to deal with Uncle Malik?” Mafia shot, grabbing her phone.

He rubbed his hands down his face and pushed out a heavy breath. “She's just hurt right now, especially now that her dog was killed.”

“Dad, she's always like that. As usual, she finds a way to be angry at us all as if we made the call to keep her hostage.”

Mafia scoffed. “Well, I'm not about to kiss her bipolar ass. She already knows I don't do that kind of shit.”

“I really don't know where to start with her,” he stressed. “She has so many layers of pain that I might not be able to help her heal.”

“Well, the first thing she needs to do is talk about why she's hurt. She doesn't open up to anyone and I'm sure that's why she's angry, because she keeps all of her feelings bottled up,” Sky said.

Malik looked at Sky. “I kind of just want her to come to me freely, but I feel like deep down, she really needs me. I gotta at least show her that I’m gonna fight for her.”

Mafia smacked her lips. “Hmmp, you can do all that fighting on your own. I’ll end up slapping Finesse for talking crazy to me.”

Malik smirked. “You’re still evil as shit, niece.”

Mafia chuckled. “I’ve actually calmed down a bit. Getting rid of a no-good husband will do that to you.”

“Actually, Dad, I think Kano has mellowed her out as well,” Sky instigated.

“Kano, huh?” he chuckled. “He seems like a good dude.”

“He is,” Mafia beamed. “He’s going to be my next husband.”

Sky clapped her hands happily. “Did he propose?”

“No, but I’m speaking it into existence.”

“What about you, Sky?” Malik asked with a raised brow. “Is this Ryker dude going to marry you?”

“Of course. He tells me all the time.”

“Yeah, a’ight. Make sure you let him know that he’s not going to get a lot of time to make it happen either.”

“Okay, Dad.” Sky playfully rolled her eyes.

He chuckled and shook his head. “What am I going to do about your angry ass sister?”

Sky gave him a pout. “I don’t know, Dad. Just try to love on her even if she rejects you. Eventually she’ll give in and let go of that pain.”

Malik inhaled and sat back on the couch. He was aware of the hard battle of mending the broken wedge between him and Finesse. Before he was released, he made a promise to go hard for their relationship, because he needed to have a healthy relationship with her. Finesse was his first born and being free wouldn’t be worth it if he couldn’t establish a bond with her.

One week later...

Finesse walked inside of her hair boutique with heavy lids. The last week had been so stressful that she hadn’t been able to get a good night’s rest. Since she wasn’t comfortable with Azai knowing where she lived, she decided to move into a new condo across the street from her old building. Packing and moving within a week had been an extremely difficult task but Finesse had managed as best she could.

“Damn, you finally remembered that you had a business to run,” said her employee, Deshawn.

Finesse flipped her middle finger at her and straightened a hair bundle that was hanging off the stand. She loved hair extensions so much that she decided to open a boutique that strictly sold hair weave. Her store had been designed by her Aunt Kitty and consisted of different textures of hair on the glittered wall. Several bundles were propped on glittered stands on top of a marble table, while custom wigs were near the back on mannequin heads.

“I don’t have to be here. That’s why I pay your peanut-head-ass,” Finesse retorted.

“Oh, don’t talk shit; because your cheap ass don’t even pay that well. Shit, I’m really just here so I can get that crappy ass insurance that you offer.”

Finesse walked behind the desk and sat her purse on top. She curled her lip and flicked her hair behind her shoulder. Deshawn had been her worker for the last two years and deep down, Finesse did appreciate her loyalty. Deshawn was considered a stud with a boy cut. She was on the short side, standing at four-feet-eleven. Her petite body was covered in an array of tattoos, with a small heart near her left eyebrow. Finesse always thought that Deshawn was beautiful with her high cheekbones and heart-shaped lips, but her masculine decorum usually overshadowed her good looks.

“So, what’s been going on while I’ve been away? Did that one salon pick up their hair?”

Deshawn scoffed. “Yeah, and her ass thought we were going to deliver. I had to tell her she had to bring her lazy ass to get the shit.”

“That hoe knows we don’t deliver. The fuck we look like? A pizza shop?”

Finesse pulled her phone out of her bag and dialed Quest’s number for the umpteenth time. She had been trying to reach out to him all week, to no avail. She placed the phone up to her ear and scowled when his voicemail came on.

I wonder if that bitch blocked me.

“Oh, and we have a new client for wholesale. They’re going to review the contract and get it back to me today.”

Finesse nodded. “Good. You need to make some damn money around this bitch.”

“Right, ‘cause you damn sure ain’t doing nothing around here. Don’t you feel like I need a raise?” Deshawn asked.

“Girl, if you don’t raise your boy-built-ass out of my face. I got too much on my mind to be fooling with your ass.”

Deshawn shook her head. “You suck as an employer.”

“Whatever. Aye, let me see your phone real quick.”

“Why?” Deshawn narrowed her eyes.

Finesse held out her hand. “I need to make a call. Girl, let me see that weak ass Android.”

“Um this is the Galaxy S8,” Deshawn boasted, passing her the cellphone.

“Yeah, with that surveillance ass camera.” Finesse laughed and walked into her office.

She closed the door and dialed Quest’s number. Right away, the phone began to ring, which only angered her. After three rings, his deep baritone answered.

“Who is this?”

“Bitch you see I’ve been calling your punk ass. You must’ve put me on the block list,” Finessed hissed in a hushed tone.

“Finesse?”

“You know who the fuck this is. Stop fucking playing with me.”

“Aye, why you calling my phone on this rowdy shit? Calm your ass down,” he fumed.

“Fuck you. How dare you let me sit and not give that man back his money? After all we’ve been through, you would really say fuck me like that?”

“Man,” he drawled. “Ol’ boy didn’t even want his money. I tried to offer it to him.”

“That’s bullshit,” she seethed. “You were just going to let me rot like I wasn’t shit. People been telling me that your ass is shady and now I see that shit.”

“I don’t give a fuck what people been saying. You know I wouldn’t do you like that. Like I said, I tried to give him the money back, but he didn’t want it.”

Finesse cheeks were flushed with redness. Her body shook with anger while she listened to Quest blatantly lie to her.

“You’re cancelled my nigga and that’s my word,” she threatened.

“I know you ain’t threatening me, Finesse. You know I don’t take too kindly to that shit.”

“And you know I never go back on my word. What I speak always comes into existence, so you better watch your back, bitch.”

Finesse hung up the phone and pinched the bridge of her nose. She grinded her teeth and released a deep breath

through her nose. She couldn't lie and say that she wasn't affected by Quest turning his back on her. They had gotten a lot of money together. She thought that they had established a bond that couldn't be severed. Now that her vision was much clearer, Finesse had finally recognized the shady individual that people had been warning her about for years.

After spending another moment in her office, she walked out but stopped in her tracks when she saw Deshawn talking to Malik. He leaned over the counter with his fingers intertwined. He was dressed casually in a red Polo jogging suit and air max sneakers.

Ugh, I don't wanna deal with his ass.

"Finesse, why didn't you tell me that your pops was out of jail?" Deshawn asked excitedly.

Finesse rolled her eyes at her then glared at Malik. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see you," he responded coolly. "I've been calling you all week. Is your phone broken or something?"

She folded her arms across her chest. "No. I've been busy getting myself together."

"Well, she ain't been here at the boutique. That's for sure," Deshawn interjected.

Finesse cut her eyes at her. "Shut the hell up telling my damn business."

Deshawn shrugged. "I was just saying."

"Okay, Malik, what's up? What did you really come here for?" Finesse asked impatiently.

He chuckled and licked his lips. “Listen, I know you feel some kind of way about me, but that Malik shit stops today. Me and you aren’t friends, so you calling me by my first name ain’t gonna work. Now Dad, Daddy, or Pops is cool, but don’t call me by my first name again.”

Finesse swallowed hard and clenched her jaw. She was bothered that he had checked her in front of Deshawn.

“Now, I wanna take you to lunch. If that’s possible.”

“I can’t.” Finesse pouted. “I’m working.”

Deshawn kissed her teeth. “Girl you ain’t about to be working. Go ahead and go with your pops.”

“Stay out of my damn business!” Finesse bellowed.

“Well, how ‘bout I go get something and bring it back? We can just eat in your office,” Malik offered.

Finesse wanted to reject him, because she still didn’t want to deal with the issues she had with her father. Being around him reminded her of all the pain she had been harboring.

“She likes eating the pasty’s from the Pasty Shop on Burleigh,” Deshawn offered.

I’m going to fire this hoe for running her fucking mouth.

“A’ight cool,” Malik nodded. “You want one?” he asked Deshawn.

“Sure,” she beamed.

“You just fell for her trap. That’s why her beggin’ ass told you about the Pasty Shop, so you can get her one. You

ain't slick, baldie," Finesse shot.

"It's cool, Finesse. I'll be back in a minute," Malik said and walked out of the boutique.

"Why the hell are you being so mean to your dad? Man, I wish my daddy was alive for me to spend time with him," Deshawn groaned.

"Shut the hell up and stay out of my life. You don't know shit about our history, so don't start assuming shit and judging."

"Whatever you say, boss."

Finesse padded back into her office and took a seat.

"That'll be twenty-one dollars."

Malik reached into his pocket and pulled out a twenty-dollar bill and a five-dollar bill. He handed it to the cashier and grabbed the bag of food.

"Keep the change," he muttered, walking out of the building.

Malik gave a few bystanders a nod as he walked to his Navigator. He got inside and headed back to Finesse's hair boutique. For the last week, Malik had been trying to reach out to her, but she refused to answer the phone. He had even gone as far as to go to her condo but was informed that she had moved. He didn't think keeping up with Finesse would be this difficult, but she was proving to be a tough challenge.

Even though her resistance to him was still so strong, he refused to give up on her. If he had to force his way into her

life, then he had no problem doing so. Malik didn't feel right bonding with Sky, and not with Finesse. Yes, she was the one who didn't want to interact with him, but as her father, Malik felt like he had to break through to her so that their relationship could get on the right track.

Once back at the boutique, Malik, stopped at the counter and handed Deshawn the bag with her food.

“Thank you so much. Did you find the place okay?” she asked.

His forehead creased. “Girl, where the hell do you think I'm from?”

“Oh, I just thought you may have forgotten your way around the city since you were gone for so long.”

“Nah, I know this city like the back of my hand.”

He proceeded to Finesse's office and knocked. When he heard her voice grant him access, he trudged inside. She sat at her desk with her eyes buried in her laptop. She looked up once he passed her the bag of food.

“Thanks,” she mumbled.

Malik tipped his head and took a seat in the chair located in front of her desk. His head slowly rotated as he surveyed the pictures of Finesse, Sky, and Mafia on the wall. The images looked like they were taken straight out of a magazine. They all looked so polished and beautiful, with long flowing hair and natural makeup. He figured they were promo pictures for Finesse's hair boutique, because her logo was at the bottom of the photo.

“Hey, do you think you can get me some of those pictures, so I can hang them up at my house?” he asked.

Finesse peered over her shoulder and glanced at the photos. “Why would you want those pictures?”

“Because you all look beautiful, and I don’t have any pictures of y’all at this age.”

She shrugged lazily. “I’ll see.”

Malik stroked his goatee and stared at Finesse, who was taking her food out the bag. “So, why didn’t you tell me that you moved?”

“How did you know that I moved?”

“I went to your place and the next-door neighbor told me. You can’t be moving around like that without me knowing, Finesse. I would like to know where you live.”

“You don’t even care about me like that,” she quipped with furrowed brows.

Malik pressed his lips together. “Why would you say that?”

“Because it’s true. You allowed Uncle Johan to let that man keep me and you didn’t do anything about it.”

“I already told you about that situation, so you can stop with the bullshit,” he warned.

“You wouldn’t have done Sky like that. Hell, you like her better than me anyway.”

“No that’s not true,” he pointed his finger. “I’ve had time to bond with her. You won’t allow me to get to know you, so you can’t really make an argument of that.”

Finesse took a forkful of her pasty and stuffed it into her mouth. An awkward silence penetrated the room. Malik wondered what was running through her mind, but he didn't want to ask.

“Why didn't you get food?” she questioned.

“I wasn't hungry.”

“So, you're just going to watch me eat?”

He smirked. “Pretty much.”

She continued to eat without saying a word.

“Even though you didn't like how things went down, I hope being held hostage will stop you from that reckless shit you've been doing.”

“I'm done with it, Malik.”

“What did I tell you about that Malik shit,” he checked her.

She frowned at him. “Oops I mean *Dad*,” she spat sarcastically. “You do know that word is earned, right? I feel like you have a lot of nerve coming to me and demanding that I call you something that you haven't been.”

The sting from her words burned his chest. He loathed her perception of him. He may not have been there for her physically, but he did ensure that his girls were taken care of behind the scenes. It was just that Finesse didn't know it yet.

“Are you going to allow me to be your father then, Finesse? You keep saying shit like that but at the same time, you won't let me in.”

Finesse chewed her food and eyed him for a moment.

“Nah. I’m going to stick with Uncle Johan. That’s who raised me,” she spat with so much venom that it caused his body to shudder.

Her words put him in a disgruntled mood. He literally couldn’t form a sentence, because her statement seared him like a third-degree burn. He nodded and quietly stood from his seat.

“I told myself that I was going to be here for you even if you didn’t want me to. I’m now realizing that it’s not the way to go with someone like you. I won’t continue to force a relationship, so I’ll go now. I’m always here, though. I’ll see you around.”

Malik walked out with dismantled feelings. He would always be there for Finesse when she felt like the time was right, but he wasn’t going to press the issue of them mending their differences if she wasn’t ready. He had to give her space and allow her to come around on her own.

Chapter Seven

Finesse sat at the barbershop waiting to get her eyebrows done. She had been going to Kye for her eyebrows for months now, because she couldn't find anyone that would maintain the shape she wanted. After the talk with Malik, Finesse felt bad for shutting him out, but she needed time to process her feelings for him. Having him in her life was a foreign feeling. Being around the man that created her, made her feel a bundle of emotions she couldn't identify with. The only man that had been a prominent figure in her life was Johan, and even though she was angry with him at the moment, she still had a great amount of respect for him.

Finesse, sat silently as she listened to the men talk shit about miscellaneous topics. She crossed her legs and pulled her phone out. She tapped on her Instagram app to check Sky's page. She still wasn't talking to her family, but Finesse wanted to make sure she didn't miss the birth of her niece. She did at least want to be a part of that moment, even if she was annoyed with Sky. When she didn't see an update, she put her phone back in her purse, and leaned back in the chair.

Usually, Finesse would be talking shit with the guys, but her mood was down. Her spirit was troubled, and she didn't know what was causing the despondent feeling. She folded her arms over her chest and gazed at the wooden floor.

Life is just passing me by.

Finesse's thoughts were interrupted when the door swung open. Kano walked inside with a man that looked awfully familiar. She watched as the two shook hands with some of the men in the shop. Kano gave her a nod before making his way over to her. Finesse smacked her lips and glowered as he approached with the stranger closely behind him.

“What's up, fam? Where were you on Sunday? The food was hittin',” he boasted, rubbing his stomach.

She released an exasperated sigh. “Don't come over here talking to me about no damn food. I'm not fucking with you either.”

Kano lowered his thick brows and raised his arms. “Damn, what I do?”

“You probably knew what my uncle did and you ain't try to stop him. I don't have shit to say to you since you're a part of the family now. You're on my shit list just like they are.”

Kano looked back at the light-skinned guy and laughed. “You're mad at the wrong person, but I'll take that shit. I don't give a fuck about you being mad at me because you're not someone I have to deal with. Johan did what he felt he had to do to stop that bullshit you be doing. Be mad at yourself, fam.”

Finesse glared at him and rolled her eyes. Kano walked over to Kye's now-empty chair, while his friend sat in a seat along the mirrored wall.

“Um, excuse me Kano, I was next,” Finesse fussed.

Kye secured the cape around Kano's neck. "He had an appointment. You gotta wait."

She waved her hand. "That's bullshit. You know it would've only taken you ten minutes to do my damn eyebrows."

Kano smirked. "I reign supreme over you," he laughed.

Finesse flipped her middle finger at him. Her eyes roamed over to the guy who was sitting soundlessly going through his phone. She felt like she had seen him before, but she couldn't pinpoint where. Her pupils engulfed his handsome features and silently approved. His thick black fade was in need of a cut. His golden khaki skin held a warm undertone. Tattoos were decorated over most of his exposed limbs including his neck. His pink, juicy lips were fenced in by a mustache and chin patch. He owned dark oval shaped eyes that were adorned by long thick lashes.

Finesse was so engrossed in her intense observation of the guy that she didn't hear Kano talking to her.

"Aye."

Finesse dragged her eyes to Kano who was smirking at her. "What?"

"I said take a picture, it'll last longer. The fuck you keep staring at my nigga for?"

Kye chuckled. "Cannon, I think she's choosing, bro."

Cannon? I like that.

"Don't do it. That's a scandalous chick!" yelled one of the other men who sat near the window.

Finesse cut her eyes at him. “Shut your fat-belly-ass up. I bet five dollars that your big-ass has a rash under your stomach from it rubbing against your pants.”

The entire shop erupted in laughter as the heavy-set guy waved his hand. Finesse returned her stare to Cannon who was finally giving her eye contact. Suddenly, the sound in the shop simmered to a minimal as she became lost in his sexy gaze. It was as if she had tunnel vision and couldn't focus on anyone but him.

“The fuck you lookin' at?” he mumbled.

Finesse instantly checked out of her daze and curled her lip. “Fuck you.”

She rolled her eyes, not appreciating his rude manner toward her. She pulled out her phone and busied herself, until Kye was done with Kano's haircut. Once he was finished, Finesse got up and sat in the chair.

“So, you want them thin, right?” Kye joked.

“Please don't play with my brows. You know those have to be on point more than anything else on my body.”

“Girl, shut up. I got you.”

Kye finished her eyebrows within ten minutes. Finesse paid him and walked out of the barbershop. She wanted to take one more look at Cannon, but she didn't want to risk him saying another slick remark. On the way to the car, her phone buzzed in her hand. She noticed that it was Mafia and smacked her lips.

“What the hell do you want?” she answered rudely.

“Are you still being a bitter bitch?” Mafia sneered.

Finesse opened her car door and got inside. “Yeah and I don’t want to talk to your ugly ass.”

“Oh, bitch, get over yourself. Talk that shit to my daddy. Not me.”

“Nah, you’re in this shit too. Now, what the fuck you calling my phone for?”

“Well, I wanted to see if you wanted to go to the club with me tonight.”

“Hell no!” Finesse blared.

“Girl, stop acting like an asshole. You know you wanna go hang tonight.”

“I do, but not with your two-faced ass. Why don’t you call Sky? Shit, you like her better than me anyway,” Finesse shot.

“Um, did you forget that Sky is nine months pregnant, you idiot? Plus stop all that woe is me shit. I can’t stand when you act like a fucking victim all the time.”

“Fuck you. I don’t care what you can’t stand, bitch.”

“Do you wanna go or not?”

“Nope.”

“Yo Gotti is going to be there. I know he’s your favorite,” Mafia sang.

Finesse, smirked and rolled her eyes. “You knew that would get me to agree you sneaky broad.”

Mafia laughed. “Hell yeah. I knew you wouldn’t turn him down.”

“You’re right. I guess I’ll go, but I’m not talking to your ass and you gotta come get me.”

“Girl, do you promise not to talk? Shit that’s cool with me. I’ll call you later when I’m on my way. Bye.”

Finesse, hung up and cranked her engine. She headed straight to the mall, so she could get the perfect outfit to see her favorite rapper.

Cannon check out his haircut in the hand-held mirror. The pads of his fingers glided down the sides of his fade and nodded.

He gave Kye the mirror. “Good lookin’ out, bruh.”

“No problem. You liking it up here so far?”

Cannon shrugged. “It’s cool. It’s a lil’ different from the south but it’s a’ight.”

Kye chuckled. “I’m sure.”

Cannon dug inside his pocket and pulled out some money. He handed Kye two twenties and said, “Enjoy that tip.”

“Thanks man.”

Cannon walked out the shop and saw Kano talking with a group of guys. He quickly ended the conversation with them and turned to Cannon.

“Kye, got your country-ass crispy. You don’t look like a Mexican anymore,” Kano joked.

“Fuck you, bruh,” Cannon laughed.

“You hittin’ up the club with us tonight?”

Cannon nodded. “Yeah, I’ll be there.”

“A’ight. I’m about to bust a move. I’ll holla at you later.”

“Cool.”

Cannon and Kano gave each other a handshake and went their separate ways. He got inside his car; but before he could insert his key into the ignition, he got a FaceTime call. He quickly swiped the screen when he noticed who was calling.

“I must’a been on ya’ mind,” he drawled in his country accent.

“Something like that,” Nicki giggled. “How are you?”

“I’m good. What’s goin’ on down there in Georgia?”

“Same ol’ same ol’. I can’t wait until I get out of this shit,” she groaned.

Nicki was Cannon’s first love who was serving time in the army. Their relationship had been put on hold for quite some time now due to the distance placed between them. Although they weren’t together, they did manage to speak to each other almost every day.

“How long ya got?” he asked.

“Another two months.” She playfully pouted. “But it feels like forever.”

“That’s gon’ fly by. You movin’ back home when ya get out?”

She shrugged. “That depends.”

“Depends on what?”

“If you come back.”

Cannon sighed and scratched the back of his neck. “I tole’ ya I wasn’t movin’ back to Nashville.”

“Yeah, you told me that and I still don’t understand why. How could you leave your hometown?”

Cannon tucked his bottom lip between his teeth and stared at the screen. Getting away from Nashville was like a breath of fresh air because his family stressed him out. His shoulders had been heavy from a lot of responsibility, and he jumped at the opportunity to leave the place he had called home for twenty-six years.

“I tole’ ya why, so stop askin’ me that shit.”

“Yeah, well, how are we supposed to get back together when you’re there?”

He wrinkled his nose. “I’on know, hell. Ya act like I’m the reason we ain’t togetha’? That shit was on you, bruh.”

“Not all.”

“The fuckin’ military must’a fucked ya’ memory up or some shit. Everything we went through was because of you.”

“I know that, Cannon,” she snapped. “But me trying to better myself, shouldn’t have been the cause of our relationship ending.”

“I tole’ ya’ ass if you joined, that I wasn’t doin’ no long-distance shit with you. I gave ya a got-damn warnin’,” he huffed.

“Yeah, but it could’ve worked out. You were just being too stubborn, Cannon. You could’ve moved where I was.”

“Then who the fuck was gon’ take care of my family?” he retorted.

She rolled her eyes. “I don’t see why you have to take care of grown people who are capable of taking care of themselves.”

Cannon’s nostrils flared as he inhaled a deep breath. Nicki was pissing him off acting as if she didn’t know his situation. She was aware that his father was disabled, leaving his mother to take care of all the bills. He had to step in, so his mother wouldn’t drown in debt; he also had to help take care of his younger siblings.

“Nicki change the subject before I cuss ya selfish ass out,” he warned.

“Why are you so dismissive all the time?” she complained. “We can’t ever discuss anything without you getting an attitude.”

“Who the fuck wants to argue?” he hissed. “I’on have time for that shit. Now tell me what nigga ya been fuckin’ with?”

Nicki gave him a knowing look. "I haven't been with anyone."

Cannon twisted his lips. "So, ya tellin' me that ain't nobody hittin' that thunder cat?"

"Cannon stop playing with me, and don't call my vagina no thunder cat."

"Mane, I'm serious. You can stop actin' like ya Virgin Mary or some shit. Ya know I know you a straight freak." He winked.

She giggled. "You really make me sick."

"I just wanna make ya smile."

"Well, you did," she smirked. "What are you plans for the night?"

He rubbed his hand over his mouth. "I'm 'posed to hit up a club with a couple of my pot'nas."

"That sounds fun. Cannon, are you happy?"

"As far as what?"

"As far as you being up north and you being away from your family."

Cannon sat in thought for a moment before he said, "I got some peace, so I guess you can say I'm happy."

Her eyes lowered. "I was hoping you would say 'no' since we're not together."

Cannon didn't want to hurt Nicki's feelings, but he also didn't want to lie to her. He had been moving through life pretty well since she had joined the army. He asked her to stay

when she first decided to enlist, but she refused. Now that she had been gone for almost six years, the wound of her leaving had healed pretty well.

“I’ll always have love for ya, Nicki. It’s just that I’m used to ya not bein’ in my life like that.”

“I don’t feel that way. I miss you more than anything.”

“Don’t get shit fucked up, I miss ya too. But as far as feelin’ empty and shit without ya, I’m way past that phase.”

She nodded somberly. “I understand. Well I’m gonna let you go. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“A’ight.”

Cannon hung up from the call and placed his phone in the cup holder. It seemed as though their conversations always ended the same way. There was a time when he wanted to be with her more than life itself, but he couldn’t. She had created a barrier in between them that he couldn’t move. Nicki made things seem simple when their relationship was anything but. She broke his heart when she left for the military; and although he had forgiven her, he couldn’t forget how she left his heart in shambles.

Mafia: I’m outside.

Finesse looked at the text and grabbed her purse. She gave herself a once-over to make sure her outfit was to her liking. She wore a long camouflage jacket that had a hood attached. Her breasts sat up perfectly in a black body suit with distressed, denim shorts. Her hair was styled in soft curls that flowed down her back. Her makeup was natural with a bold,

red lip. To complete her look, she donned her thigh-high, black boots.

After approving her appearance, Finesse grabbed her bag and strutted out the door. Mafia was parked right in front of her building, so she got inside and was greeted with the sounds of Fabolous and Jadakiss' "All About it." Mafia looked at Finesse and nodded her head in approval. Finesse rolled her eyes and crossed her leg.

"Here," Mafia uttered with her arm extended toward her.

Finesse glanced and saw that she was handing her a blunt. She grabbed the cigar and swiftly put it up to her lips. She inhaled deeply and closed her eyes. Her body relaxed instantly as the smoke filled her lungs. Mafia drove off and headed toward the club.

The music suddenly turned down. "Damn pass the blunt. You over there in deep thought with the blunt all hostage and shit," Mafia quipped.

Finesse laughed and passed it to her. "My bad. I was thinking about something."

"Have you spoken to Uncle Malik?" Mafia quizzed, taking a pull from the blunt.

Finesse sighed. "I saw him the other day, but I said some mean shit to him. I felt bad, but not anymore. He needs to leave me alone until I'm ready to deal with him."

Mafia swayed her head back and forth. "You need to quit treating my uncle like some off-brand-ass dude. At least

he's trying to be there for you, because if it was me, I wouldn't give a fuck about your disrespectful ass."

Finesse kissed her teeth. "Stay out of my damn business. When I'm ready to connect with him, I will."

"Yeah okay," Mafia shot and turned the music back up.

They arrived at the club after a twenty-minute drive. Before the two got out of the car, Mafia put some eye drops in her eyes, sprayed some perfume on her body, and popped some gum in her mouth.

"What the hell are you doing all that for?" Finesse quipped.

"Kano doesn't know that I smoke, so I'm trying to hide the smell."

"Why don't you tell him?"

"Because I don't want him to know. He doesn't smoke, and he always has something slick to say when he sees a woman smoking. Now stay out of my damn business."

"Scary-ass bitch," Finesse mumbled and got out of the car.

Their heels clicked loudly on the pavement as they approached the bouncer. The women showed their IDs and proceeded inside the club. Flashing lights and blaring music greeted them immediately. Finesse followed after Mafia who was leading them to the VIP section. Kano and his crew were seated with a couple of scantily clad women trying to get some of their attention. Finesse scoffed and noticed that Cannon was sitting right next to Kano. He looked better than earlier, wearing a purple and black bomber jacket, black T-shirt and

black jeans. On his feet were spiked Louboutin sneakers. The only jewelry he wore were diamond studs in his ears.

He bobbed his head to the music and sipped on his bottle of D'usse. Finesse reluctantly tore her eyes away from him and took a seat next to Mafia, who was next to Kano.

“Oh, I thought your ass didn't fuck with us no more?” Kano teased.

Finesse smacked her lips. “I don't. I only came because Yo Gotti is supposed to be here.”

Mafia flicked her hair over her shoulder. “Fuck her, baby. We don't need her to fuck with us.”

Finesse snickered and shook her head. She examined the crowd of people who seemed to be having the time of their lives. People were dancing, drinking and flirting with one another. While the atmosphere was festive, Finesse felt anything but. She suddenly wanted to go home and curl up in her bed. She didn't know why her emotions were so scrambled, but she couldn't help but feel blue.

Maybe a drink will pick up my mood.

Finesse leaned over to Mafia. “I'm going to the bar. I'll be back.”

Mafia gave her a nod. With her purse tucked under her arm, Finesse made her way toward the bar. She had to wait a while since people were placing their drink orders.

“Hurry the fuck up,” she mumbled with her hand placed on her hip.

Finesse tapped her fingernails on the bar while waiting impatiently for the bartender to make her way over to her.

“What you about to steal? The liquor.”

Finesse looked up to see Azai scowling at her. Her mouth suddenly became dry as a desert as she swallowed hard. Her shoulders hunched while her fingers trembled. She wanted to walk away, but her feet felt like they were bonded to the floor.

“What the fuck you doing here?” he questioned with squinted peepers.

“I...uh,” she cleared her throat. “I’m getting a drink.”

“No, you’re not.” He turned toward the bar. “Aye, Nique, don’t serve her ass nothing.”

Finesse’s jaw descended as she gawked at him. “Are you fucking serious?”

“Yep,” he smirked and walked away.

“Your petty-ass!” she yelled, glaring at the bartender who was chuckling.

“Damn,” a girl who was standing next to her teased. “Azai ain’t playing with you, I see.”

Finesse scowled at her. “Bitch shut up with your lava lamp-shaped-ass.”

“Lava lamp? I look good,” the woman defended, snapping her fingers.

“Bitch, you look like a rough draft.” Finesse stormed away and headed back to the VIP section.

She plopped down on the sofa and folded her arms across her chest. Mafia examined her with pinched brows.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing,” she spat dismissively.

Mafia shrugged and lifted her glass to her lips. Finesse couldn’t help but notice the huge diamond ring on her left hand. Her pupils quickly roved over to Kano and spotted a diamond band on his left hand as well.

I know they ain’t married.

“Um, excuse me, Mafia. What kind of ring is that on your finger?” Finesse quizzed with narrowed eyes.

Mafia smiled and glanced at the huge rock. “It’s just a ring.”

“Bullshit,” Finesse hissed. “Why does Kano have a ring on his finger then?”

Mafia laughed. “I don’t know. Maybe you should ask him.”

Finesse pushed Mafia’s upper body back, so she could gain access to Kano. She tapped his arm to get his attention.

“What?”

“Why do y’all have rings on your married finger?” she questioned with pursed lips.

He chuckled. “Stay out of my business. Remember you don’t fuck with me no more, right?”

Finesse smacked her lips. “Y’all think y’all slick, but you’re not. Are you married or not?”

Mafia nodded bashfully. “Yeah, we are.”

Finesse gasped. “Are you serious? Does anyone else know? When the hell did y’all get married?”

“Well, if your nosey ass must know, we went to the courthouse two days ago. And nobody knows yet. I didn’t get a chance to tell anyone, so keep your big-ass mouth closed,” Mafia warned.

“Girl, don’t nobody care about y’all fifth marriage,” she joked.

Kano and Mafia laughed. “You ain’t shit for that,” he chuckled.

Finesse couldn’t believe that her cousin was married for the second time. She was happy for her, because Mafia and Kano seemed to be the perfect match for each other.

“That’s really sweet, though. I’m happy for y’all,” she beamed with a faint smile.

Mafia grinned. “Thank you.”

Finesse inhaled a deep breath wondering when it was going to be her time to get some good news. She felt like everyone’s lives were progressing, except hers. Sky had found a great guy and was now expecting her first child. Mafia had found the love of her life and was now married to him. Even Malik was finally out of prison and trying to live his life right. But Finesse felt like the course of her life was stagnant, and she hated feeling like she was being left behind.

Without warning, an aching sensation appeared in her throat. She stood and hurried to the bathroom. As soon as she got into a stall, she closed the door and sat on the toilet. Tear

drops fell on Finesse's exposed legs as she held her head down. She had never been an emotional person, but her spirit was so displaced that she couldn't stop the tears from falling, even if she wanted to.

I need to get right. I feel so fucked up inside.

She snatched some tissue off the roll and dabbed her wet eyes, making sure not to disturb her makeup. She sat silently, wondering if her somber mood would cease. What discouraged Finesse the most was that she couldn't find the source for her depressive mood. Sure, she had been held hostage for some days, but she felt like she had finally gotten over that situation.

"I need to shake this shit. Got me fucking crying at the club," she mumbled.

Finesse wiped the rest of her tears and exited the stall. She was relieved that there was no one else in the bathroom because she would've been beyond embarrassed. She peered at her reflection in the mirror and fingered her hair. She didn't want to alert Mafia that she had been crying, so she waited a while before leaving out.

When she stepped into the hallway, she saw Azai speaking with another guy.

"Shit," she gritted, not wanting to be around him. Especially, when he had blocked her from trying to buy a drink.

Finesse had no way of avoiding him, so she walked by quietly, hoping he wouldn't notice her.

“What did your ass steal? The tissue?” he accused, causing the other guy to laugh.

She pressed her crimson lips together and spun around. “Shut the fuck up because I’m not on that shit anymore. So, you can keep your stupid-ass comments to yourself.”

Azai twisted his lips. “Oh, so, you retired from setting niggas up now?”

“Call it what the fuck you want,” she shot.

“Your scandalous-ass saying that now but let a nigga walk in with some money. Your rat-ass will be the first one plotting.”

“Fuck you!” Finesse stormed off.

Despite her taking a significant amount of money from Azai, she didn’t appreciate his rude remarks. He had gotten what he was owed, so she felt like the score was even now. On her way back to her seat, she saw that Mafia was approaching her.

“Where the hell were you? We have to go.”

“Why?” Finesse questioned.

“Sky had her baby. We gotta go see her.”

Finesse’s mouth curved into a genuine smile. “Oh my God! Really?”

“Yeah. My mama just called so let’s go.” Mafia ordered, handing Finesse her purse.

The girls hurried out of the club and to the car. Finesse was excited to be meeting a new addition to their family. She was hoping the new bundle of joy would lift her broken spirit.

Chapter Eight

“Isn’t she beautiful?” Sky gushed, admiring her new baby girl.

Finesse nodded and basked at her tiny face. Sky looked at the newborn with so much love in her eyes that it made Finesse’s stone-cold heart melt. Since Sky had a home birth, they were at her house. Most of the family was present except for Johan, who was out of town. A lot of members from Ryker’s family were there as well. Ryker sat in the bed next to Sky with Melody on his lap.

“So, what’s her name?” Mafia asked.

Sky smiled. “It’s Raine Alexia.”

“I approve that name,” Kitty joked.

Malik got up from his seat and reached his arms out. “Let me see her.”

Finesse watched closely as Sky passed the baby to him. He gazed at the baby with heart-filled eyes. She chewed on the inside of her cheek with a sour expression gracing her face. Seeing Malik dote on the baby caused her envious nature to surface. Finesse was feeling a little uncomfortable and didn’t want to ruin the beautiful moment by saying something slick, so she walked out of the room. She took a seat in the living room and sat on the sofa.

Minutes later, Kitty appeared with a look of disdain written on her face. Finesse knew she was about to give a tongue-lashing because her lips were pursed tightly.

“I know you don’t call yourself having an attitude at me,” Kitty chided.

Finesse released a deep breath. “No Auntie,” she responded dryly.

“Well, why is it that you haven’t been answering my calls? How come you didn’t come over for Sunday dinner? Don’t play me crazy little girl because I’m not the one. You will not treat me like I did something to you when I didn’t. Now speak up and stand on your shit.”

“I just didn’t feel like talking. Plus, you, of all people had the power to stop Uncle Johan but you didn’t. So, yes I felt some type of way toward you.”

Kitty chuckled condescendingly and took a seat on the recliner. “You know if I had the power, I wouldn’t have let Johan do what he did. He made a decision and he wasn’t going to allow anyone to change his mind. Now that I look back on it, he did the right thing.”

Finesse smacked her lips and pouted. She didn’t like hearing that she deserved to be kidnapped and held hostage in a dingy room for three days.

Kitty continued. “You needed to learn that your behavior was despicable, and things can go very badly for you if you choose to keep setting up men. Take some damn responsibility for your actions and change your ways. That’s all Johan wants for you, so he did what he felt was necessary.”

Finesse was burning up on the inside as she shifted uncomfortably in her seat. She couldn't help but feel like no one was trying to identify with the pain she was carrying. She couldn't help feeling like she had been betrayed by her family.

Kitty narrowed her eyes. "Now, you can keep your attitude because I couldn't care less, but don't be disrespectful and ignore my calls. I won't allow you to treat me like I didn't raise your ungrateful-ass. Be respectful."

"Yeah, okay," Finesse responded dismissively.

"Don't test me, Finesse," Kitty warned.

"I said okay, Auntie," she whined.

Kitty nodded, stood from her seat and walked back to Sky's bedroom. Finesse was once again placed in a terrible funk. She was ready to go and was hoping Mafia was too, since she was the one driving. She got up and padded toward the room.

She stuck her head inside. "Mafia, are you ready to go?" she asked.

"Why are you leaving, Finesse?" Sky asked. "You haven't even held the baby yet."

"I have a headache," she clipped, returning her attention to Mafia.

Mafia sighed. "I'll be out in a minute."

Finesse went back in the living room and waited patiently on the couch. Her forehead was creased, her jaw clenched tightly. She couldn't wait to get back home so she

wouldn't have to deal with her family. Minutes later, Ryker came into the room and shook his head.

“What the hell do you want?” she hissed.

“Man, you better stop doing my baby like that. Sky ain't did shit to your immature ass.”

“What? Boy you better gon' back in the room and leave me the hell alone. Don't come out here talking shit to me.”

He waved his hand dismissively. “Nah man, you be treating Sky bogus. She's been trying to call you all week and you ain't been answering like you the shit or something. Now you're shitting on her after she just had the baby. You need to be there for your sister.”

Finesse rolled her eyes. “And you need to get out of my face. Hell, go make us some salsa or some shit.”

Ryker chuckled. “Man, you're rotten as hell.”

“So.”

He rocked his head back and forth. “You bring bad energy anyway. Maybe it's best if you leave. Shit I don't want my lil' family possessed by those evil spirits you're carrying.” Ryker laughed.

“Why would you say that to me?” she asked truly bothered by his statement.

“Because it's true.” Ryker shrugged, walking out of the room.

Finesse sat in silence, trying not to process his judgement on her. She was already feeling low and now that

Ryker had informed her that she brought bad energy, she felt even worse. She covered her eyes and willed herself not to cry again.

Am I really that bad?

“Okay, come on,” Mafia announced, breaking Finesse from her thoughts.

Without saying a word, she stood and followed Mafia out of the house. The two got in the car and headed toward her condo.

“What the hell is your problem?” Mafia questioned.

“Nothing,” Finesse spat, shutting down the possibility of opening up the conversation.

“Whatever it is, I hope you deal with it because you’ve been on some bullshit lately.”

Finesse didn’t respond. Instead, she rode in silence counting down the minutes where she could cry alone.

“Aye, what’s up with ya ol’ lady sister?” Cannon questioned.

Kano looked up from his phone. “Who Finesse?”

“Yeah, her. Why her ass be starin’ at me every time she sees me? I’ on trust her ass.”

“She’s probably trying to make you her next victim,” Kano joked.

Cannon smacked his lips. “Mane, I’ll beat that hoe ass if she ever tries to play with me like that.”

Kano laughed heartily. “Nah, I’m just fucking with you. She probably wants your ass. Shit, I don’t know.”

“I’on want no bitch that be settin’ niggas up. She’s bad...but she’s *bad for business*.”

