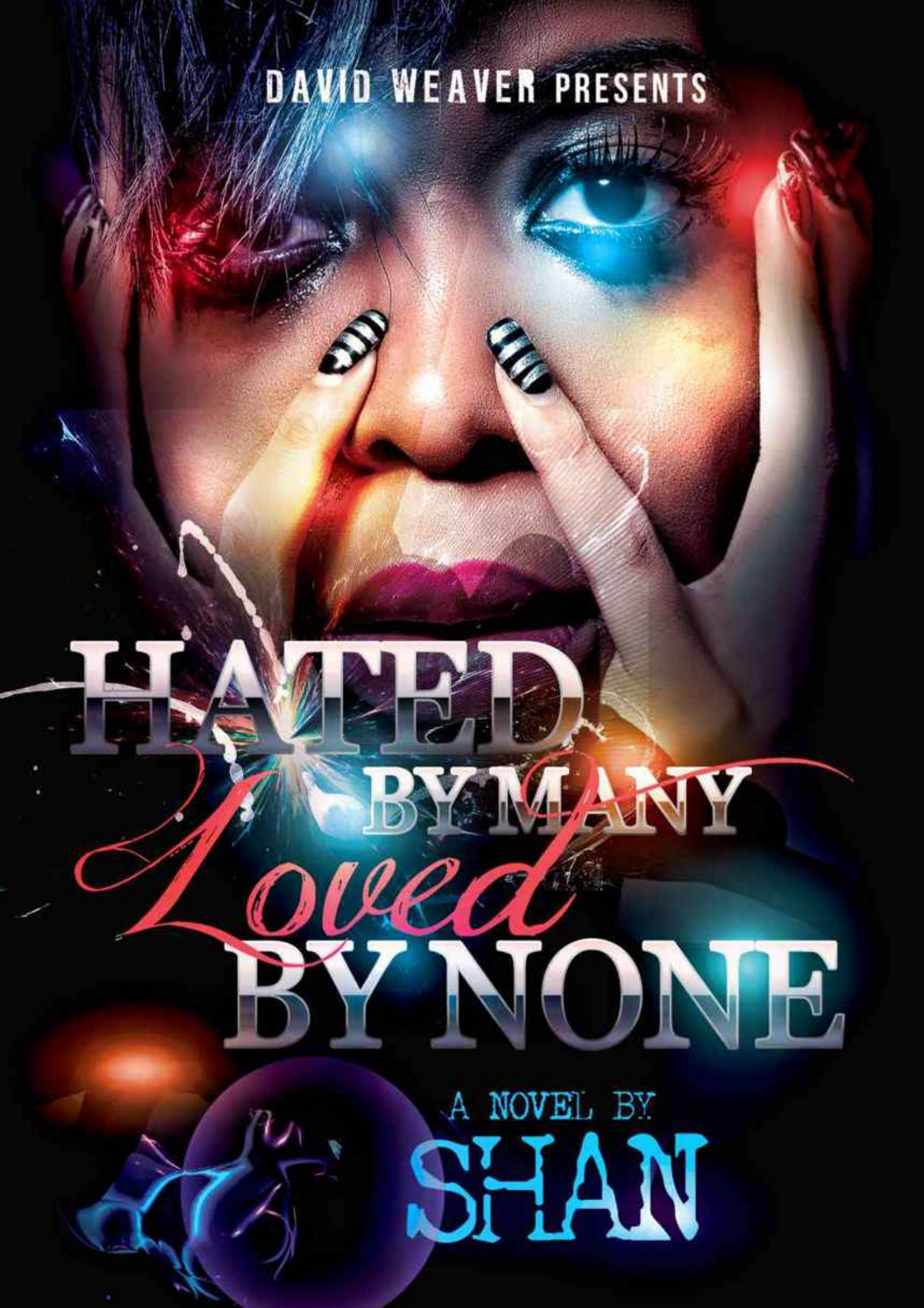


DAVID WEAVER PRESENTS

HATED  
BY MANY  
*Loved*  
BY NONE

A NOVEL BY

SHAN



HATED BY MANY, LOVED BY NONE

SHAN

HATED BY MANY, LOVED BY NONE

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## Dedication

To my loves: Stevien, Zhaniah, Zamaria, Dee, Amanda, Deuce,  
Kalayya.

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To my mother Lucy Miles: I really appreciate everything you've done for me. You are the one person that I know, for sure, who will always have my back no matter what. Trust me, that means a lot to me. I love you and thank you for all the support you have given me. You've read all my books, even though they contain a lot of curse words. You've shown much how you're down for me just by making that sacrifice to support your daughter. You are more than a backbone for me, and I appreciate it. Love you!

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Time to give 'em that werk!

Special shout out and thank you to David Weaver: Thank you for being a great mentor to me, the motivational speech you once gave me (awkward), and always being accessible when I need a question answered. Thanks for being a great boss and for definitely working with me on this release. You know my mind has changed too many times to count over the course of a few months, and I'm sure it will continue to change within the coming months. And a big thank you for making me a part of the family. #TBRS official!



## Jahzara

*Hey! How you doin', lil mama?*

*Lemme whisper in your ear*

*Tell you somethin' that you might like to hear*

*You got a sexy ass body and your ass look soft*

*Mind if I touch it? And see if it's soft*

*Naw. I'm just playin' unless you say I can.*

*Damn! The club is on and poppin' for it to be a Thursday night, I thought. Ballers are posted from the VIP to the main floor, so that means I won't be walking out with anything less than a rack.*

*I'd been working at Wet Dreams for the last three and a half years. My husband Quin got knocked for peddling drugs over the county line and, in turn, had to do a four year sentence, leaving me to handle my bills and his bills.*

*I've been holding that ass down his whole sentence and can't wait until September rolls around. My pussy is lonely and starving for some damn dick! I could easily leave Quin stuck out and boss up with any dude I choose, but I ain't that bitch. I ride for my man, and, even when times get hard and I feel like giving up, I won't. He's done too much for me to just leave him when he needs me the most. So, yeah, I'm sticking it out with him. I send letters, take the long ride to the prison once a week, the whole nine yards. To me, it will be well worth it in the end because I know, when he gets home, he's gonna do what he's gotta do to get back on top and continue taking care of me like he was doing before.*

*"Jazzy!"*

I looked over to my left at one of my regulars named Gee and nodded my head at him. He held up a few twenties. His eyes were pleading for me to come his way. After swallowing the rest of my drink, I placed the glass on the bar. As I headed in Gee's direction, I thought, *I know I can pop my ass with him for a good fifteen minutes and make a good hundred dollars or better. I ain't gonna even lie— to be just twenty-two years old, I'm a bad bitch. Smooth chocolate skin that shimmers in the light, five-seven, one-hundred and forty pounds, with long, natural hair. My ass, tits, and thighs are to die for. That's why I'm such a hot commodity at Wet Dreams. A lot of dudes come here just to see me perform, even though some of these other bitches want to act like the majority of the dudes are here for them. Nah, that's not even the case.*

"What's up, Gee?" I asked as I slid onto his lap.

It was dudes like him that contributed to my car note, rent, light bill, and more. He and many others spent damn near their whole paychecks on a couple of lap dances, and a few feels of my tits and ass, only to leave here with a hard dick and blue balls.

"Waiting to see you, Jazzy baby. Mmph," he grunted, while cupping my breasts in his hands.

Looking into his eyes and making him feel like he was the only man in the room was all it took for me to take him over the edge. In the beginning, he may have only planned to spend twenty to forty dollars, but, after I was done with him, he always came out of his pocket with more. The minimum for a lap dance was only twenty, but I always worked for more.

"Aye! Air this bitch out!"

TAT-TA- TAT- TA- TAT!

I turned my attention away from Gee and saw a flock of goons, dressed in army fatigues with black ski-masks over their faces. They each held on to either a chopper or a hand gun. They came in and got straight to the business.

Security around here had always been weak as hell, and the girls had complained on numerous occasions, but to no avail. We always got excuses about it not being in the budget, or we were told that we, the dancers, would have to come off more money for the house if we wanted better security. Hell! At the end of the night, the house was paid a pretty penny and wasn't nobody trying come up off more. Especially not me. Nah, not even.

I slowly stood up from Gee's lap, unsure of what to do next. Gee stood up right next to me and looked around at the other dancers and customers at the club. They, for sure, had everyone's attention because everything had come to a halt, including the music. *This shit is crazy as hell! The economy has gotten that bad that fools are holding up strip clubs? What the fuck?* I thought.

"These fools trippin'!" a patron yelled.

"Now, we don't wanna hurt nobody, but we will! Since y'all muthafuckas wanna be up in here strippin', then strip!" one of the goons yelled.

A bunch of groans and protests could be heard from some of the men and women who had only come to see a show and not be a part of it. Most of the men looked around at the other men, seeing which ones were going to get rid of their clothing first. I didn't give a damn since I danced half-naked around this muthafucka anyway. I quickly came out of my black, faux fur two piece set and dropped it down to the floor, and then looked over at Gee to see what he was waiting for.

**POW! POW!**

"Aaagh!" I screamed when one of the goons blew Gee's head off right next to where I stood. Blood splattered across my face and mixed with the tears that fell from my eyes.

"Do we have any further protests?" asked the goon that blew Gee's head off.

Suddenly, everyone got on board and took off every piece of clothing that they had on. I stood there silently praying for

Gee and for myself. It hurt that this was the life that I was forced to live.

Quin had been the one I depended on because I didn't have anyone. After he got locked up, the bills piled up quicker than I could keep up with, and the only way I knew to legally make some fast money was to strip. I'd left my parents' home to be with Quin a few months before my eighteenth birthday. My mama and my daddy told me that, if I left our beautiful home to go be with a no good ass drug dealer that lived in the hood, I better not ever come home.

At the time, I didn't even care. Quin was the first real boyfriend that I ever had, and I was too head over heels in love with him. I wouldn't have cared if that nigga lived in a shelter. I just wanted to be wherever he was at. The moment I turned eighteen, we went straight to the courthouse and made things official between us. Sadly, less than a year into our marriage, he got knocked, leaving me to play the role of lonely wife.

"Preciate the cooperation! Almost done, and y'all can get back to swinging 'round that pole!" one of the goons said with a slight chuckle as he approached me.

The fucker had the nerve to lick his lips as he reached down and grabbed the ones, tens, and twenties that had been placed in my G-string and garter. He made a point to stop and eye my pussy as he came up from the floor with my chedda in his hands.

*He better be glad he holding that damn gun,* I thought.

Before walking away, he smirked at me and moved on to the next victim. The whole ordeal lasted, at least, twenty minutes. Everyone in the damn club had been stripped and robbed for everything they had. As soon as the goon squad left the place, niggas stuck out their chests and got out of line, doing a whole lot of hot talking for no damn reason at all.

After it was all over, I stared down at Gee's lifeless and body and wondered if he had a wife and kids at home. It was crazy

how I'd danced for this man thousands of times since I'd been working here, been up in his personal space, but didn't know shit about him.

"Jazzy, why the hell you still standing here? Get your clothes, and let's go," Trixie said with her arm covering her breasts.

I wiped the blood from my face using the back of my hand before heading to the back to get dressed and go home.

\* \* \* \* \*

The ride home was a blur. I couldn't even remember the turns I made, the lights I stopped at, or how I made it into my house. I'd seen a lot of bullshit since I'd been with Quin, but this was the first time I'd ever seen a body, up close and personal. I didn't think that I would ever get the image of Gee out of my head— him being slumped over with blood leaking from a tiny space in his head. That image just stuck to me like glue.

Once I had showered and dressed in some comfy pajamas, I curled up on my couch with a half smoked blunt and a thick ass package from Quin. I had to be high in order to read anything that he sent me, it was the only way for me not to get mad at some of the mess he said when he wrote home. After taking a deep toke from the blunt, I pulled the letter out and smiled at the little hearts that he'd drawn around my name.

*I won't lie and say that it's not hard to wait on a man to come home when there are so many others out there that I could easily pick from. I'm only twenty-two years old and should be enjoying my life. Instead, I come home to a lonely, empty house in the middle of the damn ghetto. I definitely shouldn't be coming home without someone waiting to hold me and tell me it's gonna be okay after what I witnessed today. This, by far, is the greatest challenge I've ever had to go through, but, as the days wind down until Quin's release date, I know I can do it, I thought.*

“Shit!” I jumped and ended up dropping to the floor after hearing gun shots close to my window. *Damn, my nerves are shot*, I thought as I picked up the blunt and quickly took another hit. I allowed myself to calm down as I continued reading Quin’s letter. Everything he mentioned was mainly a repeat of all the rest of his letters. Talking about how he had niggas in the pen bowing down to him, how he couldn’t wait to come home and get back on top.

“Whatever, Quin,” I sighed, then frowned at the last few sentences.

*Jahzara,*

*Look, I know three plus years is a long time to be trying to hold somebody down, and I know the fact that I left you out there struggling didn’t help. I told you that, even though I’m here, I still know what’s going on in them streets. I’ve been hearing major things about you that I’m not happy with. Things that I would’ve never believed in a million years. All this shit got my head so fucked up that I ended up causing a damn riot because of it, and now I gotta do an extra eight months. Not trippin’ at all, though, ma. Look, sign these damn papers, and don’t make this shit more difficult than it already is. One.*

*Quin*

“Papers?” I questioned, pulling the rest of the contents from the package. The first page of the documents stunned me, causing me to drop the entire package onto the floor. “After all this time I sat here and held this fool down, this is how he is going to play the game? I left my beautiful home in a beautiful neighborhood. I don’t even talk to my parents anymore, and this is how this fool wants to repay me? He wants a damn divorce?”

Hot, salty tears spilled down my face as I cried until I couldn’t cry anymore.

Honey

2

Honey

*“¡Ay, papi! Mucho gusto, mi amor!”* I moaned in pleasure.

*“Tear this pussy up! ¡Aye, papi!”*

“Shit! That’s right! Throw that ass back!” Cedric groaned as he slapped my ass with force.

I clenched my muscles tightly around Cedric’s thin but long pole as he slammed himself into me. My juices gushed with each stroke, pushing me further and further into ecstasy. Cedric and I had been together since we were sixteen-years-old, just juniors in high school.

He was the first black guy that I’d ever dated, and he truly had me hooked from day one. I don’t know if it was his dark chocolate skin or the nice eleven inch dick he was slangin’, but, whatever it was, it had me mesmerized and unable to leave this bastard’s side.

*“Oh, shit! ¡Ay, papi! ¡Ay!”*

Just as I reached my climax, the stereo cut off, the ceiling fan slowed down, and the clock on the nightstand blacked out. I quickly pulled away from Cedric and climbed out of the bed, seething with anger.

“Please tell me you paid the light bill, Cedric?” I questioned while crossing my arms and tapping my feet.

“You fucked up my nut to talk about the damn light bill? Man, bring your ass back over here. I was almost—”

“No, no, no! Tell me you paid the light bill, Cedric! Tell me that you did and that they turned off the wrong fucking lights!”

“I paid it. I paid it like... six weeks ago.” Cedric scratched his head while looking up at me.

“Six weeks ago? The bill is due every damn month! You know this! Oh, my god! Please don’t tell me we don’t have any fuckin’ lights!”

I grabbed my clothing from the floor and quickly slid into my pants and my shirt. This wasn’t the first time we’d been without lights. Cedric always forgot to pay this bill or that bill. We never had any food in the house, fuckin’ personal items, or bus fare to get around.

The apartments we lived in were located in the Oak Cliff area of Dallas. They were rundown, but they were cheap and affordable. I always wondered what my life would be like if I lived in the North with the upper class white and seddity black people. I knew, out there, they didn’t have kids playing in the streets along with the neighborhood dope boys and crack heads. The few times I’d been out there, all I had seen were pretty houses, nicely manicured lawns, and expensive cars. All the things my ass couldn’t afford since I was just a poor Mexican with only a high school education and a broke ass boyfriend.

Cedric, who called himself a hustler, stayed in the streets all day, but always came home just as broke as he left. Half the time, I wondered why I’d spent all this time with him. He had no ambition whatsoever and laughed at me when I told him we could do better. Cedric had no issues with the way we lived and honestly thought that that shit was normal. I refused to be a broke-down hood monger for the rest of my life.

*“¡No necesito esto! ¡No necesito esto!”* I screamed at Cedric who continued to lie in the bed like the lights being out didn’t bother him.

“Can you speak English please? Hate when you do that shit!” Cedric finally got out of the bed and grabbed his boxers and jeans from the floor.

“As long as you have been with me, you should know Spanish by now. See, this is what I’m talking about Cedric! You don’t make an effort to do anything, and I’m sick of it!” I crossed my



arms over my chest and stared at him as hot tears fell down my cheeks.

“What you mean ‘you’re sick of it’? What does that mean?”

“That means, I’m tired, Cedric! That means, I don’t wanna do this anymore! You haven’t had a real job since we’ve been together!”

“Oh, and you have? You call selling Avon a job? Fuck you gonna tell me I ain’t had a real job since we’ve been together, and I’m the one bringing in the majority of the paper. Get outta here with that shit,” Cedric sighed, before pulling his shirt over his head.

“Fuckin’ *perdedor!* ¡*Perdedor! Pasar toda la noche en las calles para nada,*” I spat.

After guiding my way carefully through the darkness, I went into the closet and pulled out a small duffle bag. I continued cursing Cedric out in Spanish, knowing that it irked the hell out of him because he didn’t understand it.

“Where the hell you think you’re going?” Cedric asked as he fired up a Newport.

“Away from here! I know you don’t expect me to sit up in a dark ass house with you all day.”

“I’m about to go make some money and get the lights back on. Just give me a couple of hours. You can’t just chill for a few hours?”

“No, I cannot. You know why?” I asked. “Because when you come back home, you won’t even have enough to get the lights back on. You will have either smoked it or drunk it all up. I’m sick of this, and I’m sick of you! I want you to pack your things and get out!”

“Honey, you talking real reckless right now! I’m not going anywhere. This is my house, too!”

“I want you out! *Yo quiero que usted fuera!* Get out and be gone by the time I come back!”

Cedric grabbed my arm as I attempted to walk past him. I elbowed him in his stomach and then turned and slapped him in the face. This had been going on for years, and I was sick of it. Sick of not having the finer things in life, sick of dreaming about better and not doing better. I wanted more for myself, and it didn't look like I was going to get anything more than what I already had if I stayed with Cedric.

I looked at Cedric one last time before exiting our bedroom and leaving the apartment. My best friend Tomeka lived in an apartment complex a few miles away, and I knew that she would allow me to stay with her until I figured things out. One thing was for sure— Cedric and I were done.

\*\*\*\*\*

The walk to Tomeka's house took forever. With the heat and the thin sandals I had on, I wondered if I would ever get there. I just hoped that she was home when I got there.

I'd known Tomeka since elementary school, along with our other friend Jahzara. We were like sisters and had each other's backs through thick and thin. There wasn't anything that we wouldn't do for each other, which was how I knew Tomeka would be cool with me crashing at her place for a couple of days.

My mother and father had moved back to Mexico, leaving me with no one but my girls and Cedric's broke ass. I had a couple of aunts and uncles, but none of them approved of me dating a black guy. They always told me how they wanted me to date a nice, wholesome Mexican man, but my preference was for a fine ass chocolate brother... with a big dick, of course.

If I couldn't date a black dude, then I didn't wanna date any man. That was how serious my attraction to black men had become. Cedric had been the first, but he wasn't the only. Several times, when we'd broken up, I had my taste of others, and that made my addiction worse. From time to time, I still messed with one of the guys on the side, but it was only when I needed money to pay a bill that Cedric couldn't afford to pay. He would kill me if he found out, but— Shit!— what did

he expect? If he wasn't man enough to take care of home, then I would gladly find someone that could.

"Aagh! It's fuckin' hot out here!" I screamed, almost tripping over my feet.

I caught my balance, threw my bag over my shoulder, and continued to walk. I'd made this walk before with ease, but, this time, it was killing me. Several times, I contemplated turning around and going back home, but I didn't want Cedric to think I'd changed my mind. I wanted his ass out of our apartment, and I wanted him to know that I was serious about no longer being with him.

Besides, turning back would be dumb because I could finally see Tomeka's apartment complex up ahead. A few more minutes and I would be there. I just hoped that she or her boyfriend DeMarcus were there to let me in.

Once I finally made it and came upon Tomeka's place, I immediately regretted not calling first. She and DeMarcus were standing outside. They were in the middle of a full blown argument, and all the neighbors had front row seats.

I approached cautiously, wondering if I wanted to get involved in their shit or not. I always felt like Tomeka could do better than DeMarcus' trifling ass, but, like me and our girl Jahzara, we loved who we loved.

Tomeka was tall, standing at about five-eight and weighed around one-hundred and fifty pounds. She had a nice, thin frame, light skin and light brown eyes. She wore her hair in a bob that stopped at her shoulders.

"Tomeka, everything okay?" I asked, dropping my bag to my feet.

Tomeka

3

Tomeka

“Sick dick, muthafucka! You out here like that, DeMarcus? You fucked so many hoes that you don’t know which one gave you this shit!” I crossed my arms over my heaving chest.

“Meka, I said, ‘Let’s go in the damn house!’ Every time we have a fuckin’ argument, you wanna be out here in front of these nosy muthafuckas, showcasing and showboating!” DeMarcus yelled doing his best to shy away from the subject.

“Fuck going in the house! These the bitches you around here fucking! Which one of these ducks gave you the shit? Got these bitches ‘round here laughing at me!”

“Tomeka! Go in the house, girl. Stop letting these bitches see you sweat, mami,” Honey said in my ear.

I looked around at the crowd full of women and couldn’t help but wonder which one of these chicks had slept with my man. Two years of being with DeMarcus, and it had been the same shit since day fuckin’ one. Don’t get the shit twisted ‘cause I wasn’t one of those females that allowed their man to walk all over her as long as home was taken care of. I can do for me without any assistance from a man, even if what I had wasn’t much in the eyes of some; it was mine.

I lived in a one bedroom apartment in the middle of Oak Cliff, drove a Honda Accord, and worked as a customer service rep at a call center. I didn’t need shit from DeMarcus, not his money or the nasty dick that swung between his legs. The only reason I was with this fool still ‘til this day at this very moment was because he had a problem with his hands. I’d tried everything to get rid of him, but, each time, he beat me until I begged him to stay. That was the reason for having the

argument outside, I knew he wouldn't dare touch me with all those people watching.

I hated for those wretched hoes to know that shit wasn't butter smooth between me and DeMarcus, but it was the only way I could confront him and let him know how I felt without him putting his hands on me.

"You know what, Marcus? It's not even worth it. It's not as if shit is going to change. I'm out here making a fool of myself and getting all worked up for nothing."

I turned and headed for my apartment with Honey in tow. At a time like this, I was glad to see my girl Honey because I desperately needed a friend to talk this shit out with, especially after leaving the doctor's office that morning and finding out that I'd been infected with gonorrhea and chlamydia. *Type shit is that?* I wondered as I pushed through the door and fell to my sofa.

I didn't understand this at all. DeMarcus claimed he loved me and that I was the best thing to ever happen to him, but then he goes and does some bullshit like this. *Kinda love is that?*

"You good, mami? Can I get you anything?" Honey asked as she kneeled in front of me.

I dropped my head into my hands and cried something terrible. I wanted out of this shit but didn't know how to go about doing so. No lie. DeMarcus had me too scared to do anything but what he said to do. I knew that, once Honey was gone and he and I were alone, I would have to suffer for the scene I'd caused outside.

"Honey, I just want a better life than the one I have. Is this all I'm worth? Why can't that muthafucka respect me enough to keep his dick in his pants," I asked, peering through the cracks of my fingers.

"You know you're worth more than this. DeMarcus doesn't deserve a woman like you, and you know that. Just leave him. I left Cedric today," Honey smiled.

I laughed through the tears, “Yeah, right, heifer. You know damn well you’re going back. Is that why you’re here?”

“Yeah. Wanted to see if I could crash on the couch for a couple of days. My lights are off and—”

“Of course, you can, Honey. You know you’re welcome to stay here for as long as you like,” I eagerly said.

With Honey here, DeMarcus would have to save his beating for a later date. Hopefully, by the time she left, he would’ve forgotten about it.

“Thank you, mami. I appreciate it. I’m done with Cedric this time. I’m serious. I know I say that all the time, but I gotta get out this fuckin’ neighborhood,” Honey shook her head. “Do you know that somebody killed the chick that lives next to me? Murdered her ass while we were sleeping. What if that had been me?”

“Damn!” I sighed. “This world is getting crazier and crazier. Have you talked to Jah?”

“No, not in a couple of days,” Honey answered.

“Somebody ran up in the club last night, and a dude was killed right in front of her. Then, she found out that Quin’s sentence was extended, and he wants a divorce. I told her I would be over there today, but then I got the news from the doc and this—”

“A divorce? We need to go and check on her. Oh, my god! That’s why I hate not having a damn phone.” Honey flipped her curly hair off her shoulders and stood up.

She pulled me up from the couch, and I laughed at how I towered over her short frame. She was only five-two, weighed one-hundred and thirty-five pounds, but was built just like a sister. Her honey brown skin made her look more black than Mexican, and the fact that she had ass for days didn’t help.

“I hope the heifer is okay, and I hope like hell she got some loud. Bitch needs to get twisted. Let’s go!” Honey headed for the door with me following behind her.

Jahzara lived about twenty minutes away in West Dallas in a house ducked off behind some train tracks. It was a neighborhood that was known for gang and drug violence. No one really messed with Jahzara because she was Quin's lady, but I often found myself worrying about her being over there all alone.

"Jahzara!" Honey yelled as she knocked on the door. "It's me and Meka! Open up, baby girl!"

We stood on the porch for a few moments before the door finally opened. Jahzara stood in the doorway wearing a tiny robe that barely covered her thick hips.

"Hey," she said dryly.

She looked bad, like she'd gone through hell and back and was on her way again. We walked inside and immediately were hit by the smells of weed and air freshener.

"Are you okay?" I asked as I buried my ass on her comfy sofa.

"Quin isn't coming home for another eight months, but, to top it all off, after all this time that I held his ass down, he doesn't want me anymore. He wants a divorce. I don't know if I can do this anymore, y'all," Jahzara said, sounding like a little school girl.

"Join the party. Honey's lights are off, and she left Cedric. I'm burning and wishing I could leave DeMarcus," I huffed, folding my arms over my chest.

"Wait, what? You're burning?" Jahzara asked with her mouth wide open.

"Yep. Went to the doctor to get a shot this morning. Can't believe this shit," I sighed.

"I'm not going back to Cedric. I promise this time. I need to find me a new man," Honey interjected, "and get out the damn hood. So sick of my life."

"I know what you mean, Honey. After the shit that went down at the club and then this morning, the police raided the house across the street. I want better. I need better." Jahzara shook

her head. “I don’t know what Quin expects of me, but I know he doesn’t think I’mma sit here and watch over his shit, and he doesn’t even want me anymore.”

“Watch over what? This raggedy house?” I asked, scrunching my nose up.

“This house, his stupid ass car, and the six kilos he was able to hide from the police,” Jahzara said as she lit up a half smoked blunt.

“Fuck the house! Fuck the car! Did you say this nicca left you with six kilos of coke?” Honey asked, finally parking her butt on the sofa.

“Yep, six kilos of uncut, pure, grade-A coke.”

The whole room grew quiet as we marinated on what Jahzara had just said. I wasn’t a drug dealer and didn’t know anything about dope, but I knew Jahzara had to be sitting on some money. Quin had been big time before he got locked up. He had the whole East and West Side of Dallas eating from his hands. There was a time when all Jahzara had to do was cook, suck, and fuck, and Quin gave her everything she needed and wanted. Now, she was forced to shake her ass in order to make rent and other bills. I always wondered what happened to all the money Quin had. Had it been seized by the police? Was he hiding it? Or did Jahzara know where it was and just didn’t want to touch it?

“Did he leave any money behind, Jah, or did the police confiscate it all?” I asked.

“He says that the police took it all, but I don’t believe him. Quin never left all of his money in one spot for fear that he might get popped or robbed one day.” Jahzara leaned over and handed the blunt to Honey.

“You don’t have any—” Honey coughed after her first toke. “Any idea where he may have left it?”

Jahzara shook her head, “Nah, but, even if I did, y’all, I wouldn’t touch it. Quin would kill me.”



Honey and I both looked at Jahzara like she had shit drizzling from her mouth. There were times I'd had to loan her money when she didn't make enough at the club, and she was talking about she wouldn't touch his money. Oh, hell nah!

"So, you'd rather keep dancing at that club for the next eight months, struggling until Quin comes home, and then what? What if he puts your ass out on the streets? What if he's serious about that divorce? What if he really is done? What are you gonna do then?" I asked baffled by it all.

"If that had been me, all those bricks would've been gone, and I would've been moved out of this raggedy ass neighborhood. Shit! You sitting on a good hundred thousand dollars or more and don't even know it." Honey blew out a cloud of smoke.

"A hundred thousand?" Jahzara and I said simultaneously.

"Yep, and just imagine, if you break it down and then sell it. It's more. If Quin had been a real man, he would've allowed you to get rid of that shit and take care of everything until he came home. Selfish asshole!"

Jahzara sat quietly for the remainder of the night. I'm sure she spent most of the night wondering if she should touch Quin's dope or not. I wasn't so sure if she should mess with the dope, but— Hell!— if she could find out where the fool's money was at, that would be better.

"What if I found someone to show me how to break it down? Would y'all help me sell it?" Jahzara asked after a long period of silence.

"Yep!" Honey smacked her lips. "I need to get my lights back on, get a phone, and, hopefully, a car. Hell, yeah! I'll help!"

I shook my head, "Jahzara, you can't be serious. Find out where his money is at. I'm not finna be sitting on the corner selling no dope. Girl, hell, nah. I can just stay at my job and continue to do me."

"Yeah, continue to let Marcus beat your face in every time he feels like it," Honey said with a roll of her eyes.

I looked over at Honey, then at Jahzara, in shock. I had no idea that they knew what DeMarcus had been doing. I had tried so hard to cover it up. I didn't think anyone knew.

"How is me turning to a drug dealer gonna keep DeMarcus from beating my ass?" I asked with attitude.

"Who knows? Maybe, you can make enough money to get away from his ass or even hire a nigga to murk that fool," Jahzara laughed and so did Honey.

"Whatever!" I tossed a pillow at Honey.

"Seriously though, since I've known you and Honey, that's all y'all have talked about— getting out of the hood and having so much money you wouldn't know what to do with it. I know one thing, though. I'm never going back to Wet Dreams, and I'm damn sure not going back to my parents," Jahzara said.

"I'm in, Jah. You don't have to ask me twice," Honey smacked her lips.

"Nah, I'm good. Y'all have fun with that," I smiled weakly.

I listened to Honey and Jahzara put their plan together on how they were gonna move the dope. They went through plan after plan, but none of them sounded decent enough to me. I honestly thought they were foolish and wanted nothing to do with that shit.

Jahzara

4

Jahzara

The robbery and homicide at Wet Dreams forced the club to shut down for a few days, but it didn't take long before the owners reopened for business. Fools were piling back in looking for a peep show like nothing ever happened. I said that I wouldn't dare step foot into that muthafucka again after what went down, but money had to be made. Besides, Honey and I needed a real live d-boy to help us get started on our little venture. Wet Dreams stayed packed with dudes that hustled, and all I had to do was point out the one that was at the top of his game.

Honey was right about everything she had said the other night. Had Quin been a real man, those bricks would have been sold and bought already. Instead of saving them for when he came home in the months to come, he could've easily given the green light for me to get rid of them to invest in our future. Since he didn't, he had me out here struggling, shaking my ass for men, and he wanted to dump me because of it. He forced me to take matters into my own hands.

*I know, once he finds out that I sold his shit, he will try to kill me, I thought, which is why I have to do this shit quick, fast, and in a hurry.* I had to come up quick and get the fuck out of dodge before Quin could even come home and find out what happened.

Quin knew what kind of life I was living before he pulled me out of my parents' care, and he promised me that he would give me everything I had and more. Staying by his side through his bid was a hard pill to swallow, but I did it. For the first few years, I was there, struggling and never even thought about another man. *I played my part to the best of my ability, and this nigga couldn't even show me the same respect and*

*do his? So now it's like, what's a bitch supposed to do?* I wondered.

I refused to go back to my parents' house for them to preach to me about how they knew *this* would happen or how they told me *that* would happen. *Nah, not gonna happen*, I thought.

I strutted through the club on a mission, heels clicking, hips twerking, and ass jiggling. I spotted a few brothers that looked like they were getting it, but none of them had that "It" factor. Just because a dude had on a shit load of jewelry, a knot of cash, and was drinking on a bottle of Dom didn't mean he was a true baller. I was looking for the dude that wasn't looking to attract the limelight, the one that looked like money but didn't care to show it.

"Mmm, there he is," I smiled, while looking at a mocha colored brother dressed in a white t-shirt and black jeans. He wore a simple pair of Air Force Ones on his feet, a small cross around his neck, and a tiny, tiny pinkie ring. "Gentlemen."

"Shawty, got a fat ass!" one of the fellas yelled that was sitting nearby.

I did a lil' dance to make my booty clap a few times, then made my way over to my target. He smirked as he eyed my full set of breasts and thick thighs.

"Sup, daddy? Wanna lap dance?" I asked, placing my hands on my hips.

"How much for a dance?" he asked.

"Twenty minimum," I said, sliding into his lap. He smelled of weed and Issey Miyake cologne. "What's your name, daddy?"

"Imran. What they call you?"

He slid a twenty dollar bill down the front of my bra top and popped the string afterwards for effect.

"Jazzy," I cooed in his ear as I bounced my ass and rolled my hips like I was riding his dick.

“Jazzy, huh? Show me some tricks. I know you got some.”

“Nah, I ain’t here for that. I got a proposition for you.” I slowed up a lil’ to look into his eyes.

“Oh, yeah? What’s that?” Imran asked unable to keep his attention away from my breasts.

“I got some bricks, and I need some help moving them. You help me, and I’ll give you one free and clear for your troubles.”

“I don’t fool around with dope, mama. What you think this is?” He placed his hands on my thighs to push me away.

“I know exactly what it is. You in deep, and it’s written all over your face. One brick free and clear and three percent profit. Make your mind up and let me know. I’ll be around.” I gave him a peck on the cheek and slid off of his lap.

Imran grabbed my arm and pulled me back down on his lap. He looked me dead in my eyes this time, no straying away to other body parts.

“Is there somewhere we can go to speak in private?” he asked.

I nodded my head, slid off of him again, and then pulled him to his feet. We walked through the club and out the back exit. Once outside, I got a real good glimpse of how gorgeous Imran really was. The club lights did nothing for his beauty nor his swag. I knew dude was on one, but, once we walked out into the night light, it was definitely proven.

“So, what’s this you talking about? You a hustla, or you just fuck with a hustla?” Imran asked.

“I’m just trying to get out this club and stop shaking my ass for chump change. Can you help me or not?” I asked.

Imran went into his pocket and pulled out a pack of Newports. He slid out the cancer stick and fired it up. He leaned against the brick wall and eyed me from head to toe.

“What’s your real name, Jazzy?” Imran asked, sucking from his square.

“Jahzara, but my name doesn’t have anything to do with this. Are you—”

He cut me off.

“Where the birds at? Let me see what you working with.”

“Just let me know if you’re gonna help me or not. We can set up a time and place later for all that,” I insisted, stepping closer to him.

Imran laughed, “I need to see what I’m dealing with first. You might be the police or something. Shoot me your number, and I’ll get up with you tomorrow.”

I called my number out for Imran to store in his iPhone and then made my way back into the club. I hoped like hell that Imran was the right choice and that this wasn’t going to be some big come up for him. I needed somebody who was already on. A brick with maybe a small percentage was just a nice incentive for helping a sister out.

*Guess I’ll just have to wait and find out,* I thought.

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The following morning, I got a call from Imran. He wanted to meet to discuss whether or not he would help me with the product. I gave him my address, and he said that he would be over around noon. I had Honey come over to the house before he got there, in case the fool tried to get out of line and pull some shit on me.

“Jah! Calm down, mami!” Honey snapped.

I was freaking out and nervous ‘cause I knew that what I was doing would have some backlash. Quin still had eight months left in prison and didn’t have to know anything about what I was doing, but the thought of him finding out had me shaking like a leaf. My plan was to use his dope, make as much money

as possible, and replace it before he got home and even knew what I'd done. The first plan I came up with was leaving and getting out of dodge, but that meant I would be on the run for the rest of my life. Nah, not happening.

"I'm trying to calm down. I just can't help but think about Quin finding out and what he will do to me once he gets out," I said nervously.

"He's not gonna find out, and so what if he did, Jahzara? You been holding that man down for three and a half years, strugglin' while he had the means to provide a decent life for you but didn't! Then, he wants to dump you! You deserve to profit from the dope, and you shouldn't owe him a dime!" Honey yelled.

The knock at the door caused me to damn near jump from my skin. I looked at Honey to see if she was ready. Then, she sashayed over to open the door. On the other side, Imran stood wearing a white wife beater, a pair of gray jogging pants, and some damn flip flops. I did my best not to frown at the disappointment his appearance was. I had pegged him to be a baller, and the muthafucka shows up looking like one of the local d-boys.

"Sup, Jahzara? You gonna let me come in or what?" Imran asked.

"Umm, yeah," I stepped out the way and allowed Imran to enter. Honey and I traded looks before I offered Imran a seat. "This is my girl Honey. Honey, this is Imran.

"Sup, beautiful? How are you?" Imran asked Honey.

"*Mejor que usted busque,*" Honey said with a slight giggle.

"*Yo acababa de salir de la cama. Me disculpo,*" Imran said, surprising me and shocking the hell out of Honey. Her face turned red before she broke into laughter.

"I'm sorry. That was rude of me. It's not like I look any better right now," Honey said, shaking her head in shame.

“Okay! Glad to see that you two will get along perfectly,” I said, crossing my arms over my chest.

“Let’s see what you got,” Imran suggested.

I nodded my head and walked to my bedroom where I’d placed one of the kilos. I grabbed it and went back into the living room. Honey and Imran were deeply engaged in a conversation that I couldn’t understand. Whatever the hell he was saying to her had the bitch blushing rosy red.

I dropped the kilo on the coffee table, bringing their attention to the white powder that shined like crystals through the clear wrapping.

“Damn, you wasn’t playing, huh? How many of these did you say you have?” Imran’s mouth seemed to water as he stared at the dope.

“I didn’t, but this one is yours if you help me. I learned a few things from watching my old man, but I need to know more,” I said, looking on seriously.

“Is this where you got that from? Your old man?” Imran raised a brow in suspicion.

“Yeah, he was killed a few weeks back and left her this product,” Honey quickly lied, causing me to twist my facial expression up.

Imran looked up at me for confirmation, and I hurriedly fixed my face and nodded. He took a pocket knife out of his pocket and sliced a tiny slit into the package. Once he brought the knife out, small traces of residue glistened in the light. Imran dipped his tongue onto the knife, shook his head, and coiled back like he’d just got a taste of something bitter.

“Hell! Where did your old man get this shit from?” Imran asked while nodding his head. “Put this up. We need to go to the store.”

Honey and I looked at each other once again as Imran explained that, in order for us to do anything, we needed



supplies to get us started. I locked the weight up and left to go to the store with Imran and Honey.

I left out the door as the Jahzara that wouldn't do no wrong to anybody, the chick that would've never betrayed her man, but, when I returned, I would be coming back as Jah.

## 5 Honey

## 5

## Honey

A whole week had gone by since I'd been back to the place I shared with Cedric. Although I told his ass to get out before I left, I secretly wished that he would be there when I walked in. No matter what, I couldn't seem to shake the love I had for him. We'd been through so much together, so many ups and downs, that it didn't even seem right to just give up on it all.

Now that I was down with this new hustle with Jahzara and Imran, I hoped that things would get better for me and Cedric. I had made enough money in the past week to get the lights back on, get some groceries, and even get myself a cell phone from Metro PCS. Things started off slower than Jahzara and I had expected, but Imran assured us that things would pick up and that we would be making more money than we knew what to do with. He said that the product we had was top shit and that niggas would die to get to their hands on it. Once fiends figured out our shit was better than the rest, business would be booming.

I walked into my apartment and was surprised to see that the lights were already on, since I had just paid them less than an hour ago. The place had been cleaned from top to bottom, smelling like Pine-Sol and incense. I slightly smiled knowing that Cedric had to be home. I made my way into the bedroom and spotted Cedric lying across the bed, shirtless with a pair of jeans on. His light snores traveled through the bedroom, making me aware that he was asleep. I dropped my duffle bag on the floor and headed to the bathroom to shower.

I hadn't realized how tired I was until I stepped foot into the tiny bathroom. Imran had been working me and Jahzara like slaves. He taught us how to take the powder form of the coke and turn it into the crack rock that we needed to distribute

and sell. Over and over again, we measured out the soft product ounce by ounce, mixed it with water, boiled it, and then froze it. We did the steps so many times that I swear, every time, I closed my eyes it was all I saw. That and images of Jahzara and me going back and forth from the freezer to the stove. We cut up so many cookies that our hands burned from the residue. Imran failed to tell us that using gloves and masks would be beneficial to our health. Nonetheless, I couldn't wait until I was stacking up some paper.

I drenched my head underneath the stream of hot water and allowed the heat to relax my body. I was really beginning to feel the stress of the week and was more than ready to go and lay next to my man. *I guess I will apologize for going so hard on him, knowing that he tried his best even if, sometimes, it isn't enough,* I thought. *Maybe, now that me and Jahzara have this lil' work going, we will have some room to bring Cedric in since Tomeka doesn't want to have anything to do with it.*

"When did you get here?" Cedric asked, causing me to jump at the sound of his voice.

"Not too long ago! You scared me!" I yelled over the water.

"Come and see me when you get out! We need to talk!" Cedric pulled the shower curtain back and exited the bathroom.

I quickly finished showering and made my way into the bedroom where Cedric was sitting on the edge of the bed, rolling up a Dutch Master. I had a big, thick, blue towel wrapped around my body as I stood in the middle of the floor, waiting on Cedric to speak up and say whatever was on his mind. Silence crippled the space between us, and my curiosity was peaked more than ever now. He wore a look of frustration and sadness, making me wonder if all of this was stemming from me walking out on him or if it was something else.

"Cedric, you said you wanted to talk. Talk!" I demanded, dropping my towel to the floor. I walked over to my dresser

and pulled out a pink and white negligée.

“Honey, we’ve been together forever. Through break ups, make ups, just—Shit!— every damn thing. I know that I haven’t been the man that you needed and maybe wanted me to be, but I have been here for you, and you know that.”

“I know, Cedric, and that’s why I wanted to apolo—”

“I’m not done,” Cedric said, cutting me off. His tone suddenly became firm, causing me to stop what I was doing to look him in his eyes.

“Look, I’m—”

“How long have you been fucking him?”

I blinked my eyes repeatedly and hoped that I wasn’t hearing him correctly. *Did he just ask me who I was fucking? Does he know? I wondered. But how? We were so careful.*

“*¡Lo que sea! ¡No sólo me preguntas!* What...what did you just ask me?” I asked, suddenly feeling like there wasn’t enough air in the room.

“You heard what the fuck I said? How long, Honey?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about. How dare you accuse me? Is it because you are half the man you are supposed to be?” I yelled, trying to turn things around. My cheating was so sporadic that I didn’t even see how it was possible that he even knew about it. I wouldn’t dare admit to anything because I had a feeling he was just fishing around for info. “*¿Cómo se atreve usted?*”

Cedric chuckled to himself and then flicked the ashes of the blunt into the ashtray. He stood up from the bed, and it was the first time I noticed that he already had on his shirt and shoes. He bent down and grabbed two bags that sat at his feet that I had failed to notice as well.

“You’re leaving? What is this? What is going on?” I asked, beginning to panic. “Cedric!”

“Never, Honey! Not even once!” Cedric yelled, and I knew what he was referring to. He always commended himself on being a one woman man, but, unfortunately for him, I couldn’t be a one man woman.

“And I never cheated! Cedric! You have to believe me! Someone is telling lies!”

“The eyes don’t lie! I know what I saw. Don’t even worry. I’m only half a man anyway, so why the fuck you got them tears in your eyes? I’m out.”

Cedric turned his back to me and walked out of our bedroom.

“Cedric! Cedric!” I cried after him. I ran out of the bedroom, half-naked, titties swinging all over the place. “Don’t you...*No te das una vuelta por esa puerta!*”

“Get out of my way, Honey! All this time we’ve been together, I never once fucked another bitch! Never! You are...you were the only woman I needed! I can’t believe you did me like this, and then you lie to me about it!”

“Cedric, I’m sorry it was one— ”

I started, but Cedric cut me off.

“And you still lying! Get out of my way, Honey! It’s over!”

Cedric pushed me to the side and pulled open the door. He took one last look at me before he walked out of the house and out of my life.

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“Hey,” I said, putting my purse down on Jahzara’s table and slouching down into a chair.

“My god! You look like shit. What the hell happened to you?” Jahzara asked.

“I didn’t get any sleep last night. Cedric left me,” I sighed.

“What do you mean ‘he left you’? You put him out, so how could he leave you?”

“You know how I am, Jahzara. I always put him out, but I never mean it. What the hell am I going to do without Cedric?”

“I don’t know, but I got some good news, and I got some bad news.”

“Tell me the bad news first, and then, maybe, I’ll feel better after I hear the good.”

“The bad news is we only have enough product to last us for the next two to three weeks. Good news is I think I know who Quin’s connect is.”

I reached in my purse, pulled out a cigarette, and quickly lit the end of it. I inhaled a cloud of smoke and slowly blew it out. While looking deep into Jahzara’s eyes, I waited for her to tell me what this meant. In two to three weeks, would we be broke again? So what if she knew who Quin’s connect was. It didn’t mean that he would meet with her.

“Honey, did you hear me?” Jahzara asked, snapping me from my thoughts.

“Yeah, I heard you. So, what do we do? I cannot go back to being more broke than what I already am. Now that Cedric’s gone, I am really by myself. I can’t afford rent and the other bills.”

My eyes suddenly became watery as I thought about how much harder life was about to get for me. I had put Cedric down so many times for not taking care of his responsibilities, but, as I thought about it, he did everything. Paying the light bill yesterday was the first time I’d paid a bill in a long time. Things got shut off, but we always had a roof over our heads.

“What have I done? What have I...¿*Qué he hecho*, Jah?”

“Honey, calm down. It’s going to be okay. You know, whatever happened between you and Cedric will not even matter in a few days. Just like you always go back to him, he will come back to you. Right now, we gotta focus on getting this paper.”

“Okay, okay. You’re right, I’m sorry,” I said, taking in a deep breath. I wiped my eyes and tried to take my focus off of my home life. Jahzara was right. Cedric would come back, and we would make sweet love like we always did.

I sat and listened to Jahzara as she went over different ways to approach Quin’s connect. She said she had met him several times before but didn’t put together who he was until after going through Quin’s things last night. I really hoped that, no matter what idea she came up with, it would work and keep getting us money.

## 6 Tomeka

## 6

## Tomeka

After a long day at work, I decided to come home and play nice with DeMarcus. Things had been really tense since I'd put our business in the streets. The ass whooping I suffered when I came back home from Jahzara's the other night was really light compared to the previous ones I'd received after pissing him off. I halfway expected him to kill me for the show I'd put on that day.

I stood over the stove and stirred my pot of collard greens, and then pulled the oven open to check on the cornbread. I usually didn't throw down like this unless it was a Sunday, but I knew a meal this great would relax both DeMarcus and me. I heard the door open and close, and then, shortly after, I heard DeMarcus' footsteps coming towards me.