“I feel you,” Kano agreed. “Plus, her mouth is ridiculous. She be talking too reckless and shit. She’s cool but she wouldn’t be your type.”

Cannon tugged on his chin hair thinking about how Finesse kept staring at him at the barbershop.

“I can’t believe ya ass got married again,” Cannon said, changing the subject. “I just knew you was done with that shit after Savannah’s triflin’ ass.”

“Fuck that bitch,” Kano shot angrily.

Cannon laughed. “Ya ain’t heard from her?”

“Not since I blocked her ass. Mac said he saw her a while back and she asked about me.”

“I know his crazy ass said something slick.”

Kano snickered. “Hell yeah. You know he can’t pass up a chance to shit on her.”

“Shit, Savannah was bad for business too. She was doin’ shit that would have her ass layin’ somewhere leakin’.”

“Man, tell me about it. I’m just glad that I got her ass out of my life. I’m with the woman I’m supposed to be with anyway. But what’s up with you and your girl, Nicki? Y’all gon’ make that shit work or nah?”

Cannon shrugged. “I’on know. She wants me to move back to Nashville when she get out the army. I tole’ her I

wasn't doin' that shit, so I'on know where we stand."

"Do you wanna be with her?"

"I would try again, but she would have to come here."

Cannon's ringing phone interrupted their conversation. He looked at the screen and saw that his little sister was calling.

"What's up, Cammie?" he answered.

"Hey. I was calling because we need some money for some food."

He sighed heavily and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I just sent mama some money last week. She ain't go grocery shoppin'?"

"No. She went to the casino."

Cannon gritted his teeth and balled his fist. His mother had been battling a gambling addiction for quite some time. It had gotten so bad that she would go to the casino and spend all of her money before she took care of her responsibilities.

"She's gettin' on my mufuckin' nerves," he groaned. "What did pops say?"

"You know she doesn't listen to him. She runs all over him and does what she wants," Cammie complained.

Cannon's father was in a terrible accident and was now paralyzed from the waist down. His mother took advantage of that fact and walked all over him.

"I'm 'bout to stop sendin' her ass money. Aye, how old is ya again?"

Cammie smacked her lips. “Cannon, I tell you my age every other month. I’m seventeen.”

“Yeah that’s right. I need to get ya an account, so I can send money to you instead of mama’s ass.”

“I would love that,” she perked. “That way me and Casha won’t have to depend on her for anything. Do you know she wouldn’t even pay for Casha’s cheerleading uniform? Daddy had to borrow the money from Grandma.”

“Why he ain’t ask me?” Cannon quipped.

“You know Daddy don’t like asking you for money.”

“That’s that bullshit. Aye, I’ll be down there next week, so I can set ya up an account. When I set that shit up, ya can’t tell mama about it, ya heard me?”

“I promise I won’t.”

“A’ight, I gotta go.” Cannon hung up and sat back in the seat.

“Your mama on that bullshit again?” Kano asked.

“Mane,” he drawled. “She keeps goin’ to the fuckin’ casino spendin’ all the damn money I send her ass. I’m cuttin’ her ass off.”

Kano smirked. “She ain’t gon’ like that shit.”

“I’on give a fuck. She needs to go get a job just like the rest of us. I’m done enablin’ her ass.”

Finesse walked into her boutique with her ear glued to the phone. She was listening to Sky complain about her

leaving abruptly the night before.

“I told you that I had a headache, Sky. Why do you have an attitude?”

“Because I thought I was going to celebrate the birth of my daughter, with my sister. You were upset when I told you that you wouldn’t be the second person that I called. The fact that I called you before Aunt Kitty and you didn’t answer, pisses me off. You always complain about someone not liking and including you, but you never do the shit that you’re supposed to do,” Sky snapped.

“I was at the club and didn’t hear your call. You can’t fault me for that,” Finesse argued.

“I don’t care. You only saw Raine for five minutes before you left. I try really hard to include you in my life but sometimes you make me regret it.”

“Regret?” Finesse repeated stunned. “Why would you say that to me?”

“Because you caught an attitude with me because of a decision Uncle Johan made. For a week, I tried to call you and what did you do? You ignored me like I was nothing. Then I reach out to you, so you can be a part of the birth of my child, and you don’t show up. When you do show up, you leave with an attitude. I’m really sick of you, so stay away from me and my family until you get yourself together. You bring negative energy that I don’t want.”

Finesse’s scoffed with her mouth gaped in incredulity. “Are you serious? So once again, you’re dismissing me from your life. What if I want to see my niece?”

“Bye.”

Sky hung up leaving Finesse in a state of shock. She didn't think Sky would take her hasty departure so personal. She didn't like not speaking to Sky, so she tried to call her back, but was greeted by her voicemail.

“Fuck,” she mumbled. “Now Sky is pissed at me again because of some bullshit,” she complained to Deshawn as she approached the front desk.

Deshawn peered at her with slumped shoulders and saddened eyes. “Oh yeah?” she uttered dryly.

Finesse noticed her sullen mood and asked, “What's wrong with you? Your girlfriend didn't let you lick her lil' coochie?”

Deshawn flipped her middle finger at her. “You're not funny at all. My mama is moving in with her new boyfriend, so I'm going to have to look for a place to live.”

“Why won't you get your own place?”

“Because I can't afford it. My student loans are kicking my ass. I can't even afford a studio apartment at this point. I should've never gone back to school.”

“Well, find a damn roommate. Shit all those hoes you claim you got should have a place for you to stay at.”

“Finesse, we're all college students who either live on campus, or at our parents' house,” Deshawn fussed.

“Well damn,” Finesse sighed. “What are you going to do then?”

Deshawn shrugged. "I guess I'll bed-hop at my friend's dorm room. I really don't have a choice at this point."

Finesse felt bad for Deshawn because she had just recently decided to go back to school to finish her degree. She had been under the impression that her mom would help her out financially, while she pursued her studies.

"Your mama ain't shit for kicking you out with her Alfre Woodard-looking ass."

Deshawn rubbed her temples with her index fingers. "She's in that selfish stage right now. She acts like she didn't tell me she would help me until I got my degree. She really let me down."

Finesse sighed. "I can't believe I'm about to say this." She paused. "You can stay with me until you get on your feet. This shit is only temporary."

Deshawn's eyes widened as a wide grin stretched across her face. "Finesse, are you serious?"

"Yeah, but don't get geeked because your ass gon' pay me something. You're not laying up in my house for free. Also, there will be rules in place. I just gotta think of them first."

Deshawn jumped up and down and extended her arms toward Finesse, but she pushed her away.

"I was trying to give you a hug," Deshawn explained.

Finesse smacked her lips. "I don't want no damn hug. Now get back to work."

“You’re still a jerk, but a sweet one. I promise I won’t be in your way, Finesse. Thank you so much,” Deshawn gushed.

“Whatever,” Finesse mumbled, and headed to her office.

Her conversation with Sky was weighing heavily on Finesse’s mind. Sky had stopped talking to her once before, and it was one of the most depressing times in her life. Sky was like her safe haven; not speaking to her would be grueling.

“I’ma call Auntie Kitty on her ass,” she spoke out loud.

Kitty hated when the girls weren’t speaking, so Finesse was certain that Sky would drop her attitude once Kitty stepped in the middle.

“Aye, some dude is here to see you,” Deshawn whispered with her head poking inside the room.

“Who is it?”

“He didn’t tell me his name.”

Finesse rose from her seat and shuffled to the front. She pursed her lips together as Quest stood on the other side of the desk with Ro. Her eyes rolled as she stepped from behind the counter. He was wearing his signature smirk that was pissing her off to her core.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” she snapped, avoiding pleasantries.

Quest calmly stroked his beard. “I came to talk to you.”

“We don’t have shit to talk about. Now get your shady ass out of my store,” she pointed toward the door.

“Nah, we need to talk about that threat you shot at me the other day. That shit ain’t been sitting too well with me. So, what’s up Finesse? You tryin’ to have some shit on my head?”

Finesse stepped closer into his personal space. “I don’t give a fuck what ain’t sitting well with you. Mothafucka I wasn’t *sitting well*, being held hostage, because your bitch ass didn’t give the money up.”

“You know the game, Finesse. You weren’t supposed to even give my name up in the first place. That’s a straight violation, baby.”

“And you violated when you didn’t try to help me out of my situation. Listen Quest, I don’t give a fuck about none of this bullshit you’re talking. As far as my threat goes, that shit still stands. You’re cancelled, like I told you before.”

He glared at her with clenched jaws. “I told you I don’t fuck around like that. Now we can play this tit for tat shit if you want. You keep telling me I’m cancelled like I can’t get to you first.”

Finesse, smirked at his subtle threat. “Try it bitch, and not only will you be dropped, but that bald-headed bitch, and that ugly-ass baby will be too. You know you can’t fuck with me, so I don’t know why you brought your happy ass up here thinking I’m a fucking game. Don’t fucking try me.”

He peered at her with narrowed eyes. “I’ll be seeing you around.”

“I doubt it mothafucka. Now get your shiesty ass out of my place of business.”

Quest tipped his head and strolled out with Ro right behind him. Finesse didn't trust Quest and she needed to call Johan to alert him that he may try something slick with her.

“What was that all about?” Deshawn questioned.

Finesse shook her head and shuffled to her office. She grabbed her phone and reluctantly dialed Johan's number. Although she was still pissed at him, she needed to let him know about Quest threatening her.

“Hello?” he answered.

Finesse took a deep breath because she didn't know what to say to him. She was angry, but she needed his protection.

“It's me, Finesse.”

“I know it's you. Are you calling to apologize?”

“I guess so...I'm sorry, but I'm mad that you told that man to keep me.”

“I don't care. I told you that I'm done coming to your rescue. You're always putting me in fucked up situations, and it was time for you to learn that I'm tired of your shit. Now, the next time you decide to fuck with someone else's money, I'm not fucking with you at all. You better call your dad because I'm done with your shit.”

Finesse rubbed her eyes and inhaled a deep breath. “I'm not doing it anymore. I don't want to live my life like

that. I just never thought you would tell someone to keep me hostage.”

“I never thought someone as smart as you, and as beautiful as you are, would set people up to be robbed. I don’t know about you, Finesse. You make your life more difficult than it has to be. You act like you grew up in this fucked up home with people who didn’t care about you. I know the death of your mom, and Malik’s absence may have affected you, but there is no need for you to be behaving like this. Me and your Auntie made sure we gave you the best of everything. We also showed you tons of love, so you can’t say that you didn’t get any affection. You’re just your own enemy, and I would love for you to get yourself together before something bad happens to you.”

Finesse cleared her throat in an attempt to keep the achy feeling from surfacing. His words cut her deep, but she couldn’t say that he was wrong. Johan had provided a great life for her and Sky and despite her reckless decorum, she did appreciate him.

“I’m...uh... I don’t know,” she mumbled, feeling tears pooling in her eyes.

“You don’t need to respond. Just think about what I said and change your ways.”

“Okay.”

“Now, how are you doing?”

“Well, I just got a visit from Quest. He kind of threatened me because I sent a warning to him about not helping me out of my situation, with that Azai guy.”

“Don’t worry about him. I got some things in place. You want me to send some security to your store.”

“I would appreciate it.”

“I’ll have someone there within a few hours,” he assured.

Finesse breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank you.”

“No problem. Finesse you know you’re my special girl. Me and you have a bond that no one else shares. Don’t confuse my fed-up attitude with me not loving you because I love you very much.”

The tears she had been holding captive finally rolled down her bronzed cheeks. It felt so good to hear her uncle express his love for her, because she knew he was disappointed in her.

“I love you too,” she replied in a quivering tone.

“All right. I have to go. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Bye.”

She grabbed some Kleenex from the box on her desk and wiped her eyes. Hearing the dissatisfaction in his voice made her heart ache.

I can’t disappoint him anymore. I gotta get my shit together.

Finesse was no longer going to be a part of setting men up for money. She declared to herself that it wasn’t the life she wanted to live anymore. She was going to focus on healing herself. She was beyond broken, and she knew that there was

no one who would be able to fix her until she dealt with her emotions on her own.

Chapter Nine

Nicki walked into her house and sat the keys on the coffee table. She traveled to the kitchen and grabbed a water bottle out of the fridge. She cracked it open and took a huge gulp of the ice-cold beverage. She had just gotten off work and was beyond exhausted. Nicki was a radar technician in the U.S. Army. It was a job that she had been enjoying for the last six years and she was hoping to continue to pursue it once she was discharged.

She hopped on the counter and continued to sip on her water. Her thoughts immediately drifted to Cannon. He was someone who had made a permanent mark on her heart. He was the first man she ever fell in love with and to this very day, she still felt so strongly about him. They had been a great couple before she decided to enlist. She had prayed for him to support her decision, but Cannon did everything but. He wasn't excited about her leaving him because just like he had become her place of solace, Nicki had been his haven as well.

Cannon had a lot to bear on his shoulders when his father became disabled. His family would stress him out to the point he would disappear to Nicki's house. She took great pride in being the person he could run to when his troubles took over. When she announced that she wanted to better herself and enroll in the army, Cannon was livid. He gave her an ultimatum; either she stays home and be with him or go to the army and end their relationship. Nicki didn't want to waste

her life away in Nashville, so she decided to follow her heart and leave for the army.

Cannon broke up with her immediately and stopped talking to her. She tried everything to get him to speak to her, but his stubbornness wouldn't allow him to accept her calls. It wasn't until after a year of being gone, that Nicki went back to Nashville for a visit and finally tracked Cannon down. He was still adamant about not being with her but offered her a friendship. She wasn't excited about being friend-zoned, but she would rather have him in her life than be without him.

Her thoughts were disrupted when she heard the front door open and shut. Nicki jumped down from the counter and walked into the living room. When she saw that it was Brandon, she gave him a nod and plopped down on the sofa.

"I'm surprised you came home after I did. You usually get off early on Fridays," she mentioned.

"I know, but I had to get some paperwork done."

He kicked off his boots and took his jacket off. Brandon padded toward the couch and took a seat.

"I'm so glad it's the weekend. Damn, this was a long-ass week," he complained.

"Shit, tell me about it. I didn't even have time to go get my nails done this week."

Brandon smirked. "I know your ass has probably checked out mentally by now. You ready to be discharged?"

Her face lit up with a smile. "Hell yeah. I'm tired of being in the damn military. I'm ready to take over my life

again. No more answering to these assholes and doing what they say because they rank higher than me.”

“I feel you,” Brandon noted. “Did you decide if you were going back to Nashville yet?”

Nicki shrugged. “I was hoping that Cannon would move back, but he told me that he wasn’t. If I have to move to cold-ass Wisconsin to be with him, I will. I just don’t wanna deal with those cold-ass winters.”

He chuckled. “You’re definitely going to have to deal with brutal winters, but it’ll be worth it if you wanna be with your guy.”

She looked at him and smirked. Brandon was average-looking with a short cut, deep brown skin, and a thin mustache. His eyes were round with a wide bridge nose and full lips.

“Yeah it’ll be worth it. I’m just hoping that me and him will connect the way we used to, when we were together. I really miss being with him.”

“Have you told him about our situation?” he asked with furrowed eyebrows.

Nicki swayed her head back and forth. “Unfortunately, no. I don’t know how to explain it to him without him blowing up on me. He wouldn’t understand.”

“Yeah, but don’t you think he should know before you guys get back together?”

Nicki rubbed her hands down her face. “I mean he should but damn it won’t be easy telling him. Cannon is cold-

hearted and can be very dismissive. I'm sure he wouldn't speak to me again if I was to tell him about this."

"Just tell him," Brandon urged.

"How?"

"Just say 'Hey, Cannon, I got married to this guy but I'm not in love with him or anything. I only married him for the military benefits and that's it. We haven't had sex, and we don't sleep in the same bed.' How did that sound?"

"Like death," she fussed.

"Make sure you throw in the 'benefits' comment right after you say we're married, though."

"That shit won't matter to Cannon. All he's going to hear is that I'm married."

Brandon held his palms up. "I tried to help you. You want me to tell him?"

Nicki's face contorted into a mean mug. "Are you serious? He would probably hop on a plane and beat both of our asses. I have to be the one to tell him. I just have to tell him face to face. I'm not sure when that shit will happen."

"We need to get started on the divorce process before you leave. Hell, I need to start looking for a new place."

"Yeah, I know," she sighed. "I feel like I have so much to do."

He nudged her leg. "Hey, don't be stressed. You're finally getting out, while I have two more years to go."

"I thought you were going to make a career out of this."

Brandon curled his lip and shook his head. “Nah, I changed my mind. I’d rather go back to school for an IT program.”

“Yeah, you’re great with computers.”

“Thanks.” He stood and stretched. “I’m about to go take a shower. In the meantime, you need to figure out how to tell Cannon you’re a married woman unless you think you’re good enough to hide it.”

Nicki thought for a second. She wondered if she could pull off Cannon not knowing that she had been married for the last three years.

“That may be an option.” She smirked sneakily.

Brandon threw his head back in laughter. “Girl, you’re asking for trouble. I’ll let you figure it out, though. I’m going upstairs.”

Nicki watched him trudge up the stairs while he rapped some lyrics. He had given her an idea that she wasn’t completely confident about.

Can I really hide this marriage from Cannon?

The idea caused a nervous sensation to run rampant in her body, but revealing her secret caused a terror-stricken feeling to consume her. Cannon wasn’t an understanding person, and she knew him so well that she was certain he wouldn’t accept her excuse for being married to Brandon. But she wanted to be with him so badly that she was willing to take the risk of harboring her secret. She just had to plan everything out accordingly, so he would never find out.

Finesse scowled when she awoke from her slumber. She winced at the bright sunlight that radiated through her bedroom. She aimlessly grabbed her phone and noticed that it was seven in the morning. A burning odor assaulted her nose as thin clouds of smoke sauntered in the air. When the smoke detector began to sound through the house, Finesse jumped out of her bed and ran to the kitchen.

She stopped abruptly when she saw Deshawn waving her skinny arms in the air to fan away the smoke.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Finesse gritted.

“I was trying to make some bacon, but I had the fire up too high. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you up.”

Finesse smacked her lips, stomped to the window and lifted it open. She then turned on the ceiling fan in her living room and opened a window.

“You knew your ass couldn’t cook, so I don’t know why you tried it. Now you gon’ have my house smelling like smoke and shit,” Finesse ranted.

Deshawn stared at her with worried eyes. “I didn’t mean it, Finesse. Please don’t put me out.”

“I should kick your ass out for bringing pig into my damn house. I don’t eat that shit.”

“Well, I didn’t know. I thought I would be nice and try to fix us some breakfast.”

“Fuck that. Be nice and don’t cook at all. As a matter of fact, your ass is banned from using the stove. If you need to cook, it better be microwaveable.”

“Really Finesse? I can really cook it’s just that the heat was a little too high. Let me prove it to you.” Deshawn opened the refrigerator and pulled out a carton of eggs.

“Hell no! I don’t want you to cook me shit. Now get your ass out of the kitchen. You’ve only been living here for two days and you’re already trying to burn down my damn house.”

Deshawn rolled her eyes and sighed deeply. “Okay warden. Damn I feel like I’m in prison.”

“I don’t care what your ass feels. Shit go back to the dorms if you feeling strongly about it.”

“Nah, I’m just playing. You’re not that bad.”

“That’s what I thought.” Finesse stomped back into her bedroom and slammed the door.

She went into her bathroom to brush her teeth and wash her face. Once she was done with her morning hygiene, Finesse grabbed her phone and dialed Sky. When Sky’s voicemail came on, she smacked her lips and hung up.

“How can I get to her ass?” she wondered out loud.

She scrolled to her contacts and stopped at Ryker’s name.

“I do not wanna deal with his silly-ass,” she complained.

She really wanted to speak to Sky, so she bit the bullet and decided to FaceTime him. She nibbled on her bottom lip as she waited impatiently for him to answer. Within seconds, his face appeared on the screen.

“Why the fuck are you FaceTiming me without an appointment?” he questioned.

“I need to talk to Sky. She won’t answer for me.”

He laughed. “She doesn’t fuck with your bad-spirit-having-ass anymore.”

Finesse gave him a knowing look. “Stop saying that. Let me talk to Sky, Ryker.”

“I’m not with her. I’m at my cousin’s house right now. Get off my baby nuts man.”

Finesse laughed. “You’re such a punk. I wanna see Raine.”

“Raine is booked and so is Sky. Stop harassing us with your bullshit, Finesse.”

“Please Ryker,” she begged. “I need your help. I need you to talk to Sky for me. I’ll buy you something. Anything you want.”

His thick brows lifted. “Word?”

“Yeah, as long as you get Sky to talk to me.”

“A’ight, I want tickets to see LeBron play next week. Make sure they’re floor seats. Get me about four tickets.”

“Four tickets?” she screeched.

“Yeah, I wanna take my bro and my cousins with me.”

“Fuck them.”

“Nah, fuck you and fuck you seeing the baby and Sky,” he retorted.

Finesse rolled her eyes at the stupid smirk that was on Ryker's mug. "Okay, you bastard. I'll have the tickets for you."

"A'ight, you'll talk to Sky when I see confirmation that you bought the tickets."

"Bye."

Finesse groaned as she hung up. She grabbed her iPad and purchased the Bucks tickets. She then sent the confirmation email to Ryker. He texted her back a minute later.

Ryker: Got it. You should be hearing from Sky tonight.

Finesse: Ok.

Finesse was hoping that Ryker came through for her because she missed her sister terribly. She also wanted to bond with Raine, since she had seen her only once. She went to her closet and picked out an outfit to wear. She refused to stay in the house and be depressed, so she decided to go over Mafia's house.

After showering, Finesse put on her floral-print Adidas track suit that fit her body like a glove. She sported some matching shell toes and wore her hair to the back, in a sleek ponytail. The only jewelry she wore was her oversized gold hoop earrings.

"I need to go buy more of these outfits," she noted, checking out her backside in the mirror.

Once she was done getting dressed, she grabbed her purse, phone, and keys and walked out of her bedroom. On her

way out the door, she saw that Deshawn was sitting at the kitchen table eating some cereal.

“Hey Finesse, can I close the store an hour early today? I wanna go to my friend’s concert tonight.”

Finesse shrugged. “I guess.”

“Thanks.”

Finesse walked out of the door and down to the parking garage. She hopped in the car and made her way to Mafia’s house. Normally, she would never pop up at her house, but she needed her company since Sky was ignoring her. Finesse parked, walked up to the front door, and rang the doorbell.

Mafia answered the door wearing a short silk robe and holding a coffee mug. “What the hell you doing over in my neck of the woods?”

Finesse smiled. “I came to see my favorite person.”

“Yeah, right. Sky still ignoring your ass. You ain’t slick,” Mafia laughed and moved out of the way, so Finesse could come inside.

“Okay, I’ll admit that she’s not fucking with me, but I wanted to come and see you. Do you know I had to call Ryker and bribe him, so Sky can call me?”

Mafia cackled and shut her door. “Girl, what did he ask for?”

“Tickets to the Bucks vs. Cleveland game. That shit was taxing too, but I wanna see my damn niece, so I had to take that L.”

“You should’ve known he was going to milk you.”

Finesse heard voices coming from the kitchen. “Who is that?”

“Who do you think?” Mafia quipped.

“I mean I know it’s Kano, but who else?”

“Oh, his guy Cannon, is here.”

Finesse’s almond peepers lit up. She hadn’t seen him since the club and she was excited that he was in the same house as her.

“Oh, no, don’t make him your next victim because his ass doesn’t play that shit. He might kill your ass,” Mafia warned.

Finesse smacked her lips. “I’m not doing that shit anymore. I just think he’s nice to look at, damn. Get off my fuckin’ back,” she shot and headed toward the kitchen.

When she entered, Kano and Cannon looked up at her at the same time. Kano gave her a nod while Cannon quickly looked away.

Damn, his ass is hard to get.

He was dressed casually in a blue camo-print skull cap, fresh white T-shirt, and denim jeans. His diamond necklace rested on his chest while his Hublot watch shined on his wrist. She couldn’t see what shoes he was wearing because he was sitting behind the island. Finesse sauntered to Cannon with her hand held out.

“I’m Finesse.”

He shook her hand with a stone expression. “Cannon.”

She continued to hold his hand. “You look so familiar to me. Where do I know you from?”

“Girl, you don’t know him,” Mafia interjected.

“Bitch shut up,” Finesse snapped under her breath, and turned her attention back to Cannon.

“I was one of the dudes that checked on ya when ya was down bad,” Cannon drawled.

Oh shit! He saw me at my fucking worst. How embarrassing.

Finesse smiled even though she wanted to run away. “Oh, my goodness, you’re so damn country. Where are you from?”

“Nashville,” he answered.

“Oh really.” Finesse batted her long lashes. “Ain’t that where Garth Brooks and ‘em live?”

Kano laughed. “How the fuck is he supposed to know where that man lives? Shit, we don’t listen to no country music.”

“Fuck you, Kano. I was only asking a question.” Finesse rolled her eyes. “So, Cannon, are you just visiting?”

He shook his head. “Nah, I stay here now.”

Finesse grinned. “That’s good to know.”

“Shoot your shot, Finesse,” Mafia cheered.

Cannon hadn’t cracked a smile yet. He peered at Finesse with a certain coldness that she didn’t like.

I wonder if I’m giving off bad energy.

“So, Cannon, do you have a girlfriend?”

He shrugged. “I gotta situation.”

“What does that mean?” Finesse quizzed.

“It means I got a situation? Why you askin’?” he gazed at her with his oval-shaped eyes.

“I don’t know. I was just being nosey.” Finesse looked over at Mafia. “Hey, you wanna go shopping today? Your treat.”

Mafia twisted her face. “No, it’s not my treat. I ain’t your damn sponsor.”

“You’re right, but you just married Kano’s ass and I know he got some coins. Speaking of marriage, did you get a prenuptial agreement, Mafia?”

Mafia swayed her head back and forth. “No, I didn’t.”

“Oooh, Uncle Johan is going to kill your ass. You know he doesn’t play that shit,” Finesse hissed.

“Johan ain’t gon do shit. Aye, mind your damn business,” Kano shot at her.

“Let me guess, y’all are going to be together forever, so there is no need for you to sign a pre-nup,” Finesse quipped sarcastically.

“Why you in married folks’ business?” Cannon asked with a curled lip.

“Because I know how my uncle is, and I want them to get prepared to hear his mouth since they didn’t get a prenuptial agreement. Uncle Johan wants to protect the

family's money and he always demands that we get a prenup before we get married. Now you stay out of family business.”

Cannon glared at her. “I’ll hit ya in ya shit right now.”

Mafia and Kano burst into a fit of laughter. Finesse glowered at Cannon who was returning the same expression.

Finesse waved her hand dismissively. “Mafia, can you get dressed so we can go? I’m not feeling the energy in the room.”

“That’s because ya walked ya ass up in here. Openin’ up that big-ass mouth ya got. Ya look much better with ya mouth closed,” Cannon snapped harshly.

Finesse jerked her head back. “That was mean as fuck. Why would you insult me like that?”

“Because it’s the truth.”

“Fuck you. You bright-ass, tongue-tied-ass punk. At least I know how to talk with your bad grammar-speaking ass,” Finesse shot.

Suddenly, a smile appeared on Cannon’s face, which only angered Finesse. She couldn’t believe he had the audacity to shit on her in front of everyone.

“Cannon, don’t be talking shit to my sister. Finesse let’s go upstairs before shit gets real,” Mafia suggested, placing her hands on Finesse’s shoulders and ushering her out of the kitchen.

“Dude, why you go off on him?” Mafia laughed as they headed upstairs.

Finesse kissed her teeth. “He’s a bitch-ass nigga. I thought he was cute, but that country-ass bumpkin can eat my ass.”

Mafia laughed as Finesse followed her to the bedroom. Cannon had put a damper on her mood, but she was determined not to let his words ruin her day. It seemed as though everyone was attacking her character with cruel words. She was emotionally fragile and hearing how she wasn’t a good person was weighing down on her heavily. Finesse had to swallow the tears that were building up in her eyes and focus on trying to have a good day without thinking about how broken she truly was. She didn’t want to break down and cry in front of Mafia, because she never wanted to appear weak in front of her.

Chapter Ten

Malik smiled at Raine as she slept peacefully in his arms. He hadn't been able to leave her side since she had come into the world. He gazed into her tiny face with pure adoration. Holding her reminded Malik of the times when Finesse and Sky were babies. He had no clue at that time how to be a father, but he was determined to do it. Only he didn't get a chance to raise his girls himself due to his irresponsible decisions. He really thought that this baby was God's way of allowing him to make up for missing out on Sky and Finesse's upbringing.

"Dad you're going to have her spoiled if you keep holding her," Sky fussed.

Malik chuckled. "What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong is she's going to turn into a brat, because she's going to expect us to hold her all the time."

"Well, I'm sorry but I'm not putting her down. I just wanna watch her sleep."

Sky giggled and sat next to him on the couch. She seemed to be moving around just fine since giving birth five days earlier.

He peeled his eyes away from Raine and looked at Sky. "You still sore?"

“A little; but I’m getting better. I can’t wait to get back to my yoga studio. I feel like I’m going through withdrawals.”

“You’re taking six weeks off, right?”

She shook her head. “No way. I can’t take off that long.”

“Sky, you have to let your body heal. You just pushed a baby out,” Malik advised.

“I’ll be fine, Dad. Don’t worry.”

He laughed. “Is that your nice way of saying shut the hell up?”

Sky giggled. “No, I would never say that to you.”

“Have you spoken to your sister yet? You know I hate when y’all are beefin’.”

Sky sighed and rubbed her eyes. “I know. But Finesse made me mad the other night. She had made such a big fuss about not being the second person I called when I went in labor, and when I did call she didn’t even answer the phone. Then when she showed up, she left abruptly and didn’t bond with Raine. That pissed me off.”

“Do you know why she had an attitude?”

“No why?”

“Because Kitty checked her ass about not answering her calls. Finesse is spoiled as hell, but she also needs love, so don’t be so hard on her. Has she tried to reach out to you?”

“She probably has but I’ve had my phone on do not disturb. I didn’t want any distractions while I’m trying to bond with the baby.”

“I get that, but call your sister,” he ordered.

“Okay,” she groaned. “Have you spoken with her recently?”

He swayed his head back and forth. “No, I haven’t. I tried to force myself into her life, but I would rather her come to me. She has issues that she has to deal with, and I don’t think she’s ready to sort out her problems.”

Sky offered him a small pout. “I know it hurts that you and Finesse aren’t close yet, but I have faith that you guys will get there. She’s just a difficult woman,” she tittered.

“Shit, you ain’t lying about that. She’s just like your mother, but much meaner.”

“You miss her, don’t you?”

The room grew eerily quiet as Malik’s almond peepers cast down to the floor. Lexi was someone he rarely thought about because the memories of her were too painful to deal with.

“I do, but I don’t wanna talk about it. Did I tell you about my new business venture?” he asked, changing the subject.

She perked up. “No, but do tell.”

“I’m going to start flipping houses. I have a contractor and a team of people who’ve done a lot of renovations. I already purchased my first house on the south side. We’re going to get started on demo tomorrow.”

Sky clapped happily and wrapped her arms around his neck. “Dad I’m so proud of you. You’re really trying to better

your life and that means so much to me.”

Malik was warmed by her words. She pulled back with tears in her eyes.

“Why are you about to cry?” he asked.

“Because,” she sniffled. “I still can’t believe that you’re home. I never thought I would see you on the outside and sometimes I just cry because you’re really here with me. It brings me a lot of joy to see you holding Raine and putting together a business for yourself.”

He smiled and pulled her head over, so he could kiss her temple. “Thank you, Sky. I really appreciate you. I told you that you used to get me through my toughest days when I was locked down. Now it’s my turn to return the favor for you.”

Their chat halted when the door opened. Ryker walked in with Melody running behind him. She ran over to Malik and smiled at Raine.

“You missed your sister?” Malik asked her.

She nodded eagerly and stroked the baby’s soft curls.

“Aww, you’re such a good big sister Melody,” Sky cooed.

“What’s up with y’all?” Ryker greeted and took a seat next to Sky.

“Nothing much. I’m trying to get my Dad to put Raine down, so she won’t become a spoiled baby.”

Ryker chuckled. “You be the main one holding her though. Why are you frontin’?”

Sky nudged him. “Don’t tell my business.”

“Aye, your sister called me. You need to call her back because she wants to see Raine,” Ryker announced.

“I know, I know. I’m going to call her,” Sky groaned.

“You need to call her tonight. I kinda made a promise that you would since she bought me some Bucks tickets.” Ryker chuckled.

Malik shook his head with a smirk. “Why are you swindling my child? You ain’t right.”

“Yeah, don’t be taking gifts from my sister,” Sky chimed in.

“Man, she offered,” Ryker explained with his hands in the air. “Her ass is so desperate to talk to you that she’s willing to pay, so you know I wasn’t turning down shit but my collar.”

Sky pursed her lips at him. “I’ll just see her tomorrow at Sunday dinner. That way we’ll be able to talk face-to-face.”

Malik passed the baby to Sky and stood. “I’ll be back later. I have to go meet with my contractor.”

“Okay, Dad. See you later.”

“A’ight.”

Malik walked out the door and got inside his car. He was happy that his life on the outside was working out for the better. The only thing that was motionless was his relationship with Finesse. He was still adamant about keeping his distance, but it was such a challenging task. Instead of being bothered by his lack of communication with her, he said a silent prayer

with hopes that she would come to him and attempt to mend their differences.

After a full day of shopping, Finesse and Mafia walked into Kopp's Frozen Custard to get some ice cream.

"I gotta use the bathroom. I'll be right back," Mafia said and walked away.

Finesse nodded and continued to stand in line. When it was time to order, she stepped up to the desk and asked, "Can I have a cone with one scoop of chocolate ice cream?"

"Sure," the cashier replied. "Is there anything else?"

"Yeah, put a strawberry shake on there too," a deep voice boomed behind her.

Finesse hastily turned her head and scoffed when she saw that it was Azai. He looked down at her with his light-brown eyes and smirked.

"Um, I'm not buying you anything. You need to get your own damn ice cream," she sassed and turned to the cashier, "You can take his shit off."

"Nah, you can keep it on. Aye, your ass owes me."

She turned to face him again. "I don't owe you shit. You got your money back now leave me alone."

"I want my damn shake. Your cheap-ass need to be offering me a meal as much shit you put me through," he ranted.

She laughed condescendingly. "What did I put you through? Boy if you don't gone some damn where with the

dramatics.”

“Don’t worry about it. Just get my damn shake.”

Finesse released a deep breath and reluctantly turned back to the cashier. “You can keep his shake on there.”

The young woman smiled and nodded. “That’ll be seven dollars and thirty cents.”

Finesse reached into her purse and grabbed her credit card. She handed it to the woman and waited patiently for her to swipe and give it back. The cashier then gave her a receipt.

“Okay, your order will be up shortly.”

Finesse nodded and stepped away from the counter. She found a place in the corner to stand and wait. She groaned when Azai ambled over to her. She discreetly checked out his appearance and silently approved. He wore an oversized denim jacket with a Puma hoodie underneath. Distressed black jeans hung loosely off his waist with black Timbs completing his look. His kinky hair was matted with a fresh lining giving him a hunky appearance.

Finesse shook her head as he approached her. “Get the hell away from me, now. You got your shake now leave me alone.”

He grinned. “Why are you acting like I’m the one that did something to you? You’re the one who stole my bread.”

“Can you stop saying that?” she gritted, looking around to make sure no one heard him.

He lifted his brows. “Oh, you’re embarrassed. Well your ass should’ve thought about that before you played my

nephew.”

“Fuck him. He killed my dog, so I don’t feel bad about gaming his green-ass.”

Azai threw his head back in laughter. “He got your fool-ass. That’s what you get for violating me.”

“That’s not funny,” she fumed. “My dog was innocent, and she didn’t have anything to do with me taking your money.”

“I was innocent too, so talk that shit to someone who cares.”

Finesse rolled her eyes just as Mafia was approaching them. Her eyes darted back and forth between Azai and Finesse, in confusion.

“Who is this?” Mafia asked.

“Nobody,” Finesse quickly spat.

Azai extended his hand toward Mafia and she shook it. “I’m the guy whose money she stole. My name is Azai.”

Mafia’s mouth dropped in shock before she burst out laughing. Finesse grilled Azai with squinted eyes.

“You’re so not funny. Stop telling people that shit.”

“It’s the truth,” he shrugged.

“So, you’re the guy that held her hostage for three days?” Mafia questioned.

Azai nodded and scratched his scalp. “Hell yeah. I had her ass begging me to go home and shit. I should’ve kept your

ass a little longer. Shit, you are embarrassing your family's name, anyway.”

“What the hell do you know about our family's name?” Mafia quipped.

“I know Johan was tired of her shit. He was so tired that he asked me to keep her thieving-ass. You can't be a Lattimore carrying yourself like you do. Your uncle is too respected for you to be clowning on him, and shit.”

Finesse felt her body flush with heat. She clenched her jaw as she mean-mugged Azai. Hearing him stir up Johan ordering him to keep her had the veins in her neck throbbing. She was trying her very best to get past the situation, so she painfully ignored his dig at her.

Azai snorted. “Don't get quiet now. I hope your ass chill on that scheming shit, because you're too beautiful to be doing scandalous shit like that.”

“So, you think she's beautiful?” Mafia teased.

He nodded. “Yeah but being beautiful doesn't mean shit. You can be the baddest bitch in the world and still be rotten on the inside.”

Mafia nodded. “I agree.”

Finesse smacked her lips and glared at Mafia. “Don't agree with his ass. He just shitted on me and you're sitting up here nodding that big-ass head of yours.”

“Bitch, don't come at me because he's speaking the absolute truth. I can agree with whatever I wanna agree with. Ol' bitter ass.”

Azai smirked at Finesse which only caused her irritation to multiply.

“Order number fifty-one!”

Finesse glanced at the receipt in her hand and noticed that it was her order number. She shuffled to the counter and grabbed the milkshake and ice cream cone.

“Thank you.”

She headed back to where Mafia and Azai stood and passed his milkshake to him. “You’re welcome,” she sassed.

He winked at her. “Good looking out.”

“Damn why you ain’t order me shit?” Mafia fussed.

“Because you were in the bathroom and I didn’t know what you wanted.”

“You ain’t shit,” Mafia rolled her eyes and went to stand in line.

Finesse’s eyes cautiously roamed to Azai who was gazing at her intensely. She shifted her weight to one leg and folded her arms across her chest. His pensive stare was making her uncomfortable.

“What?” she finally spat.

He shrugged. “I’m just trying to see why my nephew fell for your bullshit. That’s all.”

“He fell for it because you ain’t taught his ass nothing. Plus, he was gullible as hell; and honestly, I didn’t even have to work that hard on his stuntin’-ass.”

“Oh word?”

“Word,” she boasted and smirked.

“That’s nice to know. Do better a’ight, and thanks for the shake.”

Azai walked away, leaving Finesse with the scent of his masculine cologne. She strolled over to Mafia who was still standing in the line.

“Did your boo leave?”

Finesse wrinkled her brows. “Boo? Girl if you don’t get the fuck on.”

Mafia snickered. “He was fine as hell. Too bad you blew it by stealing his shit.”

“I don’t want his ass anyway. He looks like a tall glass of stress.”

“You’re the same thing, girl. Did you forget that you aren’t the easiest person to deal with?”

Finesse rolled her eyes. “I didn’t forget because someone is always reminding me of how horrible of a person I am. Y’all better be glad I’m not suicidal because I swear you people would’ve driven me to kill myself.”

Mafia waved her off. “Girl, stop being dramatic.”

“I’m serious. I’m always getting shitted on by people and I’m sick of it. I told y’all that I was going to change but I still get the side eye from everybody.”

“Finesse, we don’t have to jump for joy all because you said you were going to change. We have to see it first,” Mafia explained.