"Damn, you got it smelling good up in here," he said.

He kissed me on the back of my neck as he wrapped his arms around my slim waist. Instantly, the aroma of perfume struck me in the nose, overpowering the smell of the food. I turned around to stare DeMarcus in his face, the denseness behind his dark brown eyes said that he was either drunk or high. His brown skin was smooth without so much as a blemish in sight. The dark chocolate sweater he wore fit so perfectly over his fit arms and chest. I brought my stare down to the slacks and dress shoes and immediately showed my displeasure.

"When did you come home and change clothes?" I asked.

"What do you mean? This is what I had on when I left for work this morning," he said, looking down at his clothing.

"DeMarcus! No, it's not! I ironed your clothes last night, remember?"



“Well, this is what you had out for me to wear. Look, don’t start tripping and shit. Just let me know when dinner is ready. I’ll be in the living room watching the game.” DeMarcus opened the refrigerator and grabbed a beer out of it.

“Why don’t you go live and eat off of that bitch?” I mumbled as I pulled the oven open.

“What did you say to me?” DeMarcus jerked me by my arm, causing me to turn in his direction. He slapped me with an open hand that pushed me back against the hot stove. I didn’t understand why he liked to do me like this as much as he did. *Why must he continue to hurt me when he is the one always doing wrong?* I wondered. I brought my hand to my lips and could feel blood dripping down my chin.

“What? You want me to apologize? Bitch, fuck you! You always got something slick to say! I spend most of my time with you, and all you can do is complain!” DeMarcus yelled like some crazed maniac.

I turned my back on him and brought my attention back to my food. I said nothing and did nothing for fear that I would only make the situation worse.

“You just gonna turn your back on me, like I wasn’t just talking to you!”

He jerked my head backwards. Then, he pushed forward into the hot stove with force. My eyes widened in desperate fear that I was going to get burned and scarred for life. I did everything to remove DeMarcus’ hands from me, but that only made things worse. He punched me so hard in the side of my head that it sent me flying into the refrigerator. I collapsed to the floor but quickly got onto my knees and crawled out of the kitchen.

“You need to learn when to shut your mouth! Maybe, then, I will stop putting my hands on you!” DeMarcus huffed.

Soon as I was clear from DeMarcus’ wrath, I climbed to my feet and raced to the bedroom where I locked the door behind me. I looked around the room until I spotted my purse

hanging on the knob of the closet door. I rushed over towards it, pulled out my cell phone, and dialed 911. *This shit has to stop*, I thought. I was close to losing my job for calling in so much because of these black eyes, busted lips, and other noticeable bruises. I was certain that, by tomorrow morning, I would be swollen and making another embarrassing call that would permanently blemish my record.

“Meka, open the damn door!” DeMarcus bellowed.

I nervously dropped the phone to the floor, knowing that, if he caught me calling the boys on him, he would beat me even worse before they could make it here to stop him. I reached down and grabbed the phone from the floor and put my ear to it just in time to hear the operator asking what the emergency was.

“Yes, I need to report an assault,” I said in a hushed tone.

“I’m sorry, ma’am. Can you please speak up? You want to report what now?” the operator asked.

“I want to report an assault. My boyfriend has hit me multiple —”

The bedroom door came crashing open, and DeMarcus filled the space between him and me within seconds. My entire body shook in fear, and the phone slipped from the grasp of my hand. DeMarcus brought his fist up and punched me in the face and grabbed me so that I wouldn’t fall. He punched me over and over again before allowing my body to drop to the floor. I rolled over onto my stomach in hopes of protecting my face from further brutality. DeMarcus delivered a kick so powerful to my stomach that I could hear and feel my ribs crack. My mouth dropped open, but no sound came out. The pain was so horrific that it sent me into a sudden state of shock. I closed my eyes and just lay on the bedroom floor, allowing my mind to take me away from the current state of my body.

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DeMarcus was no longer standing over me and could be heard in the other room, cheering for the game. I slid across the floor, looking for my cell phone, but didn't see it in the place I had dropped it or anywhere around. Slowly, I climbed to my feet, hardly able to stand straight up due to the broken rib. Once I made it outside of the bedroom, all I saw was the back of DeMarcus' head as he pigged out in front of the TV on the dinner I had made.

"Baby, grab me a beer out the fridge! I swear Dallas bet not lose this game," DeMarcus yelled without even turning to look at me.

I nodded my head and moved into the kitchen where I grabbed a can of beer and a knife. I'd done nothing but love DeMarcus since the first day I laid eyes on him. I'd never touched another man nor had I ever even thought about it. I'd given him respect as a man, as my man, and all I'd received in return was broken bones, black eyes, and swollen lips. This shit... I was sick of and couldn't take anymore.

As I stood behind DeMarcus, I stared down at the top of his head and thought about what I was going to do. I'd never been one to hurt anyone, but the way I was feeling—battered, bruised, and broken... didn't he deserve the same kind of treatment?

"Baby, you get my beer?" DeMarcus asked as he looked up at me.

I brought the bottle down, smashing it over his head. He immediately brought his hands up to his face, stood up from the couch, and looked at me in disbelief. A slight grin spread across my face while I held my side from the awful pain.

"Bitch, what the fuck is wrong with you?" DeMarcus asked as he climbed over the couch and came at me.

Soon as he got within a couple of feet of me, I struck. I stabbed DeMarcus over and over again until the knife got jammed in his chest. He reached out at me, and I took a step back where I watched him collapse to the floor.

\* \* \* \* \*

I got out of my car, damn near stumbling to the ground. I could barely stand up straight, let alone walk to my destination. I pushed the car door closed with what little strength I had left and slowly moved towards Jahzara's house. I had no idea how I made it without killing someone or killing myself. My vision was blurred in my right eye, and I couldn't see anything out of my left eye. DeMarcus had really done a number on me this time, but, after tonight, I just knew that I would never have to worry about him touching me again.

I crept up the porch and banged on Jahzara's door with all my might. I couldn't believe I'd just killed someone like it was nothing. I had stabbed DeMarcus over and over again and then left him to die without so much as feeling bad about it.

The door slowly opened, and a dark-skinned guy that I'd never seen before stood in front of me. He scrunched his nose up at me and then looked out into the streets like he was expecting someone to pop up out of the bushes. I grasped a hold of my side, wincing at the crippling pain.

"Is Jahzara home?" I asked breathlessly.

The porch light came on, and Jahzara pulled the door wide open. The moment she saw me, her mouth dropped open in shock.

"I killed him, Jahzara. He's dead."

Jahzara

7

Jahzara

Seeing Tomeka standing outside of my door half dead was not what I expected to see. I also didn't expect for her to pass out or for Imran and I to have to rush her to the hospital. We were in the middle of cutting up the last of the dope we had left, sharing a blunt, and getting to know each other better when she showed up out of the blue. All this talk she was doing about killing somebody before she damn near hit the pavement had me spooked.

I knew that DeMarcus hit on her because I'd seen her with a few bruises across her face previously, but I'd never seen Tomeka this bad off. She was fucked up, and, if she had really killed him like she said— Hell!— he deserved it and more. I ran my fingers through Tomeka's hair and impatiently looked at the red light we had stopped at. I desperately wanted to get my girl to the emergency room and get her the help she needed. She was so messed up that I barely even noticed it was her.

"Just run the damn light!" I yelled.

Imran looked at me through the rearview mirror but didn't move or say anything. Finally, after a few more seconds, the light turned green, and we were back en route to the hospital. It took a little over ten minutes to get there, and, when we did, I didn't even wait for the car to come to a complete stop before I jumped out. I rushed through the hospital doors and stopped the first staff member I saw.

"Excuse me! Ma'am, my friend has been beat up, and she fainted. She needs help." I pleaded for her attention. She looked at me and nodded her head before racing over to a desk where there were more hospital workers. Suddenly, several of them came running my way, and I could breathe a

little easier. I followed them outside and watched as they pulled Tomeka out of the car and onto a gurney. I followed them back inside and was pointed in the direction of a lady holding some paperwork for me to fill out. She ushered me into the waiting area, and I sat down and took a few deep breaths before filling in all the blanks that I could.

“She’s gonna be alright. Just chill out,” Imran said as he approached me.

I looked at him and couldn’t help but crack a smile. He’d been so beneficial to me and my girl Honey over the past week, teaching us the ins and outs of the game and the dos and don’ts. There was some stuff that I knew from being around Quin whenever I was paying attention, but, mostly, there were a lot of lessons learned. The money wasn’t extravagant just yet, but I had a feeling, if I got in good with Quin’s connect, that it would get there. All I could say at that point was “Fuck Quin and his life”. That muthafucka had a real bitch out here holding him down, and he wanted to get rid of me the cowardly way. A letter and a package through the mail was what a punk ass nigga would do. Instead of waiting until his time was up and stepping to me like a real man, he had cowered down and turned into this lil’ ass boy. It was all good though because, like I said before, I wasn’t going back to my parents’ house for them to preach about all the bad decisions I’d made in my life. Nah, not happening. The only way I was returning there was when I was on top, driving a Benz, with a purse full of bands. If using Quin’s shit and another man was what I needed to get me there, then so be it.

“Yeah, I know that she will be okay, but I just can’t believe he did her like that. Did you see her face?”

“She was pretty messed up. I don’t know who this cat is, but he needs to be dealt with by a real man,” Imran said, sticking out his chest.

I looked around before speaking. “She said she killed him. Didn’t you hear her?”

“Thought she was tripping. She looked out of it. You believe that shit?” Imran looked around and then took a seat beside me.

I placed the pen on the clipboard and then shrugged my shoulders. Looking at Imran and into his eyes, I realized this was the closest I had been to him since the night I’d met him at Wet Dreams. We’d been working side by side for the past week, but I hadn’t been close enough to feel the amount of electricity I was feeling now. The smell of Extra mint gum on his breath and his favorite Issey Miyake cologne had my pussy throbbing in my Dereon jeans. It had been a lil’ over three years since I’d had any dick, and Imran was making that fact harder and harder to deal with. I had to get myself together because, although Quin wanted a divorce, we wasn’t divorced yet.

“I wanna go by there. If that muthafucka is dead, good for him. If not, I wanna beat his ass and make him wish he was dead for what he did to my girl,” I said in a hushed tone.

“Let’s see how baby girl is doing, and we can most definitely run through there, but, first, we need to get back to your house and put that shit up.”

I nodded my head in agreement, forgetting that I’d left thousands of dollars worth of dope on my table. Once I completed the paperwork for Tomeka, we waited until someone updated us on her status. After about an hour’s wait, we received word that she had a broken rib, a damaged retina in her left eye, and some other bruises over her body that would heal over time. I visited with Tomeka for a few minutes and told her I was going to check on a few things before coming back to sit with her. Imran and I left the hospital and headed back to my house to put the stash away before going to check out things at Tomeka’s place.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Oh, shit,” I said, shaking my head at the red and blue lights that covered the parking lot of Tomeka’s apartment complex.

“Damn! Is that your girl’s spot?” Imran asked, looking around.

“Yes, that’s definitely her spot. Look at all these damn laws! Man, the whole place is on lock,” I sighed.

“Damn! Maybe she did kill that fool.”

Just as Imran said that an ambulance rode past us in the direction of the ten plus police cars that were all over the place. I shook my head and nodded for Imran to get out of there. DeMarcus just better be glad that Tomeka did his ass over and not me. I didn’t like that hitting on a female shit and had been wanting to get at him for the longest but didn’t want to step on my girl’s toes. After what I saw that night, I no longer cared, but it looked like I wasn’t even gonna have to get my hands dirty.

“So, you wanna get something to eat?” Imran asked as we drove through Oak Cliff.

I sighed and slouched down into the peanut butter seats. “I don’t wanna do anything but get back to the hospital with Tomeka. This shit is crazy.”

Imran placed his hand on my thigh, causing me to perk up and damn near jump out of the passenger seat. He quickly removed his hand and stared at the side of my face. I refused to look at him, mostly because I was embarrassed and mainly because of what his touch did to me. I felt myself getting moist in places that a married woman shouldn’t be getting wet in, especially by a man that wasn’t my husband.

“My bad. Just trying to get you to calm down. She’s gonna be good. The doctor said it. You saw it with your own eyes, so stop worrying. We haven’t ate all day. I’m hungry, and I know you are, too.”

“Yeah, okay. Yeah, let’s get something to eat.”

Imran and I drove through the city until we came across Cheddars. We were miles away from home. I was really



hoping that we went to McDonald's and ate on the run. All this personal time around Imran was making me nervous and weak.

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Once inside of Cheddar's, the hostess seated us, handed us menus, and took our drink orders. I spent a lot of time staring at my menu, versus looking at Imran, or even trying to converse with him. My ass had never been scared of a man a day in my life, but— Damn!— this nigga here was doing something to me.

"You gonna avoid me all night?" Imran nudged me with a light kick of his foot.

"Nah, just got a lot on my mind." I shook my head and finally looked up at him. His smile was so gorgeous, the dimples— Damn!— just all of it. He wasn't your ordinary dope boy, rocking jewelry just so you knew he was paid or wearing the labels that most muthafuckas couldn't even pronounce. He was just natural with it. He was so normal that it didn't even make sense.

"So you and Tomeka been friends as long as you and Honey, too?" Imran asked, breaking the ice.

"Yeah. We all went to the same elementary school and been together ever since. Those are my girls. Ride or die," I said with a smile.

"That's what's up. So, Honey. You trust her?"

"What kinda question is that? Told you. That's my girl. Ride or die."

"So, if you get the meet with your old man's connect, you're gonna take her with you?"

I paused before I answered because I hadn't even thought about that. I was sure she was gonna want to be with me if I was able to make that meet happen. I mean, this was supposed to be about me and her, and Imran was only helping out. He'd already been paid with the key I gave him,

and I wasn't looking to give him anything more than the small percentage fee that was promised.

"Why? I know you don't think I'm bringing you along," I said with attitude.

"Look, I have a nice lil' hook up that I've been using for the past few years. Things have been good, but I won't lie and say that they can't get better. I haven't seen product like what your old man had on the streets in years, so, yes, I want to get my hands on more."

"Yeah, I knew that one lil' bird wouldn't be enough. That's why you brought me to Cheddar's. Being all nice, giving me those bedroom eyes. You were hoping I'd give you the drop on old man's connect." I folded my arms over my chest and rolled my eyes. "Nah, not happening."

"So, do tell me how you're gonna work this out? I'm quite sure, if he deals with you, you're gonna have to come with some paper on the table, and this little chump change you made over the last week ain't gonna cut it. And what about Honey? Is she going to put up any bread to help you out?"

"She better. She knows that, in order for us to make more cake, we need more flour." I frowned.

"But, if she doesn't, then what?"

"I'll get what I can afford."

"It doesn't work like that. I'm not sure how your old man did things, but I'm quite sure, whoever this dude is, he doesn't accept less than a certain amount, and, even if you don't have enough money, he's most likely gonna want you to take some on consignment, just to see if he can deal with you in the future. Do you and Honey even have what it takes to move... let's say.... ten birds a month? Maybe even twenty?" Imran asked as his eyes narrowed on the center of my face.

"I'm sure we can do it," I said confidently.

Imran laughed, "Hell! It took you more than a week to move five. Y'all don't know what y'all are doing and really need to

let me handle things. Real talk.”

That time, I laughed, “Nigga, I don’t even know you. We talking about me and my girl’s livelihood. Can’t just drop that shit off in a fool’s lap I don’t know.”

“You right, but I’m just saying, a chick as bad as you should be out shopping, getting her hair and nails done, not burning up the tips of her fingers.”

I looked down at my fingers and then quickly crossed my arms over my chest. I wasn’t trying to hear shit that Imran had to say because it wasn’t going to happen. First of all, I was all the way wrong for taking Quin’s shit and offing it like it was mine, and I would be even more wrong if I gave his connect away for the next nigga to come up. The keys could be replaced, but my life couldn’t be if I fell for Imran’s trap. I knew I had to soak up whatever I could from Imran and get rid of his ass ASAP. He was beginning to be a problem.

Honey

8

Honey

I rushed into the hospital on a mission to get to Tomeka's room as soon as possible. I'd received several messages from Jahzara telling me that she'd been hurt and that I needed to get to the hospital right away.

A thousand different possibilities of what could be wrong swirled around in my head as I walked through the halls to get to where Tomeka was located. I knew that she and DeMarcus had their problems. I knew that he would lose control sometimes and hit on her, but not to the point to where she needed to be hospitalized. I wondered if somebody had mugged her in the parking lot of her complex or if she'd gotten into a car accident on her way home. Tomeka and Jahzara were the closest I would get to having sisters. *I don't know what I will do if I lose one of them*, I thought.

"What the hell is going on?" I asked as I rounded the corner.

There was a crowd of police officers, some dressed in uniform and others dressed in cheap suits and worn out shoes. The closer I got to the crowd, the quicker I noticed that they were standing outside of Tomeka's room.

"Excuse me. Can someone tell me what's going on?" I asked, but no one paid me any mind. It wasn't until I tried to go into the room that I was stopped by a heavysset white cop. He placed his hands up and pointed for me to move in the other direction, but I refused. I peeked around him and saw that Tomeka was cuffed to her bed and was in a heated argument with another officer dressed in a suit.

"Look! I need to get in there! That's my friend! Why did you arrest her?" I asked furiously.

"Ma'am, I need you to step back!" the officer yelled.

“No, you need to tell me what is going on! Why are you arresting her? *¡Me diga algo!*” I demanded with a stomp of my foot.

“Ma’am, who are you?” one of the plain clothes officers asked as he came over to me.

“I’m her best friend. What is going on?” I asked.

“I’m Detective Fellers, and, right now, we’re investigating the attempted murder of DeMarcus Grace. Do you know anything about what happened in Ms. Childs’ apartment earlier this evening?”

Detective Fellers had a note pad and pen ready, but I was frozen with shock.

“Attempt...attempted murder, you said?”

“Yes, DeMarcus was stabbed eight times and is currently fighting for his life in the trauma unit downstairs. This could easily go from attempted murder to homicide, so we need answers.”

“Look, I don’t know what’s going on. I was called by a mutual friend and told that Tomeka had been hurt. I don’t know anything about murder or none of that. *Estoy tan confundido,*” I hissed.

“Who is this mutual friend?”

“Just a mutual friend...I don’t understand...I’m...”

I was so confused, but, just as I was about to have a nervous breakdown, Jahzara and Imran walked up. The frown that crossed my face was one that couldn’t be stopped upon seeing the two of them together. Imran had already showed us everything that we needed to know, so, as far as I was concerned, he should’ve been out of the picture by now. *This isn’t the time to speak on it, but I will be sure to bring that shit to the table later,* I thought.

“Hey, Honey! What’s going on?” Jahzara asked.

She came and stood next to me, and Detective Fellers looked her body over lustfully before licking his lips and finally bringing his attention to her face. I knew that he recognized her from her nights at Wet Dreams. It disgusted me every time we were in public and niggas got to cackling and calling her by her stage name. I know she had to survive since Quin got locked up and left her with nothing but bills, but taking her clothes off for money should've been her last choice. I tried not to judge my friends because none of us were perfect, but I never approved of the ass shaking and whatever else she may have been doing to get money.

Although I slept with my little friend for cash, it was different because he was the only one, and we'd been doing this for a while. I'm sure Jahzara had been with plenty of other men, probably every night of the week. Everybody knows that, these days, strippers don't make no damn money. To be honest, I wasn't surprised at all that Quin wanted a divorce. Jahzara was far from dumb and could've gotten a regular job.

"I'm Detective Fellers, and I was just speaking to your friend here about the attempted murder of DeMarcus Grace. Do you have—"

"Attempted murder? So, you're telling me the muthafucka isn't dead?" Jahzara blurted out, causing everyone to stare in our direction. I held my head down and shook it shamefully.

I elbowed her. "Jahzara?"

"What? Did you see what he did to her damn face? He broke her damn rib and damaged her eye. I don't have any sympathy for him." Jahzara crossed her arms over her chest and stared at the detective.

"What do you know about what happened earlier this evening?" the detective asked.

"Nothing," Jahzara stated flatly. "All I know is that he beat my friend's ass, so what you gonna do about that?"

"She's currently under arrest until we can figure—"

“Under arrest? What did you arrest her for? All she did was defend herself! He should be arrested and not her! I swear, I hate you fuckin’ pigs!” Jahzara screamed. She turned around and tried to get into Tomeka’s room just as I had but was stopped just the same. “Let me in!”

“She’s currently a prisoner of the Dallas Police Department. No visitors,” the detective stated.

“Don’t worry, Tomeka! I’m gonna get you a lawyer! Don’t say anything!”

Jahzara walked away, and both Imran and I chased behind her. I looked over my shoulder and frowned at Imran, wishing this fool would just go away. He was acting like a little puppy that didn’t want to leave its owner’s side.

“Jahzara! Hold up! I need to talk to you,” I said, grabbing her by her arm. “Alone.”

“I’ll be in the car.” Imran walked away, leaving the two of us alone. I waited until he was out of earshot before I spoke.

“Why the hell is he still around?” I asked, crossing my arms over my chest.

“What do you mean? Because he is helping us, ” Jahzara answered, feigning ignorance.

“He’s taught us everything that he can teach us. Now, get rid of his ass.”

“Soon enough, Honey. Where the hell is Cedric?”

“Cedric doesn’t have anything to do with this. I’m—”

“Cedric has a lot to do with it ‘cause, soon as y’all have problems and go on a break, that’s when you start sticking your nose up in me and Meka’s shit.”

“I’m trying to look out for you, Jah. It’s something about Imran I don’t trust. Like the fact, he always walking around here looking busted and disgusted. If he is this so-called balling d-boy, then why the hell he don’t look or smell like money?”

“Look, Honey. Let me worry about him, okay? I got this under control. He’s not gonna be around for too much longer.” Jahzara rolled her eyes at me and proceeded to leave the hospital.

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“Hey, wake up. Can you hear me?” I asked, looking around cautiously. “Baby, wake up.”

I leaned over and kissed DeMarcus on his cheek and allowed a single tear to slide down my face. He looked...dead. If it hadn’t been for the many monitors that were hooked up to him, breathing for him, then I would’ve thought just that. Couldn’t believe that he and Tomeka’s fights had come to this. Him, sitting here fighting for his life, and Tomeka, on the verge of being shipped off for attempted murder.

DeMarcus had to be the guy that Cedric saw me with ‘cause he was the only other guy I’d been seeing for the past year. I never meant to sleep with one of my best friends’ men, but it sort of just happened. A break between Cedric and me led me to Tomeka’s couch, which led me to their bed one night when Tomeka was working late. A one-time mistake led to many steamy encounters between us.

Things had gotten to the point where I was in love with DeMarcus and with my high school sweetheart Cedric. In a fantasy world, I would be able to keep them both, but I knew that wouldn’t be possible. If I had to choose, I would more than likely choose the one person that I couldn’t have—DeMarcus. I loved him dearly. He’d always helped me out when Cedric and I were struggling. I always told Cedric that the money had come from Avon orders, but I hadn’t sold any Avon in months.

I grabbed hold of DeMarcus’ hand, kissed it, and said a silent prayer for him. I hated to leave his side, but I knew, if someone caught me in here, then there would be a whole lot of bullshit to come with it. I definitely wasn’t trying to answer any questions from the cops, and I damn sure didn’t need Tomeka finding out about this. If she could do this to him,



then I could only imagine what she would do to me if she ever found out. With one last kiss on the cheek, I exited DeMarcus' room and made my way out of the hospital.

## 9 Jahzara

## 9

## Jahzara

Last night had really caused me to come home and break down. I'd been doing so well, holding things together, that I guess, hearing that Tomeka was going to be arrested for attempted murder really did it for me. Everything from my husband wanting to divorce me, me having to steal from him, and becoming a drug dealer, to this.