She remained quiet since it was Mafia's turn to place her order. After she recited what she wanted, the two stood off to the side.

“Listen, Finesse, I know I don't express it enough, but I do want you to do well. I believe you can change your ways and become a better woman. All you need to do is deal with your issues, especially with Uncle Malik. But don't think I don't want the best for you; I'm rooting for you.”

Finesse gave her a faint smile. “Thanks.”

It felt refreshing for Finesse to hear that Mafia was rooting for her personal growth. It wasn't every day that Mafia had positive words for her. They usually fought like cats and dogs, so Finesse welcomed her encouraging words with open arms. She was determined to get her life together, for not only herself, but to prove to everyone that she could change.

Sunday Dinner

It felt like ages since Finesse had been to her Uncle Johan's house. The aroma of cooked food immediately flowed through her nostrils, prompting her stomach to instantly growl. Finesse made slow strides to the dining room because she was nervous about seeing everyone. When she walked inside, she spotted Johan and Malik conversing at one end of the table and Kano and Cannon seated at the other end.

What the hell is he doing here?

“Hey,” she greeted nervously.

“Finesse. So nice of you to join us,” Johan said, standing from his seat.

He gave her a warm hug and kissed her forehead. Finesse's almond-shaped eyes wandered to Malik, who offered her a simple nod. Without saying a word, she took a seat in the middle of the table and purposely sat quietly. Lately, the opinions of other people had been affecting her emotionally. It was rare for Finesse to care about what others thought about her, but she couldn't help but allow their assessments to bother her psyche.

Everyone seemed to have the same analysis of her character, and although she didn't want to believe that she was such an awful person, she considered that it may be some truth to their words. Since Finesse was consciously trying to watch what came out of her mouth, she sat silently going through her phone, in an attempt to remain cool.

"You can't speak?" Kano shot in a teasing manner.

Don't say nothing slick, Finesse.

"Hey Kano," she greeted dryly without any eye contact.

"That's the only person you see?" Cannon asked.

Bitch, I wish I would speak to your bama-ass.

"I was told I look better with my mouth closed, so I'm just going to sit here quietly," she replied in a nice-nasty tone.

"Who told you that?" Johan intervened.

Finesse made a gesture with her head in the direction of Cannon. "The guy that's with Kano."

"Oh, you don't know my name now?" Cannon laughed.

Johan pointed. “Cannon, you better leave my niece alone. She’s rough around the edges, but she’s not that bad.”

“She was talkin’ crazy to me that day, so I had to shut her up. Right Finesse?”

She finally gave him eye contact and almost creamed her panties. He was looking good despite the disdain she held for him. His thick fade was freshly trimmed with a precise lining. His fair skin gleamed, which heightened his warm undertone. Cannon’s round, chocolate orbs bore into her so intensely that Finesse had to cross her legs.

“You’re beautiful with your mouth opened or closed. Me and Cannon are gonna have to have a talk.” Malik smirked.

Finesse gave her father a faint smile. “Thank you.”

“Snitch-ass,” Cannon muttered.

Before she could respond to him, Mafia and Sky walked into the room. Sky was holding the baby which caused a surge of excitement to sprint through Finesse’s body.

“Oh, you graced us with your presence,” Mafia joked.

“Hey, sis. I was going to call you last night, but I fell asleep,” Sky greeted, sitting next to her. “I’m not mad anymore. I forgive you.”

Finesse reached her hands out, so she could hold Raine. When she secured the baby in her arms, she fell in love instantly. She looked like a baby doll with black hair, light skin and heart-shaped lips.

“Aww, I really like her Sky,” Finesse cooed, rubbing Raine’s head softly.

Sky giggled. “You’re supposed to love her, Finesse. She is your niece.”

“I mean, of course I love her. It’s just that she’s so perfect. You’ve really been punishing me by not letting me see her.” Finesse pouted.

“Well, I told you why I was mad, so let’s just put it behind us and move on,” Sky offered.

Finesse nodded and kissed Raine’s little hand. “I thought you were supposed to stay in the house with her. It hasn’t been six weeks yet.”

“That’s the same thing I told her,” Kitty fussed, coming into the room with a pot of greens. “Sky knows it’s too early to have my baby out, and you’re still open.”

“Auntie, don’t put my business out there. Besides, I didn’t think a five-minute drive with Raine, would be so bad,” Sky expressed. “I’m positive she’ll be fine.”

“If she gets sick, I promise I’m going to get you,” Kitty threatened.

“She won’t, Auntie,” Sky groaned.

“Where’s your silly significant other?” Finesse asked Sky.

“He had something to do. He said he would stop by later if he had time.”

“Good. I don’t have to put up with his shit-talking,” Finesse joked.

Sky tittered. “Y’all two are going to give me a heart attack.”

The family began to eat and chatter amongst each other. Finesse had truly enjoyed being with her family again. Despite she and Malik not conversing much, she even enjoyed having him around. After dinner, everyone dispersed into separate rooms. Finesse sat on the couch with Sky and Mafia, while the men hung out in the backyard. Kitty busied herself in the kitchen to clean the dishes.

“So, do you like being a mom?” Mafia asked Sky.

Sky grinned so hard her cheeks flushed with redness. “I love it so much. It’s the best feeling in the world knowing that you’re someone’s mom. I can’t wait to have more.”

“Wait a minute, how many kids do you want?” Finesse quizzed.

“I want two more.”

“Damn, your coochie is going to be stretched out,” Mafia joked.

Finesse cackled loudly. “I was going to say the same thing.”

Sky shook her head. “You two are childish. I’m not going to be stretched out.”

“Hmmp, that’s what you think,” Mafia sassed.

“So, Mafia, when are you going to have kids?” Sky questioned. “You and Kano need some babies.”

Mafia smiled bashfully and shrugged. “Who knows? Maybe a year or two. Maybe in six or seven months. I don’t

know.”

Finesse stared at Mafia with narrowed eyes. “You ain’t slick. I caught that six or seven months comment. Bitch, are you pregnant?”

Mafia shrugged again. “Who knows?”

“Mafia,” Sky gushed. “Are you really pregnant?”

Mafia looked around and placed her index finger to her lips. “Girl, be quiet before someone hears you.”

Finesse smirked. “Damn, Kano finally shot up the club and put a baby in you. That’s what’s up.”

“I didn’t say I was pregnant, broad,” Mafia hissed. “So, don’t go around telling people that shit.”

“I think you are, but you either haven’t told Kano yet, or you want to wait after you reach a certain month,” Sky guessed.

“Umm hmm, did you know they were married?” Finesse asked Sky, in a hush tone.

Sky tipped her head. “Yeah, she told me right after they did it.”

Finesse cut her eyes at Mafia. “You always tell Sky everything before me. I thought I knew some exclusive shit,” she ranted.

“Please don’t start with that bullshit. As a matter of fact, I’m going to the kitchen because I don’t wanna hear your cry baby-ass right now.”

Mafia rose from her seat and strutted away. Finesse shook her head in an attempt to keep her jealousy from

surfacing. She always felt like Sky and Mafia left her out of certain aspects of their relationship and she despised it.

“Finesse, it’s not that big of a deal. At least she told you and didn’t keep you in the dark about it,” Sky offered nicely.

Finesse didn’t respond because she didn’t feel like arguing with Sky. They had just made up and she wanted to keep the peace between them. Suddenly, Cannon walked inside the house and headed straight for the powder room.

“Bama-ass,” she mumbled under her breath.

Sky looked at her with an arched brow. “Who Cannon?”

“Yeah, his country-ass was talking shit to me the last time I saw him. Can you believe I actually thought he was cute?”

Sky tittered. “I mean, he is handsome, Finesse. So, I’m guessing you lost interest because he said something you didn’t like.”

Finesse waved her hand. “Yeah, fuck that bright-ass bitch.”

Sky covered her mouth and cackled. Finesse couldn’t help but join in because her laughter was so infectious. Seconds later, Cannon emerged from the bathroom, wiping his hands with a paper towel.

“Hey Cannon,” Sky called out. “Come over here for a second.”

Finesse glared at Sky with expanded eyes. She didn't want Cannon in her space, and she was wondering why Sky felt the need to call him over to where they were sitting.

“What's good?” he said and took a seat on the huge sectional.

“I think you and my sister started off on the wrong foot. She was a little offended by something you said, and I think you guys should start over,” Sky suggested.

“I wasn't offended by his slow-talking ass,” Finesse quickly retorted.

Cannon glowered at her with a clenched jaw. “See, that's why I checked ya ass last time. Ya talk too much.”

“You talk too much,” Finesse mocked in a southern accent.

Sky snickered. “Girl cut it out. I figured since you're new in town that perhaps Finesse can take you out and show you the city.”

Finesse smacked her lips. “Who says I want to be bothered with his mean ass?”

Cannon chuckled and pulled on his chin hair. “Why ya always gotta talk shit? Like, would it hurt for you to be cool sometimes? That's why I said ya more attractive with ya mouth closed.”

“I don't care what you said. I tried to be nice to your ass, but then you tried to shit on me, so fuck speaking to you in a pleasant manner.”

Sky clapped her hands together. “Um, okay, this isn’t going the way that I want, so let’s do this. Why don’t you exchange numbers and if you two feel like being around each other, then you guys can plan something.”

Finesse briefly explored Cannon’s handsome features. She didn’t mind hanging out with him. She just didn’t want to witness him talking bad about her anymore.

He stood abruptly. “Come talk to me.”

Finesse reluctantly rose from her seat and followed him out the front door. He sat on the steps and Finesse followed suit.

“So, ya was really bothered by my comment?” he asked and licked his pink lips.

Be honest, Finesse.

She nodded without responding verbally.

“But what if I was tellin’ the truth, though?”

She pierced him with angry eyes. “It’s not true. Even if it was, you didn’t need to say that in front of my family.”

“So, what ya want me to do? Apologize,” he drawled.

Finesse covered her mouth and snickered.

“The fuck ya laughin’ for?”

“You and that country-ass accent. You speak lazy as hell.”

Cannon smirked, which caused Finesse to almost melt. For the most part, he always held a stone expression on his face, so seeing him genuinely smile was quite refreshing.

“You keep talkin’ ‘bout the way I speak like it’s cool, but I can’t say nothin’ ‘bout ya sensitive-ass.”

“The way you said it, was fucked up. I ain’t do shit to you for you to speak to me like that.”

“A’ight, listen, I’m sorry for shittin’ on ya but ya talk too slick. Now if you can keep that mouth under control, I might take ya out to eat.”

Finesse attempted to keep her mouth from stretching, but she failed miserably when her lips formed into a curve.

“I thought you had a situation. I wouldn’t want to step on anyone’s toes.”

He waved his hand dismissively. “It’s just a situation, Finesse. I ain’t in a relationship.”

She nodded slowly. “Okay, well, I wouldn’t mind going out with you as long as you’re nice to me.”

He dug inside his pocket and pulled his phone out. He handed it to her and said, “Put ya number in.”

Finesse grabbed his cell and punched her number in. She made sure to call her phone so that she could save his number.

She passed it back to him. “Here.”

Cannon slid his phone back in his pocket. “I gotta question for ya.”

“What is it?”

“You ain’t on that scheming shit no more, right? I can’t be associated with somebody who sets niggas up for money. I’on respect that shit.”

She felt like a knife had been jabbed into her chest. It seemed as though Finesse couldn't escape her past. She wanted to be angry and storm away, but she couldn't because she had brought this all on herself. It pained her that her character was being questioned because of the terrible decisions she had made.

She sighed. "No, I'm not doing that anymore. I learned my lesson, so you won't have to worry about that."

"A'ight," he nodded. "I'ma fuck with ya when I come back from outta town."

"Where are you going?"

"I gotta go to Nashville for a couple days. Why ya being nosey?" He smirked.

Finesse shrugged. "I just wanted to know."

He licked his lips and stood. "I'm 'bout to go back in the house. Ya coming in?"

"No, I'm going to sit out here for a minute."

Cannon headed back inside as Finesse enjoyed the cool night air. Her mind was racing as thoughts of going out with Cannon emerged. She was attracted to him, but she didn't know if she was capable of being someone other than "Finesse the scammer." She didn't go out on dates just for her pleasure. Whenever she did go out with men, there was always an agenda to get money from them. She had never even been in a solid relationship with a guy. Finesse had always been guarded with her heart. She consistently protected the very essence of herself, in an attempt to keep men from getting to know who she really was.

She had camouflaged her authentic being so much that she didn't even know how to display it to the people around her. She still had issues she had to deal with, but she wasn't sure if she was prepared to expose them. She was comfortable with living in the bubble she had created for herself, because it was easier than explaining the traumatic thoughts that sat on her mind daily.

Chapter Eleven

Cannon had just pulled up to his parents' home and parked. He'd caught an early flight down to Nashville, so he could set his little sister up with an account. He also wanted to talk to his mother about her spending habits and frequent casino trips. He stepped out of his rental, trudged to the front door, and used his key to access the house.

The TV blared loudly, as he entered the living room. His father, Darius, sat in his wheelchair, eating a plate of eggs. His smooth salt and pepper hair was combed to the back. His skin was the shade of cocoa with thick brows, slanted eyes, and dark full lips. He smiled when his eyes landed on Cannon.

"I didn't know you were coming home today? What's up?"

Cannon padded over to him and gave him a handshake and hug. "I'm only stayin' for two days. I just wanted to check on things. How's everything been?" he asked and took a seat on the recliner.

Darius sighed deeply and shook his head. "Your mama's gambling has gotten out of control. I had to stop my disability check from going to our joint account because she would spend it all. She didn't even pay the mortgage last month. We're actually behind."

Cannon balled his fists and cracked his knuckles. He was annoyed by his mother's blatant disregard for the household's monthly expenses.

“Why ya ain't call and tell me? I would'a had that shit paid for ya.”

“Man, Cannon,” Darious drawled. “I don't like calling you for everything. You have a lot to deal with. I try not to add to your plate.”

“Pops, I'on care about all that. You can't be behind on ya mortgage. You need to put ya pride aside and ask for help, ya heard me?”

Darious nodded. “I hear you but still, I don't want you to carry the weight from your mama's bad choices.”

“I'm 'bout to get her ass togetha'. Cammie called me askin' for money for groceries and I ain't like that shit. I'm gonna set her up an account so I can just send money through her, and y'all won't have to deal with mama or her bullshit. What else y'all behind on?”

“Well, the cable is probably getting cut off this week. I just made a payment arrangement with the electric company and the car insurance lapsed two months ago. Donna knows this, but she can't seem to keep her ass outta the casino. You don't know what I've been dealing with since you moved away.”

Cannon felt a twinge of guilt flow through his body. When Kano got the offer to takeover Johan's operation, Cannon didn't hesitate to ask him if he could use his assistance. Cannon was so tired of his family throwing the

weight of their problems on him that he jumped at the chance to move. He didn't mind helping them, but he felt like they were taking advantage and he was tired of it. But now, as he gazed at the weary expression on Darious' face, Cannon couldn't help but feel like he had abandoned them.

"I'll take care of all the bills, Pops."

Their conversation was cut short when his mother, Donna, opened the front door. She came in carrying several shopping bags. Cannon's mother was Caucasian with a short, blonde bob cut. She was a heavy-set woman with big breasts and a bulging stomach. Her hazel eyes were the same oval shape as Cannon's, with a slim bridge nose and thin lips. When she noticed Cannon, she sucked her teeth.

"What the hell are you doing here?" she muttered and shut the door.

"What ya mean what I'm doin' here?" Cannon quipped. "Ya act like I can't come visit."

"I thought we stressed you out. Why would you bring your ass back here when you hopped on the first thang smoking to get away from us?" she hissed.

Cannon tucked his bottom lip between his teeth and exhaled a deep breath. His mother hadn't been happy about his move to Milwaukee. Whenever she had a chance to express her disdain for him leaving, she didn't hesitate.

"Why ya ain't been grocery shoppin'? Cammie called me 'cause she said y'all ain't have no food."

"She's a got damn lie," Donna roared. "It's noodles and hot dogs in there. They just wanna eat McDonalds every single

day.”

“They’re tired of eating noodles and hot dogs, Donna,” Darious defended. “They don’t want to eat that shit every day.”

She glared at him with ice cold eyes. “If you feel that way, then maybe you should get your ass up and cook them something. Oh, I forgot, you can’t fucking walk.”

“Aye, that was some fucked up shit to say,” Cannon seethed. “You really be on some weak shit.”

Donna pointed her index finger at Cannon. “No, you’re on some weak shit, leaving your family to struggle, while you go about your life all easy and breezy.”

Cannon stood and glowered at her. “Y’all wouldn’t have to struggle if you would keep ya ass outta the casino. I give ya money every month and it ain’t no way y’all should be behind on bills. You gamblin’ all the bill money away.”

“I’m not gambling all the bill money away. He doesn’t bring any damn money in this house!” she shouted, pointing to Darious. “Shit, we don’t even have enough to cover our fucking expenses.”

“Well get a job then,” Cannon retorted.

She twisted her face. “A job? Boy, I haven’t had to work in almost twenty years and I’m not about to start now.”

Cannon chuckled in disbelief. “So, you’d rather have ya family drown in bills than get up off ya lazy ass and go to work?”

Donna pounded her fist into her open palm. “I don’t care what you say. I’m not going to work. The fact that you’re making all of this money with Kano and you won’t give me the amount of money I ask for, is a disgrace.”

With wide eyes, Cannon gawked at Donna. “I was payin’ all the bills but ya ass didn’t appreciate it. I shouldn’t have to pay everything all ‘cause ya don’t wanna go back to work. And stop countin’ my damn pockets. That’s ya problem now, ya always countin’ somebody else’s money.”

“Kiss my ass, Cannon. You grew up not to be shit. I don’t even know why you came back here. Get out of my house.”

“Hmmp, now it’s ya house?” Cannon chuckled. “From what I hear this gon’ be the bank’s house if you don’t come up with the mortgage payment.”

“Well, you need to give me the money to pay it,” Donna hissed and folded her arms over her busty breasts.

Cannon smacked his lips. “Didn’t you just tell me to kiss ya ass? I wish I would help you out.”

“Well then, shut the hell up worrying about our business. Hell, coming to my house questioning about some shit that has nothing to do with you...” Donna hiked up the stairs, continuing to mumble obscenities.

“Selfish ass,” Cannon muttered and took a seat back on the couch. “I’on know how ya put up with her.”

Darious shrugged. “I’ve kinda learned to tune her out. Ever since I got in this chair, her ass has changed drastically,

but if I leave I wouldn't be able to take care of myself on my own.”

“You don't need her. If I have to hire ya a personal nurse and take care of ya bills, I will.”

“I wouldn't want...”

Darius' sentence was cut off by the ringing of Cannon's phone. He peered at the display and noticed that Nicki was calling him. His thumb quickly swiped the screen and then walked into the kitchen for some privacy.

“Hello?”

“Hey. How are you? I've missed you.”

Cannon rubbed his hands over his mouth and took a seat at the peninsula. “Straight.”

“What's wrong?”

“I just got done arguin' with my mama ol' selfish ass.”

“Wait, are you back home in Nashville?” she questioned.

“Yeah, I flew down here this mornin'.”

“Oh, I didn't know that. Why did you guys get into it?”

“'Cause she's been bullshittin' with the money I give her and not payin' the bills. I'm tired of my sisters callin' me going without shit, 'cause my mama keeps spendin' all the money gamblin'.”

“She's still gambling? I don't know Cannon, it seems like it's getting worse. She might need to seek an addiction specialist.”

“Nah, I know what to do for her ungrateful ass. I’m cutting her off. She ain’t gettin’ shit else from me,” he declared.

“But what if your sisters or father need anything?”

“I’ll have somethin’ set up for them. What’s been up with you, though?” he asked, changing the subject, not willing to waste an entire conversation on Donna.

“Just working and missing you. I’ve been thinking about life after the military and I really wanna be with you. I’m willing to move to Milwaukee if that’s what it takes.”

He pinched his bottom lip between his index finger and thumb. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah but I know we have issues that we need to work out, so I’m willing to be patient with you. I’ll follow your lead.”

“That’s cool but I’d rather get into that shit when ya get out. I’on wanna plan shit and it don’t work out the way we wanted it to.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she quipped.

He rolled his eyes to the ceiling. “It means I’m not about to plan a relationship with ya right now. Like I said, we can talk about everything when ya leave the army.”

Nicki sucked her teeth. “You sure do know how to ruin my damn mood. What you said wasn’t even necessary. All you had to say was that you were cool with it. You’re always going to the left with shit.”

Cannon hung up from the call and put his phone back in his pocket. Arguing with Nicki was something he wasn't going to do. His mother had already pissed him off and he refused to allow Nicki to drain him of the good energy he had left.

He went back into the living room and stood over Darius. "I'll be back when Cammie gets outta school. I'm 'bout to go see Mac."

Darius nodded and Cannon proceeded to the door. He walked out of the house and jumped into his rental car. He was only prepared to stay for a short amount of time, so he went to see some of his people before he came back to handle his business with Cammie.

Finesse stepped out of her car and ambled inside of her boutique. She was surprised to see one of her uncle's men, Herb, standing in the corner but quickly remembered that Johan told her he would send someone to cover her shop. She gave him a nod; he returned the same gesture.

"You didn't tell me we had a security guard. He scared the shit out of me when he walked up on me this morning while I was opening the store," Deshawn chuckled.

"I forgot," Finesse shrugged and approached the desk. "Was it busy this morning?"

"Hell yes!" Deshawn grumbled. "You know everybody is trying to get in to get their Fourth of July bundles. We've sold out on most of the long bundles. Hopefully, the new shipment arrives tomorrow or else we're fucked."

“Well, they got past customs, so I’m sure they’ll be here. I’m hungry as fuck. You didn’t bring nothing in?”

“I stopped by Krispy Kreme this morning, so there are donuts in the back. If you would let me cook, I would’ve made us some breakfast this morning.”

Finesse curled her lip. “You can’t cook, Deshawn. You almost burned by damn house down trying to cook swine. Fuck outta here.”

Deshawn shook her head. “You’re the worst roommate, ever.”

“No, you’re the worst cook, ever...and we ain’t roommates. Your homeless ass just needed a place to stay.”

“Whatever. Oh, some guy called the shop looking for you.”

Finesse crinkled her brows. “Who was it?”

“Some guy named Ro or Rome. He didn’t say why he was calling because his rude ass hung up on me.”

“I don’t know why the fuck that bitch is calling me,” Finesse muttered and pulled her phone out of her purse. She had been getting private calls ever since last night but opted not to answer because she wasn’t sure who it was.

“Who is he to you?” Deshawn question.

“A fucking nobody.” Finesse sat her phone down and glanced at the mirror along the wall. She stroked her long tresses and sighed.

“I’m thinking about cutting my hair and wearing it in its natural curly state.”

“How short are you trying to go? Like my hair?”

Finesse smacked her lips. “Hell naw. I’m not trying to look like you, Lil’ Bow Wow. Do you know the singer Miguel?”

“Eww *his* hair?” Deshawn scrunched her face.

“No not his hair but he has a girlfriend named Nazanin. Her hair cut is how I want my hair. I think it’s time for a new look, plus I’m tired of wearing weave.”

“Ever since your edges came out that one time, you’ve been scared to wear a frontal again.” Deshawn laughed.

Finesse chuckled. “I was mad as fuck. That bitch knew she put too much damn glue on my edges. I started to go back to the shop and fuck her up.”

When the chimes sounded through the store, Finesse and Deshawn brought their attention to who was entering through the door. Finesse’s mug instantly contorted into a grimace when she saw who it was.

“I need to speak to you,” the woman demanded, approaching the front desk.

Finesse glowered at her with squinted eyes. “We don’t have shit to talk about. You can bounce your ass out of my boutique.”

“Quest is missing.”

Finesse shrugged and folded her arms over her chest. “What the fuck does that have to do with me, Tata? Don’t bring this bullshit to my place of business. I don’t fuck with his shady ass like that anymore.”

“That’s exactly why I came to you. He told me how you were threatening him and sending messages about him being cancelled. Now he’s been missing for two days and that’s not like him.”

Finesse laughed dramatically. “That’s not like him? Girl you don’t even know what that man is capable of doing. I wouldn’t be surprised if he got tired of your baldheaded ass and dipped on you.”

Tata inhaled deeply and stepped closer to Finesse. “Look bitch, I didn’t come up here to play with your ass. If you know where he is, then you need to tell me. Shit won’t be good for you if something happened to Quest.”

“Finesse, are you good?” Herb asked, with his eyes fixated on Tata.

“Yeah, I’m good,” Finesse assured. “You better get your soft ass outta my face before I drop your bitch ass. Just like I told Quest that he was cancelled, bitch you can be too. Don’t come in here like you tough because we all know you ain’t about shit. You get Quest to do your dirty work bitch you ain’t no killa at all.”

Tata jerked her head back. “What the fuck are you trying to say? You must not know me.”

Finesse stepped closer into her personal space. They were so close that Finesse could feel her hot breath tickling her nose. “I know all about that shit you did to your ex best friend. What kind of bitch pretends to be someone’s friend for years and then set her up to be killed? If you were really a bad bitch, you would’ve handled that hoe right away. But nah, your scary ass had to get her set up.”

Tata stood with her mouth gaped open. Finesse smirked at the astounded expression that was taking over her face.

“Oh yeah, Quest told me all about your schemes,” Finesse chuckled. “We talked a lot, especially about your boring ass.”

Tata’s eyes seemed to turn black as her forehead creased in anger. Without warning, she gathered a glob of saliva and spit on Finesse’s neck. Outrage was written all over Finesse’s face as she processed what Tata had just done. Once she realized how violated she felt, Finesse swiftly punched Tata in the face, knocking her to the floor. A loud thud boomed through the room as Tata’s body hit the ground.

“Oh my God. Finesse, chill,” Deshawn pleaded, running from around the desk.

A deafening silence permeated Finesse’s ears as she pounced on Tata. She began to strike her violently with her closed fists. She didn’t hear a sound while pummeling Tata’s face to a bloody pulp. Blood seeped from her mouth as well as multiple open wounds on her face.

“Finesse, you’re going to kill her. Stop!” Deshawn yelled.

Finesse’s adrenaline had catapulted to a level she had never been familiar with. She couldn’t halt her arms from flailing. Each time her fists connected with Tata’s face, Finesse felt a surge of satisfaction. Abruptly, Finesse was snatched up by Herb. He bear-hugged her and carried her over to the other side of the boutique.

“Bitch, don’t you ever disrespect me by spitting on me, hoe!” Finesse belted with her veins throbbing from her neck.

Although Tata’s face was now glazed with crimson blood, she hopped to her feet and ran toward Finesse. Tata threw her fist and connected with Finesse’s cheekbone. An aching pain immediately spread throughout her face, which angered Finesse even more.

“Let me go. You let this bitch sneak one on me. Get the fuck off me,” she gritted and broke out of Herb’s strong grasp.

Finesse kicked Tata in her stomach causing her to double over and groan. She then threw an uppercut which knocked Tata back on her ass.

“Bitch, I’m about to kill your ass!”

Deshawn attempted to grab Finesse, but she was far stronger than her.

“Finesse, calm down,” Herb said, restraining her once more.

“You better get that bitch out of my shop before I get charged with murder today,” Finesse warned.

“A’ight, I’m about to get her, but I need you to calm down.”

Finesse’s chest heaved up and down as she tried to catch her breath. Tata had brought her to a place she had never visited before. She had never been so consumed with anger that she blacked out. Finesse didn’t even remember beating Tata like she did. The only thing that continued to plague her mind was the ball of slob that exited Tata’s mouth.

“Ima get you bitch. You cancelled too, hoe!” Finesse threatened as Herb ushered Tata out of the boutique.

“Not if I get to you first, bitch!” Tata retorted with a bloody mouth.

Finesse advanced toward her but was stopped by Deshawn. “Move out my way.”

“No. You need to calm down. What if there was a customer here.”

“I still would’ve whooped her ass,” Finesse quipped. “Did you see that bitch spit on me? When I leave here, I’m going to her house, so I can beat her ass some more.”

“Finesse, are you trying to go to jail?”

“Bitch I don’t care about no jail. I got bail money,” Finesse spat.

Deshawn pinched the bridge of her nose. “You’re better than that, man. You don’t need to be behind bars because of that ignorant ass chick.”

“Fuck what you’re talking about. I’m whooping her ass again.” Finesse walked away and into her office.

She grabbed some Kleenex and wiped off the saliva that Tata had spit on her.

“Stupid ass bitch. Now I need to go take a shower.”

She grabbed her phone and dialed Mafia’s number. After three rings, she answered.

“Hello?”

“I need you to go ride down on the bitch that just spit on me,” Finesse ranted, fanning herself with her hand in an attempt to cool herself down.

“Oh, hell nah! Who the fuck spit on you?”

“Quest’s bitch, Tata. She came up to the boutique talking shit and when I checked her ass, she got mad and spit on me.”

“What did you do after that?”

“What the fuck you mean? I beat her ass but I’m still mad and I wanna go beat her ass some more. I ain’t never had someone spit on me. I feel so fucking violated,” Finesse fumed.

“I’m on my way to get you now. She messed with the wrong one today. Be ready because I’m about to pull up.”

“A’ight.”

Finesse hung up and then grabbed her handheld mirror from her desk to examine her face. Her cheek was flushed with redness. She glided the pad of her finger over the bruise and hissed.

“Now, I look like I lost the fight,” she fussed.

She put the mirror away, stood from her seat and grabbed her purse. She walked back to the front and glared at Herb.

“When I’m fighting, don’t hold me back because you let that bitch sneak a punch on me.”

Herb held his palms in the air. “I didn’t mean to let that happen, but you were about to kill that girl if I didn’t grab

you.”

“So, what?” Finesse roared. “She deserved to die after spitting on me with her nasty ass.”

“Where are you about to go?” Deshawn quizzed.

“Mafia is coming to get me, so we can go to that bitch’s house. I told you I’m not playing with her ass.”

“Finesse, you already beat her up. Just let it go,” Deshawn pleaded.

“I ain’t letting shit go.”

Finesse walked out of the boutique not willing to listen to anymore of Deshawn’s pleas. Nothing was going to stop her from beating on Tata’s ass after her disrespectful stunt. Mafia pulled up and Finesse hurried to get in her car.

“Where does this bitch live at?” Mafia quizzed. “She fucked with the wrong mothafucka.”

Finesse cracked her knuckles. “Make a right at the light. I swear I’m going to murder that hoe.”

I love Charae tales.

Chapter Twelve

Two days later...

Finesse sat Indian style in the middle of her bed, trying to find something to watch on Netflix. It had been a couple days since her fight with Tata and she was still outraged by her disrespectful gesture. After Mafia picked her up that day, they drove to Tata's house to finish what Finesse had started. She was highly disappointed to learn that Tata wasn't home. She even instructed Mafia to go to a few of Quest's spots that she knew about, but there was no sign of Tata being there.

Finesse would never get over being spat on. Tata had sparked a nerve so bad within Finesse, that she declared every time she saw Tata that she would beat her ass. She was also highly irked by the contusion that graced her left cheek. Finesse was so self-conscious about the bruise that she didn't leave the house that day. She declared she wasn't going to step outside until the discoloration on her deep brown skin vanished.

"Deshawn!" Finesse yelled out.

A minute later, Deshawn opened the bedroom door and poked her head through the opening. "Yeah."

"Bring me some chips and dip."

"Why you didn't get it?" Deshawn quipped.

“Because I heard you in the kitchen. Don’t you see that I’m out of commission right now?”

Deshawn laughed. “Girl, that little bit of redness on your face does not mean you out of commission. You’re over doing it.”

“Whatever. Just bring me my shit.”

Deshawn rolled her eyes and closed the door. Finesse smirked and continued to look for a show she could binge watch. Deshawn came back in with the items she had requested and passed them to her.

“Here.”

“Thank you.” Finesse smiled.

Deshawn quickly padded out the room without saying a word. Finesse opened the chips and dived in right away. When her phone rang, her eyes darted to the screen and instantly expanded. Her heart galloped in her chest when she saw Cannon’s name flashing.

“Shit,” she whispered and wiped her hands on the bottom of her robe.

She picked up the phone and cleared her throat before she swiped the screen.

“Hello?” she slightly purred.

“What’s good? This Cannon,” he drawled.

Finesse grinned when she heard his southern accent. “Oh, hey. What’s up?”

“Shit. I got some free time and wanted to know if ya wanna go somewhere?”

Damn he just had to call when my face is fucked up.

“I can’t tonight.”

“Why not?” he questioned.

“Because my face is bruised, and makeup won’t cover it.”

“Who whooped ya ass?”

Finesse smacked her teeth. “I’ll never get my ass whooped. My hands are lethal.”

“Shiiitt,” he drawled. “Not if ya face fucked up. Somebody hit ya ass with a combo and I wanna know what the fuck ya did.”

Finesse rolled her eyes at his statement. “I just told you that I would never get beat up, so drop it.”

“Yeah, a’ight. Well, I tried to take ya ass out, but ya actin’ weak and shit. I’ll holla at ya later.”

“Wait, why you can’t stay on the phone with me? Are you about to go see your situation?” she questioned with laughter in her tone.

“Mane, ya need to chill with that shit. My situation ain’t even in town. Why ya care anyway? You ’posed to be Finesse, with all this high self-esteem, right? You ain’t ’posed to be bothered by no other bitch.”

Finesse opened her mouth to speak but the words had escaped her. She couldn’t help but feel like he was throwing shots at her.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” she quizzed.

“I’m just sayin’ that I wouldn’t think you would be concerned about another bitch. That’s all.”

“Hmmpf, I guess.”

“You don’t need to guess. Stop readin’ into the shit. I’ll holla at ya later.”

“No, wait, how about you come to my house? Maybe we can watch a movie,” she suggested with her fingers crossed.

Silence filled the phone instantly making Finesse regret inviting Cannon over.

“I’ll stop by. Send me ya address.”

Finesse bounced in the bed with a huge smile on her face. “Okay, I’m about to send it to you now.”

She hung up the phone and quickly texted him her address. She then hopped from the bed and threw on a cropped t-shirt with the matching shorts. She had blow-dried her natural hair earlier after washing it, so she styled it in a sleek ponytail to the back. Finesse checked out her appearance in the mirror to ensure that her laid back look was perfect.

“Deshawn!” Finesse yelled.

After a while, the door opened, and Deshawn stood with an annoyed expression on her face. “What, man?”

“I’m about to have company, so don’t bother me, okay?”

“Um, I never bother you. You’re the one who keeps calling my name,” she hissed.

Finesse narrowed her eyes. “And I’m going to keep calling your name. Just make sure your ass stays away from the stove. I don’t feel like being embarrassed tonight.”

“Whatever,” she groaned and closed the door.

Finesse sat back on the bed and waited anxiously for Cannon to arrive.

An hour later...

Cannon stood outside of Finesse’s condo door and adjusted his snapback cap before he knocked. Seconds later, Finesse opened the door, wearing her sneaky grin. He couldn’t stop his eyes from devouring her thick frame. Not only was Finesse blessed with a beautiful face, but her body was stacked. Her hardened nipples were prominent under the fabric of her shirt. The shorts she wore hugged her frame so tightly that her pussy print was visible.

Damn.

“Come in,” she ordered, breaking him from his naughty thoughts.

Cannon stepped inside of her condo and nodded in approval. The white and black furniture was nicely placed throughout the living room. Finesse led them down a hallway where a short girl with a boy cut stood near a door. She wore a wife beater with some basketball shorts. He expected Finesse to introduce him to the young woman, but she didn’t. Instead, the girl gave Cannon a nod in which he returned the same gesture.

When they entered Finesse's bedroom, she closed the door after him. Cannon examined her room, loving how high her king-sized bed sat up. The room was dimly lit with several candles that smelled like lavender.

"Is that ya ol' lady?" Cannon asked, referring to the woman in the hallway.

Finesse curled her lip. "Ol' lady? Nigga, I ain't gay."

Cannon laughed and took a seat in the chaise that was by the big bay window. "My bad. I thought ya might like the same shit I like."

Finesse stuck her middle finger up and sat on the mattress. "You ain't funny. That's my roommate who works for me. She needed a place to stay, so I helped her out."

"So, ya do have a heart?" he joked.

Finesse attempted to hide her smile but failed miserably. "Your mean ass better not start with me. We're going to have a good night, okay?"

Cannon nodded with lustful eyes. Something was nagging at the back of his mind telling him to go home. Finesse was deemed forbidden in his eyes. Several people had given him warnings about her including Kano. But somehow, he found himself in her presence.

He stood and gently grabbed her chin. He inspected the bruise that was located on her cheek. "It ain't even that bad. What happened?"

Finesse snatched her face out of his grasp. "Any mark on my face is bad. This bitch came up to my boutique talking shit. When I checked her, she thought it was a wise decision to

spit on me. So, I whooped her ass, and when my security guard tried to restrain me, the bitch caught me off guard and hit me in my face.”

“Why she come to ya place tryin’ to fight you?” Cannon questioned.

“Cause she’s a bitch.”

Cannon knew it was more to the story, but Finesse wasn’t trying to elaborate on it. He sat back in the seat and stretched out.

“Why are you sitting over there? Come sit next to me.” She waved her hand toward herself.

He shook his head. “I’on need to be next to ya ass. Let me chill right here.”

She peered at him with flirty eyes. “So, you don’t wanna sit next to me?”

“I’m chillin’ right here,” he responded, avoiding her question.

Finesse pursed her lips together and then crossed her legs. Cannon’s tongue swiped over his pink lips while gazing at her thick thighs.

“Ya dangerous,” he blurted out.

Her arched brows furrowed. “How so?”

“Cause people been warnin’ me about ya, but I’m still here sittin’ with ya ass.”

He witnessed her chest rise slowly and then fall. “So, people warned you about me?”

He nodded his response.

“Listen Cannon, my past ain’t pretty. I’ve done a lot of bullshit to people without giving it a second thought. Am I proud of it? I’ll be honest and say I was in the past, but *now* I’m not. When I was being held hostage, it gave me time to think about my actions and I don’t wanna live like that anymore. I need to change and get myself together because I have a lot of demons that I battle on a daily basis. I said that to say, if you can’t handle my past, then we don’t have to talk. It can be a hi and bye situation between us. There’s no pressure.”

Cannon respected her honesty and he could tell by the sincerity of her voice that she really wanted to change her ways.

“I wouldn’t be here if that was the case. Calm ya lil’ ass down,” he joked, and planted his hand on the side of his neck.

Finesse smiled. “What’s wrong with your neck?”

“I fell asleep on the plane and got a crook in it. My shit hurtin’ like a mufucka.”

“You want a massage?” she purred, wiggling her fingers.

There she goes with that sexy shit again.

“Hell yeah.” He stood and took off his hoodie.

He went to sit at the foot of her bed while Finesse crawled behind him. Her sweet scent immediately drifted into his nostrils. When her hand touched the side of his neck, his penis seemed to harden instantly.

“You didn’t bring one of those neck pillows with you for the plane?” she questioned.

“Nah,” he replied, becoming lost in the feel of her hands.

Finesse was working the crook in his neck like a professional. The soreness in his muscles was slowly diminishing with her magic fingers.

“You know when I usually see a man, I think about what I can take from him. When I saw you, I was instantly attracted to you; that never happens,” she revealed.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yep, and when you rejected me that day in front of Mafia and Kano, it hurt my feelings. I was pissed at you because I was actually interested in you and you shitted all over me.”

“I thought I apologized for that. Why ya bringin’ up old shit?”

“I was just letting you in on my thoughts,” she mumbled. “I don’t usually do that either.”

Cannon could sense by the tone in Finesse’s voice that she was unhappy. Whenever he looked into her eyes, they held a vacancy that had him wondering what she was going through internally.

“Why do ya seem so sad?” he questioned.

Her hands stopped massaging him immediately. Cannon turned around to face her, only her head was hanging low. He lifted her chin with his index finger.