Tomeka was going to need a lawyer, and a damn good one. I knew it was going to take a substantial amount of money to be able to do so, and, being that she was my girl...like my sister, I had no problem doing that for her. If I couldn't get the connect to give me anymore drugs to sell, then I was more than willing to go back to Wet Dreams. The owner had been hitting me up like crazy, begging me to come back, but that was my last option.

"Damn! I really fell asleep over here," Imran said as he stood over me.

"Shit! You scared the hell out of me. You shouldn't walk up on people like that, you know?"

"Yeah. Well, I thought I heard crying from the other room, and I wanted to be sure that it wasn't you, but I see that it is."

Imran's hands caressed my shoulders, but, once again, I jumped at his touch. I tried to move from the window pane where I was sitting, but he wouldn't allow me to.

"Just relax. I won't do anything you don't want me to do."

He placed one hand on each shoulder and attempted to massage the stress away. I could feel the tenseness, and, in the beginning, I refused to relax, but it wasn't long before I let my guard down and laid my head against Imran's chest.

The feeling was so good that I didn't even protest when Imran slid his hand down my shirt and fingered my nipples. My back arched, and my mouth dropped open slightly. I had men touching me all the time up in the club, but this touch was different. This touch had my clit swelling, and my juices flowing.

"Look at you," Imran said.

My eyes popped open. Looking over at the goofy smile Imran wore caused me to be embarrassed. I wondered if he could tell that it had been almost four years since I'd had some dick. *Is it written all over my face, or is it in the way I almost came from the negro simply twirling my nipples in his fingers?* I thought.

"I'm sorry. We should get some work done," I said bashfully.

Imran walked over to me and slowly got down on his knees. My heart began to race erratically, causing my body to get super-hot. He pushed my legs open and gently kissed my inner thighs. I closed my eyes and relaxed until an image of my husband Quin popped in my head. I jolted my eyes back open quickly, looked around the room, and began to breathe heavily.

"You okay? You want me to stop?" Imran asked with a concerned expression on his face.

"I don't know if this is a good idea, Imran. We barely know each other and— "

"It's cool," he said, placing another kiss between my thighs. "I'll stop if that's what..." Another kiss. "...you really want."

Imran slid both his hands around my waist, placed his hands around the tiny boy shorts I wore, and slid them off. Another grin crossed his face as he eyed my dripping pussy. I guess he knew, like I knew, that, although my mouth was saying one thing, my body was saying something completely different. The moment Imran dipped his tongue into my wetness, I grabbed hold of whatever I could to keep myself from falling off the window pane.

Imran did laps around my pussy with his tongue, causing me to gush even more. I placed my legs over Imran's shoulders and began to grind my hips in a slow motion. Feeling him lick and suck my clitoris made me tremble and moan in pleasure.

"Ohhhhh! Imran! Oh, my goddd!" I yelled.

Imran suddenly lifted me up from the window and stood straight up with my legs still wrapped around him. He gently pushed me forward, so that I was now hanging upside down.

"Please don't let...ohhhh...mmmhhhh!" I moaned.

Tears dropped from my eyes as all the blood rushed to my head. Imran was taking me higher than I'd ever been before, making me want to scream, but I held my composure. My pussy muscles clenched tighter and tighter the closer I came to cumming all inside of Imran's mouth. Knowing I couldn't push him away, I prepared myself to let it rain. More tears flooded my eyes as the waves of ecstasy saturated his lips and dripped down his chin.

"Ahhh! Okay! Okay! Put me down!" I screamed no longer able to take the pressure.

Imran brought me over to the bed and gently laid me across it. He spread my legs open and filled the space between them. Our lips locked, and, once again, my breathing went out of control. If his damn head game was that good, I could only imagine how the dick was.

"I really, really like you, Jah," Imran said, before covering my lips with his. I felt the tip of his dick penetrate my opening, and I brought my hands up to stop him.

"Condom, Imran."

He went into the shorts he slid off and pulled a rubber out of his pocket. I watched as he slid the condom over his dick, while I attempted to swallow the lump that had formed in my throat. I didn't know which part was worse— the fact that he had length or the fact that he also had width.

*Shouldn't nobody have that much dick*, I thought before Imran made his way back between my legs. He brought my left nipple into his mouth as he slowly slid himself inside of me. I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and closed my eyes.

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I jerked upward and jumped out of the bed like the house had been on fire. The sounds of *She Got a Donk* blared through the room, and the irritating noise of my phone vibrating against the wooden dresser caused me to frown. I made my way over to the phone and quickly answered without even looking at the ID.

“Hello,” I said dryly.

“Aye, who this? Somebody called me from here a few times last night,” the caller said.

I pulled the phone away from my ear and glanced at the number, realizing it was Quin’s connect. I quickly put my ear back to the phone.

“Yeah, umm my name is Jah—Jahzara and you might not remember me, but I met you a few times through my husband Quin,” I said nervously.

I knew that, if I didn’t pull this off, then I might as well call the owner of Wet Dreams and tell him I would be down to do a show or maybe two that night.

“Quin? Quin?” he said, running the name through his head.

“Yeah from Dallas. I met you and your partner a few years ago before Quin got locked up. Think it was at Quin’s birthday party,” I said and left my bedroom, so I could speak in private.

“Okay! Yeah! Yeah! That’s my dude right there. Bruh still locked up?” he asked.

“Yeah, he is but will be out soon. Look. There is something I need to holler at you about,” I said, cutting straight to the point. “Quin left me dry out here, and I need some help maintaining.”

“Is that right? Did Quin tell you to contact me?”

“I’m going to be honest with you. He doesn’t know I’m calling you, and I’m honestly surprised that you still have the same number after all these years.”

“Business line, but what can I do for you, lil ma? I mean, it’s been years since I spoke with Quin, and— Shit!— I really don’t know if I should be speaking his name right now.”

“I understand that, considering the circumstances, but, look, I need you to hear me out. I know it’s only so much I can say over the phone, but I really need you to help me out. I promise you, it’s not on no bullshit.”

“I hear ya, but the reason I’ve been able to keep my freedom is because I don’t trust nobody, especially not some nigga’s bitch. Do me a favor and lose this number ma, a’ight?” he said, causing my heart to damn near leap from my chest.

“Please don’t hang up! If we can just sit down and talk, then you will see that—”

I pulled the phone away from my ear and noticed that he had disconnected the call. I went back into my bedroom and crashed down on the pillow top mattress. I really, really needed to get dude to see me. It was the only for sure way I would be able to step foot in this game and make some real money. According to Imran, the kind of product that Quin had stored up all these years was unlike anything he’d seen in years. He said that niggas would have no choice but to let me eat only because they wanted in on what I had.

“What’s wrong?” Imran asked.

“That was the dude, the connect. He just hung up on me. What am I gonna do? I gotta get Meka a lawyer and—Damn! — I really didn’t wanna go back to that club.”

“You’re not going back to the club. That ain’t no place for my lady to be at. Hell, nah.”

I looked over at Imran and couldn’t help but smile at him. Hearing him call me his lady sort of intrigued me and scared

me at the same damn time. I was still married, so it wasn't even possible for me to be someone else's lady.

"Don't worry about Meka. I have a lawyer, and I'll get in contact with him to see if he can help your girl out. This shit should be open and shut for her anyway. He attacked her, and it was obvious. I got you. Don't worry."

I couldn't open my mouth to say anything because I wondered just why Imran was doing this. A week and some pussy wasn't enough for this dude to just hire a lawyer for another bitch. The connect pretty much said "fuck you", so what was this dude's motive?

"I appreciate that, Imran, but why? You don't even know Meka, and you barely know me."

"Because it's something about you that makes me wanna take care of you. A woman that's as smart, beautiful, and sexy as you are deserves to be taken care of and more." Imran winked and flashed that goofy ass smile of his.

I didn't know what to take from all this. I'd never been the type to just fall at a man's feet just 'cause he told me a few things that sounded good. With me, things had to be shown in order for it to be proven. I was about to lie back in bed with Imran when my phone vibrated a few times against the dresser. I got up to see who it was and noticed that I had a text from an unknown number.

*Only because Quin is my dude, we can meet tomorrow morning. But don't ever call that number again.*

A bright smile spread across my face, and I began to jump up and down for joy. All I needed was for dude to trust me, give me some work, and things would be on and popping for me and my girls. This was like our lifeline. Without this connect, it was either sink or swim.

My phone vibrated once again with another text message that held a Houston address. I frowned because I hadn't been expecting to take a road trip, but I sent my reply anyway.

*Ok. Thanks. See you then.*

“What happened?” Imran asked as he slid to the end of the bed.

“He’s gonna meet me! He told me to come see him tomorrow morning in Houston! Oh, my god, Imran! I need this,” I yelled ecstatically.

Imran chuckled and wrapped his arms around my waist. He kissed me on my forehead and then looked into my eyes.

“I’m going with you, and I’m not taking no for an answer,” Imran said without a doubt.

“Imran, I didn’t tell him about you. How is it going to look if I meet my husband’s connect with my boyfriend on my arm?”

“Tell him... I’m your damn brother, cousin, uncle, or whatever. I have the money you need. That lil chump change you and Honey have isn’t enough to convince that dude you know what you’re doing. He will know, for sure, that you’re a beginner and won’t deal with you.”

“How do you know that for certain?”

“Jah, I’ve been doing this for years. Trust me. The only way you deal with a connect is if you’re moving big weight. No nickel and diming hustler will ever get to even see what the connect looks like. That’s what you and Honey are. You have small change that doesn’t have say in the big leagues, baby girl. I’m going to the house to pick the paper up that I’m going to give you. I’ll be back soon, so we can roll out.”

“Roll out? He said tomorrow morning.”

“What time tomorrow morning?”

“Shit! Let me text him back and ask what time.”

“And watch. He won’t reply. He’s not gonna tell you the time until he’s ready to tell you the time. He could be ready to meet at three or four o’clock in the morning, so you need to already be there. Just be ready to go when I get back.”

With that, Imran threw his shirt over his head, pulled his shorts on, and slid his feet into his shoes. I watched him,



frozen in thought, wanting to argue with him, wanting to let him know that I felt like he was trying to play me, but I didn't do any of that. Part of me knew he was right. I didn't know the first thing about dealing drugs or what to say when I got out there. Maybe, I should look at Imran as a godsend and just be thankful he was in the club on the very night that he was. I left the bedroom behind Imran to lock the door, but, soon as he went out, Honey came in. I didn't miss the look Honey shot him as he struggled to get his belt buckled as he walked to his car.

"What's up, girl?" I said, reaching to hug Honey.

She pushed me away and looked at me with such displeasure that it almost made me slap the shit out of her. I crossed my arms over my chest defensively and waited for the slick comments to fly out of her mouth.

"So, you fucking niggas in your husband's house now?" Honey asked.

"Bitch, don't worry about what I do. Who I fuck is my own business. The connect came through, and I'm going to Houston to meet him."

"You're going to Houston to meet him? What about me?"

"Stay here and get rid of the rest of this shit. We gotta come up with the money to get Meka a lawyer," I said like it was the obvious.

"Wait a minute! We ain't gotta do shit. Didn't nobody tell her to go and cut that nigga up like she was Freddy Krueger. DeMarcus is awake and talking. Her ass is fucked, and I'm not wasting my money on that."

My mouth dropped open, and my heart raced like it had done earlier. This time, I wasn't nervous; I was fucking heated. Tomeka, Honey, and I had been friends since we were six and seven-years-old. We were supposed to have each other's backs through thick and thin. This was one of the thicker moments. How the hell could she say what she just did and with a straight fuckin' face?

“Honey, I’mma act like I didn’t hear you say what the fuck you just said. Tomeka is our girl. No matter—”

“I’m—”

She tried to talk but I cut her off.

“No matter what she did! Whether it was justifiable or not, we’re supposed to have her back! If you’re gonna sit here and tell me that you don’t, then you need to get the fuck out!”

I pointed at the door that we were already standing close by. I felt like pushing her ass out onto the porch and slamming the door in her face.

“Look! All I’m saying is that I overheard DeMarcus talking to the laws, and he said Meka attacked him while he was sitting down watching the game. He admitted that they got into a lil’ fight and that he hit her, but he said the fight was over by then. He said, when he got up to get the knife out of her hands, Meka went to stabbing him with no mercy,” Honey tried to explain, and I swear that I saw tears forming in the bitch’s eyes.

“So, what’s your point? She needs a lawyer, and I’m gonna get her one. You down to help me or not?”

“I don’t have much, Jah, and you know that. I will give what I can, but don’t expect me to give everything.”

“Thank you! Soon as Imran and I return tomorrow, we can go and find her a lawyer. Right now, I need you to finish getting rid of the rest of the product.”

“So you’re taking him and not me? You taking trips with this nigga, but you gonna leave me here to do the grime work! Talk about having each other’s backs, but you choosing a nigga over mine!”

“I’m not choosing anyone, Honey! Imran knows what he is doing and neither of us do. Hell! If I could stay and let him go, then I would. Don’t think I’m leaving you out because it’s not like that. It’s me and you all day. Believe that.”

“That’s not how I feel. Ever since he’s been around I just...  
*Siento que le pierdo!*”

“English, Honey!”

“I feel like I’m losing you!” Honey said and allowed those tears I’d seen earlier to slide down her face.

“Bring your short ass here.” I pulled Honey in for an embrace and knew all the animosity was from stress and lack of rest. Without Cedric, Honey was a mess, and it was beginning to show now more than ever. This was the first time that I actually felt like he wasn’t coming back. “You will never lose me, bitch. We’re sisters. Now, dry those eyes.”

We shared a quick laugh before letting each other go.

“So, how was it?” Honey asked.

“How was what?” I questioned.

“Bitch, I saw Imran trying to fix his pants. How was the dick?”

“Oh, shit! All I have to say is Mandingo, and he definitely knows how to work it. Nigga had me climbing the walls and shit. Damn.”

I shook my head, thinking about Imran eating my pussy better than my husband ever had, and he swung the dick even better, too. This was the first time I actually didn’t feel the least bit worried that Quin was divorcing me. His loss... and Imran would be a helluva gain.

## 10 Tomeka

## 10

## Tomeka

Shit has been mad crazy these past few days. The moment the doctors released me from the hospital, I was hauled off to Lew Sterret and booked on charges for attempted murder. Apparently, DeMarcus woke his ass up just in time to cry like the lil' bitch he was. He made sure to tell the police how he was watching the game on my sofa when I attacked him. Never mind the fact that he damn near beat me to death. No. They didn't care about that shit at all. All they kept saying was that I stabbed and damn near killed him. Kept saying how, if the knife would've went just another inch to the right, it could've done *this* or another inch to the left and it would've done *that*. All I had to say was "Fuck DeMarcus". If I had to spend the rest of my life in jail for damn near killing him, then so be it. I bet, after the shit I did to him, he would never put his hands on another woman, and, right now, that was all that mattered. I wished the bitch before me had had the balls to do it then. Maybe, we would've been that Bonnie and Clyde duo like he'd always wanted.

I leaned forward on the hard ass bench and blew smoke out from a cigarette I had bummed from a white chick. My ass didn't even smoke, but it seemed so appropriate for the situation. Here I was, sitting on a bench that felt like it would break my ass at any moment, a broken rib that hurt practically every time I breathed in, with mad bitches that looked like they were too strong for their own good.

I was sure that I no longer had a job to return to and would soon be out of a place to stay, but, then, I thought, *I won't even complain because shit could be worse. I could still be at home, miserable as hell, getting my ass beat every damn day of the week. I could be at home crying, hiding from the world,*

*and living in shame. I actually like this life a lil' better than the last. I might not look free on the outside, but I damn sure feel like it on the inside.*

I flicked the cancer stick to the floor and just stared at it as the fire sizzled against the ground. I thought about how I watched my mama get beat every day until she ended up in a coma. I never told anyone what really happened to my mom because I was so embarrassed at how weak she was. She had allowed a man to control her life until it was too late. She never once spoke up for herself, so, when the time came, I never once spoke up for her.

Her boyfriend at the time lied and said someone broke into the house and attacked her, and I didn't tell them any different. For years, she sat in that coma and not once did I say a word to protect her. Even in her death. A cold case yet to be solved because of me. Honey and Jahzara didn't even know the truth behind my mother's death.

For so long, I felt as if God stuck me with DeMarcus as part of my punishment. Made me suffer through all those beatings because I watched her suffer and didn't say anything. And nobody did anything to help me. My girls knew, and neither of them reached out a helping hand. I was starting to wonder if they were really my girls at all. I saw them the day the police bombarded my hospital room but hadn't seen them since. At my arraignment, I expected to see, at least, one of them but not a familiar face was in sight.

"Childs! Tomeka Childs!"

I stood up at the mention of my name and was met by a petite guard at the metal cell door. My eyes grew big when she stuck the key in and pulled the big door open to let me out. A slight smile spread across my face, and I almost took off running, but I kept myself grounded.

"I'm free to go?" I asked.

"For now. You made bail. Lucky for you. We were just about to put you in general population. Follow that line right there.

Stop by the desk on your way out to sign your papers, and pick up your belongings,” the guard said before locking the cell back and treading off in the other direction.

I followed the guard’s directions and signed myself out. The walk to the exit was long as hell, but I was grateful to be leaving. I know I said something different earlier, but— Hell! — that was before I knew I was going to be free.

Once I got outside, I spotted Jahzara across the street, waving, with a huge smile on her face. I jogged until I reached her, gave her a big hug, and almost didn’t want to let her go. I thought they had turned their backs on me, but I should’ve known better. I should’ve known that it was just taking time and that I needed to be patient.

“Oh, my god! Thank you so much, Jahzara! I was starting to think I was one of those bitches up in there. How...where did you get the money?” I said all in one breath.

“Me and Honey came up with it, and... umm...Imran helped me out on the rest,” she said, pointing her eyes in the direction of some fine ass man standing by a car. He was dressed in a plaid button up, crisp blue jeans, and a pair of red and black Jordans. He was cute as hell but looked a lil too young to be hanging around my girl.

“That’s the same guy that was there the night I came over. Who is he?” I nosily asked.

“Just a friend. No worries. He’s cool people. Let’s get out of here, girl. We’ve been waiting for hours for them to release you.”

Jahzara pulled me towards the car where her friend stood and made quick introductions before we got inside the car. I could actually see Jahzara glowing and wondered if it had something to do with this man sitting on the side of her. If she was happy, then I damn sure was happy for her. I just hoped that she was doing the right thing because it hadn’t been too long since she’d received the divorce papers from Quin. I

hated for her to open one door when the other one hadn't been closed yet.

"So, we all pitched in and got you this bad ass lawyer. I heard he is like 32-1 for criminal cases. Imran said he is a beast with it, so I think you will be in good hands with him," Jahzara explained.

"How much is all this? How much do I owe y'all, Jahzara? I mean I know to bail me out cost ten thousand dollars... and now a lawyer...I gotta pay you all back," I said, shaking my head.

"Don't worry about it. I know, if it had been me, you would've done the same thing."

"Hell, nah! I gotta do something! I can't let y'all put yourselves out there like that. At least, let me join up with you and Honey and pay back what I can."

Jahzara turned around and looked at me like I'd lost my mind. At first, I was totally against selling drugs, like I was some nigga, but, now that I knew I was out of a job, I really didn't have a choice. I couldn't allow them to pay for my freedom while I just sat on my ass and watched. If they were willing to risk their lives, then I was going to do the same.

## 11 Honey

## 11

## Honey

## Two Weeks Later

I pulled my brand new Impala up to Jahzara's house and got out of the car. We were supposed to be meeting here to talk about some changes in how we were distributing the product we'd gotten from Quin's connect. Personally, I thought everything was fine and didn't see the need to change it. I'd made a nice stack of cash and couldn't wait to make more. My bills were paid for months in advance. I'd just bought my first car, and had a new fancy ass wardrobe. To me, wasn't shit broken, so there was no need to fix it.

I walked up to the house and grabbed the hidden key that sat under a rock near the porch. I went to open the door, but I noticed that it was already opened. I looked over at the driveway and saw that it was empty, meaning no one should've been home. Jahzara already told me that she was running behind, and, if I made it before she did, to go ahead and use the key to get in.

I pushed the door completely open, walked in, and immediately noticed that the entire place had been trashed. The couches were out of place and cut up, the TV had been tossed to the floor, and papers were scattered throughout. Broken glass crushed underneath my tennis shoes as I walked in. Picture frames had been broken and thrown all over the place. It didn't seem to be a robbery because nothing of value was missing. I took out my cell phone to call Jahzara but was startled when I heard the sound of someone gasping behind me. I turned around to see Tomeka, Jahzara, and, of course, Imran standing in the midst of the storm.

"Oh, my god! Who did this?" Jahzara looked around.



“The door was open when I got here, and...it looks like they were looking for something,” I said as I began to clean up some of the mess.

“Looking for what? I’ve lived here for years and never had problems, so, why now?”

“Well, you wasn’t selling drugs out of your house before either,” I said.

Jahzara took off running through the house with Imran hot on her tail. Tomeka and I looked at each other before going to see what the problem was. Before we could even make it to the room, Jahzara screamed and began to wail.

“What happened? Jahzara, are you okay?” I asked, looking around in confusion.

“They took my safe! They took my fuckin’ safe,” she cried.

“Baby, chill out. It’s gonna be okay.” Imran wrapped his arms around Jahzara and allowed her to cry on his chest.

I couldn’t help but roll my eyes as I surveyed the damage of Jahzara’s room. It wasn’t nearly as bad as the rest of the house, so it made me wonder if the culprits knew exactly what they were looking for.

“I’ll start cleaning up in the front,” Tomeka said and exited the room.

I looked over at Jahzara and Imran and decided to follow behind Tomeka. Their fucking mushiness made me sick to my damn stomach. Jahzara was still married for crying out loud. I know that I wasn’t a perfect person, but Cedric wasn’t my husband. I joined Tomeka and helped her to clean up all the trash and glass.

“I’m getting sick of him being around, Meka. We need to do something about this,” I said in a hushed tone.

“Who? Imran? Why, Honey? He is cool, and he makes her happy,” Tomeka said. She’d always been the dumb and naive one out of the bunch. I shook my head and moved closer to her.

“How do you think whoever broke in here knew to touch her safe? Did you tell them?”

“Hell, nah.”

“Well, neither did I. Nobody else has been up in here but us three. He’s been around for a good month, and look what happened.”

“Well, somebody needs to tell her. If he did this, then—”

Tomeka paused and looked over my shoulder.

“Look. Don’t worry about cleaning up. I’m getting a room tonight, and I’ll worry about this shit tomorrow,” Jah said.

“Are you sure?” Tomeka asked. “I don’t mind staying and helping—”

“The muthafucka threatened my life. Whoever this is, is taking this shit personal.” Jahzara held up a small piece of paper with some words scribbled on it. I ran over to her and snatched the letter from her hand.

“*¿Lo que en el infierno?*” I questioned. The note read:

*Lay down or get laid out, bitch.*

“*¿Quien hizo esto? ¡Tenemos que encontrar ellos y matarlos! ¡Agujeros de culo estúpidos! ¡Estupido bastards!*” I yelled.

“Nobody knows what the hell you are saying, but it doesn’t even matter. Let’s get out of here,” Jahzara huffed.

I placed the note on her dining room table and shrugged my shoulders. Tomeka stared at me as if she was expecting me to say something about what we were talking about, but I wasn’t going to do it. *Not now, not with him around*, I thought. Soon as I had an opportunity to talk with Jahzara privately, I would definitely bring it up.

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“Damn! I was wondering when you were gonna come and see me again,” DeMarcus said with a grin.

“You should’ve known I wasn’t going to leave my papi waiting long,” I said as I made my way over to him.

After giving him a kiss on the lips, I took a seat next to his bed. He looked one hundred percent better than he had the very first time I’d seen him, when he was damn near dead.

“Damn! Sure ‘preciate it that for real. So, what’s been up? You looking real icy right about now.”

“Yeah. Remember I told you about the lil’ business me and Jah was running. Well, it’s starting to pay off. I bought my first car the other day. A 2009 Chevy Impala.”