“You don’t wanna talk about it?”

“It really isn’t anything to talk about. I’m fucked up on the inside, and I’m trying to deal with it on my own. You wouldn’t understand.”

“You ain’t gotta deal with it on ya own, though. Get some help.”

She smirked. “You don’t care about me. Plus, I don’t wanna talk about it because I look much better with my mouth closed. Remember?”

Cannon rolled his eyes. “You ain’t gon’ let that shit go, are ya?”

“Nope,” she giggled. “I’m going to always remind you of how you hurt my feelings.”

He waved his hand. “Get over that shit.”

“Can I kiss you?” she slipped out.

Cannon chuckled at her question. It was innocent and seemed unusual coming from a girl like Finesse.

“Ya need some affection?” he flirted.

She nodded bashfully. “Yeah.”

Cannon slid his hand up to her neck and gently pressed his lips against hers. She grabbed the back of his head and deepened the kiss. Cannon had only planned to give her a quick peck, but Finesse slid her tongue inside his mouth. His dick was fully hard as their tongues intertwined hungrily. He pulled back and bore into her with heavily seductive eyelids.

“You tryin’ to stick ya tongue down my throat and shit,” he joked.

“Can we fuck?” she blurted with an austere expression.

Cannon laughed and shook his head. “What?”

“You heard me,” she said and took off her crop top. “I’m really horny and I wanna fuck you.”

His mouth watered at the sight of her heavy titties. Her chocolate nipples were firm and begging to be devoured.

“Mane, Finesse,” he groaned, rubbing his hands down his face. “I can’t handle ya like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like a hoe off the street. You Johan’s niece, so I gotta treat you with a certain level of respect even though ya wild as hell.”

“You didn’t have that respect when you bust me out in front of Mafia and Kano,” she quipped.

“That’s ‘cause you was talkin’ shit, though.”

“Well, I’m not talking shit right now,” she purred and reached for his belt buckle. “I’m trying to moan in your ear as you’re digging deep inside me.”

Cannon was really trying to avoid going to that level with Finesse so soon, but the way his dick was poking through his jeans alerted him that he might have to give in to her request.

“Nah, I’m chill on ya.”

Finesse sat up on her knees and kissed his lips. She unbuckled his pants and released his brick hard tool. Her long, red nails looked perfect, stroking his dick.

“Your dick ain’t saying chill,” she grinned. “Now stop fighting what you really want and stick this dick inside me.”

Cannon smirked and bit his bottom lip. Finesse’s sultry eyes were making it difficult for him to reject her.

“Ya really wanna fuck?” he asked just to be sure.

“Yes. I told you that I was horny, and I want you to satisfy my craving.”

She grabbed his hand and inserted it into her shorts. Cannon rubbed her clitoris and then dipped his hand into her dewy honey pot.

“Now, you know you wanna feel how wet this pussy is,” she purred and kissed his lips.

Cannon wanted to resist the temptation to bury himself deep into Finesse’s treasure box, but her pussy was too wet to pass up.

“A’ight, turn ya ass around.”

Finesse giddily slid her shorts off and turned her bare ass around. Cannon licked his lips at her fat cheeks that sat in the air. Her juices glistened from her center, prompting his dick to curve in anticipation. He jumped out of the bed to undress. He made sure to grab a condom out of his pocket and secured it on his penis. He crawled back in the bed and grabbed Finesse’s thick hips.

“Don’t be runnin’ from this dick, Finesse,” he warned.

“Boy, you don’t even know who you’re talking to. I can keep up with the best of them,” she boasted.

“I’m ’bout to show ya who’s a boy.”

Cannon proceeded into her moist opening slowly. He tucked his lip between his teeth to suppress the urge to moan out loud. Her vaginal walls expanded, gripping his manhood the way that he liked. Finesse's pussy felt like the best piece of heaven he had yet to experience. She was wet, heated, and surprisingly tight. His fingertips sunk into her plush skin as he drove his dick deeper into her tunnel.

“Oooh, like that,” Finesse moaned.

Damn, I wasn't expecting this.

Cannon's movements were slow and steady. He wanted to enjoy and appreciate the pleasure of Finesse's snug walls. His eyelids shut unconsciously as Finesse's loud moans sounded throughout the room.

“Damn Finesse,” he muttered breathlessly. “Ya pussy so good.”

“Go deeper,” she ordered, arching her back even more.

Cannon gripped her hips and smacked into Finesse's center with force. The room was infused with sounds of his pelvis slamming into her ass and Finesse's moaning. He glanced down at her ass that was jiggling against his dick. The sight almost made him have an orgasm prematurely.

“You better work this pussy. Shit,” she groaned with her face smashed into the pillow.

Cannon was not only stroking her wetness, but he was moving his hips in a circular motion to ensure that he was hitting every inch of her pussy. He was so engrossed by the moisture of her center that he didn't realize that Finesse had slid off his dick.

“What ya doin’?” he huffed with irritation.

Finesse didn’t say a word as she turned around. She glided the saturated condom off his dick and quickly slipped his erection inside her mouth. Cannon planted a hand on the back of her head as she hungrily sucked his member. Her warm mouth slid all the way down his shaft, allowing him to feel the back of her throat. She pulled back and gazed at him with erotic peepers.

“Do you like a lot of spit, baby?” she purred.

Cannon was too entranced by her wet lips being wrapped around his head that he couldn’t do anything but nod. Finesse gathered up a wad of saliva and spit on the tip of his dick, she smeared the dribble down his shaft with her hand.

“Like this, baby?”

“Hell yeah,” he muttered, feeling like she was putting him under a dangerous spell that he would have a hard time escaping.

In one swift motion, Finesse swallowed his dick and proceeded to suck the life out of him. Her movements were fast, prompting him to move back a bit because the feeling was becoming too great. Slobber dripped from the corners of her mouth, making the scene look like a porn set. Finesse was so skilled with giving head that she didn’t even use her hand while sucking him. Cannon threw his head back in total bliss, feeling his nut approaching quickly.

Finesse jacked his dick off with her hands as she sucked on his balls. Every touch she delivered, felt like it was producing an electric shock to his body. Finesse was relentless

with her mouth as she resumed sucking on his tool. She slurped, spit, and devoured his dick like something he had never experienced.

“Fuck, Finesse, hold up. I’m ‘bout to nut,” he grunted, trying to pull her head back.

She didn’t obey his command. Instead, she picked up her pace and gulped his dick down faster. Within seconds, his body tensed up and he released his fluids inside her mouth. She continued to slurp which intensified the sexual sensation that was hijacking his body. Cannon’s lean frame jerked while emptying what was left of him. With drenched lips, Finesse pulled his dick out of her mouth. She swallowed the contents of their head session and pushed Cannon backwards onto the bed.

His back hit the plush comforter as she straddled him and sat down on his semi erection. He was still reeling from the intense orgasm he’d just unleashed and was anticipating what she was going to do next.

“Get this dick back hard,” she commanded, riding him slowly.

Fuck, I don’t have a condom on.

Cannon wanted to protest, but he couldn’t speak. His words were bonded on his tongue because Finesse was working him like she was a professional. His dick had gotten hard within seconds, and once she felt his stiff girth stretching out her walls, she wasted no time in picking up the speed.

“Ooh, daddy this dick feels so good,” she belted. “You like the way I’m fucking you?”

“Yeah, slow the fuck down,” he grunted.

She twerked on his dick, making her ass bounce like a stripper. The sight caused Cannon’s dick to pulsate profusely.

“Why do you want me to slow down? I want you to experience this pussy at all speeds.”

He grabbed her waist and helped her slam down on his shaft. Finesse grabbed his ankles as she positioned her legs into the splits. Cannon’s eyes bucked from his sockets as she continued to bob on his dick with her legs spread widely apart.

“What the fuck?” he mumbled, not believing that she was that flexible.

Even with her legs split apart, Finesse was still bouncing on his manhood at a fast pace. He felt like a bitch for allowing her to work him like she was doing, so he rammed into her from the bottom to match her movements.

“Oh shit, I’m about to cum. Keep fucking me like that!” she blared loudly.

When Cannon’s eyes looked down, her pussy was squirting on his stomach and pubic hairs.

“Mmm,” she roared with pleasure.

He’d seen girls squirt on porn before, but he’d never had a woman squirt on him. The view was so alluring that he couldn’t halt his nut from shooting up inside her.

“Get up,” he grunted as instant gratification took over his body.

Finesse didn’t hear his request. She was slowly riding him while he continued to empty the contents of their

lovemaking session into her tunnel. Cannon's chest rose up and down, trying to catch his breath. Once he realized that he had nutted inside of Finesse, he pushed her off of him. She looked at him with lowered eyebrows.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” she quipped.

“I tole’ ya ass to get up when I was ’bout to nut. Why the fuck you kept ridin’ me?” he barked.

“I didn’t hear your ass whisper that shit. Plus, I was still feeling my own orgasm. You need to chill out.”

“Nah, I ain’t chillin’ on shit. You shoulda’ hopped ya ass off my dick. You bet’ not have gave me a fuckin’ disease,” he warned and got up from the bed.

“Disease?” she hissed. “I keep a clean board of health. I just had an STD test last month. You wanna see the results?”

“Yeah.” He glared at her.

Finesse angrily reached over and grabbed her phone. She scrolled for a minute before passing it to Cannon. He looked at what appeared to be a report from a physical exam. When he read that all of her STD tests, including HIV was negative he breathed a sigh of relief. He still planned to go to the clinic to be on the safe side.

“Here,” he handed her the phone back.

“I deserve an apology.”

He smacked his lips. “I ain’t givin’ ya shit. What about birth control?”

“I take the pill every day. You wanna see that shit too?”

“Hell yeah.”

Finesse rolled her eyes, reached into her drawer, and held up the packet of pills. Cannon immediately felt bad for snapping at her when he was just as much at fault as she was.

“My bad,” he muttered.

“Your bad, your ass. Get out of my condo,” she hissed, scooting out of the bed. “Nigga, having sex with me is a gift. I just blessed your country-ass and you’re treating me like one of those bitches that is trying to trap you.”

“I just said ‘my bad’, damn. Calm down,” he huffed and grabbed her arm.

Finesse snatched away from his hold and glowered at him. “Nah, I’m good. You can go.”

“Finesse,” he said sternly. “Chill out for real. I ain’t mean to come at ya like that. I’on be stickin’ my dick into raw pussy. I wasn’t tryin’ to offend ya.”

Finesse rolled her eyes and folded her arms over her bare breasts. “Yeah whatever.”

“You forgive me?” he smirked.

Finesse tried to hide her smile but couldn’t resist forming her lips into a curve. “I’m tired of you treating me bad, Cannon. I actually like you, but you keep playing me like I ain’t shit. I may have to stop dealing with you.”

He was instantly doused with guilt as he gazed into her sad eyes. He realized that Finesse was fragile and although she talked a good game, he still had to watch the way that he spoke to her.

“I know and I’ma do betta’ when I’m talkin’ to ya,” he promised.

Finesse pursed her lips together and headed to the ensuite. Before she closed the door, she looked back and said, “You can still leave. I’ll see you around.”

Cannon was stunned as she shut the door. He had never been dismissed by a female and a part of him was offended by her rude attitude. He stomped to the bathroom door and opened it. Finesse was standing next to the shower, turning the water on. The sight of her beautiful body instantly made his dick hard.

“Aye, I’ll leave when I get ready to. Who the fuck ya think ya talkin’ to like that?”

Finesse smiled and stepped into the shower. She ran her hands down her wet body as she gazed at him, lustfully. Cannon didn’t know if he should leave the room or enjoy the show she was putting on. When Finesse made a gesture with her fingers inviting him inside, he wasted no time stepping into the shower with her.

“I knew your ass was all talk.” She laughed. “Now pick me up and slide that dick in me, so I can see if you can handle all this weight that I have.”

Chapter Thirteen

Tata took a peek out of the window before she opened the door for Ro. He stepped inside and gawked at her with worried orbs.

“Damn, what happened to your face?”

Tata’s face was still bruised from her altercation with Finesse. She attempted to cover her contusions with makeup, but she didn’t like the way it looked.

“I got into a fight with Finesse, but have you heard anything yet?” she changed the subject.

“Nah, the streets ain’t saying shit. You still ain’t heard from Quest?” he questioned.

Tata shook her head and closed the door. “No, I haven’t. It’s been almost a week now and I’m fucking worried.”

“Man, Quest wouldn’t just disappear like this without telling one of us about it. I feel like he got caught up.”

“Caught up with what?” Tata asked with a shaky tone.

“That beef between him and Finesse. You know she connected and I think she had somebody do something to him.”

Tata covered her mouth and released tears that she had been holding since Quest had disappeared. He was the love of

her life and the father of her son. She would literally die if something tragic happened to Quest.

“Don’t cry, Tata.” Ro rubbed her back in a circular motion. “I’m sure he’s probably laying low until he feels like it’s safe.”

“He would never go without seeing the baby, Ro. Me and him were all about communication so if he is laying low, he would’ve definitely told me. Something isn’t right. I just feel deep down in my heart that something happened to him.”

“I’m just trying to be positive. Did you go file a report with the police?”

She smacked her lips. “Yeah, I did that two days ago, but I don’t think the police care that much. I haven’t even heard anything from them.”

“I’ll keep my ear to the streets, but I don’t know what our next move should be. I feel worthless just waiting the shit out.”

“That’s all right, I’m going back to Finesse’s shop and I’m going to beat her ass again. I know she knows something but the bitch acting like she doesn’t know where he is.”

“Aye, Tata, I don’t think you wanna mess with her like that. She comes from a family full of beasts and they wouldn’t hesitate to kill you. You gotta leave that shit alone.”

Tata glowered at him. “Are you serious? She’s probably the reason why he’s missing. I’m not going to sit around and allow that bitch to get away with threatening my man and possibly having him killed.”

“Listen, going up against her is like asking for a death sentence. They won’t give a fuck about you being a woman. I know Quest gassed your head up a lot, but this is a fight you won’t win.”

Tata jerked her head back and expanded her eyes. “Can you stop acting like a little bitch and ride this out with me?”

“Who the fuck are you calling a bitch?” Ro seethed, stepping into her personal space. “You better calm the fuck down talking to me like I’m some off-brand-ass dude.”

“You know what? Get the fuck out. I don’t need your help anymore!”

Ro scoffed and opened the door. “I know you think because you orchestrated your best friend’s murder that you can just do everybody like that, but it won’t work for you. You better make sure you got an army if you’re trying to go against Finesse.”

Tata slammed the door in his face and locked it. Unlike him, she wasn’t going to sit around and do nothing about Quest’s disappearance. If she had to fight by her lonesome in order to get some answers, then so be it. She needed to find her man because she was on the verge of having a nervous breakdown.

Finesse lay in bed thinking about her passionate encounter with Cannon. Their night spent together was nothing short of satisfying. Sex was the only thing on their menu as they devoured each other’s bodies. He had even stayed the night, but he ended up leaving early in the morning.

It had been so long since Finesse was genuinely attracted a guy. She wanted to continue her pursuit of Cannon, but she wasn't sure what she wanted from him.

Should I date him? Or should I keep him as a sex buddy? Shit, I don't know how to be someone's woman anyway.

So many thoughts were rummaging through her mind that she felt like she needed to talk to someone. She grabbed her phone and decided to call Sky, so she could vent about her night with Cannon.

"Hey, Finesse, I was just thinking about you," Sky answered.

"I hope you weren't thinking negatively about me."

"No, I wasn't. I was wondering why I haven't heard from you. I also wanna know why you didn't tell me you got into a fight? How come Mafia had to tell me?"

"Because you tell her shit that you don't tell me. It doesn't feel good, now does it?" Finesse teased.

"Oh, please. Grow up."

"Anyways, what's the baby doing? Can I come see her today?"

"Of course, you can. I'm breast feeding her right now and trying to keep Ryker away from me."

"What did he do?"

"He's horny and it hasn't been a full six weeks yet."

Finesse cackled. "You better give him some damn neck and quit playing."

“He’s still not satisfied with that. He wants it all and he’s not going to stop until he gets it. I’m afraid that he’s going to hurt me because I’m not fully healed.”

“Well, you’ll figure it out. I need you to call Mafia on three-way, so I can tell y’all something.”

“Okay, hold on.”

Sky immediately clicked over. Finesse nibbled on her bottom lip as she waited for Sky and Mafia to come back on the line.

“Okay, Finesse? Mafia?” Sky said.

“I’m here,” Finesse replied.

“What the hell do you want Finesse?” Mafia huffed.

“Well... I just wanted to tell both of y’all that I fucked Cannon last night.”

Finesse smirked as they both gasped on the other line.

“OMG, Finesse, what made you do that?” Sky giggled.

“You’re such a slut, but I got one question. Did he have some good dick?” Mafia quizzed.

“At first, he didn’t know how to handle me, but he redeemed himself the second and third time.”

“Bitch!” Mafia laughed. “How many times did y’all have sex?”

“Like four times and I gave him some head before he left this morning.”

“Wow Finesse, you actually let him spend the night? That’s a new one for you. You really just gave that man your

body without stealing his money. I'm so proud of you," Sky gushed.

"Thanks, but I didn't sleep with all those guys I set up. I may have fucked two of them and was given some head by others. Stop making me sound like a rotten hoe," Finesse smiled proudly.

"Okay, so, you said all that to say that you must really like Cannon then, right?" Mafia asked.

"I do, but I don't know if I want to be with him, or just have sex with him. I don't know how to be a girlfriend and I don't like the way he views me either. I know he thinks low of me, but he won't admit it."

"Well, you used to be Joanne the scammer, so what do you expect?" Mafia shot.

"Bitch shut up. I wasn't talking to you anyway. I was speaking to my sister," Finesse argued.

"Okay y'all, let's not start bickering about this," Sky diffused. "I would suggest that you show him a side of you that no one has seen before. Display someone other than the woman you used to be."

Finesse pondered her suggestion and agreed that it may be a good move for her. "I guess I can do that, but I don't know how to be a girlfriend. What should I do?"

"Did he ask you to be his woman?" Mafia questioned.

"No but just in case he does, I want to be prepared."

"Aww this is so sweet. I really think you guys would be cute together. Make sure you have him court you though.

Don't just make your relationship about sex," Sky advised.

"Yeah, don't be making shit all easy for him," Mafia chimed in. "He needs to earn your love and your heart."

"I'll try but I don't know how I'll do it because I'm so guarded," Finesse groaned.

"You weren't guarded with that pussy," Mafia joked.

Finesse snickered. "I was super horny last night, and he came over looking too good. I had to give him some of my sweet stuff."

"Sis, I can't believe you had sex with him so soon," Sky laughed.

Finesse shrugged. "I don't care. I had to do what I had to do."

"But real talk, Cannon is a cool dude. He don't be out here wildin' out and acting crazy. If Kano has him working so closely to him, then that should tell you that he's a solid dude. I don't see him with too many women either and he keeps a low profile. He just talks country as hell." Mafia giggled.

"I love his accent even though I make fun of it. But I'ma take y'all advice and ease into this shit with him."

"Yeah and let me know how it goes. Finesse are you going to come over?" Sky asked.

"Yeah, as soon as I get dressed, I'll be over there."

"A'ight, I gotta go open the shop since Kris is off today. Finesse come keep me company, please," Mafia begged.

"Only if you buy me some food. I'm not about to come up there just to sit and look at your ugly ass," Finesse retorted.

“I’ma feed your slutty ass. I should call my mama and tell her how you gave up the pussy.”

“Please don’t do that because I don’t wanna hear Auntie’s mouth.”

“Yeah, whatever. Bye.”

Finesse hung up from the call and headed to take a shower. She wondered what she and Cannon’s newfound connection would consist of.

“Cannon did you hear me?” Kano asked.

Cannon blinked out of his daze and glanced at Kano. “Nah, I ain’t hear ya. What you say?”

“I said, that Mac needs you to go down south to help him clean up some money.”

“When?”

Kano shrugged. “Shit, I guess whenever you can.”

Cannon was an important figure in Kano’s operation. He had obtained an Associate’s degree in business management from a technical college, so starting and operating a business was like second nature to him. He would clean up the money by making the cash seem legit. He created businesses or hid the money in foreign banks. He had even developed an overseas company to send invoice scams, creating fake loans to borrow money against.

“I’ll call him later,” Cannon noted.

“Why you didn’t come to the kickback last night?” Slim asked. “That mothafucka was leanin’,” he gloated.

“I was gon’ come, but I got caught up with somebody,” Cannon chuckled.

Kano glanced at him sideways while smirking. “What the fuck so funny?”

Cannon rubbed his hands down his face and chuckled again. “You would never guess who I was with last night.”

“Who?” Slim and Kano asked in unison.

“Finesse.”

Kano threw his head back in laughter, while Slim peered at him shaking his head. Cannon was certain they were going to have some slick remarks about his encounter with her.

“Did you check to make sure she didn’t steal nothing out of your pockets before you left?” Slim joked.

Kano laughed harder, causing Cannon to join in.

“Nah, she ain’t do that. Her ass knows betta” Cannon drawled.

“I knew you couldn’t resist her ass. How did y’all end up seeing each other?” Kano quizzed.

“I called her, and she invited me over to her house.”

Slim smiled sneakily. “So, what happened nigga?”

Cannon grinned and pulled at his chin hair. “I’m not gon’ say too much, but I will say that Finesse is a beast in the bedroom.”

Kano and Slim erupted into a fit of laughter. Cannon couldn’t wipe the smile off his face because he knew that they were about to clown him.

Kano shook his head. "I told your ass she was dangerous. Now she got you whipped from the pussy."

"Bruh, she was doin' some shit that I ain't never seen be'fo'. Plus, she don't get tired, so she had my ass up all night. Shit, I need a nap right now," Cannon joked.

Slim licked his lips. "I knew her thick ass had some good box. I've wanted to fuck her for some years now."

Cannon didn't like his comment, but for the sake of the conversation, he chose not to address it.

"So, what now? You gon' keep fucking with her?" Kano asked.

"Probably." Cannon shrugged, knowing that he would definitely be seeing Finesse again.

"This dude here," Slim pointed to Cannon. "He gon' end up falling in love and shit. What if she scams your ass? What would you do?"

"She tole' me she ain't on that shit no more. I think ol' boy who held her hostage scared the fuck outta her."

"Do you believe her?" Slim questioned.

Cannon nodded. "Yeah, I do."

"What about Nicki?" Kano quizzed.

Cannon sighed at the thought of Nicki. He was aware that she wanted to rekindle their relationship and a part of him did as well. But Nicki had disappointed Cannon in the past, so he was reluctant to reconcile with her.

"Shit, I'on know. I still fuck with her, but I ain't tryin' to talk about us bein' togetha' until she gets outta the army."

Kano shook his head. “That’s ‘cause you let Finesse get in your head and now you don’t want Nicki no more. You fucked up and now you ain’t gon’ be able to get Finesse out your system.”

Cannon smacked his lips. “Mane, chill on that shit. Ya act like I’m ‘bout to be out here on some sucka shit.”

“You think I’m bullshittin’ but you gone fall hard for Finesse. Watch and see,” Kano warned.

Cannon waved his hand and pulled out his phone. He didn’t see himself falling for Finesse because he still had feelings for Nicki. Since he hadn’t spoken to her since he hung up on her, he decided to send her a text. He also wanted her to take his mind off of his raunchy night with Finesse and cease his guilty thoughts. He knew Nicki wouldn’t like that he was seeing another woman, and while they weren’t together, he would never want to throw the fact that he was fucking with Finesse in her face.

Cannon: WYD?

Nicki’s eyes seemed to light up at the text message from Cannon. She hadn’t spoken to him since their disastrous conversation, and she was relieved to see that he was reaching out to her.

“Hey, we’re going to go out for lunch? Are you coming?” asked one of the soldiers.

She quickly shook her head. “No, I’m going to hang out here.”

He nodded and walked away. Everyone in the shop exited the building leaving Nicki alone. She wanted to hear Cannon's voice, so instead of texting him back, she decided to give him call.

"What's good?" he answered in his deep, southern accent.

"Hey. I'm glad you reached out. I've missed you."

"Oh yeah? What ya been on?"

"Not much. I'm at work right now. I know our last conversation kind of went left; I apologize. I shouldn't have started an argument with you when you had just got done bickering with your mom."

"It's cool, Nicki. I'm over that shit."

She breathed a sigh of relief. "Good. I was thinking about coming to see you for a weekend. What do you think about that?"

"Um...I guess that's cool."

Nicki titled her head and pursed her lips together. "Why did you say, 'um'? Do you not want to see me?"

"Don't start with me," he warned. "Ya always readin' into some shit. I said it would be cool. But, if ya plan on coming to argue with me, then maybe you should keep ya ass where you at."

She inhaled a deep breath in an attempt to keep her emotions together. She didn't want a repeat of their last conversation, so she chose her words carefully.

“I’m not coming to argue with you. I just want to see you, baby. Do you miss me at all?”

“Yeah, I do.”

She smiled brightly. “Well, I’ll let you know when I book my flight. Are you going to be busy tonight because I want to FaceTime you?”

“I’m probably hit the club or somethin’”

“That’s all you do now is go to the club,” she teased.

He chuckled. “What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing at all. I’m just messing with you. Well, can I call after the club? I stay up pretty late.”

“Yeah, do that.”

“Okay. Bye honey.”

“Bye.”

As soon as Nicki ended the call, she logged onto her computer to book her flight. She was craving Cannon something awful and she couldn’t bear to wait another month and a half to see him. She was hoping during her visit that they would converse about reconnecting romantically. Nicki wanted nothing more than to reconcile with the love of her life, and she prayed that Cannon would finally allow her access to his life again.

Chapter Fourteen

Finesse stared at the picture of her mother that sat on her vanity and sighed. Each day that she awoke, thoughts of Lexi would immediately flash through her mind. She missed her mother so much that her chest would ache at the reality of her not being there. Finesse often contemplated how her life would be if her mom was still alive. Although it had been twenty years since she had passed away, Finesse's memories of her were still so vivid.

"I miss you so much, Ma. Why did you have to leave me?" she whispered and gently swiped her thumb across the photo.

Finesse swiftly blinked away the tears that were threatening to spill at any moment. She hated that every time she thought of Lexi, she would become so consumed with grief that she couldn't help but cry. No one understood the agony of not having her mother around, and despite her Aunt Kitty stepping in and trying to fill the void Lexi had left behind, Finesse still yearned for the maternal love that she no longer had.

A knock at her bedroom door ceased her somber thoughts. "What?"

Deshawn opened the door and walked in fully dressed in a denim jacket, red Adidas hoodie and Distressed jeans. To complete her ensemble, she wore a pair of red Van sneakers.

Her boy cut was freshly cut with a funky design on the side of her head.

“Hey, you wanna go hang out with me and my girl tonight?”

Finesse twisted her face. “Where the hell y’all going, and what girl you got now? You switch bitches more than I switch my damn panties.”

“You don’t even wear panties,” Deshawn countered.

“That’s beside the point. Now who’s the new bitch?”

“It’s a girl I met on campus,” Deshawn grinned. “She looks so good too. You gotta meet her.”

Finesse waved her hand dismissively. “She’s probably weak as fuck.”

“Man, please.” Deshawn smacked her lips. “You know my taste in women is superb. But, anyways do you want to come or not?”

“Where are y’all going?”

“To Lavish. I think Cardi B is supposed to be there tonight. I’ll drive and pay for all your drinks as a ‘thank you’, for letting me stay with you. What do you say?”

Finesse pondered her invitation for a minute and then reluctantly nodded. “I guess I’ll grace you with my presence. Give me like forty-five minutes to get ready.”

“A’ight, bet.” Deshawn walked out of the room and closed the door.

Finesse rose from her seat and walked into her closet. She didn’t know what she was going to wear but she knew she

had to shut the club down.

An hour later, Finesse strutted out of her bedroom and into her living room where Deshawn and a woman were waiting.

“Oh, my goodness, you look stunning,” the tall chick gushed.

Finesse looked her up and down and silently approved. Her slim frame was covered in rick, dark skin. Her hair flowed down her back with a part down the middle. Her eyes were hazel, her nose wide, and she had beautiful, pouty lips.

“Finesse, this is my girl Mick. Mick, this is Finesse,” Deshawn introduced.

“It’s so nice to meet you, boo. You are just so damn cute,” Mick raved.

“Thanks,” Finesse responded dryly.

She smoothed down her black mini skirt that she had paired with a white crop top and thigh high, snakeskin boots. Finesse’s hair was styled in a high ponytail and her makeup was bold with a black smoky eye.

“You ready?” Finesse asked Deshawn.

“Sure. Let’s go.”

The trio walked out of the condo and piled into Deshawn’s Malibu. During the ride, Finesse thought about Cannon. They had texted earlier that day, but she hadn’t heard from him since. She made a mental note to check on him when

she left the club because she wouldn't mind ending her night with him.

They arrived at Lavish, fairly fast since Deshawn had hopped on the highway. Once she found a parking space, the women got out, walked to the entrance of the club where they were granted access.

The hypnotic sounds of Migos' "Stir Fry," instantly welcomed them as they shuffled through the packed club. Finesse bobbed her head as Deshawn led them to an open booth.

"What do you want to drink?!" Deshawn yelled over the music.

Finesse shrugged. "Just get me whatever you're having!"

Deshawn nodded and walked away. Mick scooted closer to Finesse, prompting her to give the strange woman a side eye.

"So, does Deshawn have other bitches?" she asked with her eyes darting around the club.

Finesse smacked her lips. "Bitch, I don't know her damn business like that!"

"But y'all live together!"

"And?!"

"And does she have other woman come over to the house? Have you seen anyone come to the boutique for her? I just wanna make sure she's not blowing smoke up my ass when she says that I'm the only one!"

Finesse rolled her eyes because she couldn't stand insecure bitches. "Girl, it's too early in y'all relationship to be asking this kind of shit. Just sit your skinny ass back and enjoy the night."

Mick crossed her arms and sat back in the booth. Finesse shook her head at her antics and looked out at the crowd of people. Her peepers seemed to zoom in on a familiar person who was sitting with another guy and sipping on a drink. He too was bobbing his head to the music while eyeing people who passed him by.

Should I go speak to him?

A part of Finesse didn't want to bring too much attention to herself in case he rejected her, but then the other part of her truly wanted to say hi. She stood and pulled down her mini skirt. She strutted over to where he stood and waved shyly. His pupils absorbed her thick frame before he gave her a nod.

"You plotting tonight?" he asked.

Finesse gave him a knowing look. "No Azai. How many times do I have to tell you that I'm changing my life?"

He smirked. "I just wanted to make sure you didn't revert back to your old ways."

She chuckled. "You're a damn jerk. How come I always see you at a club?"

"Because I'm a promoter."

"So, you're the plug?" she joked.

“Hell yeah,” he smirked. “Everybody knows I’m the one that gets shit done. Hell, you should know that by now.”

Finesse rolled his eyes at his subtle shade. “You didn’t have to go there, but whatever. I guess I deserved that.”

He chuckled. “Now, you know I had to get one in.”

Finesse smiled at him while discreetly taking in his appearance. His hair was covered by a White Sox snapback. Azai seemed to be growing a beard since the last time she had seen him. His husky frame was covered in a studded leather jacket, black T-shirt, black jeans and Timbs. Diamond chains hung loosely from his neck while diamond studs decorated his ears.

“How about we call a truce and become cool? No more scammer or stealing jokes, okay?” she offered with her hand held out.

Azai stared at her skeptically before shaking her hand. “As long as you don’t fuck with my money again, we cool.”

“I got you,” she laughed.

On the other side of the club, Cannon glared at the scene before him with a clenched jaw. He tilted his head and popped his neck as he continued to stare intensely. He didn’t know why it irked him to see Finesse all in another man’s face, but he was highly irritated by her flirty behavior. What annoyed him the most was that it was the same guy she had stolen money from.

“You good?” Slim asked.

Cannon nodded sharply and stood from his seat. He walked away without saying another word to anyone. He had been contemplating leaving the club since he had arrived, but now that he was witnessing Finesse giving her attention to someone other than him, he was ready to go.

Before he headed to the exit, Cannon stopped in his tracks and turned around. He felt like he had to approach Finesse to let her know that he wasn't pleased with her behavior. Yes, he was aware that she didn't belong to him, but he couldn't help but become consumed with jealousy knowing that she was entertaining another guy.

When Cannon headed toward where she was standing, he noticed that she wasn't there anymore. He rotated his head to the right and saw her sitting down with what appeared to be her roommate, and another woman. He proceeded toward the table and roughly tapped her shoulder. Finesse turned around with her face in a scowl, but immediately perked up when she noticed it was Cannon.

“Why the fuck you was all in that nigga's face?” he fumed.

“What?” she asked visibly taken aback by his attitude.

“Ya heard what the fuck I said with ya extra flirty ass.”

“If you're referring to Azai, I was only saying hi to him,” she explained with wrinkled brows. “What the hell is your problem?”

“Don't worry about it. I'm out.” He briskly turned to walk away.

Cannon heard Finesse calling his name, but he continued toward the exit. He wasn't feeling her or her explanation, and before he did something out of his character, he decided to leave. The night air blanketed his face as soon as he stepped outside to make the trip a few blocks away to his car.

“Cannon hold up!” Finesse yelled after him.

“Nah, take ya friendly ass back in the club!” he yelled without turning around.

He continued to amble down the street until Finesse caught up to him and grabbed his arm. He finally stopped and glowered at her. In spite of his raging attitude, he thought Finesse looked beautiful as she stood before him. Her juicy lips were coated in a nude gloss that tempted him to kiss her. Her striking appearance was probably the reason he didn't like seeing her talking to another man.

“Damn, can you stop and listen to me for a minute?” she huffed.

He scoffed and reluctantly pulled his gaze off her and peered down the street.

“I was only saying ‘hi’ to that man. I wasn't doing anything wrong; and let's be clear, even if I was flirting with him, I have the right to do that because I don't belong to you, Cannon.”

He inhaled a deep breath as he processed what she had spoken. Finesse was right; she didn't belong to him. But Cannon couldn't wipe away the envious nature that had absorbed his entire being.

“I’m trippin’,” he drawled.

Finesse rubbed his arm with a smirk on her face. “It’s cool. But I can’t lie; it’s nice to see that you’re a lil’ jealous over me.”

Fuck! Now I showed her that I care about her.

“Yeah, whatever, Finesse. I’m ‘bout to leave so take ya ass back in the club and keep greetin’ niggas.”

“You really need to chill with all the shade you’re throwing. Since you got me out here explaining myself, I wanna go with you now.”

“I’m goin’ home.”

“Well, I’m going with you.” She grinned.

Cannon couldn’t resist the subtle smirk that was forming on his mug. He hated that Finesse was starting to have an effect on him. Resisting her charm was going to be a lot harder than he thought it would be.

“Mane, bring ya ass,” he spoke and began to head toward his car.

“Hold my hand first. I’m not trying to fall in my heels,” she whined.

Cannon grabbed her hand and intertwined his fingers with hers. Not even a minute ago, he was ready to curse Finesse out, and now she had him holding her hand like a sucka.

Damn! Kano might be right about her.

The couple walked down the street until they got to Cannon’s candy apple red, Audi SQ5. He used his key fob to

unlock the car before he opened the passenger door.

“Ooh, you’re such a southern gentleman.” She kissed his cheek and got inside.

He shook his head and watched as she slid in the seat. When her feet were inside the car, he closed the door and jogged around to the driver’s side and got in. He started the engine and looked over at Finesse.

“Put ya damn seat belt on,” he ordered.

She playfully rolled her eyes and did as she was instructed. “You love trying to tell me what to do, huh?”

Cannon didn’t reply as he pulled off and headed toward his loft. He never invited women back to his home, but somehow, he didn’t mind allowing Finesse into his personal space. Typically, when he met a woman he would always rent a hotel room, bang her brains out, and then leave right after.

After a thirty-minute drive, Cannon pulled into the parking structure and killed the engine. He glanced over at Finesse who was going through her phone.

“If anything comes up missing, I’mma beat ya ass,” he warned.

The saddened expression on her face made him instantly feel guilty for his comment.

“I’m just playing with ya,” he quickly reneged. “Don’t get all soft on me, and shit.”

Finesse didn’t reply to him, but he could sense that she was annoyed by the tightness in her jaw.

“Finesse, I was just fuckin’ with ya,” he nudged her.

“Don’t touch me,” she barked.

Cannon sighed and wiped his hands down his face.
“So, ya mad now?”

“Fuck you.”

“You want me to take ya home?”

“No, I want you to stop trying to be funny all the damn time. How many times are you going to throw my past in my fuckin’ face? If you’re going to keep shittin’ on me, then we can end this shit right now. I don’t need to fuck with you, Cannon.”

“First off, watch who the fuck ya talkin’ to. I was wrong, so calm ya lil’ ass down. I promise I won’t bring that shit up again.”

Finesse rolled her eyes and folded her arms across her chest. Cannon pulled her arms out of the position just to mess with her.

“Stop touching me,” she fussed.

“Stop poutin’ like a lil’ ass baby. Gimme a kiss.”

“Hell nah. I don’t wanna kiss your crusty-lip-ass.”

Cannon scoffed. “You wish my shit was crusty. Get ya childish ass outta my whip.”

He got out and waited for Finesse to finally emerge from the car. She still had a pout on her face, so he grabbed her hand, and led her to the elevator. The two rode up to his place in silence but they did manage to steal flirty glances from each other. Once they arrived at the desired floor, Cannon strolled to his door, stuck the key inside, and unlocked

it. He opened the door and flicked a switch that turned the lights on.

“Turn that bottom lock for me,” he said, dropping his keys on the peninsula in his kitchen.

“This is nice, Cannon,” she sang, dragging her hand on top of the marble counter.

“Thanks. Take them high-ass boots off. You ain’t ‘bout to scratch my floors.”

“Boy this dusty-ass floor,” she laughed, unzipping her boots. “I’ve seen better floors than this.”

“I’m sure ya wild-ass has.”

He licked his lips as Finesse bent over to take her boots off. Her ample ass cheeks peeked from under her skirt, causing his manhood to stiffen immediately. She sauntered over to him with her bare feet hitting his hardwood floors. The sweet scent of her perfume had commanded his senses as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

“You like me, don’t you?” she questioned.

Cannon jerked his head back slightly. “Why ya say that?”

“Because your ass ran up on me because you saw me talking to another man. That yellow-ass skin of yours turned super red with thoughts of me entertaining someone who isn’t you. Just admit that you like me.”

“Don’t gas ya self,” he stalled.

“So, you’re not going to tell me that you like me? You don’t want me talking to anybody else, Cannon?” she purred

and kissed his neck.

His dick twitched at her touch. He looked down at her lustful expression and blinked with heavy lids.

“I can’t say that, when we ain’t togetha’.”

“But, if you had it your way, would you want me dating someone else?”

No

“You can do whatever ya want, Finesse.”

Finesse twisted her lips and stepped back from his embrace. “Yeah, that’s what your mouth says; but those actions are speaking mighty loud.”

Cannon waved his hand dismissively. “Girl, shut that shit up. I’m ’bout to go upstairs. Ya need a pillow and a cover for the couch?” he joked.

Her lips curled instantly. “I didn’t come over here to sleep on no damn couch. Shit, I can go home and get in my own damn bed if that’s the case.”

He chuckled. “I’m just fuckin’ with ya. Come on.”

Cannon led Finesse upstairs to his bedroom. The space was open with exposed brick walls and a high ceiling. His bed sat in the middle of the room with a TV mounted to the wall and a dresser on the right side of the room.

“Is this where all the fucking happens?” she questioned, looking up at the ceiling.

“Stay outta my business,” he smirked.

Finesse rolled her eyes and took off her crop top. Her voluptuous breasts sat up perfectly with erect nipples. She then took off her skirt, exposing her bare pussy. Cannon didn't realize he had been stuck in a daze until she called his name.

“Cannon.”

He shook his head slightly. “What?”

“Do you have an extra toothbrush here?”

He nodded. “Yeah, go look in the bathroom cabinet.”

She turned on her heels and padded toward the adjoining bathroom. Cannon swiped his tongue across his lips watching her ass bounce up and down. He was so attracted to Finesse, and now that he had gotten a taste of her pussy, he knew it would be hard for him to stay away.

Cannon took off his shirt and jeans. Wearing only his boxers and socks, he pulled back the covers and slid onto the mattress. Finesse came out minutes later and slipped under the covers. She snuggled closely to him with her minty breath flowing into his nostrils. The warmth from her body enveloped his frame as he wrapped his arm around her.

“How old are you?” she asked.

“Eighteen,” he joked.

She kissed her teeth. “Stop playing.”

“I'm twenty-six.”

“You're a youngin'. I'm older than you.”

“How old?”

“I'm twenty-seven.”

“But ya ain’t older than me mentally though. Childish-ass girl,” he shot.

Finesse giggled. “You can never resist shading me, huh?”

“Nah, ‘cause ya talk too much shit.”

“Whatever. What’s your real name?”

“Damn, Ricki Lake. Why ya all in my business?” he fussed.

Finesse cackled. “Did you really call me Ricki Lake, though? I haven’t heard that name in years.”

“Yeah, ‘cause ya nosey as hell.”

“So, what? I have a right to know your real information. Now what the hell is your real name?”

“It’s Cameron.”

“Cameron. I guess that’s cute. How did you get Cannon from Cameron?”

“When my sister was lil’, she couldn’t say Cameron, so she would say Cannon instead. That’s how I got my nickname.”

“Oh, how sweet,” Finesse teased and climbed on top of him. “But, I think your name has another meaning that your family doesn’t know about.”

“Oh yeah? What’s that?”

She grabbed his erection and stroked it slowly. “Because you’re really carrying a cannon in your jeans.”

He laughed and gripped her cheeks with his hands. “Ya nasty ass.”

“But you like it, right?”

“Yeah, ya probably the nastiest chick I been with.”

Finesse pecked his lips. “I’ve always had a strong sexual appetite. I don’t attach sex with my feelings like most women. I can fuck the shit out of you and walk past you like you never existed.”

“That’s what ya saying now, until ya start catchin’ feelin’s. All it takes is the right one to get ya there.”

“Like you?” she quizzed.

“I ain’t sayin’, me. I’m just sayin’ that one day you gon’ catch feelin’s for somebody, and it won’t be that easy for ya to walk away.”

“Are you referring to your *situation*? Tell me more about that.”

Cannon didn’t want to elaborate on his situation with Nicki because it was complicated. Plus, he didn’t want to make Finesse feel some type a way because she wouldn’t understand the bond that he shared with Nicki.

“I’on wanna talk about her.”

“Why not? I wanna know what’s up between you two.”

“Ain’t shit up, now. She was my first love and we was togetha’ for a minute be’fo’ she went to the army. We broke up after that, but we always kept in touch.”

“So, do you still love her?”

This was the very reason why he didn't want to discuss Nicki. He didn't want to convey his feelings for her, because he didn't want to hurt Finesse. After a long pause, he finally responded.

"I love her, but I ain't in love with her no more," he revealed.

"Do y'all plan on getting back together? I need to know so I can know how to move forward with you."

Cannon grabbed her chin and made her look him in the eyes. "What ya mean by that?"

"It means if you and her are planning on rekindling y'all little situation, then we need to stop fucking around because I told you that I like you and I'm not going to keep seeing you, so you can shit on me, for her."

He sighed deeply. "I'm here with ya, so that's all ya need to focus on. She don't even live here so you don't need to be worried about that shit."

"Are you being for real?"

"I'll always be honest with ya, Finesse." He kissed her lips.

Cannon knew there was a slight chance that he and Nicki could possibly get back together, but he didn't want to express that to Finesse because he loved having her around. She was slowly earning a place in his life and he wanted to see how deep their chemistry could go.

Finesse slid her tongue inside of his mouth as his erection grew. She had his dick so hard that it begun to pulsate. She glided her tongue down his chin and to his neck.

She sucked and gently bit his skin, prompting his body temperature to soar to an alarming level.

“You got a condom, baby?” she whispered and stuck her tongue inside his ear.

Cannon reached over into his nightstand and grabbed a rubber. He handed it to Finesse and told her, “Put it on.”

She tore the condom open with her teeth and put it inside her mouth. She winked at Cannon before she disappeared under the covers. Seconds later, he felt her warm mouth skating down his shaft with ease. He sank his teeth into his bottom lip, feeling the tip of his dick hit the back of her throat.

Finesse popped up from under the covers and positioned her body into a squat. She sat down slowly on his manhood and released a throaty moan.

“Damn, Finesse,” he said breathlessly, feeling her snug walls hug his dick.

He slid his hands up to her breasts and pinched her hardened nipples. Cannon felt like Finesse was trying to put a spell on him and he was willing and able to be her prey. She moaned in complete bliss as she circled her hips and bounced on his dick at the same time.

“Oooh, this dick is everything,” she purred. “How does it feel, baby?”

His laborious breaths were heavy. “Feel good as fuck,” he groaned.

She leaned forward and stuck her tongue inside his mouth. Their kisses were fervent and burning with lust.

“Who rides you the best, daddy?” she asked, picking up her speed.

“Shit... you gon’ make me bust. Slow down.”

“Answer me, daddy. Who fucks you the best?”

Something deep within Cannon wouldn’t allow him to confess that Finesse did indeed fuck him like no other. He couldn’t let her have one up on him like that, so he glided his hand around her neck and pulled her toward his mouth. He kissed her hungrily and pressed the pad of his thumb against clitoris.

“Mmm, Cannon, you’re making me wetter,” she muttered with her lips closely hovering over his.

“I wanna see ya squirt, again.”

Finesse sat up straight and planted her hands on his pecks. He rubbed her clit faster, causing a whimper to escape her lips. She didn’t miss a beat and was still bouncing on his erection at a rapid speed.

“Come on and let me see that pussy squirt,” he ordered in a husky tone.

“Fuck,” she moaned.

All of a sudden, fluids showered his pelvis as her body jolted with pleasure. His mouth watered at the sight of her juices spraying all over him. He took great joy in seeing her body release such an intense orgasm.

“Shiiitttt,” she gritted.

When Finesse came down from her sexually-induced high, she jumped off his member and took the condom off.

She took no time in gulping down his dick and massaging his balls with her hand.

Cannon closed his eyes and allowed her mouth to take him to great heights. Once again, Finesse deep-throated his shaft without gagging. He had been doing his best to hold his nut while she rode him, but with her mouth going up and down his shaft at lightning speed, he couldn't hold it anymore.

He grabbed a fistful of her hair and shot a load of semen in her mouth. His body jerked violently, as Finesse continued to suck him dry. Once he emptied what was left of him, he opened his eyes and saw her gazing at him with seductive orbs. She positioned herself on her knees with her eyes still trained on him. She stuck her tongue out to show him that she had swallowed every last bit of him.

“Nasty-ass.” He chuckled.

“You like it though, so quit frontin’.”

She hopped out of bed and went to the bathroom. She came out with a soapy towel and washed him up. She then went back in the bathroom and handled her business. After the long day—and now, night...Cannon immediately began drifting off into a deep slumber.

Chapter Fifteen

Tata put her baby in the crib and covered him with a blanket. She patted his back until he dozed off. Once he was asleep, she tiptoed out the room and closed the door. Ever since Quest's disappearance, her days had been weary, wondering if he was okay. A part of her felt like something may be wrong with him, but the other part of her wanted to have faith and believe that he was safe. It had now been over two weeks, and she hadn't heard anything from him. She tried calling Ro, but he had suddenly stopped answering her calls.

She tried going to every spot that she knew Quest to hang out at, but there was no sign of him. Each night, when she laid down to rest, sleep would evade her. Tortuous thoughts of him would torment her mind to the point that she would end up crying for the entire night. Tata didn't want to believe that the vanishing of Quest was her karma for all that she had done in the past, but she couldn't help the thoughts that plagued her mind. She had been the one to orchestrate her best friend's murder, and while Tata felt like she was justified for the setup, she knew that this was all coming back to haunt her.

When the doorbell rang, Tata sprinted to the door and opened it without seeing who it was. Her heartbeat quickened as she peered at two Caucasian men.

“Can I help you?” she asked with trembling vocals.

“Hi, I’m Detective Carell, and this is Detective Mason. May we come inside?” Detective Mason asked.

She nodded her head and stepped to the side to allow them access. The men didn’t go beyond the foyer as they stared at her with a neutral expression.

“We’ve come in regards to Quentin Franks.”

Tata held her breath and swallowed hard. “Okay. Did you find him?”

“We did ma’am, and I’m afraid I have some bad news...”

Before he could finish his sentence, Tata dropped to the floor and released a gut-wrenching cry. She knew in her heart that something had gone terribly wrong, but she didn’t want to believe that the love of her life was dead.

“I’m really sorry for your loss ma’am,” the detective spoke apologetically, kneeling down to comfort her.

Tata didn’t hear a word that he said. She was still trying to wrap her mind on the devastating fact that Quest was gone and never coming back. She had lost her best friend, as well as her son’s father, and it caused her heart to bleed.

“Where did you find him?” she whimpered with tears saturating her cheeks.

“He was stuffed in a trunk in an abandoned lot. It appears that he had a gunshot wound to his head. We were able to identify him because he still had a wallet on him.”

Tata shook her head to keep the visions of his lifeless body from forming in her mind. She had been praying for a

safe return and seeing that her prayers had fallen on deaf ears left her in shambles. This had to be the worst day of her life.

“Ma’am, do you know who could’ve done this to him?” Detective Carell questioned.

A menacing scowl immediately graced her face. “Yes, her name is Finesse Lattimore. That bitch had my man killed.”

Detective Mason jotted something down on his notepad. “Do you know why this person would have him killed?”

“Because they got into it before he went missing and she threatened his life. I have the text messages to prove it.”

“Can we see them?”

Tata stood to her feet and shuffled to grab her phone off the coffee table. She scrolled through her text messages until she came across the ones between Quest and Finesse.

“Here. This is the one where she said he was cancelled.” She pointed at the screen.

The two men looked at the text messages together as Tata attempted to keep her limbs from shaking.

“Do you know why they were at odds?”

She shrugged. “I believe she thought that he may have stolen money from her. I really don’t know, but if there was anyone to do this, then it was her.”

“We’re definitely going to look into this. We’re going to need these text messages, as well as anything else you may have on this Finesse person. In the meantime, we’re gonna need you to go to the morgue and identify the body.”

Tears fell freely from her eyes again with thoughts of identifying Quest's body. She didn't want the images of his lifeless frame to haunt her.

"Okay," she mumbled through tears.

The detective rubbed her shoulders before they exited the home. She was all alone and had no one to lean on during this devastating time. Her Grandpa had passed a year ago and she had no other family. Quest had been her everything, and she was saddened that she was now a single parent. They had planned out their lives together; now Tata would have to face the world alone without the person she planned on spending eternity with.

"Ouch, girl, you're digging too deep into my cuticle," Finesse complained, glaring at the nail tech.

"I'm sorry. I'm just trying to make sure it's perfect," the young girl replied.

Mafia laughed. "Don't be so hard on my new girl. She's really good."

Finesse gave her a side eyed. "We'll see how good she is when she finishes. I usually don't let new people do my nails, but I ain't have no choice since Kris is on vacation."

"I hired another girl, but she doesn't start until next week. I had to bring some young women in, so I can get that younger crowd," Mafia smiled and tapped her temple with her index finger.

"Good for you, Mafia. You're really trying to expand, and that's a good thing," Sky noted.

“Don’t gas this bitch. She ain’t doing nothing too profound.” Finesse laughed.

Sky giggled. “I don’t see how you two hang out but don’t get along. I mean y’all literally spend your time together arguing with each other. I don’t get it.”

“Mafia thinks she’s all that and I have to remind her sometimes that she ain’t shit. You always need someone in your corner to speak the truth.” Finesse winked.

“I *am* all that,” Mafia corrected her. “You’re just salty because you don’t have the charm that I have.”

“Chile please.” Finesse waved her hand dismissively. “You’re an evil bitch who goes around shooting your ex-husband in the feet. As a matter of fact, I need to send Kano a warning text, telling him to sleep with one eye open. You can’t be trusted.”

Mafia laughed. “Girl, I’m not playing with him like that because he’s always alert, and he’ll shoot my ass back. I will not be playing with that man like that.”

“Y’all are terrible,” Sky chuckled and shook her head.

“Oh, y’all, I have a new business venture that I want to start, but it’s something unusual and I don’t know if it’ll work,” Finesse stated with doubt in her tone.

“What is it?” Sky asked.

“I don’t want to say, because if y’all say something slick, I’m going to be pissed off.”

“Girl, just say the damn shit and stop being so fucking extra all the time,” Mafia scoffed.

Finesse flicked her middle finger up. “You’ll get whooped in your own shop. Try me.”

Mafia waved her hand. “Just say it.”

“Okay, well,” Finesse paused. “I want to open an all-female barbershop.”

“What?” Mafia sang. “Aye, I’m not gonna lie. That shit sounds so fly.”

“I like that idea, Finesse. I would definitely love to see what you would come up with,” Sky added.

Finesse couldn’t wipe the smile off her face knowing that her inner circle supported her business decision. She had been contemplating on what her next move in life would be, so when the idea came to her, she thought it would be a cool business investment.

“Thanks y’all. I just feel like I wanna do something for myself since I’m trying to change my ways and shit.”

“So, would the ladies only cut women’s hair or men’s hair too?” Mafia quizzed.

“Well, I would love to have men and women coming to get cut, but I only want females cutting the hair. I figured if I get some beautiful girls in there, it would bring a lot of business, especially for the thirsty niggas,” Finesse joked.

“I can just see the shop now with dudes waiting in line, so they can get cut up from a big-booty hoe.” Mafia cackled.

“That’s hilarious.” Sky giggled. “I would definitely come and support.”

“You should get someone who does eyelashes and makeup too. Your business would definitely boom if you added those services,” Mafia noted.

Finesse nodded. “Yeah, I might do that too.”

“What made you want to open another business?” Sky questioned.

“Well, I wanted to do something for me. I guess I wanted to work hard for something to prove to myself that I’m capable of putting a business together.”

“But you have a hair boutique,” Mafia reminded her.

“Yeah, but I didn’t have to work very hard for that because Uncle Johan gave me the money for it. I just want to build a business without having anyone give anything to me,” Finesse explained.

“I can respect that. Just make sure I still get my discount on my bundles because you know I need my hair,” Mafia chatted.

Finesse rolled her eyes. “Girl, shut up talking to me about them damn bundles. You’ll still get the family discount.”

“That’s all I needed to know.” Mafia stuck her tongue out.

When Finesse’s phone rang next to her, she looked at the screen hoping to see Cannon’s name, but was disappointed when Deshawn’s name flashed across the screen. Finesse picked the phone up and quickly answered the call.

“What do you want Lil’ Romeo?”

“Hey, there’s two detectives here asking for you?”

Finesse's eyes bucked from the sockets as she quickly straightened her relaxed posture. "Two detectives? What the fuck? Why the hell are they at my house?"

"They said they want to speak to you about something. Do you wanna talk to them?"

"Hell nah," Finesse chided.

"Hello, Finesse. This is Detective Mason. How are you?" A man with a high-pitched tone asked.

She rolled her eyes. "I don't know. Why the hell are y'all at my house asking to speak to me?"

"We want to ask you a few questions regarding the homicide of Quentin Franks."

Finesse grinded her teeth at the mention of Quest's government name. The only thing that brought her pleasure was knowing that he was finally dead.

"I don't fuck with him, so y'all are requesting to speak with the wrong person."

"I've heard that you two didn't get along. I would appreciate it if you met me down at the station for a couple of questions. We're just trying to find out what happened to him. We won't hold you for too long." he promised.

Finesse didn't like being anywhere near a police station, let alone speaking to a detective. She didn't feel good about their request at all.

"We'll see. I gotta go." Finesse ended the call and looked at Mafia and Sky.

"Who was that?" Sky questioned.

“That was Deshawn calling me to tell me that some detectives are at my house requesting to talk to me.”

“For what?” Mafia asked.

“Somebody finally killed Quest’s bitch ass. I don’t wanna talk to them, though. Shit, they’re not about to try to pin that shit on me because I ain’t have nothing to do with his ass getting murked.”

“Well, somebody must’ve told them your name if they wanna talk to you,” Mafia noted.

“It probably was his bitch, Tata,” Finesse spat, folding her arms over her chest. “That stupid-ass bitch probably told them all of my information. You know what? Fuck that, I’m not going to the police station.”

“They probably want to rule you out as a suspect, Finesse. I think you should go talk to them,” Sky advised.

Finesse glowered at her. “Fuck them. I ain’t have shit to do with nothing and I’m not going to talk to them, so they can try to frame me for it.”

“I don’t know, Finesse. I would go just to clear your name,” Mafia agreed.

Finesse nibbled on her bottom lip as she pondered their advice. She didn’t want to be in the presence of the detectives, but she also didn’t want them to think that she had anything to do regarding Quest’s situation.

“I’m about to call Uncle Johan and ask him.” Finesse pulled out her phone and dialed Johan’s number. She was extremely frustrated when she was greeted by his voicemail. “Damn, he didn’t answer.” she fussed, ending the call.

“Call Dad and ask him what you should do,” Sky suggested.

Malik hadn't even crossed her mind, but she really needed an opinion on if she should go down to the police station. Since Malik was seasoned with dealing with cops, Finesse reluctantly dialed his number.

“Hello?” Malik answered.

Finesse discreetly let out a deep breath. “Hey...um... it's me, Finesse.”

Mafia covered her mouth with her hand to keep her from laughing. Finesse shot her an evil eye and turned her back toward her.

“I know it's you, Finesse. What's up? What do you need?”

“Some detectives want to talk to me about a guy I used to be cool with. I don't know if I should though.”

“Why do they wanna talk to you? Is he dead?”

“Yeah, he is, but I didn't have shit to do with that. I don't want to talk to those fucking pigs.”

“Somebody must've given up your name for them to come to your house and ask to speak with you.”

“It was his bitch. I beat her ass a while back, so I wouldn't be surprised if she told them that I had something to do with him being dead.”

Malik released a deep sigh. “You know what? Go talk to them, but I'm going to send my lawyer there to meet you.”

“Wait, why do you have a lawyer?” she quizzed.

“Because I was a criminal, Finesse. Why else would I have a lawyer?”

“Oh. What should I say?” she asked, genuinely worried.

“Shit, tell them the truth. You ain’t have shit to do with nothing. Make sure you give them an alibi and everything. If they had something on you, Finesse, they would’ve come to arrest you. Just be honest and call me when you get there, so I can let my lawyer know which district you’re at.”

“All right. I will.”

“A’ight, I’ll talk to you in a minute. Bye.”

Finesse ended the call and stood from the chair.

“What did he say?” Sky asked.

“He told me go talk to them and that he’s going to send a lawyer for me.”

“Shit, they don’t have nothing on you anyway. Just tell them the truth and you’ll be good. You want me to come with you?” Mafia offered.

Finesse nodded. “I would appreciate that.”

Mafia pulled her feet out of the water and dried them off with a towel. She then stood and slid her feet into her sandals.

“Aw, I wanna come too,” Sky whined.

“Nah, you gotta get home soon so you can feed Raine. I’ll just call you when I leave from there,” Finesse promised.

“Okay,” Sky said.

“Quesha, lock up for me,” Mafia ordered to the nail technician. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I got you,” Quesha assured.

Finesse and Mafia walked out of the shop and hopped inside Finesse’s car. She said a silent prayer, hoping things would go smoothly with her meeting with the detectives. She was a ball of nerves and she didn’t want to say the wrong thing that would incriminate herself.

An hour later...

Finesse tapped her fingers on the steel table as she peered at the two detectives before her. She bit the inside of her cheek with her heart racing. Detective Carell rummaged through a stack of papers, while Detective Mason jotted something down on a notepad. Finesse’s almond-shaped orbs glanced at Clarence, the lawyer Malik had sent. He was sitting casually, with his legs crossed.

“Okay, can you tell me how you and the victim knew each other?” asked Detective Mason.

Finesse shifted in her seat and cracked her knuckles. “We used to be cool once upon a time.”

“So, you were friends?” Detective Carell questioned.

“Yeah,” Finesse replied with a stone expression.

“How long were you two friends?” Detective Carell quizzed.

Finesse shrugged with knitted brows. “Shit, I don’t know. For a minute.”

Detective Mason tipped his head. “When we went to inform the victim’s girlfriend about his death, she gave us your name and said that it may have been you that killed him. Do you know why she would say that?”

Finesse sucked her teeth. “She was jealous of the friendship me and Quest shared. That could be a reason. Shit, I don’t know why her ugly ass would tell y’all that.”

“If you don’t have any evidence against my client, I’m going to ask that you wrap this up,” Clarence, requested.

Detective Carell pulled out his phone and passed it to Finesse. She instantly recognized the messages she had sent Quest after she was held hostage.

“Okay?” she quipped. “Why are you showing me this?”

“I wanna know why you told him that he was cancelled. What does that mean? Is that some kind of slang for threatening to kill him?”

Finesse released an exasperated breath. “It means that me and him were no longer going to be friends,” she fussed. “Damn y’all are reading a little too much into this shit.”

“Well when a person turns up dead with a gunshot wound to the head, and we have texts from a person who was threatening the victim, we have to look into these things,” Detective Mason explained.

“Well, y’all got the wrong person. Why would I kill Quest when I can just stop fucking with him?”

Detective Carell chuckled. “Tatiana informed us that he had stolen some money from you. That may be a reason

you would kill him.”

“She’s a fucking lie!” Finesse barked. “We stopped being friends because he was shady as fuck. Do you even know whose murder you’re investigating? Quest was the grimmest person who walked the earth. He robbed people all the time. Shit, it could be anybody who murdered his shiesty ass.”

Detective Mason glared at her for a minute before he said, “We believe the victim was murdered between June 16th and June 17th. Can you tell us where you were those nights?”

“At home. You can even ask my roommate.”

“Would you be willing to provide a DNA sample?”

“She will absolutely not,” Clarence intervened. “We’re done here. Let’s go Ms. Lattimore.”

Finesse stood and followed her lawyer to the door. Detective Mason opened the door for them and they walked out and headed toward the elevator.

“They don’t have any evidence on you, so don’t worry about anything. As long as your alibi checks out, then you should be good,” Clarence assured.

Finesse breathed a sigh of relief. “Good.”

“I’m going to make sure everything is okay. Malik is an old friend of mine, so I’ll definitely make sure that your name is cleared.”

Finesse offered a faint smile. “I appreciate that.”

The two boarded the elevator in silence. They arrived in the lobby fairly fast since they had only been on the fourth

floor. When Finesse stepped off the elevator, Mafia hopped up from her seat and shuffled over to her.

“What did they say?” she asked.

“They weren’t talking about shit. Just fishing for some bullshit because that hoe, Tata, told them that I was the one that killed Quest,” Finesse fumed.

“We should go to her house and whoop her ass for that shit,” Mafia ranted.

“Uh, if I were you I wouldn’t have any contact with her. You wouldn’t want her going to the police and getting you arrested. Just stay away from her,” Clarence advised.

Finesse nodded. Having any contact with Tata wouldn’t be wise. Plus, Finesse didn’t want to give her the satisfaction of knowing that she was bothered by her claims.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Mafia agreed. “Well, let’s go. I told my daddy what was going on, and he said when he gets back in town tomorrow that he’ll handle it.”

Finesse scoffed. “Good. I hope he tells that bitch to keep my name out of her mouth.”

“Well, ladies it was nice meeting you, but I have to go.” Clarence gave them both handshakes before he walked out of the building.

“A’ight come drop me off, so I can get home to my baby. He was missing me.” Mafia poked her bottom lip out.

“Y’all are sickening,” Finesse joked, as they walked out of the district.

“Don’t hate. Oh, and your boo thang said to call him.”

“Who Cannon?”

“Who else? Kano must’ve told him where you were, and he said to have you call him.”

Finesse smiled brightly and took her phone out of her purse. She dialed his number and waited anxiously for him to answer. She hadn’t spoken to Cannon all day and she couldn’t wait to hear his country drawl.

“What’s good, Finesse?” he answered

“Hey,” she smirked.

“You good? I heard ya was gettin’ interrogated, and shit.”

“Yeah but they didn’t have anything on me, so they had to let me go. Were you worried about me?” she joked.

“Hell nah.”

“You ain’t shit.”

He laughed. “I wasn’t sayin’ it like that. Stop bein’ so damn soft. What ya ‘bout to get into, though?”

“I’m going home. Why?” she grinned.

“I wanna see ya. Can I come through or what?”

“Only if you bring me something to eat.”

He smacked his lips. “Mane, what ya want?”

“Some Chinese food. Get me some shrimp fried rice, egg rolls, and chicken.”

“Damn, ya greedy than a mufucka,” he complained.

“If you get me something to eat, I’ll make sure to put you to sleep real good. Deal?”

He snickered. “I got ya.”

“Bye.”

Finesse hung up and then hopped in her car. She looked over at Mafia who was holding a grin on her face.

“What bitch?”

“You’re so in love. Just admit it.”

Finesse curled her lip. “In love with who? I hope you’re not talking about Cannon.”

“Yeah I’m talking about Cannon. You love him, don’t you?”

“Girl, I just started messing with him. Now, I won’t say that I don’t like him ‘cause I do, but love? Bitch, you must be crazy.”

“That’s what your mouth says but that smile you just had while you were on the phone with him tells me otherwise. But, I’ll play along with you.”

Finesse didn’t respond to her claims. Instead, she started the engine and pulled off. She had feelings for Cannon, but she would never admit to being in love with him.

Chapter Sixteen

Nicki grabbed her suitcase from the overhead compartment and ambled off the plane. She was finally in Milwaukee to see Cannon and she couldn't contain her excitement. All week, she had been counting down the days until her arrival. While walking through the airport, she texted Cannon to make sure he was there to pick her up.

After a long walk from the gate, she finally arrived outside and looked for Cannon's car. When she heard a horn honk, she glanced to her right and saw him sitting in a truck. A smile stretched across her face as she strolled over to him. He got out the car and met her on the sidewalk.

"I missed you," she gushed, wrapping her arms around his neck. She kissed his lips tenderly and pulled back.

Cannon smirked and wiped her lip gloss off his mouth with the back of his hand. "How was your flight?"

"It was good. Cannon, I'm so happy to see you. I missed you so much." She hugged him again.

"I missed you too," he admitted.

Nicki cupped his face in her hands and kissed his lips once more. He opened the passenger's door for her and she slid inside. Cannon then put her suitcase in the back and jumped in the driver's seat. His masculine cologne quickly filled the car, prompting Nicki's kitty to throb. She couldn't

wait to get Cannon alone, so she could display just how much she'd missed him.

She rubbed his jet-black fade with her hand and said, "You look so handsome babe. I'm kind of salty that I don't get a chance to wake up to you every day."

He smiled bashfully. "Don't gas me."

"I'm for real. I missed you so much. Do you have a fun weekend planned for us? I wanna have some fun."

"We can do whatever ya wanna do. Ya hungry?"

She nodded. "Yeah, I can definitely eat."

"What do ya have a taste for?"

"I want some breakfast. Are there some good breakfast spots here?"

He nodded. "Yeah, it's plenty."

While Cannon drove, Nicki gently rubbed on his hair and the back of his neck. A sense of familiarity and comfort encompassed her which gave her some peace. She could finally take a break from work and military life, and just chill with the man who owned her heart. She couldn't fully bask in Cannon's presence too much because the secret she had been harboring was still weighing her down.

They pulled up to a place called Mad Rooster and parked. The couple got out the car, walked inside the restaurant, and was seated right away. Nicki couldn't take her eyes off Cannon's handsome features. His oval-shaped eyes scanned the menu unaware that she was staring at him. His juicy, pink lips were begging to be devoured. His beautiful

body art peeked from under his Houston Astro jersey. Nicki had been in love with Cannon ever since she was a teen, and she didn't see the feeling ever going away.

“Hi, and welcome to Mad Rooster. What can I get you two to drink?” asked the bubbly waitress.

“Lemme get a Sprite,” Cannon requested.

“And I'll take a water with no lemon.”

The lady smiled. “Sure thing. I'll get that for you.”

The waitress walked away, and Nicki returned her eyes to Cannon. He peered at her intensely, as if he had something to say.

“So... you're still working with Kano?” she asked.

He nodded. “Who else would I be workin' with?”

“I don't know,” she shrugged. “I thought maybe you would put your degree to use and do something else.”

His jaw tensed immediately. “I am puttin' my degree to use.”

“Yeah, but it's illegally,” she whispered.

He glowered at her. “Shut up talkin' to me about that shit, Nicki. Ya heard me.”

She inhaled a deep breath and willed herself to change the conversation. She could sense that he was becoming irritated, and she didn't want their visit to start off wrong.

“I've been looking for jobs here. I've actually been eyeing one at the airport. I want to apply, but we haven't really discussed our setup when I get discharged.”

“And we ain’t gon’ discuss it. At least not right now.”

Nicki pressed her full lips together and released an exasperated sigh. “Why not discuss it? I’m trying to have a plan, and your ass is stalling and shit.”

“I ain’t plannin’ shit with ya. You must’a forgot the way ya ass moves,” he shot.

She jerked her head back and wrinkled her forehead. “How the fuck do I move?”

“You ain’t fuckin’ reliable,” he shot, glaring at her sharply. “Did ya forget how ya said ya wasn’t gon’ go to the army, but then ya indecisive ass changed ya mind at the last minute? Or what about how ya swore you was only gon’ do four years, but then ya changed ya mind and signed up for another two years? I ain’t plannin’ shit with ya, ‘cause all the fuck ya do is switch up on me at the last minute and have me lookin’ crazy.”

Tears gathered on the brim of her eyes as she shifted uncomfortably in her seat. Cannon’s words stung immensely. She’d made several promises to him that she hadn’t been able to keep. It broke her heart to see how badly she had affected him with her broken commitments.

“I’m sorry,” she muttered.

“Don’t be sorry. Just stop bringin’ that shit up to me right now. We’ll talk about ya movin’ here when ya get out the army. Ya heard me?”

She nodded and focused her attention on the menu. “I really do want to be with you, Cannon. I want to right my

wrongs and show you that I can be the woman you need. I promise I won't disappoint you anymore."

Nicki felt a twinge of guilt pierce her heart because she knew that if Cannon found out she was married, he would never speak to her again.

"We goin' to a strip club tonight. I wanna show ya a good time for the weekend, so let's not talk about our relationship shit," he suggested, ignoring her pledge.

"Will it be just us two?"

He swayed his head back and forth. "Nah, some of my crew will be there. I gotta talk to ya about somethin', though."

"What is it?"

He licked his lips and sighed. "I been fuckin' with somebody else real tough lately. I like her a lot and she might be around tonight. I ain't want you to be blindsided by her poppin' up."

Nicki felt like someone had put a plastic bag over her face to prevent her from breathing. Her chest ached profusely as her toffee-toned skin became clammy. Hearing Cannon confess that he liked someone other than her, caused her heart to shatter into tiny pieces.

"Are you serious right now?"

"Yeah."

"Is that why you don't want me to move out here?" she barked.

"I ain't say I didn't want ya to move here. I said I ain't plannin' that shit until ya take care of ya army situation. She

don't have shit to do with us.”

“Well, how much do you like this broad? Do you love her?”

“I like her,” he groaned. “I guess this is what the fuck I get for bein’ honest with ya ass.”

“Well, how did you think I would take the man that I’m in love with, saying that he’s been with someone else? I don’t like the shit Cannon, damn.”

“So, what ya gon’ do then? Now ya don’t wanna go to the strip club?”

“No. I want you to stop seeing that bitch and focus on me and you. What we got is real, and I’m not about to compete with no other bitch. Shit, I shouldn’t have to,” she sassed.

Cannon rubbed his hands down his face. “We ain’t togetha’ and ya lucky I even tole’ ya ‘bout her. Ya not competing with shit, ‘cause I ain’t in no relationship with nobody.”

Nicki rubbed her misty eyes and willed herself not to cry. She wasn’t going to allow another woman to come between her and Cannon. The love they shared for one another was everlasting, and she couldn’t bear to see him ride off into the sunset with someone other than her.

Cannon reached over the table and grabbed her hand. “I wanna enjoy ya this weekend, so let’s drop the dumb shit and just have fun.”

Nicki peered at him somberly and shook her head. She didn’t want to ruin the visit with Cannon, although he had her feeling like she was going to be competing for his affection.

Finesse, Deshawn, and Mick strolled into the strip club, bobbing their heads to Migos' "Bad Bitches Only". Cannon had invited her to the strip club and since Sky was being a mommy and Mafia was busy with Kitty, she decided to invite Deshawn and her annoying ass girlfriend.

"Big booty hoes!" Deshawn yelled with glee.

Finesse smirked and shook her head. "I knew your ass would be excited to see some ass. You better hope that praying mantis don't get all over your ass."

"Who Mick?"

"Who else?" Finesse quipped. "Her ol' insecure ass."

"She's just been hurt before. She's not that bad," Deshawn explained.

"Whatever."

Finesse scanned the club for Cannon and spotted him toward the back along with Kano and the crew. She strutted over to him with a huge grin on her face. He looked scrumptious wearing a Brooklyn Nets jersey, black jeans and Jordan 10s. A diamond chain rested on his chest while his Phillippe Patek watch decorated his wrist. His beautiful body art covered his toned arms and neck area, giving him that rugged appearance that she adored. A black cap sat backwards on his head providing a peek of his precise lining.

Finesse licked her lips as she approached him. Cannon admired at her with his sexy bedroom eyes and smiled.

"What's good?" he asked, hugging her.

“Not much. You look good tonight.”

“Thanks. Ya kinda fly too, but who tole’ ya to wear this shirt with ya titties poppin’ out?”

Finesse looked down at her silk Versace shirt that she tied around her waist. Her plump breasts were propped up in a push-up bra that had them on full display.

“I don’t need permission from your ass to look good,” she sassed.

“Yeah, aight,” he nodded. “I want ya to meet somebody.”

Cannon grabbed the hand of a slim, small-breasted woman who was standing next to him. Finesse quickly surveyed her, wondering why he was introducing her to another woman. Her skin was the shade of rich coffee, and she wore minimal makeup. She had shoulder-length hair styled in a wrap.

“Nicki, this is Finesse. Finesse this is my ex-girlfriend Nicki.”

Finesse released a heavy breath as she pressed her glossy lips together. She had no idea that Cannon was hanging with his ex. She wasn’t the jealous type when it came to other women, but Finesse could have done without meeting her, especially with the way Nicki was glaring at her.

“Nice to meet you,” Nicki said dryly and took a seat.

Finesse smacked her lips and said, “Bit...”

“Chill,” Cannon quickly cut her off.

“Don’t fucking tell me to chill. You should’ve let me know that she was here because I would’ve never showed up.”

“I wanted to hang with ya tonight. She came to visit for the weekend and I ain’t want ya to feel like I was shittin’ on ya ‘cause she was here,” he explained.

Finesse didn’t care for his explanation. She felt like he should’ve informed her about Nicki’s visit ahead of time. Without saying a word, she went to take a seat at the end of the booth. Deshawn and Mick followed suit and sat next to her.

“You okay, Finesse?” Deshawn asked.

Finesse nodded sharply and crossed her legs. Cannon’s orbs bore into her intensely. She did her best to try and ignore him.

“Is that his girlfriend?” Deshawn questioned.

“His ex-bitch,” she scoffed.

“Well, if it makes you feel better, that bitch doesn’t have shit on you. She looks plain as hell to me,” Mick scoffed.

“Girl, looks don’t mean shit. It’s all in the way a person makes you feel. It’s a reason her plain-ass is still around,” Finesse fumed, feeling her anger rise to a level she didn’t want it to go.

“You need a drink,” Deshawn noted, and grabbed a bottle of Ace of Spades. “Open your mouth, so I can pour it down like the rappers in the videos.”

Finesse laughed. “I’ll kick your ass if you try to play me like that.”

Deshawn cackled and shrugged. “I forgot how bourgeois you were.”

Finesse flicked her middle finger and did her best to forget about Cannon’s stunt. Three strippers came over to their section and began to dance and bounce their asses. Finesse pulled out some bands from her purse and made it rain on the dancers.

“That money could’ve been my raise,” Deshawn complained.

“Bitch, do you want a place to stay, or a raise? Because you can’t have both!” Finesse retorted.

Deshawn sat back in her seat and folded her arms on her chest. “I’m cool with what I have.”

“Yeah, that’s what the hell I thought.”

Finesse rolled her eyes and continued to throw money at the strippers. When Nicki stood from her seat and headed toward Finesse, she scoffed.

What does this hoe want?

Nicki sat next to Finesse and tapped her shoulder. “Me and Cannon have a lot of history together. He told me he likes you, but you won’t be able to compete with his love for me.”

Finesse laughed loudly with her hand over her chest. “Yet, you’re here feeling threatened by my presence. Get your insecure-ass on.”

“I’m not insecure. I’m just looking out for you because when I get out the army, me and Cannon will be together.”

“Oh, for real?” Finesse feigned surprise.

“Yes. We’ve actually made plans to go buy a house when I get out. So, I’m coming to you woman-to-woman, telling you that you shouldn’t get comfortable.”

Finesse turned to her angrily. “And I’m telling you woman-to-woman that you should go back to your seat before I punch your fucking nose in.”

Nicki grinned. “Do I detect a little fear?”

“Bitch, fear? Of you? You must be crazy. Cannon ain’t my man and I’m not about to sit here and discuss some irrelevant shit with your insecure-ass.”

Nicki got close into Finesse’s personal space. Their noses were inches apart as Nicki opened her mouth to speak. Without giving it a second thought, Finesse swung her fist and punched Nicki in the mouth. Blood immediately seeped from an open cut that was on the bottom of her lip. Deshawn gasped while Mick laughed loudly.

“Don’t ever get in my fucking face ever again hoe,” Finesse spat.

“I’m about to fuck you up!” Nicki screeched.

Cannon hurried over and grabbed her before she could swing her arms. He glowered at Finesse with much disdain. “Aye, what the fuck ya do that for?”

“She shouldn’t have gotten in my face. I told her ass to get the fuck on, but she didn’t want to listen.”

“Move Cannon, so I can fuck this bitch up!” Nicki yelled, trying to break from his strong grasp.

Kano shook his head. “Finesse, you be on that bullshit.”

Finesse snapped her head at him. “Shut the fuck up talking to me! If a mothafucka get in your face, I guarantee your hot-headed-ass wouldn’t be cool and not do shit!”

“You childish as fuck, mane,” Cannon huffed, and ushering an irate Nicki away. “Ya always find a way to do some fuck-shit.”

Finesse couldn’t believe that Cannon had flipped on her. Nicki had been trying her, so she had given her exactly what she needed.

“Fuck you, too. You better not call me after this!” Finesse blared, feeling more upset with each word she spat.

A security guard came over to the section and pointed at Finesse. “You gotta go. We don’t tolerate any fighting in here.”

Finesse shook her head and grabbed her purse. She stood with Deshawn and Mick doing the same thing.

“Y’all don’t gotta leave. I’m good,” Finesse assured them.

“Well, how are you going to get home?” Deshawn asked. “We can leave. It ain’t no problem.”

Finesse waved her hand. “I’ll call somebody to come get me. I don’t wanna ruin y’all night, so just stay.”

“You sure?” Deshawn asked.

“Yeah, I’m good.”

Deshawn and Mick nodded, then took a seat back in the booth. She locked eyes with Cannon who was glaring at her with a tensed jaw. Finesse stuck her middle finger up on the way out the booth.