“Damn, business must be real good. Shit! What’s Tomeka up to?”

The smile on my face quickly turned into a frown. *I know he did not just ask me about his ex-girlfriend who put his ass in here*, I thought. I folded my arms over my chest and refused to answer the question. If he wanted to know how the hell she was doing, then he would have to ask her himself.

“Look. I only asked because the detectives came through and told me they were ready to take the case to trial the moment I got out of the hospital.”

“Well, if she goes to jail, then she goes to jail. She shouldn’t have stabbed you all those times.”

“That’s your best friend, Honey.”

“But I’m in love with you.”

“I’m not pressing charges, but the state is gonna do it anyway. I won’t testify.”

“What? Why not?” I sat forward in my seat.

“Because I’m not. I beat Tomeka for no damn reason, Honey. Because I was fuckin’ wacked out of my damn mind. Every time I put my hands on her, it was for no damn reason at all. I deserved this and more,” DeMarcus said, pointing out his surroundings.

“I can’t believe that you are even talking like this right now! You sound fucking stupid!” I yelled. I shot up from my chair and began to pace the room. “You just wanna get back with her. I knew it. So, you’re gonna leave me just like Cedric, huh? *¡Agujero de culo!*”

“This isn’t even about that. You need—”

“No! No! Fuck you, DeMarcus!” I stormed out of the room with hot tears streaming down my face. I knew that Tomeka was my friend, but, with her still around, I knew that DeMarcus was still going to want her. I knew how he felt about her, and that was the reason I couldn’t get him to feel the same way about me.

“Honey?”

I looked up and saw Tomeka coming my way. She was holding on to a set of papers and looking like she’d just left the gym.

“What the hell are you doing up here?” I asked.

“I had to come give blood for this damn case and—”

“And you... what? Decided to come and see DeMarcus?” I questioned folding my arms across my chest.

“No, I decided to bring a Thank You card to the staff that took care of me during my stay. I don’t wanna see no damn DeMarcus.” Tomeka waved a card in front of my face, and I immediately realized I was tripping. I was about to give myself away for no good reason at all. I flashed Tomeka a smile and tried to lighten things up.

“Good, girl, ‘cause you know I was about to get on your ass. You know, I gotta look out for you and Jah.”

“Don’t worry. I know better. Let me drop this off, and we can walk out together.”

I nodded my head and watched as Tomeka headed over to the nurses’ station to drop off the ugly ass card she had bought.

“What are you doing here?” Tomeka asked when she came back to where I was standing.

“Oh, ummm...this dude I’ve been dating was shot, and I just sat with him for a lil while,” I lied.

“Dude? Dating? Why am I just now hearing about this?”  
Tomeka said with a smile. “Is he okay?”

“Yeah, he’s good, and I’m just trying to feel him out and see how things go,” I said with a big smile on my face.

“That’s good, Honey. You deserve to be happy,” Tomeka said.

*You’re damn right I do. When your ass goes to jail, I will be the happiest woman alive, bitch,* I thought as we walked out of the hospital.

## 12 Jahzara

## 12

## Jahzara

“Oh, shit!” I moaned as Imran slid deep inside of me from behind.

I squeezed my muscles tightly together and threw my body into his. The deepness and thickness of his rock hard rod caused me to shake each time he hit my spot. I brought my hand down and massaged my swollen clitoris.

“Damn! Your pussy is so wet and good!” Imran groaned as he deeply stroked my walls.

We’d been behaving like horny bunny rabbits ever since the first time we had sex in my house that also belonged to my husband Quin. I hated that our relationship ever went past the business stage because I just couldn’t seem to get enough of Imran. The way he feasted off my pussy like it was a Thanksgiving meal was nothing short of amazing. The way he swung his dick inside of me like he belonged there had me ready to get on my knees and propose marriage to his ass. He knew my spots so well, knew how to touch them, how hard or how soft to go. It was almost perfect.

I moaned lightly when Imran pulled out of me and crashed onto the bed. I crawled over to him and climbed on top of him. I tried to slide his dick back inside of me, but he pushed me away.

I laughed, “Aww, is that baby sensitive down there?”

“That’s not funny,” Imran said groggily.

“I know you’re not going to sleep on me,” I fussed.

“Nah. I need to talk to you about something, though.”

I sat up in the bed and grabbed my purse that contained my stash of weed and cigars. My heavy weed habit had come

from years of being around Quin. I used to indulge with the girls when I was younger, but it was never enough to call it a habit.

“Go open that window before you have hotel security up in here.”

I nodded my head and went over to the window to open them up. I couldn't wait to get out of this damn room, but I didn't know where the hell I would go when I left. Honey's apartment was too small, and there was no way I would be chilling at Tomeka's after she stabbed that nigga DeMarcus up in there. I didn't see how the hell she was doing it.

I went back over to the bed and began to roll my blunt up. I looked over at Imran and waited for him to speak. I had a feeling that, whatever it was, it wasn't going to be good.

“Aye! I think that you should come and live with me at my place. It's not safe back at your spot, and I wouldn't mind having you around my headquarters.”

“Umm, I don't know about that, Imran.” I shook my head.

“Why not? We together damn near everyday anyway.”

“I'm still married, Imran, and this isn't right.”

“Your husband is dead, so what's the problem?”

“There is something I need to tell you,” I sighed and quickly lit the tip of the blunt. “My husband...he's not dead, and... ummm...he's currently locked up. He's doing the last few months of his bid.”

“Whoa!” Imran sat upright in the bed and stared at the side of my face.

“I've been faithful to him the whole time he's been there. For three and a half years, I held him down until he sent divorce papers in the mail all because he said he'd heard some things. That's why I decided to sell those bricks and—”

“Damn, you got me out here selling a nigga's shit! Taking his connect! Do you realize that means war when he gets out,

Jah?” Imran yelled. He snatched the blunt from my hand, got out of the bed, and paced the floor butt ass naked.

“I know, but I mean, I was just gonna replace the bricks. I’ve already put one back, and, the next time around, I was gonna put—”

“You put that one back ‘cause that’s the one you gave me for free. You haven’t put shit else back. Tell him you sold them shits to pay your bills. If that nigga wanna see me, then we’ll take it to the streets. I’m not giving up that connect, and, if he wanna go to war, then we go to war.”

“So what if y’all got the same connect. Do it—”

“Two niggas on the streets with the same product ain’t gonna work. Too much competition. Fighting over blocks, over traps. My pockets suffer right along with his. I’m not trying to go through that, but I see that I’m gonna have to. Shit!” Imran yelled.

“I’m sorry. I should’ve told you from the beginning. I wanted to, but, when Honey threw that lie out there, I just went with it. Imran, I’m sorry.”

“So, you just using me ‘til that nigga comes home, huh? I’m just a lil revenge fuck for you?”

“No, it isn’t like that. I wanted to keep things business with you, but we crossed that line, and I’ve been enjoying myself.”

“Enjoying yourself? Fuck I look like? A ride at the amusement park?”

“Imran, I like you. I really do, but everything is so complicated, and I don’t wanna bring any drama to your life.”

“It’s over between you two, right? You said he sent you divorce papers, so it’s over, right?” Imran asked. He passed the blunt back to me and gabbed his clothing from the floor.

“Yeah. I...”

Hell! I didn’t know what to say. Part of me wanted to wait until Quin got home. I wanted him to tell me to my face that



he wanted a divorce, and part of me wanted to go down there and deliver the signed papers to him myself. I sort of wanted to work it out, but— Hell!— I also wanted to say “fuck him”, get this money, and shit all over his ass when he touched down. All this time, I’d been that ride or die chick for him, and so quickly he tossed me to the side because of rumors. Most likely, a hating ass bitch was all in his ear, spreading lies about me, and he believed that shit. I felt like, if it was that easy to convince him that I wasn’t that chick he needed me to be, then I definitely didn’t need to be spending any more time waiting for him.

“Yeah. It’s over. I hadn’t had the time to consult a lawyer, but I will.”

“Good. I want you to come and live with me, Jah. Let me treat you the way you’re supposed to be treated.”

I looked into Imran’s eyes and could see that he was sincere. He’d been nothing but nice to me, and I had no reason to believe that he would do anything to hurt me. I nodded my head and let out a nervous laugh.

“Okay, I’ll come,” I said.

After I said that, he dropped to his knees and pulled me to edge of the bed. Then, he dipped his head in between my legs.

“Yeah. I’mma go see that lawyer ASAP!” I said as my eyes rolled behind my head.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had the girls meet me back at the house the next morning to clean up as much as possible and, also, to help pack some of the things that I would be taking to Imran’s. Couldn’t help but wonder who the hell had broken into my house and why. There weren’t too many people that knew I was dealing and,

of those that did, I knew they wouldn't touch me on the strength of Quin.

Something wasn't right, but my brain wouldn't even allow me to try and figure it out. I was about to take a bold step by moving in with Imran. I barely knew this dude, but it just felt so right, and that was what scared me. It scared me that, all the things I'd felt for Quin in the beginning, I was now feeling that way about Imran. The last thing I should have been doing was jumping into a new relationship when I hadn't quite wrapped the last one up.

"I hope you know what you're doing," Honey said, tossing some glass into the trash.

"Do we ever know what we're doing, Honey? Isn't it normal for everyone to just jump into things, head first, and pray that we, at least, land on our asses?" I sarcastically asked.

Honey was starting to irk the hell out of me. I really wanted to put her ass on blast and let Tomeka know that Honey didn't donate a dime to help her out of jail. The day that I needed the money I couldn't get in contact with her to save my damn life. I called her, at least, twenty times to see if she could put something up to help but nothing. Later, she claimed that she had to send some money to Mexico for her parents, but I knew that wasn't true. Just like me, Honey didn't even talk to her damn parents. And, to top it off, a week or so later, she popped up with a new car. If it wasn't for Imran pitching in to help, Tomeka would've had to sit in jail a lot longer. The only reason I hadn't mentioned it yet was because of all the craziness going on, but I damn sure couldn't wait to call the slut on the shit. She wasn't going to get away with that shit. Nah, not happening.

"I like Imran, and I think, if he treats you good, then go for it. Might as well," Tomeka said but the look that Honey shot her caused her to say more. "But are you sure that he is who he say he is?"

"Yeah, I'm positive that he's legit. You, bitches, just need to let me do me."

We continued cleaning up the house, doing our best to get it back to normal. After we all were satisfied, I packed up enough clothing to satisfy myself for a while and met Imran back at the hotel. On the ride over there, I felt like a very big change was about to happen in my life. I could only hope that it was for the better and not for the worse, but the turning in my stomach told me that things were about to take a turn that none of us could prepare for.

## 13 Honey

13

Honey

Six Months Later

I strutted around the apartment, making sure that my ass shook from left to right in my skin tight Juicy Couture jeans. My stilettos pumped hard against the floor, bringing pure definition to my calf muscles. To say I was a bad bitch would be a complete understatement seeing as how I was much more than that. Your girl had come up and had come up in a major way. I thank God for the day Jahzara's husband Quin mailed her those divorce papers and the bitch decided to get smart and sell that nigga's bricks. If it had not been for that, I would've still been selling Avon products, peeling eviction letters off my door, and lighting candles just to be able to maneuver through my little ass apartment. Now, I had a nice car, a nice condo in the North, and a little paper stacked up for a rainy day.

I figured another six months or so of doing this, then I would be straight enough to open up my own business and do things the legal way. I wasn't going to be like these niggas and keep going and going until the life finally caught up with them, sending them to an early grave or placing them behind bars, doing bids that didn't even make sense.

"What's up, papi? ¿Como estas?" I asked Imran.

"Estoy bien. ¿Y tu?" he asked, keeping his concentration on the money counter.

I strutted over to the table where he and a few other guys were seated and slid on top of the table in between them. I was really starting to hate Imran more and more each and every damn day. Not because of who he was but because

Jahzara was right when she said he was a damn boss. She'd picked him out of a club and assumed that he was on top of his game, and what do you know? The bitch couldn't have been more than right. Let her tell it, the nigga had a bad ass house in the suburbs, several cars parked in and outside of the garage, and a nice little bank account to go along with it. He was on his king pin shit and that frustrated the hell out of me. Jah always picked the good ones.

When we were in high school, she handpicked Quin out of a crowd of niggas, married him, and had a good life until he got locked up. Now, the bitch hit the jackpot again. My ass couldn't grab a boss if my life depended on it, and I couldn't understand why. I had the looks, the body, and I know, for a fact, I got some good pussy.

"Hell is you doing, Honey?" Imran fussed as he finally brought his eyes up to look at me.

"Where the hell is Jah at? I haven't seen her in weeks," I smiled and put a coat of lip gloss over my lips.

"My girl doesn't fuck around in the traps anymore, didn't she tell you?" Imran said with a smirk.

"What you mean 'she doesn't fuck around in the traps anymore'? I'm surprised to even see you here."

"Yeah. Well, I needed to count up my money and keep an eye on you and Tomeka. This place has come up short over the past two weeks, so we need to figure out what the fuck is going on."

"Well, if it came up short, then it wasn't on my end. You better holla at Tomeka's ass about that or one of these other niggas you be having up in here," I said, placing my arms over my chest.

"I will. Now get your ass off the table, so I can continue counting my damn paper."

I hissed and climbed over the table just like I was asked. I leaned against the refrigerator and watched as bills went through the counter and the number increased by the

second. *I wish I could put a gun to the back of this fool's head right now, blast his ass, and take all his shit. What the hell did he mean 'his girl doesn't fuck around in the traps anymore'? That's where she started and where I am still, so why the hell isn't she here?*

"So, Imran, when am I gonna see my girl? I mean, you won't tell nobody where you live, and her ass ain't checked in in a minute. How do I know you haven't killed her and disposed of her body?" I asked sarcastically.

"Why don't you call her? I'm not holding her hostage. She should be coming back from Houston in a couple of hours. I don't have anything to do with your girl time."

"Of course, you don't. I'm surprised you let her go out of town. I mean, you so busy sniffing behind her pussy like a lil' puppy that I didn't think you ever let her out of your sight."

"Bitch, get the fuck out or get to work! Jealous ass bitch!" Imran yelled.

I laughed, "Damn! I'm just playing around with you. Don't get so mad."

"Fuck you! Get to work or get the fuck out like I said!"

"Alright, boss! Chill the hell out! ¡Cálmese!"

"You calm down!" he retorted.

I rolled my eyes and went over to the stove where there were dubs sitting out, waiting to be cut up. I hated dealing with this petty shit and knew that was one of the reasons why Jahzara wasn't here anymore. Her little boy toy didn't think this was a woman's job, and I knew, the only reason why he hadn't booted me or Tomeka out was because Jahzara would kill him. I grabbed a plate, a razor blade, and a few little baggies and took my ass across the apartment to get to work. Every now and then, I couldn't help but glance at Imran's cocky ass as he sat and counted up money that he made off my slavery and the slavery of other young boys looking to come up. Yes, the money was good, and it allowed me to have a better life than what I'd had months ago, but the paper he was getting was

fantastic. A house in the suburbs, more than enough cars for just one person, and— Hell!— a woman at home that no longer has to work. Maybe, instead of me pining over DeMarcus, keeping my eye on him, and making sure that he stays away from Tomeka, I should be trying to pull Imran away from Jahzara. I mean what does she have that I don't have? All she has going for herself is big tits and a fat ass, and I damn sure have more than enough of both, I smiled, thinking about the time Jahzara told me that Imran was working with somewhat of an anaconda. I couldn't wait to try that shit out for myself. *Jahzara, never tell your girlfriends what your man is working with. Didn't you learn that from Tomeka?* I laughed on the inside as I watched Imran with lust filled eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

I moved Imran's dick in and out of mouth, gliding my hand down the shaft of it. He'd fallen asleep in one of the back bedrooms, and, as soon as the guys left to get something to eat, I ran in there to make my move. I knew, soon as I wrapped my lips around him, he wasn't going to be able to resist me. This was the same way I had got DeMarcus. My head game was spectacular, and, after this, Jahzara would struggle to keep her man happy. He would always think about me and the night he spent with me until he just couldn't take it anymore. Then, he would come to me to find what he wasn't able to get at home. It worked every single time.

"Shit, Jah," Imran groaned and grabbed the back of my head.

I frowned at him calling me by Jah's name, but it didn't stop my flow. I sucked and sucked until he was grinding his hips and pounding his dick into my mouth. I'd already stripped down to my bra and panties, and, right when Imran was getting into it, I pulled his rod out of my mouth and climbed on top of him. He still had his eyes lazily closed as I slowly slid down onto his dick. I clenched my muscles tightly around his shaft and steadily rode him, sliding up and down, trying my hardest not to moan from the good feeling. I leaned over and kissed Imran on his ear, and that was when I felt a hard tug at my hair and a sting whip across my face.

“Grimy bitch! Get the fuck off of me!” Imran yelled. He pushed me off of him and caused me to fall off of the bed and hit the floor. I got up and charged over at him when he backhanded me in the face, sending me flying back into the wall where I hit my head. I brought my hand up to my head and began to rub it as I watched Imran frantically put his dick back into his pants. He looked around like he was expecting Jahzara to come bursting through the door at any moment. “Bitch, get your shit and get the fuck out of here! Don’t let me catch you here or at any of my other spots, you got that?”

“Nigga, you can’t fire me! My girl started this shit, and, once she finds out you tried to have sex with me, she’s gonna fire your ass!”

Imran chuckled, “You heard what the fuck I said! Get the fuck out or get put out! Your choice!”

“Yeah, you just wait until Jah hears about this! I’m gonna make sure she leaves your ass, and we’ll see what kind of shit you be talking then! You are eating because of her nigga, because of her!”

“Yeah, whatever, bitch! Step! Fuck outta here!”

I grabbed my clothes from the floor and angrily pulled my pants up. Imran walked over to me and grabbed me by my hair. When he forced me to look up at him, I could see the venom that poured from his eyes. I’d really fucked up this time. Unlike DeMarcus, Imran wasn’t an easy mark.

“You go ahead and tell Jah that bullshit story and see if I don’t have one my niggas murk your bitch ass. I can’t fucking stand bitches like you!”

He released my hair, grabbed me by my arm, and pulled me out of the room towards the front door.

“Imran, let me go! Get your damn hands off of me!” I screamed and tried to fight him off.

He opened up the door and pushed me outside of it closing the door in my face. I brought my foot up and kicked the door and then slid my shirt over my head. I slid my cell phone out



of my purse and dialed up Jahzara's number. Whether she answered or not, she was gonna find out what her man did to me.

"Hey," Jahzara answered. "Haven't heard from you in a minute."

"Yeah, I know. You've been too busy with your bitch ass man to even see how your damn girls are doing," I said vehemently.

"What? Honey, don't call me with that shit. I'm in the middle of a meeting right now. Do me a favor and let Imran know that things ran over, and I'll have to catch a later flight."

"I'm not telling him a damn thing! Your man just tried to have sex with me over here at the place on Bonnie View. I told the muthafucka, 'No!', and he slapped me several times, grabbed me by my hair, and threw me out of the apartment. Then, he tried to tell me that he doesn't want me here or at any of the spots anymore."

"What? Oh, my god! Honey, are you okay?" Jahzara asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

"No, I'm not okay! If I can't get money, then how am I supposed to take care of myself? You know, I finally got out of the hood after all these years and that muthafuckas trying to send me back! You can't let him do that, Jah!" I cried.

"I won't. Let me wrap things up here, and I will be there as soon as I can to handle this shit!"

"Hurry, Jah. You should've seen the look in his eyes. It was so scary, girl. He threatened to kill me if I told you, and now I'm scared to go home."

"Don't be, girl. I'm gonna handle his ass. I promise you that."

"Okay! I believe you. I'll be waiting for you."

We hung up and a huge, sinister smile crossed over my face as I thought, *I bet Imran will think twice before he tries to threaten me again.*



Tomeka

14

Tomeka

I stared into the mirror, looking at the small, white lines that I'd cut up. My head seemed to be so freaking heavy, and my mouth seemed to be swollen, like I'd been beaten by DeMarcus all over again. I burst into laughter and nodded my head knowing that I'd scared the shit out of that nigga and that he wasn't going to be hitting anyone anymore. My laughter turned into a hysterical one as I thought about the look on his face when the knife penetrated his chest the first time. He looked how I always imagined myself to look when I saw him raise his fists to hit me.

"Boom, nigga! Should've got a gun and shot your ass because you should've been six feet under with my mama, nigga," I laughed again.

I ran my hands over my gums. Then, I took the dollar bill that I rolled up in front of me. I placed the dollar bill over one of the white lines and sucked it up my nose like it was a vacuum cleaner. Immediately, I brought my hand up to my nose and pinched it closed, shook my head, and sat back on the bed with my head against the wall. It seemed to swell more and more by the second. Coke was starting to become my new best friend, seeing as how the bitches I thought were my sisters were too busy living their own lives to give a damn about mine.

Jahzara had Imran, wife-ing her better than that nigga Quin did, and Honey was too busy with this mystery man that neither of them noticed that I'd been getting high for the past few months now. One of the d-boys that worked in one of the spots that I was also working introduced me to the drug. He had a little crush on me and promised me that I would have some of the best sex I ever had in my life when I was on the

white girl, and I wanted to see if he was right. I planned for it to only be a one-time thing, but, once I took that first hit, I just couldn't seem to get enough of it. Ol' boy that turned me on to it told me that he couldn't fool with me anymore because I was using more than he could afford. Said that my habit had gotten out of control and how he only used every so often. The nerve of him. I really hated that he did that shit because I had to start stealing from the weight they had us cooking up. I would make sure I only took enough to last me until the next shipment, so that it wouldn't be so obvious.

*BAM! BAM! BAM!*

*Damn, who the hell is this?* I thought as I grabbed the mirror off the nightstand and slid it under my bed.

I slowly got up from my bed and headed to the front door. I peeked into the peephole and saw Honey's tiny ass standing on the other side, looking like she'd been to hell and back. I pulled the door open just as she was about to knock again and frowned at her for messing up my session with my little friend.

"What's up? What happened to you?" I asked with a look of disgust.

Her hair was all over her head. She had these huge scratches on her face and neck, and her clothes were torn. It looked like she'd been to war with a damn cat or something.

"Imran is what happened to me! I told you we shouldn't trust him. Look what he did to me! He tried to rape with me, and, when I wouldn't give in, he beat the shit out of me," Honey said as she stormed into my apartment.

"Oh, my god! Are you serious?" I said, trying to stifle the laugh I had been holding in. I thought she was gonna tell me that she got into it with a bunch a chicks and got her ass beat. I wasn't expecting this news at all.

"I'm dead serious. I want that muthafucka dead, Meka! I want him dead!" she ranted.

“You need to tell Jahzara what’s going on. You can’t let her go on thinking she’s got this good man when she doesn’t.”

“I already told her, and the bitch hung up in my face. She tried to tell me that you and I are just jealous of her, and that’s why I’m accusing Imran of this. I wouldn’t do that, and you know that, right, Meka?”

“Yeah, of course. I can’t believe that she said that we were jealous of her. Why the hell would she say that?”

“She said that we were just hating on her because she makes more money than us, and now she doesn’t even have to trap anymore because Imran is taking care of her.” Honey went into her purse and pulled out a cigarette and fired it up.

She lit the end of it, puffed it, and quickly blew out the smoke. I could tell that all of this had her heated, and I didn’t blame her because it was starting to piss me off as well. My high was suddenly starting to come down, and I didn’t appreciate that.

“I was wondering why I hadn’t seen her at the spot lately. I can’t believe that Jahzara would be talking like this. I’m not in the least bit jealous of her or her man,” I said truthfully.

I was never the type to hate on any female when they were doing good or when they were happy, especially not on my friends. If Imran made Jahzara happy, then I was happy for her. If he made her sad, then I would hate Imran, and I expected the same from my so-called girls.