“I swear you better lose my number,” she warned and walked out of the club with the security guard following closely after her.

Once Finesse stepped outside, she pulled her phone out her purse, and started to dial Sky’s number.

“Yo’ ass got kicked out?”

Finesse looked up to see Azai sitting on the hood of an old school Cutlass. She quickly ended her call and rolled her eyes, because she didn’t want to hear him clown her for getting kicked out the club.

He laughed when he saw her facial expression. “You always in some shit. Why you get kicked out?”

“This bitch got too close to my face and I had to slap her ass. Why do you care?”

“I don’t; but I find it funny that yo’ ass always in some bullshit.”

Finesse smirked and folded her arms over her chest. “I didn’t do shit wrong and fuck this club. Those hoes look like they just got released from doing a ten-year bid anyway.”

Azai, along with a guy sitting in his passenger seat, laughed.

“They weren’t that bad. You need a ride?” Azai asked.

Finesse eyed him skeptically. “You’re not trying to get payback, are you?”

He jerked his head back. “Hell nah. I was tryin’ to be nice but fuck it. Find your own way home.”

“Okay, okay, I’ll take a ride. Don’t try nothing funny because I have my little .22 in my bag.” She patted her purse.

“Yeah a’ight, Finesse. Let’s go.”

Finesse shuffled to the passenger door where Azai’s friend got out, so she could climb in the backseat. Finesse slid in and admired the white leather seats with the pads of her fingers. Azai hopped in the driver’s seat and cranked the roaring engine.

“This car is fly, Azai. I meant to tell you that you have great taste in furniture too,” she complimented him.

Azai shook his head and pulled off. “This is the chick that set Kirby’s green-ass up,” he informed his friend.

The guy looked back at Finesse and swayed his head back and forth. “I can see how his ass fell for her.”

“Right,” Azai agreed. “But still his ass should’ve known better.”

“You got my lil’ homie sent back to Florida,” the guy fussed at Finesse. “Why you be settin’ niggas up anyway?”

“I don’t do that anymore,” Finesse replied, annoyed.

“Why not?” he quizzed.

“Because I was lost and now I’m found,” she joked.

The entire car erupted in laughter. Finesse was truly tired of discussing her old ways with people.

“Aye, Finesse, I’m glad you chilled on that shit because you were on your way to being killed,” Azai mentioned.

“I know that Azai, damn. I told you that I’ve changed but you don’t wanna believe me.”

Azai chuckled. “I gotta see that shit first.”

“Aye bro, stop and get something to eat. I’m hungry as fuck.”

Azai nodded. “Finesse, do you still live at the place I caught you at?”

“Nah, I moved down the street on Prospect Avenue,” she replied.

Azai nodded and pulled into a Burger King drive-thru. Azai ordered a meal for him and his friend.

“You want something?” he asked Finesse.

“Yeah, I want a number three with a Pepsi.”

Azai added her order and then pulled around to the window. He held his hand out over his shoulder. “Give me some money because you’re paying for our shit too.”

Finesse curled her lip. “I ain’t paying for shit. Y’all need to be treating me since I’m the lady.”

“Man, you still owe me from when you stole my bread,” Azai spat.

“Oh my God, can you get over that? My uncle even plugged you with more money, so I don’t owe you shit.”

“Man, I still have PTSD from when you took my shit. I’m suffering from nightmares and shit,” Azai laughed.

Finesse cackled loudly and shook her head. “I see your ass is going to ride this out. I’m so sick of your bullshit, Azai.” She reached into her purse, grabbed her credit card, and passed it to him.

“Thanks fam,” Azai said happily.

Finesse smacked her lips and sat back in her seat. Azai paid for their meals and passed the card back to Finesse. He then grabbed the food and pulled over in the parking lot, so they could eat.

With a mouth full of food, Finesse asked Azai’s friend, “What’s your name?”

“My name is Maino,” he said, holding out his hand to give her a shake.

“Me and Maino was about to torture yo’ ass until we found out that you were Johan’s niece,” Azai joked.

“I bet you was.” She stuffed some fries in her mouth. “Azai, why did you have all that money in the safe? What are you saving it for?”

Azai took a sip of his drink before he answered. “I don’t know yet. I wanted to open my own club, but you know clubs don’t last long in Milwaukee.”

She shrugged. “So, what does that have to do you with? Maybe your club will be different.”

“I keep telling him that,” Maino chimed in, smacking loudly on his burger.

“Man, it’s a lot that goes into this club shit. I don’t wanna open a club and then it closes in a year or so. I want my shit to be around like the King of Diamonds. Shit I wouldn’t mind starting a franchise.”

“Well do your research and make sure you won’t be another person who used to have a club that got shut down. Plus, you’re a promoter who has connections. Hopefully, you’ve made good connections to the point that people will fuck with you just off GP. You can do it. Make sure I get VIP when I come,” she joked.

“Hell nah. You might steal the bottles from the bottle girls,” Azai kidded.

Finesse head fell back in laughter. “I can’t stand you.”

“Aye Finesse, you feel like kickin’ it with some fly niggas tonight?” Maino asked.

“Sure. I don’t have shit else to do tonight.”

“A’ight.”

After the threesome ate, Azai cranked the engine and headed to a bar. They played pool, drank shots, and had a good time. Finesse learned that Azai was a good guy with a hilarious personality. All night, he cracked jokes on her and other people that he knew. Maino was cool and laid-back but didn’t mind poking fun at her as well.

Cannon had called her while she was enjoying her time out, but she didn’t answer. She didn’t like the way he played her for Nicki. Although she tried not to let Nicki’s words

affect her, Finesse couldn't help but think that Nicki did hold more weight in Cannon's life than she did. Finesse made a mental note to stay away from him, because she could see that this setup between them wouldn't end well.

After spending a much-needed fun night with Azai and Maino, they left the bar and Azai took her home.

"A'ight Finesse, be easy. Aye, I'm having a welcome home party for my boy in two weeks. You should come through," Azai offered.

"Where is it?"

"It's supposed to be at The Eight, but I might change it. Put your number in my phone, so I can send you a text letting you know."

Finesse grabbed his phone from his hand and punched her number in. She handed it back to him and Maino got out the car, so he could let her out.

"Aye, wait!" Azai yelled.

Finesse wrinkled her brows. "What?"

"Let me make sure all my seat belts are back there. I can't take you stealing more shit from me," he laughed.

"You're an asshole," she cackled, getting out of the car.

Finesse waved and entered her building. She was glad that she had taken a chance on hanging with Azai and Maino because she truly had a great time. Now, the only thing that plagued her mind, was her situation with Cannon. She wondered if she should leave him alone for good.

Chapter Seventeen

Cannon sat furiously in Finesse's condo as he waited for her to come home. She had been MIA for the last four hours and he was beyond pissed at her disappearing act. After getting Nicki situated, Cannon dropped her off at his home and went to look for Finesse. He didn't like the way their night ended, and he wanted to talk about everything that had gone down.

Initially, he was displeased with Finesse punching Nicki in the nose, but after speaking to Deshawn, he learned that Nicki was the one taunting Finesse and just so happened to get into her face.

His oval-shaped peepers glanced toward the door when he heard keys inserting into the lock. Seconds later, Finesse appeared with her eyes trained on her phone.

"Where the fuck ya been?!" he barked, startling her.

When she noticed that it was Cannon, her face contorted into a grimace while she smacked her lips.

"You need to get the fuck outta my crib. I don't know why you brought your bright-ass over here. Go back to your fucking No Limit soldier," she raged, marching toward him.

"I been calling ya ass all night. Who the fuck was ya with?"

"My friend," she sassed with a snake roll of her neck.

“Aye, Finesse, you really need to quit fuckin’ with me. Ya heard me. What friend?”

“Fuck you!” she yelled, pushing him. However, his brawny body didn’t budge. “Don’t come to my got-damn house no more. You sat there and got mad at me because your bitch provoked me, and I shut her dumb-ass up. It’s obvious she holds some weight in your life, so leave me the fuck alone and go check on that bitch.”

Cannon’s teeth sank into his bottom lip as Finesse yelled and poked him in the chest. He didn’t go there to argue with her, but she seemed to still be in a volatile mood.

“So, ya not gon’ to tell me where ya was?” he asked calmly.

“Fuck you,” she spat and headed toward her bedroom.

Cannon stalked after her and grabbed her arm. He spun her around and glowered at her. “Don’t walk away when I’m havin’ a discussion with ya rude-ass.”

“I don’t give a fuck about you, Cannon. You really showed me your true colors and where your heart really lies. Just go fuck with ol’ girl and let me be. I don’t have to deal with your bullshit.”

“Aye, I’on owe ya shit. Ya lucky I even came over here ‘cause I ain’t have to do that shit. You ain’t my gal and Nicki ain’t either. If I was sneakin’ behind ya back with Nicki’s ass, then I would have to hear ya fuckin’ mouth.”

“All you had to do was say that your ex-girlfriend was visiting, and I would’ve been cool and fell back. But no, you thought it was cool to invite us to the same place and expect

nothing to happen. Why you didn't stop that bitch from coming over to talk to me? Her ass had so much to say, until I knocked that hoe in her mouth. Don't get mad at my fucking reaction, when you did some bullshit.”

Cannon had to take a deep breath because he had become highly annoyed. He never thought that he would still have problems even though he wasn't in a relationship. All he wanted to do was hang with Nicki and Finesse at the same time. He didn't want to hide anything from them, but he quickly realized that he went about this the wrong way.

“Look, I thought you was on some bullshit when ya pieced Nicki. I ain't know she was talkin' shit and had got up in ya face. I ain't mean to snap at ya.”

Finesse rolled her eyes and snatched out of his grasp. She entered her bedroom and kicked her heels off. Cannon didn't know what to say to Finesse to get her to see things his way. He didn't think it was a crime to have her around Nicki, especially with them not being together. He also didn't want to shit on Finesse for the weekend because Nicki was in town.

“How long you gon' be mad at me?”

Finesse cut her eyes at him and scoffed. “I meant what I said, Cannon. Leave me alone because I don't have time to deal with you and your fucking baggage.”

He stepped behind her and slid his hand up to her neck. “I can't do that,” he professed and kissed the nape of her neck.

Finesse put up a weak protest and pushed him with her butt. “Cannon move away from me. I don’t wanna hear that bullshit.”

He kissed her again causing her tensed body to relax in his arms. “Don’t be mad at me a’ight. I thought I was bein’ up front by invitin’ ya to the club while Nicki was there. I ain’t know you was gon’ wild out and piece her in the mouth.”

“Nah, you was being stupid as fuck.” she turned around to look him in the eyes. “Listen, I know we’re not together, so you really don’t owe me anything. But don’t bring me around a woman who believes that y’all still have a future with each other. She was very confident about getting back with you, and you need to be truthful and tell me what’s up. I’m not an insecure chick, but I’m not about to stay in a situation that may hurt me in the future.”

Cannon understood what Finesse was saying completely, but he didn’t want to be without her. Yes, he and Nicki had a lot of history together, but Finesse provided him with a feeling he hadn’t experienced with Nicki. Finesse kept him on his toes. She held so much pain in her heart that he wanted to be the one to heal her. Finesse, was severely misunderstood, but Cannon accepted all her flaws, and he knew that she was just a woman who needed love.

“Listen, I ain’t in a relationship with Nicki, and I ain’t discuss one with her. We still friends at the end of the day, and that’s why we still in contact with each other. I’m here with ya, and you the one I been spendin’ time with. As of right now, you don’t have shit to worry about when it comes to me and Nicki.”

“Have you fucked her?”

“Nah, I haven’t,” he answered truthfully.

Finesse stared at him as silence suffused the room. Cannon was praying that she believed him because walking away from her wasn’t an option for him.

“I’on like when ya mad at me,” he gripped her neck gently and softly pecked her lips.

Finesse smirked. “You know you don’t care about me being mad. I think you like to piss me off.”

“Well, ya do be lookin’ sexy and shit,” he joked.

Finesse smacked his chest. “Stop playing with me. I still don’t like you right now, so go home to that dry-face bitch.”

“Watch ya mouth,” he warned.

“Fuck her and you better tell that bitch I’m not the one to play games with. She should know by now that I smack bitches for fun. I’ll never let a bitch get in my face without swinging off first. I’m undefeated in these streets,” she boasted.

“Mane, gon’ somewhere. Niggas get one lucky punch in and think they fuckin’ Laila Ali and shit.”

“Ask about me, Cannon. People will tell you that my hands are lethal.”

He rolled his eyes. “Yeah a’ight. Aye, I’m goin’ to Nashville on Monday for a couple of days, and I want ya to come with me.”

Finesse smiled and laid her hand on her chest. “Really? You want me to come?”

“Yeah, I wanna show ya my city and spend some time with ya.”

“I guess I’ll go with you.”

He tipped his head. “Bet.”

“Well, you can go now. I’m about to get in the shower, take my sleeping pill, and go to bed.”

He lowered his brows. “Sleeping pill? You got trouble sleepin’?”

“Yeah, why? Do you have a remedy for me?” she retorted.

“What I tell ya about ya mouth. Ya betta’ chill out with that shit.”

“Bye Cannon. Go home to your G.I. Jane.”

He chuckled and kissed her forehead. “I’ll talk to ya later.”

She nodded and then walked into her en suite. Cannon left out of her bedroom and walked out of her condo. He was glad that he didn’t have to fight Finesse too much because between her and Nicki, he was drained.

Tata wiped her tears as she listened to the detective tell her that they didn’t have enough evidence to hold Finesse.

“You have to be fucking kidding me. I gave you the text messages so that should be enough evidence for y’all to

arrest that bitch,” she fumed.

“Ma’am, a text message isn’t sufficient evidence for an arrest. Plus, the suspect’s alibi checks out, so we had to let her go. Do you know anyone else that may have killed Mr. Franks?”

“Fuck y’all,” Tata snapped, ending the call.

She reached into her glove box and grabbed some napkins. She looked into her rearview mirror and dabbed her wet eyes. Finesse had gotten away with killing the love of her life, and Tata was so enraged that the officers didn’t take the evidence she had given them into consideration.

“I’m not about to sit and let this bitch get away with killing Quest,” she mumbled. “If I have to kill that bitch myself, I will.”

Tata closed the glove box and grabbed her keys out the ignition. She opened the car door and stepped out. She opened the back door and grabbed the baby’s car seat out. He was wide awake as he peered at Tata with eyes like Quest’s. Every time she looked into her son’s handsome face, thoughts of Quest emerged, causing her depression to spread like a wild fire.

She covered his face with a blanket and headed inside the grocery store. She had been neglecting her grocery shopping duties because she had been so aggrieved. Tata grabbed a buggy and secured the baby on the sitting area. She took a deep breath and willed herself to shop without bursting out in tears.

She aimlessly traveled down the aisle trying to decide what she was in need of. Tata looked at the formula on the bottom shelf and kneeled down. She grabbed two different brands and read their ingredients, so she could make comparisons. The baby didn't latch on to her nipple when he was first born so Tata was forced to give him formula. After reading over both labels and checking for any hidden ingredients, Tata stood and proceeded to place the can of formula in the basket.

“What the fuck are you doing?” she gritted at the man who was holding her baby.

The older gentleman with a salt and pepper goatee smiled at her as he bounced the baby in his arms. “You know, I always wanted a son, but God chose to bless me with three girls.”

Tata swiftly grabbed the baby and snatched him from the stranger's arms. She glared at him as she palmed the baby's head and held him closely to her chest. “Get your creepy-ass away from me.”

He smirked before his almond-shaped eyes turned cold. “That beautiful baby should be the motivation to keep your fuckin' nose out of people's business.”

Tata's nose wrinkled as her eyes narrowed. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Keep your fuckin' mouth off Finesse. I would hate for that baby to grow up without *two* parents because his fucking mama ran her mouth too much.”

Tata swallowed hard as her heart thumped violently inside her chest. The glower that the strange man was sending her way caused chill bumps to sprout across her body.

“Now, don’t try me because I know all about you. You’re a traveling nurse who works for an agency. You live on 85th & Wright, and your son goes to San’s Sandbox for daycare.”

Tears rushed to her eyes at the thought of someone watching her. It was times like this she wished that Quest was there to protect her.

“Now, leave Finesse alone and stop giving her name to the police. I mean what I say, and I won’t hesitate to send you where your precious Quest is.”

He quickly walked away, leaving Tata spooked and nauseated. She looked around timidly, wondering if the strange man was still hanging around. With her heart still beating erratically, Tata placed the baby back in the seat and grabbed her bag. She rushed out of the store at a rapid pace and jogged to her car. Her fingers shook vigorously trying to get her car door open. After fumbling with her keys, Tata finally opened the door. She swiftly secured the baby in the seat belt and then jumped inside the car. Her eyes darted back and forth on the parking lot to ensure that no one was watching her.

Tata shakily inserted her key in the engine, cranked it up, and sped out of the parking lot. That was the scariest thing that had happened to her, and she had no one to run to. She drove straight to a hotel, so she could get her thoughts together

and think of a way to move far away from Milwaukee. She needed to ensure that her son was in a safe environment.

Cannon walked inside his loft and dropped his keys on his kitchen peninsula. The day had finally come for Nicki to go back home, and he was somewhat relieved. Not because he didn't want her around, but the tension brewing between them left him a bit stressed. She was still annoyed by her spat with Finesse, even asking for him to leave her alone. Cannon understood her frustration, but she needed to understand that he was a single man, and he didn't owe her any explanation when it came to Finesse.

He strolled into the living room and found her sitting on the couch. Her hair was pulled into a high bun and her coffee-toned face wore a slight pout while she scrolled through her phone.

"Ya ready?" he asked.

Without saying a word, she nodded and stood. He grabbed her suitcase and the couple walked out of the loft. The two voyaged to his car in silence. Cannon didn't want to start an argument, so he refrained from conversing with her. When they arrived at his whip, he placed her bag in the trunk and then got inside the car. The air was thick and uncomfortable as he started his engine and pulled off.

After ten awkward minutes of stillness, Nicki cleared her throat. "We should talk about this weekend," she said.

Why?

"What about it?" he replied casually.

“That wild-ass banshee really embarrassed me the other night. Why wouldn’t you let me press charges against her? Do you like her that much?”

Cannon slightly rolled his eyes and made a left turn. “Cause ya didn’t need to get the law involved in that shit. Especially, knowing I’on fuck around with them at all.”

“Well, she shouldn’t be able to get away with punching me in my mouth.”

“I know, and I talked to her ‘bout that. At the same time, ya can’t be gettin’ into people’s personal space and talkin’ shit to them. Mufuckas don’t play that shit here.”

Nicki gasped and jerked her neck back. “So, because I told her something she didn’t want to hear, it’s my fault that she put her hands on me. You’re fucking unbelievable.”

“Aye, ya ‘bout to get on my fuckin’ nerves. If ya keep on, I’ll make sure that we ain’t gon’ ever talk again,” he threatened.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“It means I’ll block ya ass if ya keep on coming at me crazy. Stop blamin’ me ‘cause Finesse pieced ya ass.”

“Well, it’s your fucking fault.”

“How?”

“You’re the one that brought the bitch you’ve been fucking in my presence like everything was all good. Do you not see how all this shit could’ve been avoided if you would’ve kept that hoe away? The fuck is wrong with you?”

Cannon glared at her briefly before he returned his narrowed eyes on the road. “I shoulda’ just hid her from ya, but I fucked up by tryin’ to be honest. It’s cool though, I’ll keep who I’m fuckin’ with to myself next time since ya can’t handle it.”

“Don’t try to turn this shit on me. You knew I wouldn’t like you bringing another woman around.”

Cannon turned the volume up on the radio to drown out Nicki’s voice. He was officially done discussing Finesse with her. He should’ve gone with his first mind and kept Nicki in the dark about Finesse. He had a feeling that she wouldn’t be able to handle it and she proved him right.

Nicki reached over and turned the music down. “So, you’re really going to crank the music up while we’re having a conversation?” she ranted.

“Mane, fuck ya. I’on owe ya shit now stop talkin’ to me.”

Cannon reached over for a second time and turned the volume up on the radio. Nicki’s rant had placed him in a sour mood and he no longer wanted to speak to her. After twenty minutes of blaring music, and evil glares from Nicki, Cannon pulled up to the airport and parked. He got out and grabbed her suitcase from the trunk. He sat it on the sidewalk and got back in his car without saying goodbye to her. Once she got out of the car and closed the door, Cannon peeled off without giving her a second glance.

Chapter Eighteen

“This is the place you’ve been bragging about?” Finesse asked, pointing to the building.

She and Cannon had arrived in Nashville early that morning and were now stopping to get some lunch at Prince’s Hot Chicken.

“Yeah, they got the best chicken in Nashville. Ya said ya like spicy foods, right?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Well, this shit is gon’ sit you on ya ass. Now they got plain, mild, medium, hot, double hot and triple hot. Which one ya wanna try?”

Finesse pursed her lips together. “Umm...let me get triple hot.”

Cannon shook his head. “Nah, you ain’t gon’ be able to handle that shit.”

“Yeah, I will. I told you I like spicy foods, so this shit won’t be nothing to me,” she argued.

“Listen, this ain’t that KFC-ass shit y’all be eatin’. This shit will burn ya ass off and have ya crying. You ain’t gettin’ that one,” he spoke with finality.

Finesse sucked her teeth. “Well, just get me the hot then. Is that cool with you?”

He smirked. “Yeah. I’ll be right back.”

Cannon jumped out the car and went inside of the restaurant. Finesse pulled out her phone and browsed through her Facebook app. Cannon’s phone began to buzz as it rested on the middle console. She picked up the phone and noticed that Nicki was trying to FaceTime him. A sneaky grin crept on her face as she swiped the screen to answer the call.

“Hey, No Limit soldier,” Finesse sang with glee.

Nicki’s face immediately warped into a menacing scowl as she peered at Finesse.

“What the hell are you doing answering Cannon’s phone?” she barked.

Finesse twirled her hair with her finger. “Well, he left his phone in the car while he went inside of this restaurant called Prince’s to get us some lunch.”

“Wait, you’re in Nashville with him?”

“Oh yeah, he brought me down here, so he can show me where he comes from. This is a nice city too, girl. The people here are so damn welcoming. It’s so refreshing,” Finesse teased.

Nicki gritted her teeth. “You listen to me you wild-ass bitch, don’t get comfortable because he’s not going to choose you. I will always come first when it comes to the women in his life.”

Finesse rolled her eyes and pretended to yawn. “You told me that before, but yet he has me here showing me his city. Listen, Lara Croft, the only person who is in competition is you. I’m not competing for this nigga. I’m simply enjoying

the ride. You're the one who's in love, not me hoe. Find your damn dignity and stop trying to fight me over a man who doesn't even belong to you."

"Cannon will always belong to me," Nicki gritted. "Let me give you some advice, enjoy your time now because when I get out the military, I will come to claim what's mine."

"And let me give you some advice. Go to Sephora and buy you some damn makeup. You was at the club looking like you just got off work. A lil' mascara and blush ain't never hurt nobody. Make sure you give Cannon something to look at, damn. Your face was plain as fuck."

"Bitch, fuck you! I don't need makeup, but your rough-looking ass does."

"Bitch, go to Iraq and fight for our country hoe. This conversation is over."

Finesse ended the call and placed his phone back in the middle console. She found it quite comical that Nicki was so bothered by her being with Cannon. She refused to get wrapped up into a feud over Cannon. When it was all said and done, Cannon wasn't her man and she wasn't his woman. Finesse was simply enjoying him.

Ten minutes later, Cannon emerged from the restaurant carrying a bag. He opened the door and slid inside the car. Finesse grabbed the bag from him and took out the box of food. Her mouth watered at the chicken that was fresh and piping hot.

"Ooh, this looks good, Cannon."

She grabbed a piece of the wing and quickly stuffed it in her mouth. She chewed rapidly until the scorching flavor hit her tongue. She sucked in a breath through her mouth in order to relieve the scorching-hot taste that was taking over her taste buds.

“Ooh shit,” she fussed, wiping her forehead that had begun forming sweat beads.

Cannon laughed heartily. “I tole’ ya that shit was gon’ knock ya on ya ass.”

“Damn, is this the hot batch?” she asked, fanning her face.

“Hell yeah, and ya silly ass was tryin’ to get triple hot, and shit.”

“Damn, I didn’t know it was this damn spicy.” She grabbed the water bottle that was in the bag and opened it quickly. She gulped down half the bottle but didn’t get any relief.

“That water ain’t gon’ do shit,” he chuckled.

“Why did you give me this hot-ass shit?” Finesse whined, feeling like her tongue was going to fall off at any minute.

“You said ya ate spicy foods so that’s what the fuck I gave ya. Ya soft ass thought this was gone be that Hot Flamins kinda shit, didn’t ya?”

Finesse flipped her middle finger and grabbed a piece of bread. “It’s good, but hot as hell. I’m not soft and I guarantee I’m going to eat all of it.”

“I know you is because I’on like my fuckin’ money bein’ wasted. Ya ready to go back to the hotel for a minute before I go handle business?”

“Sure.”

Cannon started the car and headed to their hotel suite at Omni Hotel. The room was beautiful with ceiling-to-floor windows that showcased downtown Nashville. Textured walls gave the suite a modern feel with contemporary furniture decorating the space. The two of them sat in the living room area, eating their food and conversing.

“So, what do you have to go do later on?” Finesse asked.

Cannon wiped his mouth with a napkin. “I gotta handle some business with my homie.”

“What kind of business? As a matter of fact, what’s your role in the operation?”

He offered a side eye. “Damn, ya nosey as hell. Why ya in my business?”

“I just wanna know,” she replied sweetly. “If you don’t wanna tell me, then that’s cool.”

He remained silent for a while before he replied, “I clean up the money.”

“So, you don’t touch no drugs or shit like that?”

“Nah, I create businesses, hide money in overseas accounts and make investments in other companies, so it can look like the money we make from the operation is clean.”

“That sounds interesting. So, you must be good at what you do.”

He shrugged. “I guess ya can say that.”

Finesse smirked at his modest attitude. She could tell that he didn't like to get into the details of how he made his money.

“So, are you going to visit your family while you're here?”

His nose crinkled immediately. “Hell nah. They don't even know I'm in town and they ain't gon' know either.”

She chuckled. “Why won't you go see them? Don't you miss your mom and dad?”

“I talked to my pops earlier. I'on really deal with my mama like that.”

“Why not?”

“It's a lot of reasons. One of them is she ain't appreciative. She expects me to take care of her and her addiction while shittin' on the rest of us, in the process.”

Finesse had no idea that Cannon's mother battled an addiction. He didn't really speak about his family that much. Now she understood why.

“What kind of drugs is she on?”

He smacked his lips. “My mama don't do drugs. Her ass got a gamblin' addiction.”

Finesse formed her mouth into an O, because she hated that she had made the wrong assumption.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know. When someone says addiction, I automatically think drugs.”

“It’s cool,” he waved her off. “Where’s ya mama?”

Finesse’s eyes somberly casted down to the floor as her shoulders hunched. Her mother was never a topic of conversation. She rarely even discussed their mother with Sky, because the pain of Lexi’s death was still so present.

“You don’t wanna talk about it?” he asked.

“I don’t like to,” she mumbled.

“We ain’t gotta talk about her then. Why ya don’t fuck with ya pops like that, though?”

Her fists clenched instantly with thoughts of Malik invading her mind. “Because he’s the reason my mama is dead.”

Cannon studied her with his brown orbs. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat and brought her knees up to her chest.

“Why ya feel that way?”

“He took my mama with him to murder a man. They got caught and they were both sentenced to several years behind bars. She wasn’t able to manage being in jail, so she killed herself. My dad should’ve never placed her in that position because he knew she couldn’t handle it. He robbed us of our mother and I hate him for that. We shouldn’t have had to be raised by my uncle and aunt. I just feel like my dad dropped the ball when it came to his own family.”

Finesse took a deep breath. She had never expressed her disdain for Malik with anyone, except Sky.

“I get what ya sayin’ but ya shouldn’t place the blame on him,” Cannon defended.

She cut her eyes at him. “Yeah, I should. He broke our family up because he was too stupid to tell my mama to fall back. All this shit is his fault.”

“Not really,” he challenged. “I’m sure he didn’t make ya mama come with him to commit that murder. From what I hear, Malik was tryin’ to defend her because she had been disrespected. He was just handlin’ his business as a man, but he happened to do it the wrong way.”

“You don’t know nothing about my fucking family,” she snapped defensively.

“I know, but from what I hear, ya shouldn’t hate that man ‘cause he tried to defend ya mama. Give him a break.”

“Fuck him,” she seethed. “He should’ve given me and my sister a break, but no, we had to grow up without him *and* our mother because he couldn’t control himself.”

“Mane, Finesse, ya being too hard on Malik,” he complained.

“How?”

“‘Cause you being mad don’t even seem legit. Okay, ya mama and ya pops went to jail but he left ya with family. You act like y’all had to go into foster care and grow up being sexually abused and mistreated by strange mufuckas. Ya pops left y’all with your rich-ass family and ya sittin’ here complainin’ as if you ain’t have a good life.”

The veins in her neck throbbed as she peered at him with squinted eyes. She didn't like how Cannon was speaking on her family issues, and calling her out for her being upset about her mother no longer being here.

"Stop talking to me about this shit," she said, waving her hand dismissively.

"Why, 'cause I'm tellin' ya the truth?" he shot.

"No, because you're pissing me off right now...and like I said before, you don't know shit about my family."

"Well, I'on see shit like ya do. Ya pops just got out from doin' over twenty years on the inside, and he shouldn't have to come home to ya ass having an attitude with him, and shit."

"Shut the fuck up talking to me Cannon," she grumbled with shaky vocals. "You don't know shit about my life."

"I'on have to know everything, but what I do know is that ya need to let that shit go with Malik and try to bond with him. Shit, he probably didn't make ya mama come with him to kill ol' boy, and I'm sure he ain't tell her to kill herself either."

Without notice, Finesse jumped from her seat and rushed Cannon. She swung her fist toward his face, but it didn't connect. Cannon forcefully grabbed her arms and pinned them behind her back.

"Let me go!" she screamed with veins protruding in her forehead.

Finesse was bucking so badly that they fell to the floor. Cannon straddled her and grabbed her face. He was squeezing

her cheeks so hard that she could feel his fingernails digging into her skin.

“I’ll murder ya ass if ya ever try to swing off on me again. The fuck wrong with ya?” he growled with his fair skin quickly growing red.

“Get off me!” she yelled with tears streaming from her eyes.

“Fuck that! Ya wanna get mad ‘cause I was spiittin’ the truth! Well, I’m ‘bout to piss ya off even more. Ya got a lot of nerve stickin’ ya nose up in the air at ya pops when ya been out here settin’ niggas up for money and shit. How the fuck you look down on Malik and have an attitude with him when you ain’t been livin’ right? You a fuckin’ embarrassment to the Lattimore’s! So, humble ya self and cut ya own grass before you judge somebody else fuckin’ yard.”

Cannon muffed her face before he stood, grabbed his keys, and stormed out of the hotel suite. Finesse lay on her back as her body quivered with each tear that fell. The loud cry that left her lips could be heard on the entire floor of the hotel. She covered her drenched face with her hands and sobbed loudly. She was so hurt because Cannon’s words had cut her deeply. Her family issues were a sore subject for her, and she regretted opening up to him because he had thrown it back in her face.

Finesse had deeper matters than her daddy issues. She had been heartbroken on so many different occasions, but instead of facing her issues head on, she decided to sweep them under the rug and go about her life like nothing happened. There were so many trials that had transformed her

into the person she was today. She wasn't proud of the reflection she saw in her mirror, and Cannon's words had made her feel ten times worse.

For hours, Finesse lay in the same spot on the floor and wept. She wept for her mother, she wept for her father, and she wept for the person she used to be. Although it pained her, Finesse had to finally accept the reality that she was a damaged soul

Two days later...

Finesse nibbled on the inside of her cheek as she tried to stop her heart from racing. The warm, humid air swept across her face while the sun gleamed brightly in the sky. The waves from the lake were calming, but Finesse was unsettled. Although the day was a beautiful one, she felt anything but cheerful. Her fight with Cannon was still weighing heavily on her psyche. He had spewed some words that left a dent on her heart. After crying for several hours in the hotel suite, Finesse picked up what was left of her, and packed her bags. She called an uber and arrived at the airport, so she could go back home.

When she arrived home, she locked herself in her room and cried for two days straight. Her heart was bleeding; not only because of her altercation with Cannon, but because there had been some wounds that were opened, and she needed to deal with them. Her mother sat on her mind so heavily, causing Finesse to miss her more.

She wasn't sure if she would ever come to terms with her mother's death. A part of Finesse felt like she would never

get over her suicide. She felt like the grief was too great to heal from. But Finesse was tired of holding pain in her heart. She made the call that needed to happen, so she could start her healing process.

Malik ambled over to the bench where she sat, wearing a white T-shirt, denim shorts and white Forces. His low hair cut sprouted flicks of grey as well as his goatee. He gave her a faint smile as he sat next to her.

“Hey,” he greeted.

Finesse gazed at him with tears forming in her eyes. His brows knitted in confusion as he placed his hand on her back.

“What’s wrong?”

Finesse shook her head finding it difficult to muster any words. Her heart felt so heavy and filled with sadness, that she didn’t even know what to say to him.

He rubbed her back gently. “What’s wrong, Finesse? You can tell me.”

“I’m just so mad at you,” she revealed with tears rushing down her deep brown cheeks.

His eyes fell sullen. “I know that.”

She sniffled and wiped her wet face with the pads of her fingers. “I stopped loving you at eighteen. I know it sounds bad, but it’s the truth.”

Malik peeled his eyes away from her and observed the waves of the lake. “You’re still mad at me about your mom?”

She nodded.

“I’m sorry, Finesse. If I could take it all back I would. I would’ve never placed Lexi in the position to go to jail, let alone kill herself.”

Finesse couldn’t hold the pain in anymore. Abruptly, she burst out in heavy sobs feeling like her chest would explode with misery.

“Don’t cry, baby,” Malik coached, pulling her closer to his chest.

She was so devastated by everything that had occurred in her life that she couldn’t help but release her pain through her tears. Years of acting like nothing had bothered her, had finally taken its toll on Finesse.

“I’m mad at you, but I realized that I was mad at you for a reason that had nothing to do with you. I blamed you for something that happened when it really wasn’t fair.”

“Like what?” he quizzed with his eyes boring into her.

Finesse positioned her body toward him, her eyes still cast down to the ground. She picked at her fingernails with an overload of thoughts swarming through her head.

“I was raped when I was eighteen.”

Time seemed to stand still as Malik stared at her with widened eyes. Her peepers timidly roamed to his face, wondering what was going through his mind.

“What? When did this happen? Who the fuck was it?” he gritted through his teeth.

“It happened when I went to school in White Water. I didn’t know the guy,” she muttered.

Malik rested his forehead on his clasped hands and closed his eyes. They sat in an uncomfortable silence for a while before he asked, “Why didn’t you tell me? I would’ve had that mothafucka hanging from a tree if I’d known you were violated.”

“I felt bad,” she cried. “I just felt ashamed, so I didn’t tell anyone. Not even Sky knows about this. It was one of the worst moments in my life.”

Malik swiped his mouth with his hand and held his head down. He cracked his knuckles and shook his head. “I’m so pissed off. You need to tell me something about his ass. I swear I’ll kill that bitch. Just give me a first name.”

“Dad, I don’t want that. I just wanna move on from it,” she whined.

He cut his eyes at her. “Well, I don’t wanna move on from it. I wanna snap his fuckin’ neck.”

Finesse released a heavy breath and covered her eyes with her hands. Revealing what happened to her, had to be the hardest thing she had ever done. She was tired of carrying the heavy burden that had altered her outlook on men.

“I remember when I went to school; I thought college was all about fun. I had it all mapped out. I would go to class in the morning and then I would party at night. Aunt Kitty didn’t want me to go to school away from the city. She always wanted us close to her, but I just wanted some freedom.”

Finesse took a moment to wipe her tears before she continued. “One night, I went to this party with my roommate. It was a frat party with a bunch of upperclassmen. When I got

there, it was a lot of people. I didn't want to bring too much attention to myself, so I just sat in a corner and sipped on my drink. Well, this guy kept eyeing me, and then he eventually came over. He introduced himself as G, and he seemed like a cool guy. We were talking and getting to know each other. He offered me a drink, but I refused. In my mind, I could hear Uncle Johan saying don't take a drink from someone I didn't know."

She chuckled at the memory. "Well, the house was big, and he told me that it was a rec room downstairs. So, we went down to the basement and there was a pool table and a dart board. He told me that his room was down there and asked me if I wanted to see it, so I said yeah. Looking back, I was so damn naïve to everything. Well, I went into his room and he closed the door. The look in his eyes changed. It was almost like a demonic glare that immediately had me on guard. I told him that I wanted to go back upstairs, and he just attacked me."

Finesse wept at the memory because it had been haunting her for nine long years. "He um... ripped my panties off and pulled up my skirt. He took my innocence and virginity that night and I have never gotten over it. After he raped me, I ran out the house and went to my dorm room. I packed my bags and drove all the way back to Milwaukee. I made up a story to Aunt Kitty and Uncle Johan about the people being racist, and I never enrolled back in school. I just couldn't tell them what happened because I felt so ashamed. When the guy was violating me, he kept saying that I wanted it. In my young mind, I thought that maybe I did provoke him to rape me. I was just mentally fucked up after that incident

and that's when I started hating you. I hated you for not protecting me from that monster. I also hated you for not being there when I needed you most."

Malik offered her a glossy stare. When she gazed into his eyes, she could see the regret surfacing. The expression on his face was a painful one because Finesse possessed that same countenance after she was violated.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know that happened to you. You know if I was able to be there for you, I would've never allowed someone to violate you like that."

Finesse nodded. "I not only hated you, but I started hating men. So, when I first took some money from a guy, it brought me satisfaction because I wanted to hurt dudes the same way they had hurt me. I made sure to never get attached to anyone because I didn't want to feel love. That rape-shit fucked me up to the point where I had no shame in setting niggas up to be robbed. I know it sounds crazy but that's just what it was. That was my only way to deal with being sexually assaulted."

"So, what can we do to help you heal? I don't want you walking around feeling like that anymore, Finesse. You're worth so much more than heartbreak; and if I have to spend the rest of my days making up for my absence, then that's what I'm going to do."

She peered at him and admired the sincerity in his eyes. "I don't want to hate you anymore. I want to build a relationship with you, so I can really heal from my past. I believe the love from my father will treat all the pain that's been building up inside me. I see the way you interact with

Sky, and I get jealous because deep down, I want you to love me the way that you do her.”

He grabbed both of her hands. “I love you both the same. She’s let me into her life more than you have. Do you think I like interacting with one of my daughters and not the other one? I hate it, but you made it clear that you weren’t ready for me to be in your life, so I fell back until you were. I’m ready for us to bond because I miss you, Finesse. I miss my lil’ girl that used to come see me and bring me Famous Amos cookies from the vending machine.”

Finesse laughed at the memory because she always made sure she had something for Malik when she went to visit him in prison.

“I’m not going to lie, I miss those days... I was happier then,” she mumbled the latter sentence.

“Would you like to go to counseling?”

She quickly shook her head. “No, I really don’t like the idea of counseling. I feel much better now that I’ve told you what happened to me. I want you to keep what happened between us, Dad. Please don’t tell anyone about the rape.”

He dipped his head. “I won’t tell a soul. I promise.”

She closed her eyes and inhaled a deep breath. She felt like her soul had been cleansed after revealing to Malik, her troubles with him. She was ready to take the next step with their relationship, because she truly desired the love of her dad.

“Do you ever think about *her*?” Finesse asked, referring to Lexi.

He swayed his head back and forth. "I try not to."

"How did her death affect you?"

He sighed deeply and leaned back on the bench. "Man...it fucked me up. You know we didn't have any contact with each other while we were locked up, so we went years without speaking. I missed her so much while I was on the inside. When I found out that she took her life, it fucked me up. I damn near lost my mind when I called Johan and he told me the news. Afterward, I ended up going to the hole for months because I attacked a C.O. I was so angry that all I did was fight. I just wished I could've had one conversation with Lexi before she killed herself. I felt like I could've saved her."

Finesse instantly recognized the same sadness she possessed, in Malik's eyes. She never took time to think about how her mother's death had affected him. It was always about her and her feelings; now, Finesse felt incredibly guilty for her behavior toward him.

"I'm sorry for treating you the way that I've been treating you. I was just fucked up about everything."

He smiled faintly and pulled her closer to him. "It's okay. We're going to start over and put everything behind us."

Finesse nodded because she liked that idea. The only thing that plagued her mind was her fight with Cannon.

"You know that even though I was absent physically, I always took care of you and Sky."

She lifted her head to look at his face. "Really?"

"Yep, I've always taken care of you and Sky financially. You remember your first car?"

Finesse tipped her head. “Yeah. Did you buy it?”

“Yep, and when you totaled it two months later, Johan told me not to buy you another car, but I had to. I couldn’t have Sky out here driving her own whip, and you not have anything.”

She had no idea that her father was the one that purchased her first car. She always thought it was a gift from Johan.

“I had no idea.”

“I also gave you money to start up your business too.”

Her mouth dropped. “Are you serious?”

“Yep, I knew you wouldn’t accept it if it was coming from me, so I told Johan to tell y’all that he had to clean some money up. I didn’t want y’all to work for anybody, so I gave y’all money to create your own businesses. I wanted to always put y’all in a position to get your own bread.”

“Wow, Dad, I didn’t know that. I always thought Uncle Johan was behind everything. It gives me a new perspective on you.”

“I know Johan and Kitty raised you and Sky, but as a man I had to contribute to your lives some kind of way. Since I was making money on the inside as well as the outside, I made sure y’all were straight, financially. I felt like it was *my* responsibility...not Johan’s.”

“Well, thank you, because I truly didn’t know. I just hope we can move forward and let go of the past.”

He kissed her forehead. “We will baby.”

Chapter Nineteen

Cannon was hanging out at Kano's house, with Slim and Mac, who had come up for a visit. It had been a week since his fight with Finesse, and he felt bad for his behavior. Her family issues were a sore spot, and he shouldn't have spoken on them knowing she was extremely sensitive about it. Cannon realized that his delivery was all wrong, and he should've handled Finesse with better care. He also shouldn't have provoked her to the point that she would attack him physically.

The biggest thing that he regretted from their blowup was when he told Finesse that she was an embarrassment to her family. He hated that those words had spilled from his lips during his fit of rage. He definitely owed her an apology, but he wasn't sure if she was ready to receive it.

"Aye, I saw Finesse at the barbershop and she called herself not talking to me again. I swear your girl is crazy as fuck," Kano laughed.

Cannon smirked. "You act like ya ol' lady ain't wild as fuck, too."

"Man, Mafia is cool compared to Finesse," Kano argued.

"Nigga, she shot her ex-husband twice. Did ya forget that shit?" Cannon reminded him.

“Yeah, Mafia is a savage. Shit, you could’ve sensed that by her name.” Mac laughed.

Kano shrugged. “Fuck dude. She did what she had to do.”

They all burst into a fit of laughter.

“You ain’t scared Mafia gon’ do you like that? I would be sleeping with one eye opened if I was you,” Slim chimed in.

“Hell nah. Mafia’s ex-husband was a bitch. She knows that she’s dealing with somebody of a different caliber. Mafia knows I don’t play that shit,” Kano boasted.

“She gon’ up a pistol on his ass soon,” Cannon joked.

Kano laughed. “Fuck you. Finesse ain’t stolen from you yet?”

“Right,” Slim added.

“She ain’t on that shit no more,” Cannon said in her defense.

“She be stealing?” Mac asked with his brows furrowed.

“She used to set niggas up to be robbed, and shit. She was out here living real life scandalous,” Kano spoke.

“Damn,” Mac drawled. “Cannon, how you end up fuckin’ with her? I wouldn’t even think that you would entertain a broad like that.”

Cannon shrugged. “I’on know.”

“Nah, nigga you know,” Kano intervened. “She put that pussy on his ass and that was all she wrote.”

“Really, bruh?” Mac asked with humor in his tone.

Cannon tried to hide the smile that was surfacing on his face but failed miserably. “Mane, Kano, stop tellin’ my fuckin’ business.”

Kano waved his hand. “I’m just lettin’ Mac know what’s up since he don’t be here that often.”

“So, you let ol’ girl get you with pussy. I guess, but why you ain’t let me meet her when she came down to Nashville with you?” Mac questioned.

Cannon tugged on his chin patch. “Cause we got into it and she left.”

“Why y’all get into it?” Slim quizzed.

Cannon paused for a moment wondering if he wanted to tell them about the blow up at the hotel. He decided he would keep the details of their argument private and inform them on the other things that occurred.

“We was talkin’ ‘bout some deep shit, and her ass got mad at what I tole’ her. Then she tried to swing off on me.”

“Are you really surprised?” Kano chuckled. “You know Finesse stay tryin’ to fight somebody,”

“So, you pieced her?” Mac questioned.

“Nah, but I wanted to,” Cannon revealed. “She pissed me off so bad, I ended up sayin’ some shit that was fucked up.”

“Like what?” Kano asked.

“I tole’ her she was an embarrassment to her family.”

“Damn,” Slim said, holding his fist to his mouth. “You definitely shitted on her by saying that.”

Kano shook his head. “I know she was salty by that shit. She must’ve really pissed you off.”

Cannon frowned. “Hell yeah, she did. I’on play that fightin’ shit and she almost made me knock her fuckin’ teeth out, but I ain’t mean to say all that to her.”

“So, that’s why she left, huh? What you gon’ do with her now? I personally think you should give Nicki a chance. She loves ya ass,” Mac mentioned.

“Yeah, but Nicki be on that bullshit though,” Kano noted. “Always changing up on my nigga and shit.”

“She wanna get back togetha’ when she gets out the army, but I’on know. I love Nicki but I ain’t in love with her like I used be.”

“But y’all got history though; and as far as I’m concerned, you can learn to fall back in love with her ass,” Mac advised.

“Man, Cannon ain’t trying to be living like that,” Slim fussed. “Who wants to be with a bitch that they ain’t in love with?”

“I think his feelings for Finesse grew more than he expected them to,” Kano smiled sneakily.

Cannon waved his hand dismissively, because deep down while he knew it was true, he just didn’t want to confirm it with them.

“I’ll figure that shit out when the time comes. As of now, I ain’t gon’ worry about it.”

Kano shook his head. “In a minute, you’re gonna have to worry about it. Nicki is about to get out the army and she’s expecting you to be with her. Then you got Finesse crazy ass who you got feelings for. You’re gonna have to make a decision sooner than later.”

Cannon knew what Kano was saying was true. A difficult decision was lurking in the shadows, and he wasn’t certain if he would be able to handle choosing between Nicki and Finesse. He never expected his feelings for Finesse to blossom like they did, but he didn’t regret it a bit. Despite their relationship being unconventional, he enjoyed having her in his life. Nicki, on the other hand, was his heart. They had several years under their belt, and even though Cannon wasn’t in love with her, he still adored her. He just didn’t know who the lady in his life would be when it was time to make a decision.

Nicki stacked several books in a box and sealed it with some tape. She then grabbed another box and began to throw her shoes inside. She was getting a head start on packing up her belongings since she had another month left to discharge. Nicki was so excited to be leaving the military life that she couldn’t contain her elation. Although she was ready for life after the army, she was still unsettled because she hadn’t spoken to Cannon since she left Milwaukee.

After her disastrous FaceTime call with Finesse, Nicki stopped reaching out to him for a while. A part of her felt

threatened by Finesse's presence, and she wondered if Cannon was truly falling for her. It terrified her that another woman was getting close to the man that she had deemed hers. She was extremely territorial when it came to Cannon, and she didn't like any other woman getting close to him. Nicki's heart almost exploded when she learned that he had taken Finesse with him to Nashville.

She was so agitated that she wanted to book a flight back home just, so she could beat Cannon and Finesse's ass, but she knew that she had to display some kind of self-control since she couldn't get into any trouble now that she was being discharge soon. So, Nicki decided to put some space between her and Cannon while she sorted through the array of emotions that invaded her mind. She pondered letting Cannon go, but after much consideration, she refused to give up her sweetheart. Nicki had planned her life with only him, and she wasn't going to back down because Finesse had come in and tried to take her place.

"Damn, I see you're packing early," Brandon joked, as he entered her bedroom.

She chuckled. "Yeah I figured I would get it out the way. I don't like doing things at the last minute."

"I feel you but uh...when are we going to get a divorce? What the hell are you waiting on?"

Nicki walked closer to where Brandon stood. She clasped her hands together and released a deep sigh. "I've been meaning to talk to you about that?"

He stared at her with lifted brows. "What's up?"

“I need your health insurance, so I need to stay married to you until I get a new job. I won’t be able to afford the transitional healthcare benefits, so I need you for a little while longer.”

He gawked at her. “You can’t be serious.”

“Actually, I am.”

“So, you’re about to move with Cannon and you’re still married to me? Aye, I think that’s a bad idea. I know I told you to see if you could hide it, but I don’t think you should do that. I’m trying to move on too, and I don’t want to meet a woman and still be married to you. Besides, it could end badly for you.”

“No, it won’t,” Nicki denied. “Cannon won’t find out. I’ll find a job first and then we’ll get a divorce. Brandon, I promise that it won’t be that long.”

“Just get the divorce now,” he urged.

“No! I need my damn meds. You know how bad my back gets, plus I’m gonna be due for another epidural soon. That shit is very expensive and I’m not trying to pay out of pocket for that. Listen, I can’t go without my medication, Brandon. I need you to ride this out with me.”

“Nicki this shit is janky as hell,” he rolled his eyes and scoffed. “I can’t believe you’re stepping to that man and ain’t got a divorce yet. If you love Cannon the way you say you do, then you would go into y’all relationship without all this secret-ass baggage. Don’t you want to go into your relationship with a clean slate?”

“Yes, I do,” she groaned “And I don’t need you reminding me of the shit. I should be able to find a job within the first month. I promise after I get my own insurance, I’ll divorce you and allow you to live happily ever after.”

Brandon shook his head slowly. “A’ight, I’ll let you do things your way. I just hope everything goes as planned.”

“It will; don’t worry.”

Nicki went back to packing her shoes as Brandon walked out of her room. She was aware that she was playing a potentially treacherous game, but she was confident that things would work out in her favor. Cannon wasn’t a guy that pried for information, so Nicki knew it would be easy to hide Brandon from him. She was certain she had everything under control. The only thing left for her to do, was get Cannon on board for their relationship, so they could live like they always discussed.

Finesse stood over her stove pouring pasta into the pot of boiling water. Deshawn sat at the island with her face buried into her phone. It was a rare occasion that Finesse cooked but she was in the mood for something homemade.

“Finesse, why didn’t you tell me you could cook? I thought you were the type that couldn’t boil water,” Deshawn kidded.

“The type like you?” she retorted.

Deshawn smacked her lips. “I messed up one time, Finesse. You won’t even let me redeem myself.”

“Redeem yourself in your own damn house. Hell, I didn’t invite you to stay here so you could burn my shit down.”

“Whatever. How come you don’t cook more often?”
Deshawn questioned.

“Because I don’t have anyone to cook for. If I get hungry I go buy some fast food or go to a restaurant. It’s boring to cook for just me.”

“Well, you can start cooking for me.”

Creases formed on Finesse’s forehead. “Bitch, I ain’t your mama.”

Deshawn laughed. “You’re the worst, I swear.”

“Shit, you’ll be lucky if I offer you a plate of my seafood pasta. I don’t like sharing my food.”

“Whatever. I saw that your pops was over here earlier. Are you guys getting along better or you still don’t fuck with him?”

Finesse grew quiet for a moment. She and Malik were making an effort to bond with each other and she couldn’t deny that it felt great.

“No, I’m trying to build a relationship with him. He’s a real cool dude. He’s like the male version of Sky, but he has a switch like me,” Finesse joked.

“I’m sure his switch is worse if he went to jail for murder. Did he really kill somebody?”

Finesse nodded. “Yeah, the guy had disrespected my mom and put his hands on her. Malik handled his ass, but there

was an eye witness that testified against him in court. I hope they got that bitch, too.”

“Wow!” Deshawn sat in awe. “Man, your family has been on a journey, but I’m glad you guys are making an effort to put everything behind you and focus on your relationship.”

“Yeah, me too.”

A knock at the door interrupted their conversation. Finesse looked at Deshawn with a raised brow. She usually didn’t have any visitors and her family didn’t alert her that they were stopping by. She wondered who was popping up at her home.

“Go see who that is,” she ordered to Deshawn.

Deshawn rose from her seat and padded to the door. Finesse busied herself and poured her sauce and seafood into the cooked pasta.

“Oh my God, Finesse! Look at what it is!” Deshawn gushed.

Finesse glanced up and gasped when she saw her holding a white Maltese in her arms. She quickly dropped the spoon she had been holding onto the counter and rushed over to Deshawn.

“Aww, whose dog is this?” Finesse grabbed the white puppy from her.

The puppy licked Finesse’s chin, causing her to giggle.

“I don’t know. She was sitting in this little doggie bed in front of the door,” Deshawn replied.

Finesse noticed something attached to the dog's collar. She flipped the tag over where it read "*I'm sorry.*"

A smile immediately stretched across Finesse's face because she knew exactly who sent the dog. She hadn't spoken to Cannon in a week and she missed him terribly. The stubborn part of her wouldn't call him, but she was more than happy to see that he was trying to make amends with her.

"What does it say?" Deshawn asked.

"It says, 'I'm Sorry'. Cannon sent her. Should I call him and say thank you?"

Deshawn shrugged. "I would. I think that it was sweet of him to send you another dog. Did you guys get into an argument or something? What is he sorry for?"

Finesse waved her hand. "It doesn't matter. Can you manage to stir the pasta together or am I gonna have to do the shit?"

Deshawn smacked her lips. "I can stir food, Finesse."

"Girl, don't get slick like you didn't wake me up to the smoke alarm weeks ago. Just stir the food while I make a call."

With the dog secured tightly in her arms, Finesse strolled to her bedroom and shut the door. She grabbed her phone off the charger and scrolled to Cannon's name. She inhaled a deep breath before she tapped the screen to make the call.

"Hello?" he answered.

Finesse briefly closed her eyes and relished that country drawl she'd yearned to hear for over a week.

"Hey," she spoke quietly.

"You got my present?"

"Yes, I did. Thanks for the dog. You don't know how happy this made me, because my dog was killed awhile back."

"I know."

"How?"

"I was tryin' to think of somethin' to buy ya, but I couldn't come up with shit. You ain't seem like a woman who likes flowers and shit, so I asked Mafia what I should get ya. She ain't know, so she tole' me to call Sky, and she tole' me to get ya a dog."

Tears came to Finesse's eyes because she appreciated his efforts as well as Sky for thinking about the loss of her dear Lexi Pop.

"Thank you," she mumbled, becoming overwhelmed with emotions.

"Ya know I'm sorry, right?"

She nodded. "I am too."

"I was wrong for provokin' ya. I shouldna' been speakin' on ya family issues when I knew you was sensitive about it."

"I appreciate that, Cannon. Our argument wasn't sitting right with me. We were both wrong for how we went about things."

“Yeah, I know. I wanna see ya.”

“When?”

“Right now. I’m sitting in my whip outside of ya buildin’.”

She smacked her lips. “What if I said no, I don’t wanna see you?”

“I knew ya wasn’t gon’ say that, especially since I got ya the dog. I set that shit up good, didn’t I?” he cracked.

She chuckled. “I guess. Come on up.”

“A’ight.”

Finesse ended the call and placed the dog on her bed. She ran to the mirror and took her wild hair out of the messy bun that sat on top of her head. She fluffed her waves to make it look presentable.

Finesse then grabbed the puppy before hurrying to the door and opening it. Cannon ambled to her door wearing a Black Pyramid jersey, black jeans and high top black forces. His head was covered in a skull cap and he wore no jewelry. Finesse couldn’t stop the smile that was spreading across her face.

“You keep them titties out don’t ya?” he teased, walking inside her condo.

She smirked and closed the door. Cannon walked over to her open kitchen and lifted the pot on the stove.

“Who cooked this?” he questioned, staring at the seafood pasta.

“I did,” Deshawn joked.

“You can’t even open a can of corn let alone cook some shit. I’m the one who cooked,” Finesse fussed.

“You’re so disrespectful. I’m going to my room,” Deshawn announced.

“Bye,” Finesse shot and bumped Cannon’s body with her hip so that he could step away from the range.

“I don’t like you all in my pot when you haven’t washed your hands. You hungry?”

“Yeah, hook me up.”

Cannon washed his hand while Finesse made him a plate. He then sat at the island as she placed the food in front of him.

“Can ya cook, Finesse? Ya know I’m from the south and my taste buds accustomed to good shit.”

Finesse rolled her eyes, rubbing the puppy’s head. “Just eat, damn.”

Cannon grabbed the fork and scooped some food into his mouth. He glanced at Finesse and flashed a grin.

“This shit fire,” he said, stuffing more into his mouth.

“I know,” she bragged. “Despite what you may think, I cook very good.” She took a seat across from him.

“This only one meal though, so calm ya ass down.”

Finesse giggled. “I hate you.”

“Really?” he questioned with a pensive stare.

Finesse swallowed hard. “Yeah.”

He shot her a crooked grin before eating more of his food.

“Guess who I reached out to?”

“Who?” he asked.

“My dad.”

His thick brows lifted. “Really? What for?”

She shrugged and played with the puppy’s paw. “I don’t know. I felt like it was time for us to talk. A lot of things happened to me that he didn’t know about, and I felt like we should talk everything out.”

Cannon chewed and nodded slowly. “That’s good. You don’t need to be mad at him no more.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Ya wanna know why I went so hard at ya in Nashville?”

“Why?”

“‘Cause ya had a good life and ya still complainin’, and shit. When I was younger, I was in foster care for a year and that was the worst shit I ever been through. I would get with different families and they would make me clean up like a slave, and then they wouldn’t feed me. I was being physically abused by my foster mother, and ain’t nobody rescue me from shit. That’s why when you was complainin’ ‘bout being raised by ya auntie and uncle, it pissed me off ‘cause you ain’t have to go through shit like kids who don’t have families go through.”

Finesse sat speechless. Her brown orbs became glassy as she gazed at Cannon in disbelief. She didn't know his story. She didn't even ask about his life. She immediately became doused in guilt, because she always complained about her absent parents, but she also had a good life.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know you went through that. Where were your parents?"

"Mane, my pops had got locked up for two years, and my mama was just being wild as fuck. She ain't care about shit when I was younger. Shit, she still don't."

"Is that why you two don't have a good relationship?"

He nodded. "Yep. I'on respect how she moves, but I still make sure she's straight just because she's my mama. I never liked how selfish her ass was."

Finesse placed the dog on the floor. "How did you get out of foster care?"

"My auntie got custody of me. When my pops got outta jail, he tried to take me, but my auntie started to get attached to me and she wouldn't give me back," he chuckled.

She smiled. "So, you just stayed with her?"

"Yeah, but after I turned eighteen, she moved to California to be closer to family. She begged me to come with her, but I wanted to stay in Nashville."

"Do you still keep in contact with your aunt?"

Cannon wiped his mouth with a napkin and pushed his empty plate away. "Yeah, that's the lady who raised me, so I'll never not talk to her."

Finesse gave him a faint smile because she didn't realize that she and Cannon had something in common. They were both raised by their aunts who loved them dearly.

“I love my auntie so much. I learned so much from her, and although I'm the problem child, she never treated me any differently than Mafia and Sky. Even when I would do something crazy, she would curse me out, but at the end of the day, she made sure to tell me she loved me.”

Cannon licked his lips as his peepers absorbed her mug. “Mane, ya really somethin' else, Finesse, but I can't stay away from ya ass.”

Finesse returned a gaze. She didn't like discussing her feelings, but Cannon was making her feel emotions that she had never experienced from a man. In the past, Finesse wouldn't get close to other guys because she didn't want to receive any love from them, but Cannon was different. He slithered himself into her heart, and she didn't know if she would be able to get rid of him so easily.

He smirked. “Let's go to ya room. I gotta show ya somethin'.”

Finesse grinned. “Like what?”

“I can't tell ya. I gotta show ya.”

Finesse playfully rolled her eyes and followed him to the bedroom with the puppy trailing closely behind her.

Chapter Twenty

Cannon buried his face into the crook of Finesse's neck. Her sweet scent drifted into his nose causing the blissful sensation he was experiencing, to multiply. He slithered his tongue across her skin and traveled all the way to her lips. He attacked her mouth with force while digging deep into her saturated center.

"How this dick feel?" he asked in a husky tone.

Her eyes were closed as she dug her fingernails into his skin on his back. "Good," she moaned.

Cannon kissed her chin and pulled out his dick before thrusting it back into her pussy.

"Ya wet as fuck. Ya must'a missed me?" he groaned, becoming feeble with each stroke.

"I did, baby. Stop playing and give me what I need."

Cannon tucked his bottom lip between his teeth and pinned her legs back. His picked up his pace and began to plunge into her wetness.

"Ooh, just like that," Finesse whispered, moving her hips in a circular motion.

Don't nut. Don't nut.

He was willing himself not to climax because he wanted to enjoy the satisfying sensation her pussy was giving

him. Finesse was at the top of his list. She was number one when it came to giving him pleasure.

“Finesse, ya pussy is the best. I’m tryin’ so bad not to bust.”

Her heavily lusted lids peered at him. “Come on and beat this pussy up.”

He did as he was instructed and stroked her slit, making sure to hit every inch of her walls.

“You gon’ let me see that cream?”

“Mmm hmm.”

Cannon flipped her over and gripped her thick hips before stroking her walls from the back. He looked down and noticed her wetness was coated all over his manhood.

Damn, why did I put her in this position?

Cannon was already trying to hold on to the orgasm that was threatening to spill at any minute, but looking at Finesse’s ass cheeks smacking against his pelvis made his dick tingle in delight.

“Throw it back,” he commanded.

Finesse gripped her satin sheets and threw her ass against him. His head fell back as the pleasure rushed through his body. Cannon was so into the intense bliss he was experiencing, that he didn’t even know that Finesse was creaming all over his manhood. Her body bucked as her essence dripped from her pussy. He smiled and grabbed her waist. He rammed into her center until he finally climaxed.

Although Cannon had just busted a mind-blowing nut, he needed more of Finesse. She was like a drug that he was proud to be addicted to.

He laid down next to her with his chest heaving up and down. “I’m tired as hell. Finesse ya always havin’ me drained, and shit.”

She smacked her lips and laid her head on his chest. “That wasn’t my fault this time. You’re the one that pounced on me as soon as I closed the door.”

“I needed ya and I was missin’ ya. Those five days of not talkin’ to ya felt like a damn month.”

She smiled. “You like me, don’t you?”

“Yep,” he replied proudly.

“Oh, you’re admitting it now, huh?”

“Ya shoulda’ known that I like you. I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t care about ya crazy ass.”

She playfully slapped his chest. “If I’m crazy, you are too.”

“Whatever. Aye, I need more,” he announced as his manhood stiffened.

She smirked and rolled her eyes. “I’m assuming you want me on top.”

“Yeah come do that shit to me that drive me crazy.”

Finesse giggled and climbed on top of him.

Days later, Cannon sat at the barbershop waiting to get a fresh cut. He hated that he had forgotten to make an appointment because he was forced to wait in line. When his phone rang, he noticed that Nicki was calling him. He hadn't spoken to her since she left Milwaukee and a part of him missed her. He stood and walked outside so he could get some privacy before answering her call.

“What's up?”

“Hey you. I've missed you.”

Cannon smiled and rubbed his hand over his thick, black fade. “Oh yeah. How come I ain't heard from ya then?”

“Well actually, I did call you but your lil' jump-off answered.”

“Jump-off? I'on fuck with jump-offs,” he shot with knitted brows.

“You know who I'm talking about. The girl you've been seeing. We kind of had words, so I decided not to call you for a while. I felt like we needed some space since our last visit didn't end well.”

He had no idea that Nicki had called, and Finesse answered the call. He made a mental note to check Finesse for answering his phone.

“Yeah, that shit ain't been sittin' well with me. I ain't mean to snap at ya like that.”

“I'm sorry too. I just want you to know that I get so frustrated because ultimately, I wanna be with you. I'll be discharged in less than a month and I feel like we should talk

about the status of our relationship. Do you wanna be with me or not? I need to know so I can plan my moves accordingly.”

Cannon chewed on the inside of his cheek as he pondered her question. His relationships with the two women in his life had grown so complicated that he felt torn between them. While he loved Nicki, he had deep feelings for Finesse.

He sighed deeply. “I’ on know Nicki. I don’t wanna be with ya if ya gon’ be playin’ games and shit like ya was doin’ in the past.”

“I’ve grown up. I’m not going to send you mixed signals anymore. You’re the man I wanna be with and possibly marry, Cannon. I just want you to give our love a chance. You promised me last year that you would give us a try again.”

Damn, I did say that shit.

“I know how you don’t like to go back on your word and make promises you can’t keep,” she reminded him.

“Nicki, don’t try to use that shit against me,” he fussed.

“I’m not. I’m just stating that I know you like to keep your word. Do you still love me?”

“Yeah, I do.”

Cannon couldn’t bring himself to tell her that he wasn’t in love with her. He knew it would hurt her feelings enormously.

“Well, that’s all we need then,” she spoke confidently.

“Nah, it ain’t all we need. I need to be able to trust ya word the same way ya trust mine. Sometimes you be on that bullshit and I’ on know if I wanna deal with that shit. Ya ass is

too indecisive when it comes to makin' sound decisions, especially about us. Mane, don't make me go down the list again."

Nicki sighed. "How many times are you going to throw what I used to do in my face? You're not even giving me a chance to show you that I've changed. Are you reluctant because of the other bitch that's in your life?"

"She ain't got shit to do with this," he defended. "Stop bringing her ass up."

"A'ight, well, since she's a non-factor, we need to get back on the right track. Now, I've seen some jobs that I want to apply for up there, but you haven't given me any hope on us being together. Tell me what's up, Cannon. Do you want to get back together or not?"

He rubbed the back of his neck as he stared at the mucky cement. His gut was telling him to keep Nicki as his friend. She had toyed with emotions so much in the past that he wasn't sure if he should take a chance on her. Although he was reluctant, Nicki was the only girl he had fallen in love with. She knew things about him that no other woman knew. She had been his comfort zone for years, and despite their bumpy road in the past, he still had love for her.

"When ya get out the army?" he questioned.

"In three weeks."

He tugged on his chin patch, feeling conflicted with each thought that crossed his mind. "Go 'head and apply for the job."

"Really?" she squealed.

“Yeah, mane.”

“Oh my God. I’m so happy!” she gushed.

He smirked at her giddiness because he heard it in her voice that he’d made her day.

“So, you’re going to get rid of that bitch you’ve been dealing with, right? I won’t share you, Cannon.”

He shook his head at the thought of breaking things off with Finesse. “Yeah, I know. It’s gon’ be handled be’fo’ ya get here.”

“Okay, great. I have to go back to work now. I’ll call you later, baby.”

“A’ight.”

Cannon ended the call with a heavy feeling resting on his chest. Even though Nicki was ecstatic about them getting back together, he didn’t feel good at all. Finesse was someone who he truly enjoyed, and breaking things off with her would be one of the hardest things he had to do. Cannon hated letting her go because she had become someone he looked forward to seeing. Despite the fact that they weren’t together, he felt like he owed her a face-to-face conversation, explaining his situation with Nicki.

Two weeks later...

Finesse sat at her desk adding up the expenses for her new women’s barbershop. She had finally found a building and she also hired Malik’s contractor to remodel the inside.

“Damn, this shit is taxing me,” she fussed after making her calculations. “Uncle Johan always said, ‘scared money don’t make no money’.”

Finesse opened her lap top and browsed on Pinterest. She and Kitty had been trying to come up with an elegant design for the barbershop and she wanted to get some inspiration.

“I should just do classic colors,” she mumbled. “Black and white only.”

A knock at the door had interrupted her thoughts. When she glanced up, she was surprised to see Cannon standing in the door way.

“What’s up?” he drawled and ambled toward her.

Finesse stood and wrapped her arms around his neck. Cannon pulled her close and snuggled his face into her neck. The couple basked in each other’s body heat for a moment before parting ways.

“You remembered who I was?” she joked, since it had been a while since she had been in his presence.

He playfully pinched her cheek before he took a seat at the chair in front of her desk. “I could never forget ya wild ass.”

Finesse hadn’t seen Cannon in two weeks and she found his unexpected visit quite weird. The two had texted here and there but that was pretty much it. There hadn’t been a lot of communication between them which she found unusual. Finesse wondered why the distance had been placed between

them, but she was so busy with her new business venture that she didn't have time to investigate it.

“So, where your ass been Cannon?” she questioned.

His cologne had filled the office as his eyes bore into her. He was dressed simple in a crisp white T-shirt, denim jeans and retro Jordans.

“Mane, I been around.”

“Except around me. Are we beefin' now?” she asked, not liking how he had been MIA on her.

“Nah, ya know shit is good between us. I just wanted to come and talk to ya.”

She closed her laptop. “Oh yeah? What's going on? Is everything okay with you?”

He shrugged. “I'm good. I been busy with a lot of shit though, but it ain't nothing I can't handle. I been meanin' to talk to ya about some shit.”

Finesse sat back in her seat and intertwined her fingers together. Something was off about Cannon. The energy he was offering her didn't seem like the zest she had become accustomed to.

“Okay, well, what do you wanna talk about?”

He shifted in his seat and slid his elbows to his knees. He nibbled on his bottom lip with his eyes now trained on the floor. His uneasy disposition had Finesse extremely nervous. She felt like he wanted to say something, but he couldn't find the words to get it out.

“I uh...” he paused and stared at her. “Me and Nicki got back togetha’ and I felt like I should be the one to come and tell ya face-to-face.”

Finesse peered at him with vacant eyes. Her jaw clenched without notice as her heart rate sped to a dangerous tempo. She felt like Cannon had blasted her in the chest with a shot gun with the news of him getting back with his ex. She wished she would’ve prepared herself for this disturbing revelation because she truly felt blindsided. Finesse discreetly inhaled a deep breath in an attempt to keep her anger from surfacing.

“Okay,” she replied simply.

He flicked his nose with his thumb and sat up straight. “I ain’t mean to hurt ya and lead ya on. I ju...”

“You don’t have to explain,” she cut him off. “Me and you weren’t together anyway.”

“I know that, but I felt like I should be the one to tell ya before ya heard it from somebody else. I believe I owe ya that much respect.”

The more he spoke, the angrier she became. She couldn’t understand why she allowed herself to fall for Cannon, when she always knew in the back of her mind that he would never belong to her.

“I kinda knew that you would get back with her. There was a reason you kept her around, and I should’ve known to do you how I do the rest of these niggas.”

He narrowed his eyes. “What the fuck that ’posed to mean?”

“It means that I should’ve just kept it sexual and not invited you into certain parts of my life. I’m not blaming you at all, Cannon. This shit is really my fault for not sticking to my rules.”

He chuckled. “A’ight, I’ma let ya have that. I just came here to tell ya that I’m with her now, and we ain’t gon’ be able to see each other anymore.”

Don’t cry Finesse.

Without warning, her almond-shaped orbs became misty. Despite her hard exterior, Finesse’s feelings were truly dismantled. She felt like Cannon had led her on, and she hated that she fell for his charming ways.

“All right, well, I wish you and her the best,” she said as calmly as she could muster up.

Cannon’s pensive stare irritated her because she didn’t want him to read her. She was trying her best to stay poised, but the savage side of her wanted to slap the shit out of him. Finesse loathed that she had fallen for him, and he didn’t feel the same way.

“Listen, I’on want ya to think that I ain’t care ‘bout ya ‘cause I do,” he explained.

“Cannon please save the bullshit. You made your choice now stand on it and move on. I’ma be good. Don’t worry about me. I’ve been through worse shit than this, so don’t make it like this is a break up because we weren’t together. Now, like I said before, I wish you and her good luck, but I really need to get back to my work.”

“A’ight.” He nodded and rose from his chair. “I’ll see ya around.”

Finesse didn’t respond as she watched him walk out of her office. Her chest throbbed profusely with each step that he took. The man she had developed feelings for, didn’t choose her and that hurt tremendously. Finesse stood and closed her door. She sat back in her seat, grabbed her phone, and dialed Kitty’s number. She needed to be vulnerable with someone and Kitty was always her number one choice.

“Hello?”

“Hey Auntie,” she greeted somberly.

“Hey baby. Did you come up with the colors for the shop yet?” she asked excitedly.

Finesse cleared her aching throat. “No, I uh... actually called you about something else.”

“What’s wrong, Finesse?”

“You know I was dealing with Cannon, right?”

“I wasn’t sure of that, but yeah I kind of knew. What happened?”

“He told me that he got back with his ex-girlfriend. I wish I could say that I didn’t see this coming, but I did, and I feel played for some reason.”

“Aww, honey, I hate to hear that. Were you guys working toward a relationship?”

She rubbed one side of her temple. “I wouldn’t say that, but we were bonding, and I thought that we would be in each other’s lives for a while. I’m mad at myself because I

opened up to him and allowed him into my world, when I knew I shouldn't have.”

Finesse wiped away a tear that rolled down her cheek. She had tried to hold her tears captive for the longest but could no longer cradle them.

“I'm sorry that you're hurt baby. We, as women sometimes put all of our eggs in one basket when we really shouldn't. Don't be mad at yourself because it was a reason he came into your life. He may have been around just for a season. It'll be his loss in the end because you are a very special woman, and I know one day you're going to make a great wife even though you don't want to get married,” Kitty joked.

Finesse smiled through her tears. “This is the very reason why; because men play too many games. I feel used, but I'll get over it. I just needed to talk to somebody about it.”

“You will be fine. Your bounce-back game is the best and if you want, you can come over and we can go get massages today. I don't mind letting you have my entire day.”

Finesse was truly warmed by Kitty's gesture. “I'll be there in thirty minutes.” She laughed loudly.

Kitty chuckled. “Come on, girl. I'll be here waiting.”

“Okay. Bye.”

Finesse ended the call and released a heavy breath. She had to come to grips that Cannon would no longer be a part of her life. She couldn't call him when she needed to hear his voice. She couldn't see him when she needed to feel the warmth of his body. She had to get rid of her craving for him,

because he now belonged to another woman and as much as it would hurt, she had to completely let him go.

Chapter Twenty-One

Three months later...

Cannon's teeth sank deep into his bottom lip while his eyelids closed. He gripped Nicki's straight tresses as she drove her mouth deeper on his shaft. Her wet tongue was causing his penis to tingle with delight.

"Mmm," she moaned, as she spit on the tip.

Cannon opened his eyes and peered down at Nicki. She had awakened him with some bomb head and he was grateful because he was backed up. He forced her mouth farther down his dick to speed up the oncoming orgasm. A throaty grunt escaped his lips, feeling his nut approaching faster than expected. Nicki picked up her pace and slobbered down his tool at record speed. Within minutes, Cannon was releasing his fluids down her throat.

"Fuck," he gritted with curled toes.

Once he came down from his sexual peak, he gently moved Nicki out of the way and padded to the bathroom. Cannon relieved his bladder and quickly got in the shower.

He held his head under the water with images of Finesse flooding his mind. His spirit hadn't been settled ever since he ended his situation with her. It seemed like the more time had passed, the more he missed her. Cannon felt like he had made the biggest mistake of his life by walking away from

her. His heart felt empty without Finesse. He'd tried throwing his energy into Nicki to mask the yearning for her, but that didn't work. It only made his craving for Finesse intensify.

His thoughts were suspended when he heard the shower door open. He looked back to see Nicki step inside. Her perky breasts bounced with each step that she took. She smiled at him, grabbed his body wash, and began to wash his back. Cannon continued to hold his head under the shower head, praying that Nicki wouldn't open up a conversation with him. He needed complete silence while trying to battle his thoughts of Finesse.

"You know I have my interview at three," she reminded him.

Shit.

"Oh yeah," he responded dryly.

"Yes, and I'm hoping I like this one. I wasn't feeling those other two jobs like that."

Cannon resisted the urge to roll his eyes. When Nicki moved to Milwaukee, she had obtained two very stable jobs, but she seemed to come up with any excuse to quit. Cannon didn't mind taking care of her because he had the income to do so, but he did want her to be productive.

"I hope ya like it too," he muttered.

Nicki turned him around to face her. She looked at him with squinted eyes. "What's wrong, baby? It seems like your energy has been off lately. Are you okay?"

Cannon had done well with hiding his distress; but lately, he found it strenuous to conceal his desire to be with

Finesse.

“Yeah, I’m good. I gotta ‘lot of shit on my mind.”

“You wanna talk about it?”

He shook his head quickly. “Nah, it ain’t shit. I’ll be good.” He quickly pecked her lips to dismiss the conversation.

Cannon washed his body in silence and got out the shower. He grabbed his towel and wrapped it around his waist before he brushed his teeth. He felt a strong urge to leave and go talk to Kano. He had to reveal the mental agony he was putting himself through. Cannon picked out his clothes for the day and threw them on. The weather had gotten cooler, so he sported a green Supreme hoodie, black jeans and black Timbs. He brushed his hair and secured his watch on his wrist.

“Hey, do you wanna go to dinner tonight?” Nicki asked, stepping out the bathroom. “It’s been a while since we’ve gone out.”

“Nah, I can’t tonight. Maybe this weekend.”

“Okay,” she mumbled.

Cannon knew he hurt her feelings and he felt guilty for it. He turned around and stepped closer to her. He pulled her body into his embrace and kissed her forehead.

“We can go out tomorrow. Is that cool?”

Her mouth stretched into a grin. “Yes, that fine.”

“I’ll be back later on.”

“Okay.”

Cannon grabbed his keys and walked out of the house. He sent Kano a text asking where he was. Just as he was getting inside his car, Kano responded.

Kano: I'm at the gun range. Pull up.

Cannon cranked his engine and drove toward the shooting range. He arrived after a twenty-minute drive. He walked inside and rented a gun before he strolled in the back. Cannon spotted Kano at the other end, so he ambled toward him.

“What’s up, bruh?” he greeted Kano.

Kano took the ear muffs off and gave him a brotherly hug. “What’s up with you?”

Cannon shook his head and stepped to the lane next to Kano. “I’m suffering, bruh. I really don’t like Nicki like that.”

Kano doubled over in laughter causing Cannon to join in. Although he was laughing, Cannon was really going through mental hell. Having to act like he had chemistry with Nicki, was like torture for him.

“Wait, hold on, what do you mean you don’t like her like that? You gotta explain that shit to me,” Kano requested with laughter in his voice.

Cannon released a deep breath. “It’s like this... I can’t keep fakin’ and actin’ like I’m in love with her. I love Nicki, but I’on like being in a relationship with her ass.”

“Is she doing something you don’t like or what? It’s gotta be a reason, my nigga.”

“She ain’t doin’ shit wrong. I just don’t wanna be with her like that. I should’a never told her to move up here.”

Kano grinned and stroked his goatee. “Nah, I know what it is. You miss Finesse.”

Cannon smirked. “I ain’t gon’ lie, I do.”

“I knew when you told me that Nicki was moving up here, that you really didn’t want her to come. Listen, I know you been with her for a long time but that history shit don’t mean nothing. If you ain’t feeling her, then you just ain’t feeling her. You can’t fake like you like somebody. You’ll be miserable if you do that.”