“Well, that’s not how she feels. I didn’t want to tell you, but, back when you got locked up behind that bullshit with DeMarcus, she was saying how you deserved to be in jail and how she didn’t want to bail you out. I had to give her the money to bail you out, and, because I was a little short, Imran gave me a couple of hundreds to go on there. When it came time to come and get you, the muthafuckas left me and tried to pretend like they did that shit all by themselves.”

“What? I have paid Jahzara back, at least, five thousand dollars by now! What do you mean she didn’t put no money up for me?” I asked, suddenly becoming dizzy. I’d worked

extra hard before I picked up my little habit, making sure that I did whatever I had to do to get Jahzara her money back that she put up for my bail money. Now, Honey was sitting here telling me that Jahzara didn't pay my bail and that *she* did. Wow! I didn't know what to believe at this point. If that was true, then why?

"If that's true, Honey, then why haven't you asked for none of your money back? I know how much you love money, girl. You just gonna let ten stacks slide without asking for so much as a dollar back?"

"What? You like my damn sister. I was happy to pay your bail and would do it again in a heartbeat. I cannot believe that Jahzara is even taking money from you, knowing that she didn't do a damn thing. That pisses me off. I'm about to call her and put her ass on blast." Honey took another puff of the cigarette and took out her cell phone.

"No! No! That's not necessary, Honey. You know I'm a believer of what goes around comes around. Don't say a word to her about it. I can't believe she is even acting like this. All because she's making a little money and letting the shit go to her head. Wow!" I said in disbelief.

"Right. That girl is something else right now, and I really believe that it's all because of Imran. We get her away from him, and then we get our old friend back. She is not herself."

I crashed down on my sofa, the very spot where DeMarcus was sitting when I smashed him over the head with a beer bottle. This had become one of my favorite spots in the house, only because it was a reminder of when I finally stood up for myself, a reminder that I was bolder and stronger than my mom had been. I always feared that I would be worse than what she was. I sat there thinking about all the things that Honey just revealed to me and wondered if Jahzara had really let the paper she was making go to her head like this. I mean she wasn't new to money, so I couldn't understand why she would now.

Her parents moved her out of the hood when she was thirteen-years-old, and they spoiled her up until the time she left and moved in with Quin, who, in turn, did the same thing. He showered her with gifts, kept money in her pocket, so what was so different about now? The fact that Imran stayed in a nice house in the suburbs couldn't be the problem. Or wait! At least, that was what she told us. Who knew if she was telling the truth about where Imran lived at in the first place since we couldn't even get an invite to come over. Anytime she wanted to chill, it had to be at my house, which she hated coming to since I damn near killed a man here, or at Honey's little condo she just got.

"Honey, what is it? I just don't understand why Jahzara would be acting brand new like this with us. She should know us well enough to know that we wouldn't get jealous of her like that," I said, breaking the silence.

"I don't know. The only reason I hadn't said anything before is because you had a lot going on, trying to clear this situation up with DeMarcus and the state," Honey said with a shrug of her shoulders.

I nodded my head and told Honey that I would be right back. I rushed into my bedroom, closed the door behind me, and grabbed the mirror that was underneath my bed. I needed to get a quick hit, so I could deal with the things that Honey was telling me right now. I knew that I had felt some distance from each of the girls, but I really expected it to be because we were all so busy and distracted, not behind some jealousy and envious mess.

"So, you're the one that's been stealing from Imran?" Honey asked, causing me to jump and nearly waste my stash. "I knew it was something different about you."

I looked over at Honey and watched as she confidently strutted in my direction. She kneeled down in front of me, dipped her index finger into the candy, and then ran her finger across her gums. My body began to tremble for fear of what Imran or his goons might do to me if they found out that

I had been stealing from them. Just a couple of weeks ago, they damn near killed this young soldier from the block all because he was one hundred dollars short on money that was owed. I wasn't sure of the amount of product that I'd stolen, but I knew that it was enough to piss somebody off.

"Please don't say anything, Honey. I promise I won't take anymore," I pleaded.

"Say anything? I'm not going to say anything." Honey tenderly pushed a strand of my hair out of my face and then brought her lips to mine. She kissed me and pushed her tongue into my mouth before rubbing her hands over my breasts. "I want some, too."

I pulled away from Honey and watched as she pulled her torn yellow shirt over her head and then stood up to pull her skinny jeans off. She stood in a black bra with a matching black G-string. She stripped out of her undies and tossed them to the floor as well. Her perky breasts stood at attention, and, for some reason, the sight of her neatly trimmed vagina caused my clit to jump. I'd never been attracted to a woman and had never ever looked at my friend as anything more than a friend.

Honey knelt down where the blow was, grabbed the dollar bill, and did a line. She pinched her nose a couple of times before seductively staring into my eyes. I was frozen with fear and pure admiration. She crawled closer to me, gently pushed me back onto the floor, and climbed on top of me. She went to pull my shirt over my head and then my bra. My body trembled as she lowered her head and sucked my nipples better than any man ever had, doing so with such care that it was enough to make me go wild.

"You're so beautiful," Honey said before placing her lips to mine.



## 15 Jahzara

15

## Jahzara

“Looks like you need to be going,” Tamar said to me the moment I got off of the phone with Imran. “To your brother, right?”

I laughed nervously, “Yeah, well, that’s not my brother, as you can see. I’m sorry I lied to you, but I didn’t want to you to refuse to work with us because of it. Quin asked me for a divorce, and I gave it to him.”

“Damn, I would have never thought that, but I’m not tripping. I knew, when you first came down, that Imran wasn’t your brother. That nigga kept staring at your butt the whole time I was staring at it, too, so shit...,” he laughed, and so did I.

“Imran is cooler than a muthafucka, though. I see that me and him will have one helluva a business relationship if he keeps fucking with me the way he is.”

“Well, he plans on it, and that’s part of the reason that I am here. Quin gets out in a couple of months, and Imran has a feeling that he will definitely try to get in contact with you to get back on, and he doesn’t want that happening.”

“He doesn’t want that happening, or you don’t want that happening?” Tamar asked, making me nervous once again. This dude made me feel so freaking uneasy every time I was around him that I couldn’t even focus and get my words out all the way. The fact that he was sitting in front of me with just a pair of swimming shorts on made it even harder. He was so freaking cute with his caramel skin, neatly shaved goatee, pretty brown eyes, and well defined body. Not to mention the fact that he had out of control money.

“We both don’t want it to happen. Not that we’re trying to take from anyone’s pockets, but we are aware that it could

cause a war, and you know with a war going on—”

“No one eats. Yeah, I’m well aware of that. But you know I ain’t never had no problems with Quin. He’s always been cool people and the fact that he helped me out on a lil’ issue I was having back in Dallas a few years ago was the only reason I fucked with you,” he said with that sexy ass smile of his.

“Yeah, I know, and I kinda feel funny coming down here asking you to do this. I mean, honestly, Imran doesn’t know that when I asked him to let me make this trip this time that I was planning on asking you for this favor. It’s just that I see what it has been doing to him the closer we get to Quin’s release, so I figured I could do something to ease the situation.”

“Yeah—”

We were cut off when a petite female walked over to where we were sitting, carrying a phone in her hand. She had long, straight hair that flowed to the middle of her back. She looked mixed with black and, maybe, Chinese. I noticed that she walked with a small limp but was the prettiest thing I’d ever seen.

“What’s up, baby?” Tamar asked as he stood up from his chair. “Jah, this is my wife Rozalyn. Rozalyn, this is Imran’s old lady Jah.”

I stood up, shook her hand, and shared a brief smile with her before she turned her attention back to Tamar. She shoved the phone she was carrying into his hand and turned around to walk away.

“Who the fuck is this?” he asked, putting his ear to the phone. “Yeah. A’ight. I’ll be on my way in about twenty minutes, Kari.” Tamar looked over at me and held his finger up, and I nodded my head. “Well, what you want me to do? You should’ve called me before your damn water broke, and why the hell are you calling Rozalyn’s phone?”

My interest suddenly peaked once I heard the words “water broke”. I didn’t know what the hell was going on up in this

household, but it sounded like some straight mistress drama. I tried to pretend as if I wasn't listening as I turned my head and looked towards the house where I spotted the wife standing in the doorway with her arms folded across her chest. The hurt and anger that she felt was obvious. It was written all over her face, and I felt really, really bad for her.

*I guess good looks isn't everything*, I thought as I brought my attention back to Tamar. He quickly ended the call and looked over at me with frustration clearly written across his face.

"Let Imran know that, if he can guarantee me that he will get ten extra bricks a month, then I will keep Quin out of the loop. Other than that, I won't be able to do it, ma. Sorry to cut the meeting short, but I gotta go take care of some unexpected business. I'll get my bruh out here to finish you up."

"Okay, it's cool. Go ahead," I said. I grabbed the glass of wine that was sitting in front of me and took a few sips. I honestly was at the point where I didn't care if Tamar kept Quin out of the loop or not. My intentions were good when I came down here, and I'd planned to go all out to keep things good on our side, but, after what Honey called and revealed to me, I didn't know if it was even worth my time. Then, when I called Imran to see if he was gonna fess up to anything, he had the nerve to blow me off and tell me that I better not ever call him about a bitch again.

I needed to know if what Honey said he had done to her was true, and, if so, why? What was I not doing that would make him want to go after my best friend? Had this been the first time? Would he do it again if I gave him another chance?

I had so many thoughts running through my head that it was causing me to get a headache. I couldn't wait to get back into Dallas and was glad that I decided to fly this time instead of drive like Imran and I had done many times before. Soon as Tamar's brother came outside to where I was at, I quickly handed him the money and let him know that we would be getting the same thing as the last time and told him to let Tamar know that we would let him know about the extras the

next time we came down. I could've easily given the go ahead, given Tamar the money, or got them on consignment, but I wanted to get back home and see what was what first.

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I walked into the home that I shared with Imran, slammed the door shut behind me, and headed straight upstairs to our bedroom. Imran was seated on the edge of the bed, smoking a blunt, and playing that damn Madden game that he loved to play. He was dressed in a pair of boxers with a big brown robe halfway tied around his body. I walked over and stood in front of him, waiting for him to give me his undivided attention. When it took too long for him to acknowledge me, I snatched the controller from his hand and tossed it across the room.

"I'mma take it that as you had a bad muthafuckin' trip!" he yelled.

"You damn right I had a bad trip! The whole way here I prayed and prayed that my girl was trying to pull one over on me and that you didn't actually try to force yourself on her! How could you, Imran?" I screamed shakily.

I did everything in my power to keep tears from falling from my eyes, but they poured down like rain drops. I was truly hurt by his actions because I was being forced to choose between two people that I really loved. Imran had treated me like a fuckin' queen since I'd been with him, showered me with gifts, showered me with love, and now...and now this shit. Now, I saw that he was the type that felt he could do whatever he wanted because he had money to back it up.

"You gotta be fuckin' kidding me right now. I told you, don't come to me about no fuckin' bitch! If I wanted that trashy ass friend of yours, I would've had that bitch. No problem. Trust me!"

"Oh, you that muthafuckin' cocky that you think you could have easily smashed my best friend? Fuck you, Imran! Honey would never do me like that!"

Imran shook his head as if he couldn't believe that I was speaking to him in such a way. I walked over to the closet and snatched as many of my clothes from their hangers as possible. I looked too damn good to deal with a cheating ass nigga. I could easily walk on the street and choose from any dude that I wanted, so there was no way I was going to sit here and deal with one that couldn't treat me right. Nah, not happening!

"Yeah. You would wait until my divorce was finalized to show your muthafuckin' ass! Had me leave my husband to come and be with your cheating ass! My husband might didn't leave me in a way that you approve of, but I know, for a fact, that he would've never tried to sleep with my best friend, Imran! How could you? I was already skeptical about signing those papers, and then you do this to me!"

I stormed out of the closet and threw all of the clothes I had grabbed into a pile in the middle of the floor. Imran continued to sit on the bed, toking on a blunt like I hadn't said a word to him. He was so freaking cool, calm, and collected that it pissed me off to see that I was the only one angry around this bitch. He should be super pissed that he was losing a bitch like me, but he didn't even seem to care one bit. I started for the closet again but was halted and forced to run in the other direction when a funny feeling hit me in the middle of my gut.

I rushed into the bathroom, threw the toilet seat up, and threw up everything I'd eaten in the past twenty-four hours. My stomach seemed to twist and turn as more and more of it continued to fly out of my mouth.

"Oh, my god," I whined, finally able to catch my breath. I walked over to the sink and turned the cold water on, cupping some in my hand, and pouring it into my mouth. I swished the water around in my mouth before spitting it out into the sink. I grabbed my toothbrush, covered the bristles with paste, and brushed my teeth.

It had to be that damn food I'd eaten on the plane that had me feeling this way. I spit the toothpaste into the sink and

noticed that it was mixed with red—with blood. I immediately put more water into my hand and tossed some into my mouth. I swished it around real good before spitting it back into the sink where I saw more blood.

*What the hell is going on?* I wondered as I placed the toothbrush back into the cup and walked out of the bathroom. I shook my head when I saw that Imran was sitting in that same damn spot and was actually trying to fix the controller that I had thrown across the room.

“So, you have nothing to say, Imran. You’re just gonna allow me to walk out of this house, out of your life, knowing that you are a no good, lying cheating bastard!” I yelled while holding my hand over my stomach.

“What do you want me to say, Jah? I was already convicted before you stepped off that plane, and, in your eyes, you’ve proven me to be guilty, so what the fuck do you want me to say? I told you from the jump that Honey was a trifling bitch, and you took it as me having some type of personal vendetta against her when, in fact, I just know a grimy bitch when I meet her.”

“I saw her, Imran. I saw the scratches on her face and neck. I saw her ripped clothing! She was crying and saying that you tried to rape her! How could you do this to me?”

“I didn’t do shit to you! I slapped the bitch but not enough to put no scratches on her face. She’s running game!”

“You slapped her? Slapped her? Why?”

“Because she tried to fuck me! She caught me while I was resting at the spot on Bonnie View. I slapped the shit out of the bitch and told her to the get the fuck out.”

“What do you mean ‘she caught you while you were resting’? What does that mean?”

“She was sucking my dick, and the bitch just caught me while I was sleeping! I handled her ass. That’s it! That’s all!”

I shook my head from side to side, knowing that Imran was lying to me. I gathered my clothes up and tossed them into the bag, no longer wanting to hear anything from him. I couldn't believe that things were over for us so soon. I really wanted a future with Imran, to have kids with him, and to grow old with him—the things that I didn't get to do with Quin.

I zipped my bag up, tossed it over my shoulder, and headed out of the bedroom. I wanted Imran to stop me and convince me that he didn't do anything wrong, put more effort into making me believe that he was telling the truth, but he didn't, and that was what let me know that he was lying, just like Honey had said he would do.

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“Are you sure you wanna stay up in here after what happened here?” Honey asked as she ran her fingers through my hair.

“Yeah. I'm positive. That was so long ago anyway. I just need some time to myself, just to think about everything that's going on. I'm just so hurt right now and completely shocked that this is happening. Imran had me completely fooled into believing that he was this great guy, but now I see that it was all a front. I'm so sorry that he did this to you, Honey! I'm so sorry,” I broke down crying.

“It's okay, girl. I'm fine. I'm just happy that you were able to finally see the truth about him. Tomeka and I have been trying to get you to see the real him for the longest. We've been so worried about you being with him, especially after he set you up to be robbed, so it would look like somebody was after you.”

“What?” I asked, sitting up on the couch. “What do you mean ‘he set me up’?”

“I tried to tell you, Jah, but Tomeka told me how you were saying that we were hating on you and jealous because we wanted your man, so I just kept my mouth shut. I didn't think that you would believe me when I told you, just like I didn't

think you would believe me when I told you about this incident.”

“Tomeka told you that I said that y’all were hating? What kind of lies is she telling on me, and why? I never said no messy bullshit like that. I would never say that. I haven’t even spoken to Tomeka in damn near a month. How could she even say such a thing?”

“I don’t know. She even said she believed that you were trying to cheat us out of the money we were making out of the traps.”

“Cheat y’all? Oh, my god,” I said, letting out a laugh. “Tomeka has gone freaking mad ever since she stabbed that nigga DeMarcus. She’s making shit up, and for what? I’ve done nothing but help her. If it wasn’t for me, she would probably still be sitting in jail right now. The money the bitch has been paying me back for the bail money, I’ve been secretly giving to her lawyer. How dare she go and lie on me like that?”

“I tried telling her that you bailed her out when I couldn’t help, but she just went on and on about you ‘til I just couldn’t sit and listen anymore. You’re right. Ever since she did that shit to DeMarcus, her ass has gone crazy, and I think she’s using.”

“Yeah, well....I’ll deal with her later. How do you know Imran set me up to be robbed? What did you hear or see?” I asked, getting back to that.

“I overheard him telling one of his goons to dump your safe in the Trinity River before you moved in with him. He didn’t want you to get there and find it. The only reason he did it was because he wanted you to be too scared to stay here. He wanted you to feel like you had no choice but to accept his offer to move in with him,” Honey explained.

More tears fell down my face as I paced the floor, thinking how Honey, Imran, and Tomeka were the only ones who knew exactly where I kept my safe. No one could just come up in here and easily find it, unless they knew exactly where to go. I



had thought about that so many times, over and over again, since the day it happened, but I didn't want to believe that any of the people that were close to me had done me like that.

"Wow! Thanks for the info, Honey. Thank you so much for exposing this nigga before I up and did something crazy like marrying him."

"Girl, no problem. That's what friends are for." Honey stood up and hugged me before going to the bathroom. Once she came out, we said our goodbyes and promised to hook up and do lunch or something, so we could figure out why Tomeka was spreading such vicious lies about me. Right then, I was too exhausted to think and only wanted to get some sleep.

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I dropped down to the floor and covered my head when the glass from my window was smashed in and slid under my bed when I heard my front door come crashing to the floor. I could see from beneath the bed that smoke was beginning to fill the room and listened as heavy footsteps treaded throughout my home.

"Clear!" I heard a deep voice yell.

"Kitchen is clear and so is the bathroom!" another voice yelled.

I tried to keep my mouth closed and not make a sound, but the smoke covered my face and filled my lungs, making it hard for me to breathe. As a result, I coughed uncontrollably, and, before long, I was yanked from underneath the bed, and a shit load of guns were shoved into my face. I held my hands up and looked around the room at all the uniformed men and tried to figure out what was going on.

"Where are the drugs?" one of them yelled.

I continued to cough and cough until one of them jerked me up from the floor and pulled me out of the smoky house. I sucked in the West Dallas air, welcoming it into my lungs like

never before. I looked up and finally noticed three letters that got my heart pumping at lightning speed— DEA.

“Where are the drugs?” an officer asked.

“What drugs? I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, and it was the truth. I didn’t keep anything here but a small stash of weed— nothing that would make the DEA toss tear gas into my home and come shoving guns all in my face. They had to have had the wrong house.

“Either tell us where it’s at or we’re gonna tear your whole damn house apart looking for it. We’ve been tipped off by an informant that someone was spotted bringing twenty kilos of coke into here and a crate full of guns. Tell us where to find them, ma’am.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. I have a couple of ounces of weed in my purse, as well as a registered .22. There are no drugs here,” I pleaded with them to believe me. The officer talking to me nodded for his men to go back inside. It didn’t take long before I heard them tearing my house apart. I hadn’t quite gotten it cleaned up from the last time, and I was sure that this time was about to be much worse.

I sat on the porch for what seemed to be an hour before the officers came out shaking their heads in disbelief. A slight grin crossed my face knowing that they hadn’t found a thing, just like I suspected. I almost laughed aloud until the last officer stepped out holding what I knew to be several baggies of coke in one of his hands.

“This is all we found,” he said to the lead officer. “Bout twenty of these are behind the toilet, but, other than that, the place is clean.”

“Stand up. You’re under arrest,” the lead officer commanded.

“What? Wait! I didn’t do anything. That’s not mine! Sir, that is not mine!” I cried, but he wasn’t trying to hear my pleas as he jerked me up off of the ground and forced my hands behind my back. “Y’all mad ‘cause y’all didn’t find shit and wanna plant that shit on me! Y’all know that ain’t mine!”

Two officers dragged me off the porch and took me over to an awaiting van. I was tossed into the back of it and cuffed to the seat like some animal. The door slammed shut, and that was when I broke down, crying like a baby.

“They set me up! This is a set up!” I cried to myself.

## 16 Honey

16

## Honey

Once I confirmed that Jahzara had been arrested, I pulled away from her block and headed to my home. I hated to do her like that, but, if I couldn't eat, then neither could she. Imran wasn't just going to toss me to the side like yesterday's trash and think that I was going to be fine with it. After I handled his girl, I had to figure out a way to handle him. I knew about every spot he had in Dallas and could easily hit each one and take all of his money, but that would've been too obvious. He would know that it was me after what just happened, so I had to think of something else.

*Maybe, if I could just figure where the nigga's at, follow him, and then I could hit his precious, little home that he didn't want anyone knowing about. He has to have something there that he's protecting. Why else wouldn't he want his girl's best friends to know where he lives?* I thought.

I drove around to every trap house that Imran had in Dallas, knowing he had to be at, at least, one of them. That was how he operated. He went from trap to trap, checking on his money, on the product, but never did no real work. He thought he was such a fuckin' boss. *Well, you just wait until Quin comes home. I laughed inwardly. We will see who the boss is.*

I pulled up to the last house and parked a few houses down. Imran's raggedy Honda Accord that he drove around in sat in front of the house, and there he was, leaning against the hood, talking to—is that Cedric? I squinted my eyes to get a better look and shook my head in disbelief. What the hell was he doing on this side of town, and why on earth would he be talking to Imran's snake ass? I pulled a cigarette from the box

and quickly fired it up. I watched as the two of them laughed it up like they were best friends.

*"Fucking perdedores! Fuck you two muthafuckas!"* I yelled, hitting the steering wheel. "I bet they're laughing about me. Everyone wants to talk about Honey!"

Tears fell from my eyes, and I took a deep toke from my cigarette. I pulled a .38 Special from underneath the seat and sat it on my lap. Cedric had purchased this gun for myself a couple years back after someone broke into our home. I'd never had use for it until now. Cedric had left me, and Imran had denied me, and now they wanted to sit up here and talk about me behind my back.

I quickly sucked at the square again and blew out a cloud of smoke. I watched as some chick walked over to Cedric and wrapped her hands around his waist. The two of them embraced and shared a short but romantic kiss, and that caused more tears to drip from the corners of my eyes.

I flicked the cigarette out the window, cranked the car back up, and slowly drove down the block in their direction. I held the gun out the window and blindly fired at them.

*POW! POW! POW! POW! POW!*

Seeing Cedric had completely taken me off task and made me forget my intended purpose— finding out where Imran lived.

"Shit!" I said as I drove down the dark street.

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"What's up? Damn! You just now getting home?" DeMarcus asked as he raised his head from a pillow.

"I was working. I told you that."

"What the fuck happened to your face?" he asked, reaching to cut the lamp on.

"Imran attacked me is what happened! I caught him trying to rape some little girl, and, when I threatened to tell Jah, this was the outcome."

“What? Fuckin’ pervert!” DeMarcus jumped out of bed and grabbed his jeans from the floor.

“No, no, no!” I yelled, holding up my hands. “I got something for both he and Jah.”

“What did Jahzara do?” DeMarcus asked, grabbing a cigarette.

“She took up for her man, of course. It’s cool. I have the perfect plan to shut both of them down.”

“What are you about to do?” DeMarcus asked with both eyebrows raised.

“I’m gonna write Quin again and let him know what Jah has been up to and how she gave Imran all of his stuff and even handed over his connect.”

“What do you mean ‘write him again’, Honey?”

“I wrote him before and told him about the things Jah was doing at that club. After I seen the kinds of shows she puts on in front of all those men, it disgusted me, dancing all over men, bouncing her ass in their faces, showing her titties all over the club, just degrading herself. Quin had to know.”

“It’s a strip club, Honey. That’s what they do.”