“Nigga, I am miserable.” Cannon laughed. “The only time I’m cool with Nicki is when we fuckin’. After that, I’on even be wantin’ to be around her ass like that.”

“Why you just won’t call Finesse and tell her you miss her?”

Cannon waved his hand. “Nah, I’on want her to feel like she’s my rebound. Plus, I know she ain’t fuckin’ with me like that ’cause she was pissed when I told her that I got back with Nicki’s ass.”

“So, what you gon’ do? Be miserable? That ain’t the way to live,” Kano said and cocked his burner.

“Honestly, I’on know, but I can’t stay with Nicki. I’ll even pay for her ass to move back to Nashville. I’ll buy her whatever she needs to get outta my face.”

Kano threw his head back in laughter. “Damn, you serious as fuck.”

“Bruh, I’m so serious,” he drawled. “I need some peace. But what’s up with ya? Did y’all find out what y’all havin’?”

Kano and Mafia had finally announced that they were expecting their first child.

“Nah, her mama is throwing us a gender reveal party. Shit, I really wanna know what I’m having now, though.” He laughed.

“I feel ya. Mane, ya leveled up with Mafia. She’s a real one.”

“I know; Finesse is too,” he joked.

Cannon smacked his lips. “Stop bruh.”

Cannon loaded his gun and put his earmuffs on. He fired multiple shots into the paper. Being at the gun range was like therapy for him because he was able to blow off some much-needed steam. He needed to come up with a solution to his problem really soon because he refused to continue to live in misery each day.

Finesse stirred out of her deep slumber when she heard her phone vibrate on her nightstand. She lazily grabbed her phone and squinted at the bright screen. When she was able to focus her eyes, she noticed she had a text from Cannon.

“What the hell?” she whispered and sat up on her elbows.

She opened his message and began to read it.

Cannon: Don't respond to this message. I just had to get some shit off my chest. Finesse I fucked up. I knew when I came to your office that day that I was making a big mistake, but I didn't want to go back on my word with Nicki. I miss you like crazy and I been unhappy for the last three months. I know you probably don't give a fuck, but I love the fuck outta you. I knew you hate me for hurting you but just know that wasn't my intentions. Shit ain't never what it seems, and you were always my first choice. I know this shit was random, but I needed to tell you that. Hopefully I'll see you around.

Finesse read his message three more times before she sat her phone back and laid back in bed. His message had her so conflicted that she was unable to fall back to sleep. It had been a painful task getting Cannon out of her system and she found herself still struggling to do so. She missed him so much and wished to be with him. She was still hurt by his decision, but the love she held for him wouldn't allow her to hate him.

Now that he had confessed to feeling the same way she felt, it left her emotions scrambled. She didn't know how to digest his text because she wasn't sure if she would ever invite him back into her life again. Finesse was officially confused.

“Raine, Raine, go away,” Finesse sang in the baby's face and kissed her cheek. “Tee-Tee loves these fat cheeks.”

Finesse was enjoying her afternoon at Sky's house, spending time with her niece. She found herself at her sister's house often because she truly enjoyed being an auntie.

“So, the grand opening is coming up Finesse. Are you excited for your all-women’s barbershop?” Sky asked.

Finesse smiled brightly. She had been working so hard for the last four months on her new barbershop and she couldn’t wait to see the finished product. Malik and his crew had gutted the inside and remodeled the entire shop while she and Kitty designed the interior. What made Finesse so proud of herself was that she did it on her own. She came up with a good business plan, she put up the money, and she also did the hiring of the barbers.

“Yes, I can’t wait. I want you to bring my Raine, so I can show her off to the people.”

“Me too,” Melody gushed with her arm in the air.

Finesse smirked. “Yes, you can come too. She is so sweet. I usually don’t like kids, but I do like her.”

“You better like my baby,” Ryker spat, coming into the living room wearing his work clothes on.

“Don’t start with me, you bastard,” Finesse shot.

“Daddy, I go with Fimesse,” Melody announced with her broken English.

They all burst out in laughter because Melody refused to call Finesse by her right name.

“I’m going to need Melody to learn how to say my name the right way,” Finesse chuckled.

“Aye, she ain’t lying though because you are a mess,” Ryker joked.

Finesse laughed. “Leave me alone. Like I was saying, I want everyone to come...*including you*, Marc Anthony,” she joked.

“I’ll check my schedule. I’m about to go to work. Be good, Melody.” Ryker kissed Sky and walked out the door.

“Even though I can’t stand Ryker sometimes, I think you guys make a good couple. Are you getting married soon?”

“Yes, next year. We’re going to buy our house first and guess what?”

“What?”

“Dad is going to fix it up for us?”

Finesse twisted her face. “Why are y’all getting a fixer-upper?”

“Because we want to customize the home, so it can feel like ours,” Sky explained.

“I guess that makes sense.” Finesse shrugged. “Dad and his crew did a good job at the shop. I was surprised I liked it.”

“Why?”

“Because I usually don’t like anything, but it came out great. I’m just so excited about my grand opening. Do you think people will show up?”

“Of course, especially since the radio has been advertising. Oh, and that’s all I see on my social media accounts. People are really excited about it.”

“You know Azai plugged me on the radio promo. I was so thankful because I’m worried that people won’t come.”

“Azai, huh?” Sky smiled sneakily. “What’s up with you and him?”

Finesse waved her hand. “Girl, nothing at all. We’re just friends and that’s it. Hell, we don’t even hang out alone. He always has his best friend, Maino, with us. I really only like him as a friend.”

“Oh, I thought you were getting close to him, so you could get over Cannon.”

Finesse shook her head willing herself not to think of the person that had her emotionally confused. His text was still weighing heavily on her mind, and she still didn’t know how to absorb it. She didn’t want to tell Sky about Cannon’s revelation because she didn’t feel like discussing her jumbled feelings.

“Nah, Azai is cool as hell, plus I think he has a girlfriend.”

“Do you ever think about *him*?” Sky questioned, referring to Cannon.

Finesse positioned the baby on her chest and sighed. She made sure to choose her words carefully, so she wouldn’t reveal his recent text message. “All the time. It’s like I can’t get him out of my damn head. You know what’s crazy? I haven’t seen him since he broke things off with me. I wonder if he’s avoiding me.”

“Maybe.” Sky shrugged. “Who knows? I think you may have fallen in love with Cannon, but you don’t want to admit.”

“I don’t remember denying it to you. I just hated that I put myself in the position to fall for him in the first place.”

“Aww Finesse,” Sky cooed. “Don’t worry you’re going to find someone who’s going to love you wholeheartedly.”

Finesse rolled her eyes. “I ain’t looking for that shit. I’m just trying to focus on my brand. Fuck Love.”

“Ooooh,” Melody sang and covered her mouth.

“Finesse, you can’t keep cursing in front of her,” Sky chastised her.

“I’m sorry. I be forgetting, hell.”

When the doorbell rang, Sky rose from her seat and answered the door. Malik walked into the living room wearing a bright smile on his face.

“Hey Melody,” he bent down and pinched her cheek.

Finesse smiled at the little girl who giggled uncontrollably. Malik then walked over to Finesse and sat next to her.

“What’s up, daughter? Let me see the baby?” he requested.

“You like her more than me, don’t you?” Finesse questioned, passing him Raine.

Sky rolled her eyes. “Why do always think somebody likes you less than someone else. You’re irritating.”

“Because all he talks about is Raine this and Raine that. We’ve been replaced, and you need to realize that,” Finesse sassed.

Malik chuckled. "I'm so tired of proving my love to you, Finesse. I really don't listen to you anymore when you say stuff like that."

Finesse pursed her lips. "You ain't right, Dad."

He shrugged. "Whatever; and let me love on my granddaughter in peace. I love you all just the same."

Finesse offered him a side eye. "Mmm hmmph."

"Hey Finesse. Did Dad tell you that he has a new girlfriend?" Sky asked.

"No and he better hide her because all of my ignorant nature is coming out if I meet her," she warned.

"That's not my girlfriend," Malik corrected Sky. "She's just a friend."

Sky smirked. "And guess how old she is?"

"How old?" Finesse quizzed.

"Thirty years old."

Finesse breathed a sigh of relief and rested her hand over her chest. "Girl, I thought you were about to say eighteen."

Malik smacked his lips. "Don't disrespect me like that. What the hell I look like being with a kid."

"Calm down, Malik," Finesse kidded.

He glared at her with narrowed eyes. "You gon' quit playing with me. Me and you ain't friends."

"Anyways." She rolled her eyes. "I guess thirty years old ain't that bad. Just make sure you tell that broad that you

got a daughter who's savagely legendary, okay?"

Malik chuckled. "Whatever you say."

Finesse found it amusing to poke fun with Malik. They had grown closer over the months and she truly appreciated his presence. She was relieved that she had taken the step to mend their broken relationship because she felt like it was way overdue. She was gaining a love for herself that she had never possessed. For years, she suffered quietly on the inside because of her past. She no longer awoke with a heavy heart. She didn't walk around with shoulders that felt like they weighed a ton. She had finally made peace with her mother's death, and although there was a permanent vacancy in her heart, she had finally come to grips and accepted that Lexi was no longer living.

Now, the only thing Finesse was having a difficult time with was letting Cannon go. She never knew someone could come into her life and rearrange her feelings like he had done. She wished that she had a remedy to fix her fractured heart because being lovesick was something she had never experienced. Plus, his text message hadn't helped at all; it only left her more perplexed.

Cannon pulled up to a gas station and parked. He grabbed his Black and Mild cigar and then looked at Nicki.

"What ya need from here?"

"I want some snacks since we don't have any at home. I need to go grocery shopping."

He grabbed his lighter from the middle console and lit the end of the cigar. “Go ‘head.”

Nicki got out the car while he took a pull from the Black. His phone rang loudly in the cup holder. He grabbed the phone and noticed that his little sister, Cammie, was trying to FaceTime him. He swiped the screen to answer the call.

“What’s up, sis?”

“Hey. Where are you? Why is it so dark?”

“I’m the car.” He reached up and turned the interior light on.

“Oh, okay, there you go. Listen, I have something to tell you,” she spoke in a low tone.

“Mama did some bullshit again?” he quizzed with lowered brows.

“Hell nah, I didn’t you lil’ punk-ass!” Donna yelled in the background.

Cannon chuckled and tapped the access ashes from the cigar. “What’s up, Mama?”

“Ain’t nothing up with me, but that lil’ bitch Nicki is on some funny shit,” Donna retorted.

Cannon’s face contorted into a scowl. “What the hell ya talkin’ ‘bout?”

“Listen, that’s why I called,” Cammie interjected. “So, I was on Facebook and I stumbled upon a picture that Nicki posted. When I went to make a compliment under the post, I saw a white guy comment saying that they kicked her husband’s ass in beer pong.”

Cannon quickly put the Black and Mild out in his ashtray. He had to make sure he was hearing Cammie correctly.

“What?”

“Yeah, he said her ‘husband’. So, he ended up tagging a person in his comment, and you know my nosey self went to his page, but it was private.”

Cannon balled his fist and bit the inside of his cheek. He glanced at the gas station to see if Nicki was coming out before returning his glare to the screen.

“Aye, I’m tryin’ to figure this shit out. Did she respond?”

Cammie swayed her head back and forth. “No, she didn’t say anything.”

“I told ya that bitch wasn’t shit when she first left ya ass,” Donna yelled into the screen. “She ain’t never been solid and I don’t know why you gave her sneaky-ass a chance. I bet her silly ass got married while she was in the army and didn’t tell ya.”

Donna’s words were intensifying his anger. The veins in his neck were bulging as his leg shook lightly. He flicked his nose with his thumb and rubbed his hand down his face.

“Aye, send me a screen shot of the comment and ol’ boy’s page,” he ordered.

“Okay. What are you about to do though?” Cammie asked.

“Just send it to me,” he snapped and ended the call.

His body temperature had suddenly risen to an alarming level. He stared at Nicki as she exited the gas station with so much disdain that it caused his teeth to grit. She got inside the car and turned to him.

“They didn’t even have my damn Hot Fries,” she complained. “We should’ve stopped at the other gas station.”

All of a sudden, the sound of her voice annoyed him immensely. He was hoping that Nicki hadn’t played him yet again. He was praying that this was all a misunderstanding because Cannon’s temper was at a point where he would possibly murder Nicki.

Cannon pulled off without saying a word. When he stopped at a stop sign, he saw his phone light up. He grabbed the phone and saw that the screenshots had finally come through from Cammie.

“Babe, are you going to go?” she asked, reminding him that he was at a stop sign.

Cannon ignored her. His oval-shaped eyes scanned the screenshots like a veteran detective. He didn’t have social media, so he wouldn’t put it past Nicki to have a double life since she knew he wouldn’t find out about it.

“Lemme see ya driver’s license,” he commanded.

Her forehead creased as she examined him with squinted eyes. “What?”

“Ya heard me. Lemme see it?”

“Why Cannon?”

“Cause I want to,” he barked. “Now, show me the fuckin’ license.”

Nicki jerked her head back. “Um excuse me, you better lower your damn tone. Why are you yelling at me?”

Cannon chuckled condescendingly and shook his head. “Aye, Nicki, I really need ya to quit fuckin’ with me right now. Just lemme look at ya license real quick.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Why?” he seethed, inching into her personal space.

“Because...what for? What the hell happened that caused you to start snapping at me like this? What does my license have to do with anything?”

Cannon scrolled to the screenshots and shoved them in her face. “Who the fuck is that and why did ol’ boy say that was ya husband?”

Nicki’s timid eyes looked at his phone and read the comment. She licked her dry lips and swallowed hard. “That was probably a joke.”

“Oh yeah?” Cannon asked with humor laced in his tone. “So ya don’t know the nigga he tagged.”

“Yeah, I know him from when I was in the army,” she explained.

“So, why would he call ol’ boy ya husband? That’s what I’m tryin’ to understand.”

She shrugged and held her hands out. “It was a joke, Cannon. Why are you being so ridiculous right now?”

A horn blew at them disrupting their quarrel. Cannon quickly drove off and then pulled over.

“I ain’t fuckin’ playin’ with ya, Nicki. I wanna see ya fuckin’ driver’s license,” he seethed.

“I’m not doing it,” she quipped, folding her arms across her chest.

Cannon nodded. “A’ight since ya won’t show me ya shit, that tells me that the shit is true. Bitch, ya played me for the last fuckin’ time. I swear I could blow ya fuckin’ brains out right now.”

Tears instantly rolled down her cheeks. “Cannon, could you please stop. That comment wasn’t anything serious. I love you.”

Cannon scoffed and pulled off. “I’m not even mad at ya. I’m mad at myself ‘cause I went against my gut when I knew I should’a left ya trifling-ass alone. I’m glad ya fucked up, though, ‘cause I was lookin’ for a way outta this relationship.”

Nicki sobbed uncontrollably but her tears didn’t affect him at all. The only thing her whimpers were telling him was that she was guilty.

“Cannon, I really love you.”

“Bitch, fuck ya love. I’on need ya tellin’ me ya love me when ya ain’t shit. Ya made me give up the person I really wanted to be with, so we could work on our shit. You ain’t never chose me first. Even when ya weak ass went to the army, you knew you betrayed me by leaving but you ain’t give a fuck. Ya ass knew how stressed I was around that time, but

ya still said fuck me and took ya ass to the military. So, I'on know why I expected shit to be different with ya. You really got me fucked up, but I swear I'm done with your weak ass."

"So, you're really going to tell me that you wanted to be with another woman?" she cried.

"Yep and guess what? I'on give a fuck about ya tears. You moved up here when ya married to another mufucka. You ain't shit, Nicki, and I should'a kept it movin' on ya lame ass."

"I'm not married, Cannon!" she yelled.

He glared at her briefly before driving off. "Yeah, but ya won't let me see your driver's license. If ya love me so much, how come you ain't tryin' to prove it to me?"

"I'm telling you I'm not. Why won't you believe me?"

"Cause ya word don't mean shit to me!" he bellowed. "The only thing that comes out ya dick suckers is bullshit and lies. Stop talkin' to me."

"Cannon... please," she whimpered.

"Aye, what the fuck I just say? Don't say shit to me."

Nicki put her head down and cried loudly. Cannon couldn't believe he had fallen for Nicki's bullshit yet again. He was so tired of riding her roller coaster and he officially getting off the ride. His heart was truly bruised and not because of her being married, but because he could've been building a life with Finesse, but he chose the wrong woman to be with. Nicki had never put Cannon first, she always chose herself and he despised her. Her actions always reminded him of his childhood, when his mother didn't choose him and allowed him to be placed in foster care.

Cannon pulled up to his building and pressed the button to unlock the door. “Get the fuck outta my car. Ya ass got ’til tomorrow to be out my crib.”

“Where am I supposed to go?” she bawled.

“I’ont give a fuck. Just be outta my shit or I’ma drag ya ass out myself. Now get the fuck out.”

Nicki slowly pulled the handle and opened the door. She stepped out of the car and shut the door. Cannon didn’t even wait for her to get inside the building before he drove off. He needed to get away. He had already been consumed with a heavy amount of stress, and he felt like he was going to lose his mind if he didn’t leave the environment he had subjected himself to. Cannon drove toward the airport, so he could visit the one person who would take all his troubles away.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Finesse stood back in complete awe as she surveyed people mingling with each other during her grand opening of her barbershop. She couldn't believe the turnout of people who attended because she was fearful that no one would show up. She had her female barbers cutting clients' hair while wearing their specialized smocks that she had customized. Men and women were waiting to be serviced which surprised her a bit, because she didn't think men would be willing to get their hair cut by women.

"Hey, Finesse, the décor in here is the shit," Deshawn boasted. "Aye, let me manage this place too."

"Hell nah," Finesse griped. "You're just trying to manage more pussy and the answer is no."

"Aw, come on. I'm not gonna try to holla at the girls. It just looks more fun over here than at the hair boutique."

"Lil' boy, please. You'll be fine where you're at; and where is that stick figure?" Finesse asked, referring to her girlfriend, Mick.

"We broke up last week. She wanted something else and honestly I did too."

"Yeah, well, tough cookies. Now go make sure the people are comfortable in the front." Finesse shooed her away.

Deshawn rolled her eyes and shuffled away. Finesse grabbed a champagne flute from one of the bartenders that passed her and gulped it down. She was standing in a corner trying to calm her nerves.

My heart is beating too fucking fast.

She took a moment and admired the design of her barbershop. The walls were covered in textured, black and white wall paper. Gold chandeliers hung from the ceilings. Finesse had ordered metallic gold barber chairs that gave the shop a glamorous feel. Black and white photos of Sky, Mafia, and Kitty hung on the wall, while sparkling gray tile decorated the flooring.

“Sis, you did so good,” Sky gushed, walking up to her with Raine in her arms. Sky’s pixie cut was freshly done, and her makeup was applied naturally. She wore a printed jumper with open-toe sandals.

Finesse’s mouth immediately formed into a curve. “Thank you. Give me her.” She grabbed the baby and gave her a sweet kiss on the cheeks.

“You look great, sis,” Sky complimented.

Finesse looked down at her red leather pants that tied up in the front. Her black off-the-shoulder bodysuit offered the right amount of cleavage and her black, feathered heels completed her sexy look.

“Thank you.”

“I’m so proud of you. You and Auntie did great with the décor. Why are you standing in the corner, though?”

Finesse shrugged and ran her fingers through her new, curly bob cut. “I don’t know. I guess I’m nervous.”

Sky rubbed her arm. “Don’t be nervous because you did so great. The turnout is awesome.”

Finesse nodded and inhaled a deep breath. “Yeah, you’re right. Where’s Ryker and Melody?”

“Melody went with her mom for the weekend and Ryker said he was going to stop by later. I couldn’t wait to see this place for myself. Do you need me to help with anything?”

“Nah, I’m good. I hired people to take care of everything, so I don’t need your help, but thanks. I’m just going to stand here for a while and get myself together.”

“Why didn’t you have any ginger ale for the pregnant broads like me,” Mafia teased, strolling up with her arm latched into Kano’s.

The two were dressed in all-black with Mafia’s sandy hair flat-ironed straight. She looked adorable with her small belly.

“Bitch, it’s water here, so drink it,” Finesse shot, rubbing her hands through Raine’s straight hair.

“This shop is lit, Finesse,” Kano complimented. “Shit, I might have to come and get cut.”

Mafia cut her eyes at him. “Nah, you’re good with your own barber.”

Finesse and Sky laughed because Mafia was dead serious.

“Thanks Kano. I appreciate the compliment.”

Seeing Kano reminded Finesse of Cannon. A part of her wished that he had somehow gotten news of her grand opening and showed up. Despite her disdain for ending their situation, Finesse wouldn't have minded him coming to support her.

“So, are these barber chicks legit? They won't be fucking nobody's head, up will they?” Mafia asked with a side eye.

“No, they're good. Just look at their Instagram pages,” Finesse replied.

“I see you have the lash lady in the back. I think I may get my lashes done. Can you watch the baby for me?” Sky asked.

Finesse nodded. “Yeah, I got her.”

Sky sashayed off toward the back of the shop. Johan and Kitty walked up to her looking like money. Johan donned one of his signature black suits, while Kitty was clad in a floral print blazer with the matching slacks. Her natural hair was pinned up with her curls falling everywhere.

“Oh, my baby makes me so proud,” Kitty pretended to cry. “This is so beautiful. I hope you're proud of yourself.”

Finesse smiled faintly. “Thanks Auntie.”

“I always saw the greatness in you, niece. This is a job well done,” Johan pulled her close and kissed her cheek.

It was refreshing to hear how proud her aunt and uncle were because she had always been their problem child.

“Aye, I gotta make a run. I’ll be back a’ight,” Kano told Mafia.

She nodded. “Okay.”

Kano walked away, while Johan went to converse with an associate he knew.

“Let me see my lil’ sunshine,” Kitty cooed, grabbing Raine from Finesse. “I missed my sweetie.”

“Mama, are you glad you got some new babies coming in the family?” Mafia asked.

Kitty smiled. “Of course. I’m just praying that you’re having a boy because we really need a boy in the family.”

Finesse’s nerves were still all over the place, and she couldn’t understand why, when she was having a successful grand opening. It just felt like something was missing to her, but she didn’t know what it was.

“I gotta go check on something. I’ll be right back,” Finesse walked toward the back.

She entered the office and closed the door. She took a seat in the swivel chair and inhaled a deep breath. Her anxiety had elevated to a level she had never experienced before. Yes, she was proud of what she had accomplished, but she couldn’t help but feel like there was a piece missing from her puzzle.

A knock at the door ceased her thoughts. She rose from her seat and opened the door. Malik stood on the other side with a bouquet of roses.

“Congrats, Finesse. You did really good, but why are you in here?” he questioned.

Finesse pulled him inside and closed the door. She took the flowers from his arms and sat them on the desk.

“Dad, I think something is really wrong with me,” she spoke frantically.

Malik studied her with wrinkled brows. “Why? What’s wrong?”

“My anxiety is getting the best of me. I just don’t feel good; I think I’m going crazy.” She rubbed her temples.

Malik chuckled and pulled her into her chest. “You’re just nervous because this is a project you’ve worked so hard on, and now that it’s complete, you want everything to be perfect. This is normal Finesse, so calm down because you out-did yourself.”

“You’re really proud of me?” she asked with tears in her eyes.

“Of course. I’ll always be proud of you and your growth.”

A lone tear rolled down her cheek. “Thanks Dad. I thought I was going crazy in here,” she giggled.

He smirked. “No this is just nervous jitters.”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out some tissue. He wiped her face and kissed her forehead.

“Go out there and work the room. Show the people who Finesse is, okay?”

She nodded. “Dad, you’re old as hell for pulling tissue out of your pocket. Only old niggas do that.”

They both threw their heads back in laughter.

“Forty-five ain’t old, girl.”

She twisted her lips. “Yeah, okay.”

“Now, let’s go out here so you can mingle with the people, and I can brag about the work me and my crew did,” he joked.

Finesse chuckled and followed Malik out the door. She felt somewhat better after speaking with her father. She just hoped her nervous jitters went away because she didn’t like feeling overwhelmed, especially on her joyous day.

She quickly spotted Azai walking through with Maino right behind him. She strutted over to greet them.

“Hey, I thought y’all forgot about me. Do y’all like it?” she asked

“This shit is nice. Man, ol’ girl right there is so thick,” Maino groaned licking his lips. “I’m definitely coming here from now on to get cut up.”

Finesse playfully rolled her eyes. “I knew your freaky-ass would.”

“Aye, the inside is nice as fuck. You said you and your auntie did this?” Azai asked.

“Yeah, well, I kind of followed her lead since she’s had an eye for design for a long time.”

“Yeah, this shit is nice. You did good Joanne,” Azai joked.

She hit his arm. “Stop playing with me. I’m making major moves on my own and guess what? I didn’t have to steal to do it.”

“That’s what’s up,” Azai agreed. “I’m glad you stopped that shit because you too cool to be out here like that.”

“Yeah, you’re like one of my bros,” Maino kidded.

Finesse giggled. “I guess that was a compliment, so thank you.”

“Aye, I’m about to go get me a drink and see what’s up with ol’ girl at the bar. I’ll be back,” Azai announced and walked away.

“I need me a drink too. That blunt got my mouth dry as hell,” Maino complained and followed after Azai.

Finesse smiled as the two walked away. She was glad that the people who truly cared about her stopped what they were doing and came to support her business. She couldn’t thank them enough because she really needed the support of her loved ones. Although she was still very much nervous, Finesse walked over to where people were waiting and mingled with them.

“Despite the circumstances, I’m glad you’re here. I’ve been trying to get you out here for a couple years now, and your lil’ ass always acted like you were busy.”

Cannon smiled at the woman who had raised him. After dropping Nicki off that night, he caught a flight to California. He needed some time away from his life in Milwaukee, and since he hadn’t seen his, Aunt Mia, in a year, he felt like it was the perfect opportunity to spend some time with her.

“I do be busy, Auntie,” he explained.

Her full, pink lips pursed. “Yeah okay. Now that you need my comfort, you wanna come here. Trying to use me for my love,” she cracked.

Cannon chuckled. “It ain’t like that. I really needed to get away be’fo’ I killed Nicki. She really had me fucked up.”

Mia shook her head. “Considering her history, she has always been flaky. I just never saw you settling down with that girl. At least you can walk away from the relationship knowing that you gave her your all.”

He scoffed. “I’ on care about that shit. She wasted my damn time, and I knew betta’ because my gut was tellin’ me to leave her alone. Shit, I could’a stayed with the gal I really wanted to be with.”

Mia smiled and propped her chin on her palm. “Tell me more about her.”

Cannon licked his lips as images of Finesse’s beautiful mug entered his mind. He wished that he could rewind the time and do things differently. He wished that he would’ve continued to build the bond they were creating, instead of taking another chance on Nicki. He wished for a lot of things to be different and having her in his life was one of them.

“She’s rough around the edges. She talks real slick and sometimes I gotta check her ass.” He chuckled. “But I’ on even know why I was drawn to her in the first place. She had major flaws that I couldn’t fuck with, but I still ended up dealin’ with her.”

“What do you think you were drawn to?”

He shrugged. "I think I was drawn to her need to be loved. I could tell through her rough exterior that she had issues within herself. When I got to know her a lil' betta', I saw that she had a lot of family issues that fucked her up internally. I wanted to show her love, but I ain't get a chance to."

"Well, go get her back."

"Nah." He shook his head. "I'on want her to feel like she's my rebound chick."

"If you come to her correct, I'm sure she won't feel that way," Mia explained.

He curled his lip. "What ya talkin' 'bout, Auntie?"

"If you really want to be with her, show her that she's always been your first choice. Don't just step to her with a bunch of words, show her."

"Mane, I'on know how to do all that. Plus, ya don't know Finesse. As soon as she sees me, she'll probably cuss my ass out. She likes to fight, and I'on wanna beat her ass."

Mia slapped Cannon in the back of his head. "Stop talking about beating on a woman. I didn't raise you like that."

He rubbed the area to soothe the stinging sensation. "I'on mean it for real, Auntie. I would never hit a woman."

"Good. Now what are we going to do about your true love. We need to come up with something special."

"We?" he grinned. "Oh, so, ya gon' help me out?"

"You know Auntie is always here to help her baby. I want her to see that I raised you the right way, so you have to

come to her as a grown man and show her that you're serious about her."

"I ain't ready for that right now. I need to clear my head from all the bullshit Nicki put on me."

"I understand if you need a minute. Take all the time you need, okay?"

Cannon nodded because he planned to do just that. He needed a mental break from his reality and being with Finesse just didn't seem feasible at that moment. If it was meant to be for them, then it would happen. At this moment, Cannon just needed time to think without the distractions of his chaotic world.

Two months later...

Cannon pulled up in front of Finesse's condo and parked. He killed the engine and inhaled a deep breath. It had taken him eight weeks of courage to finally face her and it was now time to claim what he deemed his. There was a lot that needed to be said between him and Finesse, and he was praying that his words were received well.

Cannon slowly exited the car and walked inside her building. He didn't even know if she was home. He didn't want to take the chance on her blowing him off, so he decided not to call beforehand. He boarded the elevator and rode up to her floor in silence. His hands were clammy as he cracked his knuckles. The muscle inside his chest thumped hastily. Cannon had never been nervous about being around Finesse,

but since he hadn't seen her in almost six months, he was on edge.

When he arrived at his desired floor, he stepped off the elevator and trudged to her door. Cannon knocked twice and then released a deep breath. When he heard the locks being unlatched, his heart rate sped up. The door opened, and Deshawn stood on the other side.

“Oh, hey,” she greeted.

“What's up? Is Finesse here?”

She shook her head. “No, I think she's at the barbershop.”

“Oh, a'ight,” he turned to leave, but Deshawn stopped him.

“Do you know where it is?”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Okay.” She closed the door.

Cannon exited the building slightly disappointed because he had been ready to see Finesse at that instance. He hopped inside his car and made his way toward her barbershop. When he pulled up, Cannon had to work himself up again to face her. He just really wanted her to be open to what he had to say.

“I hope she ain't on her shit,” he mumbled and got out of the car.

He walked inside the barbershop and was welcomed by a receptionist.

“Hello, and welcome to Finessed Barbershop. How can I help you?” she asked.

“Aye, uh, is Finesse here?”

“Sure. Let me go get her.” She rose from her seat and walked away.

Cannon took a seat in the waiting area where two other men were waiting. Once again, he was a ball of nerves as he rubbed his sweaty palms down his jeans. He bit on his bottom lip as his leg shook lightly.

“Can I help you?”

His eyes slowly landed on the woman who had abducted his heart. Finesse stood there with a crooked grin on her beautiful face. Her hair was styled in her natural curls that fell past her ears. She was dressed simple in a white T-shirt, ripped jeans and UGG boots.

He licked his lips before he said, “I came here to see ya. Can we talk in private?”

She folded her arms over her heavy chest and gazed at him for a moment. “Sure. Follow me to the back.”

Cannon stood and trailed Finesse to the office. His eyes were glued to her ass. It seemed to almost burst out her jeans. When they walked inside, the puppy he had purchased for Finesse ran up to his feet. He kneeled down and rubbed her head.

“What ya name her?” he asked.

“MJ.”

“What that stand for?”

“Mafia Junior.”

Cannon chuckled and shook his head. “Ya ass wild for that.”

She smirked. “They look just alike, so I named her after Mafia.”

Finesse sat behind the desk while Cannon sat in the chair in front. Silence permeated the room as they peered into each other’s eyes. For months, he had yearned to see her gorgeous face. He’d desired to smell her lovely scent, and most of all, Cannon yearned to rub his hands all over her perfect body.

This conversation that was about to take place was a make or break situation for him. He didn’t know if she would take his offer or reject him.

“This a cool-ass shop,” he drawled.

“Thank you,” she replied with this humorous expression on her face.

Cannon chuckled a bit and flicked his nose with his thumb.

“What’s so funny?” she questioned.

“Nothing mane.”

“So, what did you come here for?” she asked and leaned back in her swivel chair. “I know you ain’t come to see my barbershop.”

“Nah, I didn’t. I actually came to see ya.”

Her perfectly arched eyebrows lifted. “Me? Lil’ ol me. I thought you had to throw me away since you got back with

your No Limit soldier.”

Cannon stifled his laugh because Finesse always had jokes. “It wasn’t like that. I actually came ‘cause I miss you. These last five-and-a-half months felt like foreva’ without seein’ or talkin’ to ya,” he revealed.

Her almond peepers turned dark. “Oh yeah? Well, why didn’t you call? You sent that damn text, but that was almost three months ago, and I ain’t heard from you since... Oh, I forgot you shitted on me for another bitch. What happened between y’all? Y’all must’ve broken up for you to be coming here to see me.”

He held his head down because he knew what she was getting at. He didn’t want her to feel like he had come crawling back since him and Nicki were no longer a couple.

“Nah, we ain’t togetha’,” he revealed.

She scoffed. “I knew it. So, what the fuck you want from me? I’m not no fuckin’ rebound chick.”

“I ain’t say ya was,” he shot.

“Well, what the fuck do you want? I’ve been doing perfectly fine and I don’t need you coming into my life to ruin my progress. I got over you, so don’t come here thinking I’m about to let you in, because I’m not.”

“Listen, I know ya probably hate me for cuttin’ off our situation, but ya need to know that I wasn’t the same when we stopped talkin’. The only reason I went back with Nicki was because I made a promise to her be’fo’ we started talkin’. I like to keep my word, so I tole’ her we could try again, but when we got back togetha’, I wasn’t feelin’ her. I wasn’t in

love with her and I ain't wanna be with her. The whole time I was miserable because I really wanted ya. I always knew I wanted ya, and I regret goin' against my gut 'cause I knew me and Nicki should'a never got back togetha'."

Finesse sat with her bottom lip tucked between her teeth. He wondered what she was thinking because at that point, he couldn't read her body language.

"You hurt my feelings, Cannon," she muttered.

"I know, and I apologize for that."

"I was pissed at you because I asked you if I had anything to worry about when it came to you and her, and you said no. I just feel like you used me until she was available for you."

He released a deep breath and stared at her. He didn't prepare for this. He hated seeing Finesse so somber because of the decisions he had made.

"I never used you. I wasn't even 'posed to fuck with ya like that, but ya made me fall for ya, and I can't get ya crazy-ass outta my system."

Finesse smirked. "I ain't make you do shit. I just always had the gift of putting niggas under a spell," she boasted.

Cannon chuckled. "Get ya ass outta here. Don't get gassed up."

She waved her hand. "You never answered my question, though. Why are you here?"

He pondered her question for a moment. He knew why he had come to see her, but he wasn't sure if she would accept it. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a velvet box. He sat it in front of her and watched as she eyed him suspiciously.

“What’s this Cannon?”

“Open it.”

She slowly grabbed the box and lifted the top. A smile stretched across her face and then she began to laugh.

“I know you didn’t come here with this?”

He grinned. “I did and I’m serious.”

“But, you didn’t choose me first,” she snapped as she snaked her neck. “I never want to be a man’s second pick. If I’m not your first choice, then I don’t wanna be a choice at all.”

“I understand that; but ya need to know I ain’t never gave a chick a ring, and I ain’t never wanted to get married. But with you, I’m willin’ to do anything because I been sufferin’ without ya. Believe it or not, Finesse, you was never my second choice. I wanted ya all along, but I went ’bout the shit the wrong way.”

Finesse took the ring out the box and examined it closely. “I don’t know how to be a wife, Cannon. Shit, I never wanted to get married either. I didn’t think the lifestyle was for me.”

“Lifestyle?”

“Yeah, like cooking every day and cleaning. Being submissive is just something I never saw myself doing. I’m

too headstrong for it. My Auntie is a great wife, but I don't think I can do half of the shit she does.”

“I know what ya capable of Finesse and I would'a never asked if I ain't think you could be my wife. Shit, I ain't exactly a person who knows how to be a husband, but I figured we can grow togetha' and figure that shit out along the way.”

“I need time to think, okay?”

That wasn't what Cannon wanted to hear but he had to respect her request. “That's cool. Just call me when ya ready.”

He stood and stepped over to where she sat. He grabbed her hands and she rose from the seat. He wrapped his tattooed arms around her waist and buried his face in the crook of her neck. He couldn't resist smelling her sweet scent and feeling her warm body pressed against his. He pulled back to look at her.

“Don't make me wait too long.” Cannon wanted to kiss her lips but decided against it. Instead, he pecked her forehead and walked out of the office.

Cannon expected their meeting to be far worse, but he could sense the maturity in Finesse. She spoke her mind but didn't do it in a way that made her seem childish. He wanted nothing more than to join in on her journey of growth. He wanted to help her become a better woman while she helped him grow as a man.

Cannon got inside the car and sat for a moment. He pulled out his phone to text Kano but was surprised to see a text from Finesse.

Finesse: Since your yellow ass pulled my arm, the answer is yes.

Cannon's mouth was stretched so widely that his cheeks hurt. He was in complete awe as he read her text message again. She had just accepted his proposal and he couldn't be happier.

Cannon: You got me over here grinning like a bitch. You ain't gon' regret this shit. I promise.

Finesse: We'll see.

Cannon started his engine and drove off. He hadn't experienced the emotion of feeling happy in a long while. He couldn't deny that it felt good. He finally had the woman he had been craving for more than five months and he made a promise to himself that he was going to treat her like gold. She would never experience not having him in her life because he planned to never leave her again.

Epilogue

Finesse sat next to Cannon as her hair blew wildly in the wind. They were posted on a yacht enjoying a romantic evening the day before their wedding. The couple had flown their families to Aruba for their upcoming nuptials. Finesse wanted to have a destination wedding, so she could avoid all the planning and stress that came with traditional weddings. She looked over at Cannon who was chewing rapidly on his gum. His exposed arms were on full display, showing off beautiful artwork on his biceps.

“You chewing the shit out of that gum,” she joked.

He chuckled. “I’m hungry as fuck.”

“We should be arriving at the restaurant soon. I thought this was a fly way to get there instead of the usual car.”

“Nah, it’s cool. I like seein’ the water, and shit.”

She smiled and interlocked her arm into his. “So, you really wanna marry a woman like me? You know there’s no turning back now.”

Cannon looked at her. “I would’a never asked ya wild ass if I ain’t want to. Aye, did ya decide if ya wanted to buy a house or what?”

She shrugged. “I don’t want a house. I like living in a high-rise condo and taking an elevator up to my place. It fits me better.”

“Good ‘cause I’on feel like cuttin’ grass and shit.”

“Your lazy ass,” she joked. “You don’t want to do your manly chores, huh?”

“Nah, I did enough of that shit when I was growing up. My Auntie Mia made me do all the handy work.”

“Your auntie is really nice as well as your sisters. Your dad is also cool as hell. But your ghetto-ass-mama is a mess. How come you didn’t tell me your mama was white?”

“I ain’t know I needed to tell ya that?”

“Um yeah, I would like to know where you actually come from. Your mom is so ratchet too. Asking where the casinos at, and shit like we in Vegas some damn where. That’s a ghetto-ass Caucasian lady.”

Cannon laughed. “I tole’ ya she had a gambling addiction. I ain’t wanna invite my whole family and not bring her. I ain’t wanna hear her mouth, so we had to take this L togetha’.”

“Yeah, whatever. She better be cool or else I’ma slap her silly ass.”

“Ya ain’t gon’ do shit.” He gripped her chin and pulled her close to kiss her lips. “Ya know you the craziest chick I ever met and I ain’t like ya at first, but I love ya rowdy ass now.”

Finesse felt like her heart would burst from joy. “I love you too with your bright ass.”

Cannon playfully muffed her head. “Watch ya mouth.”

She grinned and snuggled closer to him. She didn’t know when she first met Cannon that he would become a

permanent fixture in her life. She loved him dearly and only hoped that they would grow together and actually become one, because she couldn't see herself with anyone other than him.

The end

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