“Yeah, but I had a feeling she was doing more than that, and that’s what I told Quin.”

“I’m starting to really believe Tomeka when she said you had mental issues. Fuck is wrong with you? I’m ‘bout to get out of here.”

“So, you’ve been talking to Tomeka about me? You’ve been talking behind my back just like everybody else has, huh?”

“This was back before you and I even started fooling around. She said you were a nut case, and I thought she was just playing around, but now I see how serious she was. I ain’t got time for this crazy shit.”

After he was fully dressed, DeMarcus left my home.

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I walked into my kitchen, grabbed a notepad from the drawer along with a pen, sat at the table, and prepared to send a letter to Jahzara's ex-husband Quin for the second time. I twirled the pen between my fingers as I thought about exactly what I was going to say to him. A smile came across my face, and I began to write:

*Hi, Quin!*

*Yes. It's Honey again. Hey! Did you know that Jahzara has already moved on and is living with this guy named Imran Jackson? I told you before that she wasn't any good, but—Geesh!— I, at least, thought she would take some time to breathe after y'all divorced. Anyway, I just thought I would tell you that ...*

"Yes, Imran and Jahzara, you guys are done, and I cannot wait until Quin touches down," I laughed and continued to write.

*Spending the night in jail because someone set you up is the worst thing ever*, I thought. I didn't get one minute of sleep because all I could think about was— *Is this another one of Imran's schemes? Had he been gaming me all along? Am I just a pawn for him?* I had picked him out of a crowd, but had he really picked me? I had so many questions but no fucking answers.

I walked outside of Lew Sterret and was truly disappointed to see Imran waiting for me. I had a glimmer of hope that one of my girls would be out there. I called Tomeka to inform her that I'd been arrested when I couldn't get Honey and told her that I'd been knocked on drug charges and needed to be bailed out. Seeing Imran there, instead of them, threw me for one hell of a loop.

"Where is Tomeka? Or Honey?" I questioned when I got closer to him.

"I don't know, Jah. Tomeka called me this morning and said she didn't have money to bail you out, and I told her that I would take care of it," he said angrily before going to get in his car.

I went and pulled the door open on the passenger side and collapsed down into the seat. *Why the fuck was he here if he was this cheating, conniving bastard that Honey was making him out to be? If he wanted me out the way, then why not leave me in there?* I wondered. God! I was so confused, but maybe I wasn't confused and everything was in black and white, and I was refusing to see it.

"Can you take me to the store please? I need cold meds or something."



“Are you gonna get your stuff and come back home?”

“What? You think, because you bailed me out of jail, that I’m going to forget about what you did? I haven’t forgot.”

“Look, I’m not gonna let you keep accusing me of sleeping with that grimy ass bitch or whatever the fuck she is trying to say I did. I let you get away with the shit just like I let you get away with throwing the fact that you didn’t wanna divorce your ex-husband in my face.”

“I didn’t wanna divorce him, Imran. That was my husband! We’d been together since I was pretty much a damn child. I just don’t think I should’ve left like that without insuring that’s what he really wanted.”

“He sent you divorce papers, Jah! What do you mean?”

“Because of rumors he heard! Somebody lied on me, and he believed them. I was mad at him and wanted revenge, but I just feel like divorcing him was a mistake.”

“Wow. So, this whole time we’ve been together has been a mistake?”

“No!” I cried. “No, Imran. I love you, but I just...I don’t know. I have never been so confused in my damn life. Just let me go to the store and, then, take me to get a room. I need to think.”

Imran reached over and grabbed my hand, squeezing it inside of his. Tears fell freely from my eyes because I knew that this would happen. I knew that I would regret starting this relationship with Imran, knowing that I had so many unanswered questions from my husband...my ex-husband. There was time put into our relationship, feelings, memories, and for me to just cave in and give him what he asked for kind of made it seem as if he was right about me. What kind of wife doesn’t put up a fight for her husband? I shook my head and knew that I’d fucked up big time. Quin would get home and find out the truth and wouldn’t want anything to do with me, and I didn’t blame him.

“I know Honey’s your girl and all for however long y’all have been friends, but I promise you, Jahzara, it wasn’t like she

said. She's lying to you, and I would never do that to you, especially not with her. I'mma let you have your time, but we need to get together and talk about us. You just came into my life, and I'm not trying to lose you so soon."

I nodded my head but didn't say anything. I just wanted things to go back to the way they were, back to when I was happily in love with the man of dreams, back before he left me all alone and before I was forced to shake my ass for cash. I wanted to go back to never touching those bricks, never getting this separated from my girls, and never falling in love with another man.

Imran ran me by a CVS and, then, dropped me off at the Marriot located near his home. I told him to give me a few days to unwind and get my thoughts together and then we would talk. I was starting to think that maybe he was right about Honey. Some things just weren't making sense, and I needed to get to the bottom of it. All I knew was that the bitch better not been lying to me. Nah, not having that.

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"Hi, my name is Jahzara Simmons, and I have an appointment at nine," I said to the receptionist.

"Okay. Fill these papers out, and we will be with you as soon as possible," she handed me a clipboard, and I turned around to where the waiting room was packed with women of all age groups. Some of them looked like babies, and some of them looked too damn old to even be there. As I made my way over to an empty seat, my legs felt as if they were about to give out on me. I was so nervous about the choice I was about to make, but I knew that it was the right thing to do. There were still so many things that were up in the air about my relationship with Imran that I knew having a child would only complicate things even further. I didn't even want to consult him about this knowing that he would try to talk me out of it and get me to keep it, but I just couldn't.

The minute I got to that hotel room yesterday, I immediately pulled out the pregnancy test I'd gotten from the CVS and

confirmed what I'd been suspecting. I knew, once I saw those two pink lines, that this was what I needed to do. Part of me wasn't ready to raise a child, and the other part of me felt that it would hurt Quin too bad to know that I was about to have a baby by another man when he and I didn't have time to.

Once I'd completed the paperwork, I turned them into the receptionist, and I awaited my turn behind all the many of women that were there. It was kind of a sad sight to see so many women there to kill babies that didn't ask to be created in the first place, but who was I to judge when I was here for the same reason? I just hoped that, when I was ready to bring a child into this world, I wouldn't be cursed and have problems doing so.

"J. Simmons!" a nurse called from a side door.

*Lord, please forgive me for what I am about to do,* I prayed as I followed the nurse to the back to prepare for my procedure.

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### Three Days Later

It had been a few days since I had the abortion done, and I hadn't spoken to anyone since then. Today was the first day I'd turned my phone back on, and the messages that were waiting for me were ridiculous. I knew that, after the abortion was done, I wouldn't want to deal with anyone because of the emotional response that I was bound to have. I mean, I wasn't this cold and heartless person that didn't give a damn about human life. I would forever regret and hate the day that I killed my unborn child, but I knew that it was something that had to be done. Just like I knew that it was time for me to confront Honey and find out if everything she had told me about Imran was true. I hated to call her a liar because she had been my girl since I was a child, but all this was starting to sound like some things from our past. And that wasn't sitting right with me.

I pulled up in front of Honey's house, killed the lights, and was about to jump out of my ride when I spotted her and DeMarcus hugged up against his car. The eyes don't lie, and my eyes were definitely telling me that these muthafuckas were a damn couple or some shit. I took my cell phone out of my purse, unlocked it, and went to my camera. I brought the phone up to the window, zoomed in, and snapped a couple of pictures of them before cranking back up and driving off.

"What the hell? How long has that shit been going on? Damn! What else has this bitch been doing?" I said right before my phone rang, and Honey's name popped up on the caller ID. I pressed the green button and placed the phone up to my ear. "What's up, girl?"

"Hey! How are far are you? I wanted to run and jump in the shower before you got here," Honey said.

I pursed my lips up, knowing the reason why she wanted to jump in the shower was so that she could clean up the funk from messing with that no good ass nigga. I rolled my eyes and tried to sound as if I wasn't salty about what I'd just seen.

"Girl, I'm not coming. I'm about to head home and lay down for a while. How about we get together tomorrow and talk? Something is wrong with my stomach."

"You going back to the house?" Honey asked.

"Yeah, why? You don't think I should go back there?" I asked just to see what she was going to say.

"I'm just surprised that you're going back after all the craziness. Well, just be careful, and call me tomorrow, so we can talk."

"Yep, sure will," I said nonchalantly.

I drove around Dallas before going back to my home in the West. The purpose of me taking the picture of Honey and DeMarcus was so that I could show Tomeka, but what good would that do besides push the three of us further apart? I hadn't talked to Tomeka in a very long time, and, each time I called her phone, she refused to answer. I really wanted to

confront her and see what was up with all that stuff she said to Honey. I really wanted to see how she was holding up. With her going back and forth to court and possibly facing jail time, I knew things had to be hard for her. That was why, when Imran told me she didn't have money to bail me out, I didn't even trip. Those lawyer fees and court costs were a beast. Trust me I was hating the fact that I would soon be dishing out cash for the same shit.

I pulled up in my driveway, killed the lights, and got out of the car, slamming the door shut. I started for the house when I realized that I'd left my purse in the car.

"Shit!" I cursed. I turned around to go back and was halted by a punch to my face that knocked me flat on my back. I brought my hands up to stop the blood that was spraying out like a hose. My vision was blurred, so I couldn't see who was standing over me.

I could hear my keys dangling and heard the door to my car open. I rolled over from my back to my stomach. Then, I got on all fours and slowly tried to get up to my feet. A forceful kick to my stomach sent me flying back over and eventually led me to black out.

## 18 Honey

## 18

## Honey

*Ding-Dong-Ding-Dong!*

“Just a minute!” I yelled. I put out my cigarette and ran for the front door. “Who is it?”

“Bitch, open the door!”

*BAM! BAM! BAM!*

I put my hand up to the knob and coiled back like it had been on fire. I knew who was waiting on the other side and wished I had known they were coming. I would’ve preferred to have my .38 in hand for this type of visit.

*BAM! BAM! BAM!*

Against my better judgment, I unlocked the door and slightly pulled it open.

“What are you doing at my house? You got your money,” I said, placing my hands on me hips.

“We want more money. I knew it had to be a reason why Imran got rid of your ass, you grimy bitch!” one of the guys yelled. He was the taller of the two. They were both dressed in all black.

“I’m not paying you anymore money. We agreed on a stack a piece, and that’s what you got!”

“That was before we knew it was Imran’s girl! If he finds out we did this shit, we’re dead, hoe! We want more money, or we’re letting him know what’s up.”

I sighed, “Okay! Okay! Come in.”

As I walked away from the door, I cursed them under my breath. Each of them had to weigh, at least, two hundred

pounds, which meant together they were a whopping four hundred pounds. *How in the hell are they gonna be scared of Imran's scrawny ass?* I wondered.

“Have a seat, and I’ll be right back.” I turned to them and smiled at the awesome thought that crossed through my mind.

“Bitch, hurry the fuck up!” the shorter one bellowed.

I went into my bedroom and grabbed my purse from the nightstand. I, also, grabbed my .38. I placed my hand over the trigger and stuffed it down in my purse, trying my best to conceal it. I’d already given them two grand and wasn’t about to give them any more money. Since I wasn’t allowed to work at the spot anymore, I didn’t have any more income coming in. I had to be real careful about how I spent money if I wanted to maintain this lifestyle I’d quickly become accustomed to. The two grand that I’d given to them was more than I wanted to give. I just couldn’t afford to give them more.

I walked back into my living area where both of the guys were seated comfortably on my leather sofa. I pretended as if I was searching for the cash in my bag as I got closer to the two of them.

“Don’t come out with no bull—”

*POW! POW!*

I shot the shorter one first. One bullet penetrated his side, and the other one hit him in the jaw. The taller one, after watching the shorter fall, got up from the couch and ran towards the door to make his exit. I aimed at the him and fired.

*POW! POW! POW!*

The first two bullets whizzed past him, going through the walls, but the last one hit him right in the back. I watched as he went crashing to the floor. I, immediately, raised my eyebrows in surprise. I didn’t have the best aim, which was

why I had missed everyone when I shot at Imran and Cedric previously.

I pulled my cell phone out of my purse and dialed up DeMarcus. The line trilled in my ear three times before he answered.

“Hello,” he said.

“I need you to come over! Imran sent these guys here, and... oh, my god!” I squealed. “Hurry!”

I hung up the phone and tossed it back into my purse. I rushed into the bathroom and prepared myself, once again, to look as if I'd been attacked.

*Shit! Now, how the hell are we gonna get their asses out of here without being seen?* I wondered as I took my right fist, balled it up, and, as hard as possible, punched myself in the jaw. I repeated the same routine over and over again on different parts of my body. By time DeMarcus arrived, he would see my bruised and battered body, feel guilty, and want to do whatever he could to help.



## 19 Tomeka

## 19

## Tomeka

I'd finally settled things with the court and was sentenced to seven years probation, one hundred fifty hours of community service, and counseling with a therapist on a weekly basis. My lawyer was able to convince a judge that I was temporarily insane when I stabbed DeMarcus and, therefore, got me out of doing any jail time for the rest of my life. I definitely had to clean myself up because I would be reporting to a probation officer on a regular basis. One little fuck up could send my ass to jail.

I walked out of the Crowley Courthouse and headed towards the street where I'd parked my car on a meter. I promised myself, the whole time in court, that today would be my last day of getting high. That night I spent in jail was enough to scare me into not ever wanting to go back again. I planned to show up at the trap, steal enough to get me through today, and then find myself another job. There was no way I could continue to work around the stuff and expect to get clean. It would be too tempting if I had to look at it every day. Weigh it, cook it, but don't use it? That wouldn't even make sense since it had been my life for the past few months.

"Meka?"

I looked over my shoulder and spotted DeMarcus walking in my direction. I nervously looked around to see if he was bringing the laws with him, and, when I didn't see anyone, I slightly calmed down. I grabbed my keys from my purse that held a container of mace and gripped it tightly in my hand.

"DeMarcus...umm... you know I'm not allowed to be within fifty feet of you, right?" I asked confusedly.

“Yeah, I know that, but I just wanted to talk to you for a few minutes. Is that okay?” he asked, raising a brow.

“Umm, yeah. Sure. What up? You’re looking well,” I said, noticing he looked a lot better from the last time I saw him considering he was covered in blood. He was dressed in a nice black suit with nice, shiny shoes.

“Thank you. I just wanna apologize for the way I treated you when we were together, for hitting on you, disrespecting you by being with other women, for the verbal disrespect, the whole nine. I’m sorry and you wasn’t deserving of that,” DeMarcus sincerely stated. He placed his hand over his heart and looked as if he was about to cry. “I truly hate that I fucked things up with you. I wish I could take it back and start all over.”

I smiled, “Thanks, DeMarcus. I would like to say that I’m sorry for what I did to you and that I’m glad the outcome wasn’t worse than it was.”

“I’m glad that it wasn’t either. It gave me a chance to clean up my life. Part of the reason I was so abusive towards you was because I had a pretty bad coke habit. Was using before I met you. It’s a terrible addiction, and it made me do some pretty fucked up things.”

I swallowed pretty hard. I was shocked to hear that DeMarcus had been doing the same thing that I was doing now. I wanted to confide in him and tell him that I now I had that same problem, but thought better of it. I didn’t want him to judge me or, even worse, inform someone, and it get back to my probation officer.

“Just a minute, DeMarcus,” I said, pulling my cell phone out of my purse. “Hello.”

“Tomeka! Hey! Damn! I’ve been trying to reach you for the longest,” Jahzara said. I frowned and wondered what number she was calling me from.

“Girl, busy. What’s up?” I asked nonchalantly.

“I’m in the hospital. I’ve been trying to reach you and Honey. I could really use y’all by my side right now. Things are so bad —”

“Hold on, Jahzara. That’s Honey on the other line,” I said, clicking over to answer it. “What’s up, Honey?”

“Hey! I need you, mami. Imran sent these guys over here last night, and I’m fucked up. They did me in, Meka.”

“Oh, my god! Honey, what the fuck is the deal with you and Imran? It wasn’t enough he tried to rape you, now he sends guys after you? Look, I’m on my way.”

“Okay! Get here quick! I’m so scared, Meka! He’s trying to kill me!”

“On my way,” I said, hanging up.

“Look, DeMarcus. I’m sorry, but I need to go. Honey was attacked last night. Imran, Jahzara’s little boyfriend, sent some guys after her, and she’s saying she’s all fucked up.”

The look on DeMarcus’ face was one of utter disgust. He shook his head, and I could tell that he was feeling the same way I was about what I had just heard.

“Meka, be careful, okay? Just watch out for Honey,” DeMarcus said wearily.

I nodded my head and rushed to my car to hurry up and get to Honey. Ever since the night we made love, I’d felt like it was my responsibility to watch over her and protect her, which was why I was completely done with Jahzara. She was letting her damn boyfriend do all this stuff to Honey and wasn’t doing anything to try to stop it. We were all supposed to be sisters, and she was letting some fling come in between that, and that I couldn’t respect. I didn’t care that she was laid up in the hospital in pain or whatever the hell she was trying to tell me on the phone before Honey called. I was sure that, whatever the reason, she was there was because of something that fool Imran had done to her. If you asked me, she deserved everything she was getting right now and whatever was to come. I still couldn’t believe her ass had lied

about bailing me out and had the nerve to take my money like she had done so. It was all good, though. She was about to learn what happened when you put a nigga and money before your friends.

*Did she just say that Imran sent some dudes to Honey's house, and now she's all fucked up?* I wondered as I sat up in the hospital bed. They were keeping me overnight for observation since I'd just gotten an abortion and was brutally kicked in the same place that I once held a baby. I shook my head to get rid of the baby thoughts because, every time I even thought about it, it caused me to burst into tears. At that point, I didn't have time to cry. Someone was really doing some hating, and that shit was starting to fuck with my livelihood. I was starting to wonder if everything was like this because I decided to enter a man's game— a game where a woman was supposed to be the wife of a hustler and not running through streets making drops and toting pistols. I had never really had any of these problems when I was with Quin because whatever went down in the streets stayed in the streets, and he never brought that shit back home. I guess that was why it was so important to Imran that I left it all alone and let him handle things. Now that I really think about it, he was well aware of how crazy things could get out there and was only trying to protect me. I smiled at the thought of Imran— his sweet face, that goofy smile of his. And I wish that we had met at a different time.

"What's up? How are you?" I looked up and spotted Imran coming through the door with a dozen roses in his hand and a Get Well Soon balloon. So thoughtful he was.

"I was just about to call you. Took you long enough to get here," I said with a huge smile on my face.

"I've been here for a little while, just trying to collect my thoughts before I came in here."

“Yeah, shit has been crazy. It’s all gonna come together real soon, so I ain’t even worried about it.”

“Yeah. Well, I hope so, Jahzara.”

“You sure have been calling me Jahzara a lot lately. What’s up with that?”

“That’s your name, isn’t it?” Imran asked with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

“Are you upset because I haven’t made time to talk to you?”

“When I couldn’t get in contact with you last night, I decided to check your voicemail and—”

“What? Why the fuck would you do that?” I yelled.

“Because I’d been calling you for two straight hours and your shit was going straight to voicemail. I was worried about you!” Imran bellowed. He walked and sat the roses on the space next to the sink and walked towards the edge of the bed.

“It’s not like I have anything to hide, but your ass still shouldn’t have been checking my voicemail. I don’t go through your shit, so why in the hell would you go through mine?” I folded my arms, pissed that this nigga pulled such a hoe move and went through my damn phone. *And how the hell did he even figure out my pass code? Was I that damn obvious?* I wondered.

“Oh, you don’t have anything to hide? What about the message from the clinic asking you how your aftercare was going? They wanted to remind you to check the pamphlet for all the support groups that are offered for women who choose abortion,” Imran scoffed. “A fuckin’ abortion? You killed my seed, Jahzara? Or did it belong to another nigga? I can’t think of anything that I would’ve done to you that was so bad that you would go and kill my seed and don’t even talk to me about it.”

“You robbed me! You tried to fuck my best friend!” I cried, partially knowing that none of it was true. He was making what I did sound so fucking bad that I had to throw that shit in

his face and let him know that I had every right and reason to do what I did.

“Robbed you? Are you fuckin’ serious? Robbed you, Jahzara? I,” he pointed into his chest, “robbed you? Me? You must have me confused with the next nigga. I have no reason to rob anybody, and, if I did, it damn sure wouldn’t have been you. Your paper isn’t even long enough for me to even consider it.”

“What about the niggas you sent after Honey? I just got off the phone with Tomeka, and she said she’s all fucked up!” I said, acting as if I personally got that information from Tomeka and hadn’t just overheard it before she hung up in my face.

“What niggas? Sending niggas after Honey isn’t making me no damn money. That bitch is an afterthought to me, even after she shot at me and my boy Ced. She wanted what you had, Jahzara, and, because she couldn’t get it, she’s making up all this shit to come between us, and, obviously, it worked. All I wanted to do was be a part of your fuckin’ life, share my life with you, treat you the way you’re supposed to be treated! Half the shit you’re throwing at me you know isn’t true. I’mma let you have that, though, Jahzara. All those lies that you keep believing, keep them. I’m out, a’ight?”

“Imran, wait—”

Imran tossed his hands up in the air and walked out of the room, leaving me sitting there with a lot of regret. The secret of the abortion was supposed to be something that I held onto for the rest of my life. I knew that it would hurt Imran because it hurt me to do it, but he would never understand my reasons behind it.

“Imran! Imran, come back here!” I cried out.

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The next afternoon, I was released from the hospital. I caught a cab back to my home. The police didn’t have any leads on where my car was or my other personal belongings like my wallet and purse, and I was quite sure that I would never see

any of them again. Thank God for the cash that I had in my pockets, or I would've been outside of Parkland Hospital with the rest of the bums begging for change to get home. It was sad that I couldn't get in contact with either of my girls when I really needed them the most. Neither Tomeka nor Honey was unavailable for me to lean on, and that shit really hurt. If I hadn't been in the hospital when Tomeka found out that Honey was hurt, I would've been right by her side. No doubt. All of this was just showing me that them hoes was really up to something and couldn't face me because of it.

I walked into the house and looked around, sickened at the sight of the mess the police had made while looking for huge amounts of drugs and some big ass guns that I never had. Stepping over the trash, I walked into my bedroom and began to search in the many of places I'd stashed weed to see if maybe I had some sitting around that the DEA didn't confiscate. My nerves were so bad right then, and a blunt and some good sleep were all I really needed to settle down.

"Yes! Yes!" I cheered upon finding a half-smoked blunt in my panty drawer. I grabbed a lighter that was sitting on the floor, quickly fired it up, and made my way into the dining area where I took a seat at the table. There was a notepad and a pen sitting out from the times I used to write weekly letters to Quin. As I took a toke on the blunt, I sat back in the seat and contemplated sending Quin a letter just to see how he was doing and to see if he was ready for the big day. His release date was just around the corner, which meant I only had so much time to get my shit together and find myself somewhere else to live.

I picked up the pen, and, when I slid the notepad in my direction, a piece of paper fell into my lap. I grabbed the paper and saw that it was the same note from the night that someone broke into my house.

*Lay down or get laid out. Bitch*

I stared at the note for what seemed like forever, studying every single word down to every single letter. The way it was



written out so neatly and perfectly made it seem like whoever did it knew that they had all the time in the world. Like they knew that I wouldn't be home until a certain time and could pace themselves, crossing every T and dotting every damn I. Taking another deep toke from the blunt, I jumped up from the table and went on a hunt to find anything that I had in my house that Honey may have written on. All I needed was a couple of fuckin' words, so I could compare the handwriting and prove to myself what my gut had been telling me all along.

I went through damn near every piece of paper that I could find in the house, every piece that was strewn over the floor, and every piece that was put in different places around the house and couldn't find anything. I knew for a fact that she'd written something at one time or another. I decided to give up, get some rest, and look around again the next morning when I had all of my energy.

"Shit! I just know this bitch had something to do with it. I just know it," I said as I walked into the kitchen to retrieve a bottle of water from the fridge. I closed the refrigerator and leaned against the cabinet, gathering my thoughts. After taking a few sips of water, I went to place the bottle back inside when the writing on my refrigerator magnet caught my eye.

*Friends for life! Amigos para toda la vida!*

The last time that Cedric and Honey broke up, Honey ended up staying at my house. Each morning, when she woke up, she would write a new message for me on the refrigerator, trying to cheer me up and also trying to teach me a little Spanish. I'd completely forgotten all about it until now, just when I was about to give up and call it a night. I went back to the table where I'd left the handwritten note and then returned to the kitchen. I placed the note up against the magnet and compared the handwriting. Compared the A's, the L's, and I's to see if they looked anything alike, and, unfortunately, they did. The handwriting on the fridge was so neat and pretty just like in the note. All the letters were too close to the same not to be a match. I allowed the note to fall

out of my hand, and I slid down the cabinet until I hit the floor and placed my head against my knees. I cried like a little baby.

Back when we were in junior high school, Honey had accused seven boys in our grade of raping her inside of the boys' locker room. Each one of the boys had claimed that Honey agreed to have sex with a few of them while the other ones got to watch. They were all arrested and charged with sexual assault, based on the condition Honey was in. She had been beaten, her hair was mangled, and her clothes were torn. Not only that, a rape kit pulled semen that matched a couple of the boys that had been accused. A year later, Honey accused a maintenance man that lived in her apartment complex, a teacher from the school, and a pastor of one of the churches of the same crime. They all had been charged and sent to jail all because of Honey's condition and because traces of their sperm that was left behind. Eventually, an investigator from the Crimes Against Children division at the FBI got involved after hearing about a child who'd been raped a handful of times within only a year. They discovered that Honey was being molested by her father and by an uncle, and that it was possible that Honey was making everything up, accusing men of malicious crimes because she was too afraid to accuse the men who had really been hurting her. Her father and uncle denied everything, and, because the FBI could never find proof of what happened, neither of them were arrested. Honey was sent to live with an aunt after child protective services stepped in, and her parents returned to Mexico.

As soon as her parents left and she was far away from her uncle, things seemed to return to normal for her and everybody around her. Although Honey never admitted if she'd lied about being raped or not, she never accused another person of doing her any harm until Imran.

*After all this time, why now? I wondered. Why now and why Imran?*

*BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM!*

I shot up in bed and quickly glanced over at the digital clock that sat on the nightstand next to my bed. It read three-thirty in the morning, which meant that the only thing on the other side of that door was trouble. I quickly trotted to the kitchen, grabbed the biggest knife I could find, and walked towards the door. Once I peeked through the peep hole and saw that it was Jahzara, I went to sit the knife down on the bar, and then went back to open the door.

Jahzara looked all frazzled and disoriented, but, even then, it didn't take away from the fact she was draped in money. Her Pink sweat suit fit perfectly against all the curves of her body, and the brown Coach shoes she wore screamed out money. Her chocolate skin, even with the bruises, was so pretty that she looked like a life-sized Barbie doll. I watched as she flipped her hair to the back and then noticed the small cut on her lip. It was then that I remembered her calling and saying she was in the hospital and wondered if she'd come across DeMarcus and was here to get my advice.

"What's up? It's rather late," I said with a yawn.

"Yes, I know, but I needed to talk to you. She's at again, Meka. I can't believe this!" Jahzara walked inside and began to pace the space in my tiny living room. I went to stand close to the bar where I'd placed the knife in case she wanted to try something.

"Who is at what again?" I asked, shrugging my shoulders and frowning in displeasure.

"Honey. Remember back in the day when we were in junior high and she accused all those boys and those men of raping

her? Come to find it was because of what her dad and Uncle Aidan were doing to her.” Jahzara stopped pacing and looked at me to see if there was any recognition.

She was going too far, and I was about to let her know that. Honey hasn't had any problems since she got away from the people that were hurting her, and Jahzara knew that. She was stretching this shit all because she knew she'd been a terrible friend to us, doing whatever she could to excuse her behavior. Accusing Honey was one of them, and I wasn't trying to hear it.

“Are you hearing yourself right now, Jahzara? All this shit you've been talking about us, being jealous of you, hating on you and that no good ass nigga you got. Then, you lie to me about bailing me out of jail, knowing that Honey did it! You take my money and then wanna call me a hater. Did my money buy them shoes on your feet?” I yelled at her. “You know damn well those niggas raped her, just like you know your dude attacked her. You need to get out of here with that bullshit!”

“Damn, Meka! She done manipulated you like that? You believe everything she told you, huh? Does that even sound like me? Have I ever lied to you about anything?” Jahzara asked with tears in her eyes.

“No, you haven't which is why I'm appalled by the shit you've been doing lately. I'm not standing for it, though. Get out, Jahzara! Honey told me you would try some shit like this. Get out of my house before I call the police and have you put out!”

“Meka, Honey was the one who robbed me. I have proof!”

“You are really pushing it, Jah! Listen at yourself. You sound desperate as hell right now. Get the fuck out!”

“Okay, cool. I'll leave,” Jahzara held her head down and slowly walked out of the door.

I walked and slammed the door shut and then immediately went to my bedroom to call Honey. She told me that Jahzara

would come to me and show her ass, and she couldn't have been more right.

"Honey! Are you sleep?" I asked the moment Honey answered.

"Not now, bitch. What's up?" she responded.

"Jahzara came through here making all these accusations. Bringing up shit from ten years ago. Talking about you were doing the same things from back in junior high school. I had to put her ass out."

"What do you mean 'doing the same thing from junior high'? What is she talking about?"

"You accusing men of rape and shit. And then she started talking about how she had proof that you robbed her. She sounded so crazy. You should've heard her," I laughed.

"That bitch! *Voy a matar*. Fuckin' bitch!" Honey squealed through the phone. I could tell she was on fire because she was beginning to speak in Spanish, as she always did when someone pissed her off.

"Look. Don't worry about it, girl. She's gone now, but I had to call you and tell you that."

"Yeah, okay. Bye!"

I hung the phone up, shook my head, and went back to bed.

## 22 Honey

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## Honey

I paced the floor, angry and pissed that Jahzara was beginning to figure things out. She was trying to expose me, and I wasn't going to have that. She didn't understand what it was like to be me. All she had to worry about was being cute and wondering which nigga she wanted to be with for the week. She didn't have real problems, except for the ones I'd been causing and was about to cause.

I had to live with the fact that all men wanted to do was hurt me. All of them wanted to taste me, touch me, and then leave me. They'd all done it. My father, my uncle, those boys that laughed at me in school, all of them. They were no different. Cedric wasn't any different and neither was Imran. Jahzara was supposed to have my back, but she was off siding with the damn enemy.

I curled my knees up to my chest and began to rock back and forth as I cried and cried. I knew that I was going to have to get rid of Jahzara for her blatant betrayal. She had to go. She just had to. I picked up the phone and called Tomeka back to let her know that we were gonna have to meet and talk to Jahzara. I told her how sick I was of Jahzara playing games and how we needed to bring her to her senses. Tomeka agreed that we needed to teach Jahzara a lesson for betraying us.

Later that morning, I drove over to Jahzara's house to leave a note on her door because I couldn't get in contact with her over the phone. It was time we handled this shit once and for all.

*Sorry, Jah. I used to love you, but you allowed a man to come between us. Just like my mommy did. That's not good, bitch.*

## 23 Jahzara

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## Jahzara

After visiting Tomeka in the wee hours of the morning, I came back to my house where I sat in the same chair for hours just staring at the floor. I'd accused Imran of some of the most hurtful things ever all because I wanted to be a good friend. I wanted to be there for Honey like a friend was supposed to and not seem as if I had chosen my man over her. I'd partially gotten rid of Imran's child because of some of the harsh things that Honey had said about him. Because I held on to the little hope that she was actually telling the truth. I should've known it was all a lie. All the signs had been there. All the accusations she'd made just came out of nowhere, didn't make sense, but, because I loved her, I rocked with her. I allowed her to manipulate me just as she was doing with Tomeka. It seemed like, the same things she was telling me about Tomeka, she was also telling Tomeka about me. Playing us against each other, so we would be mad at one another and not figure out what the hell she had up her sleeve.

It was all good, though, because I'd been thinking a lot about moving up out of Texas and starting my life over somewhere else. I first had to see what the court was going to do with me for the drug charges that were pending against me, but, soon as that was over, I could leave. I had a nice amount of cash saved up and could easily relocate and forget about everything that had happened here. Forget about Tomeka, Honey, my parents, Quin, and Imran.

I was just about to get up and retire for a few hours when a tiny piece of paper slid through the crack of my door. I got up and walked over to the window, peeking out of it just in time to see Honey getting in her Impala. I rolled my eyes and reached down to get the paper that contained a little note for

me. I scoffed at the same pretty handwriting that the bitch had.

*Jah,*

*Look. All this needs to stop. We need to get together and hash out all of our problems and get back to being sisters again. There is so much "he said, she said" shit going on that things are getting twisted and confused. I love both you and Tomeka, and I know you feel the same way about us. Let's all meet back at my place around nine tonight and discuss this over dinner. Love you, sister. Amigos para toda la vida!*

*Honey*

Just when I was about ready to give up on these two, she comes through with this. A slight smile came across my face as I folded the letter in half and went into my bedroom to get some rest. I just hoped that we did get things hashed out and figured out what we were gonna do next. I didn't know if I could continue the friendship the way it was before unless Honey fessed up to the shit she'd done and agreed to get some help.

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The clock in the rental I was driving read 8:55 P.M. After sitting here for the past fifteen minutes, I contemplated on whether I wanted to do this little dinner with Honey and Tomeka. I started to feel like maybe I should reconsider and tell them bitches, "Fuck it". I'd been through too much, too, too much.

"Hey, Imran. It's me. Jahzara. I just wanted to see if we could get together and talk. I really wanna apologize to you for a lot of things, but I'd rather do it face to face. Also, I am here at Honey's house and something doesn't feel right. If you don't hear from me within the hour, call to check on me please. Bye. I love you."



I hung up my cell phone, tossed it into my purse, and also grabbed the nine millimeter I had bought from the pawn shop before coming here. I checked the clip like I'd been taught and also checked the safety. Seeing that everything was cool, I slid it into my purse and got out of the car.

Honey stayed in a nice area that was in between the North and downtown. There was a lot of traffic going up and down through there— trains, buses, and regular commuters that made it a very noisy area. People were always out and about, doing things, making the neighborhood a good one, but it just had too much damn traffic.

While walking up to the door, my stomach did major flips, and my heart kept telling me to turn around and go home. I reached out and was about to ring the doorbell when it opened. Tomeka was standing at the door with her hand held out, welcoming me inside. I stared at her for a few moments before slowly walking into the house where I stood in the foyer and waited for Tomeka to close and lock the door.

"Smells good," I said, trying to calm my nerves and ease some of the tension that was thick in the air.

"Yeah," Tomeka said nonchalantly.

I walked behind Tomeka as we headed for Honey's kitchen. As we were walking, I heard light footsteps behind me. I glanced over my shoulder to see Honey coming my way, but, before I could react, I was knocked out by the butt of her gun.

"Oh, my god, Honey! What the fuck are you doing?" Tomeka frantically asked.

"Help me! Grab her legs, and I'll get her arms!" Honey commanded.

"What? You said we were gonna talk to her, make her see the error of her ways!"

"That's what we're doing! Now, grab her legs!"

"Honey, not by force. This is not right. I don't wanna hurt her. I just want her to know how bad she hurt us and to apologize.

Not this.”

“You said you fuckin’ loved me, Meka! I thought that you loved me!”

I tried to crawl away and get to my handbag that fell when Honey hit me, but she walked over to me and kicked me in the face. Blood shot all over the floor, and my head became heavy and weak at the same time. It hadn’t been long since I was mugged and knocked out in practically the same exact way, so it made me wonder if Honey was behind that shit, too. I could feel them dragging me across the floor. I wanted to resist, but I seemed to have lost the function of my lower limbs.

“We have to do this, Tomeka. It’s the only way she’s gonna learn. We can’t just tell her; we have to show her. If you love me like you say you do, you will help me,” Honey said to Tomeka.

I really hoped that Imran got my message, so that he could come through. I hoped he would hear the sincerity in my voice and know that I realized how much I truly fucked up.

## 24 Tomeka

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## Tomeka

I pinched my nose repeatedly, waiting for the sting of the line I had just taken to wear off and for the high to kick in. I was supposed to be done with this shit, but Honey and her fucked up plan had me going backwards. She didn't say anything about beating Jahzara's ass and tying her up when she called me. She told me that we were only going to talk to her, hopefully get her to apologize for the bullshit she had done to us, and get her to apologize for lying on Honey when she knew it was her man who'd done all of these things. I really didn't see the point and felt as if we should have left it alone. If that was how Jahzara wanted to be, then fuck her. Who needed friends like her any damn way? Before, I would've climbed mountains for her, but, after the way she acted, I was more than ready to wash my hands of her and move on.

At that point, I was livid because Honey never said that this was the plan. If she had told me this was what we were going to be doing, I would've never showed up here. I wasn't into hurting anybody since I'd already fucked up DeMarcus and my record. I wasn't trying to add anymore charges. This was not sitting well with me at all, and I wanted to tell Honey how I felt, but I knew she would start to freak out. Ever since we'd started messing around, she felt as if I couldn't say no to her about anything, and that pissed me off. She wanted me to agree with her on everything, but, sometimes, she was wrong — like now.

I walked out of the bathroom and back into the living room where Honey had Jahzara tied to a chair. Her arms were tied behind her back, and her feet were tied tightly to the legs of the chair. She had lost consciousness after the kick to the face and was slowly waking up. Honey sat on the couch, smoking a

cigarette and tapping her leg against the floor. I wondered what she had up her sleeve. Was she gonna stare at the girl all night, or was she going to try to hurt her more than what she already had? Not knowing what was going through Honey's head caused me to break out into a sweat. If all Jahzara did was tell a few lies and act as if her shit smelled better than ours, did she really deserve this? To be beat up and tied to a damn chair?

I looked over at Honey, waiting for her to say or do something. She seemed to be in a deep trance, lost in her thoughts like her soul had left her body. Her eyes were emotionless. This scared me even further because I hadn't seen this look from her since it came out that she had been molested for all those years when she was younger. I looked from Honey to Jahzara and, suddenly, felt sick to my stomach.

"Honey, what are we doing here? This is not the way to go about things," I said, filling the deathly silence.

"She's waking up!" Honey put her cigarette out in the ashtray and jumped up from the sofa. She walked over to Jahzara and stood in front of her. Jahzara blinked her eyes several times before she opened them and looked around frantically.

"Welcome back, bitch!"

Honey back handed Jahzara across the face and then brought her fist back and punched her in the mouth repeatedly. I tried to contain myself, but I couldn't. A slew of vomit flew from my mouth, onto the carpeted floor. After gathering myself, I went over to where Honey was and tried to pull her back before she killed the girl.

"Honey, stop it! You're going to kill her! This is not what we talked about!" I screamed.

"Y'all bitches hate me that much! I ain't never did shit wrong to either of you! Y'all hating me because of what? What have I ever done wrong to deserve this?" Jahzara said, spitting blood onto the floor.

“You loved the wrong person, bitch! That’s what you did wrong! You loved the wrong damn person!” Honey screamed at her.

“I loved you, Honey! I still love you!” Jahzara said pleadingly.

“Well, bitch, I don’t love you and neither does Tomeka. You treated us like shit, so don’t get mad because we hate you for it now!” Honey yelled. “My girl don’t work in the trap no more,” Honey said disguising her voice in a way that caused me to look at her like she’d really gone mad.

“No, I treated y’all bitches like family, and this is how you do me? I don’t give a fuck what Honey tells you. When it came time to bail you out, Meka, this bitch said she wasn’t wasting her money on you!”

“Shut up! Shut up! That’s all you do is lie! Stop lying!” Honey tried to hit Jahzara again, but I pulled her back.

“No, hoe! You shut up! She didn’t wanna bail your ass out because she was fucking your man! She didn’t give me a dollar to get you out because she wanted to ensure that you and DeMarcus would not get back together. If you don’t believe me, call him. I talked to him before I came here, and he said he was willing to tell you everything if you didn’t believe me.”

“He didn’t say that, you lying bitch!” Honey got away from me and rushed Jahzara. She took out the pistol that was in her pants and slammed it across Jahzara’s face so hard that it caused a few of her teeth to fly out of her mouth. The chair fell backwards, and the chair broke into pieces, allowing Jahzara to break free from the restraints that held her down. Honey ran and jumped on top of Jahzara and began raining blows to her face. I grabbed Honey’s hair and pulled her off of Jahzara. We ended up tussling, throwing punches, until the both of us backed away from each other. Honey raced over and retrieved her gun from the floor and then pointed it at me.

“Why are you doing this, Honey? What is it that you think you’re going to solve by hurting Jahzara like this?”

“She is a traitor. She sided with them! She was supposed to have my back, but, when it came down to it, she chose Imran’s side! He wanted to hurt me, and she chose him! She’s just like my mommy!” Honey began to cry sounding like she was a little girl all over again.

“I understand that, Honey, but this is not the way to handle this. You can’t—”

“Don’t tell me what I can’t do! She shouldn’t have chosen his side! She’s just like my damn mommy. I messed up when I let my mommy get away, but I’m not letting her get away with it. She’s gotta pay for allowing him to hurt me!”

“He didn’t hurt you, you lying bitch! You made it all up just like you made up all those lies in school! You psychotic ass bitch!” Jahzara yelled.

She was on all fours, trying to climb to her feet. Honey ran over to Jahzara and kicked her in her face, causing her head to snap back in slow motion. I almost thought that she’d broken the girl’s neck until I saw Jahzara steadily trying to climb to her feet. She was fighting and was determined to not let Honey win. I went over to where the two of them were, pushed Honey out of the way, and reached down to help Jahzara up. Since I couldn’t go back and change the things that had led us here, I could do something to try to stop what was going on now. If I allowed this to continue, Honey would definitely kill this girl, and I didn’t want that on my conscience.

*POW! POW!*

The pain was like nothing I’d ever felt before. My entire body seemed as if someone had lit my blood on fire. I slowly turned around to see Honey pointing the gun at me with that same dead look in her eyes. She looked to be more high than I had felt earlier. My mouth dropped open, and I tried to speak, but nothing came out. I wanted to ask, “Why, Honey? Why are you destroying the love we once shared?”

“Oh, my god. Tomeka, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to...you were trying to help her. I’m sorry...*te amo mucho! Te amo mucho!*”

Honey stepped a few feet closer to me. She reached out for me, but it was too late. My entire body went crashing to the floor.

“Tom...bitch, come here!”

*POW! POW!*

## 25 Honey

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## Honey

I fired on Jahzara as she tried to get away from me. While I was putting all of my attention into Tomeka and trying to fix the crucial mistake I had made, she ended up getting away from me. That bitch was stronger than I had thought in the beginning, all the blows I'd delivered and she continued to get up like I'd done nothing at all to her. I chased Jahzara out of the front door and fired once again, hoping that I could get her before she got into her car and sped off.

*POW! POW!*

"Come back here, you lying bitch!" I screamed, running after her at full speed, but I was halted when she turned around and started firing on me. I dove in the grass and covered my head as bullets rained all around me, but thank God none of them hit me. I heard Jahzara's car door open and close and that was when I knew that it was safe for me to get up. I jumped up from the grass and ran towards her car, firing the remaining bullets that were left inside of my gun. Her window crashed from a bullet hitting it, but she smashed through the street and hit the corner practically on two wheels.

I ran back into the house, slammed the door behind me, and went to where Tomeka's corpse was painting the carpet red. I shook my head as tears fell from my eyes but knew that I didn't have time to mourn over her. I had to get her out of here and cover up my crime before the police came creeping like I knew they would. In a neighborhood like this, I knew it wouldn't be long before they showed up.

I grabbed Tomeka by her arms and dragged her to my back door, which led to the garage. This was becoming so routine, and I knew, after I got rid of Tomeka's body, that it was best for me to pick up and get the fuck out of dodge. I'd gotten



away with the murders of those two guys, but I somehow knew that this wasn't going to be as easy this time.

Her body felt like a bag of bricks as I put all my strength into getting her out of my home as quickly as possible. I knew that this was not something that I could call and ask DeMarcus for his assistance with since he still had love for Tomeka. I could tell by the way his eyes would drift off whenever I mentioned her name or whenever he came in contact with something that reminded him of her. He would most likely call the fucking laws on me since, according to Jahzara, he was ready to tell all about our love affair. It looked like he was going to do like the rest and turn his back on me as well.

Once I reached the kitchen, I grabbed the keys to my car, pulled open the door that led to the garage, and picked Tomeka's arms back up, continuing to drag her. Once I made it into the garage, I popped the trunk open and shook my head, knowing that this was going to be one hell of a struggle trying to get her inside of here. I knelt down, put both of my arms underneath hers, and lifted with all of my might. The first time and second time I tried, I couldn't lift her, but, the last time, I was able to get half of her body inside and had to push and push in order to get her all the way in. I looked at her one last time, blew her a kiss, and closed the trunk. I took a couple of deep breaths, and then ran back inside of the house.

I went straight to the kitchen cabinet and retrieved a big bottle of bleach. I poured bleach all over the floor where I'd dragged Tomeka's body and began to follow the trail that led back into the living room. It was just too much to clean up, too much to conquer in such a short amount of time. *So, fuck it!* I thought.

I dropped the bottle of bleach to the floor and took off running to my bedroom, then into my closet. I grabbed a small duffle bag and tossed an outfit to change into once I got rid of the body. I grabbed the shoe boxes that contained some stash money and tossed them into the bag as well. I then pulled away a couple of blankets that hid the safe that had been stolen from Jahzara's house. She was right. I did rob her,

and it was only because I knew that she wasn't doing a fifty-fifty split when it came to the amount of money that was made from the bricks we were selling. Jahzara was so predictable. She used the same password for everything— her debit cards, her lock code, voicemail for her phone, and for her fuckin' safe. She never switched it up, which made it so easy for me to take it and get into it with no problems. I put her birthday in 04-10, opened it, and pulled out the stacks of cash that were sitting inside. I quickly tossed the money inside of the bag, zipped it closed, and then headed back to the garage.

I didn't know where I was going to go, but I knew it was gonna have to be somewhere where I could stretch my money out while living comfortably. I had to go somewhere where no one would even think to look for me. Part of me wanted to go to Mexico and handle the source of my problem, but I knew that the authorities would definitely find reasons to send the bounty hunters after me over there. Wherever I was going, I was gonna make a promise to myself to not get involved with any men. The times I made love to Tomeka were some of the best moments of my life, and I truly regretted that I had shot her.

It was too late to take anything back, but I could always right my wrongs by changing now, right? I mean, I did change for ten years before, so it should be just as easy to do it again. Yeah, I could change my name to something else and start a whole new life.

## 26 Jahzara

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## Jahzara

I pulled into the driveway of a home that I hadn't been to in years, a home that I should have come to when all of these problems first started happening. The place I should have come when I received the divorce papers in the mail from Quin. Although my father didn't approve of me leaving the house at just seventeen and choosing to be with a drug dealer, he was a pastor and had always had a forgiving heart. I wished I'd come to him and asked for his advice on what I should do about my marriage, instead of choosing to take those bricks and sell them off in the streets. I was sure he would have led me in the right direction, and maybe, just maybe things wouldn't have gotten so far off. I was not sure what triggered Honey to start all of this, but I truly wished I would've caught on before things had gotten so bad—before she killed Tomeka.

The mere mention of Tomeka's name made tears fall down my swollen face. I just couldn't believe that she was no longer with us. She'd gotten so caught up in Honey's manipulation and didn't realize it until it was too late.

I reached my parents' door and began to pound on it as hard as I possibly could. I heard the tires of a car screeching to a halt behind me and desperately began pounding even harder, followed by constantly ringing the doorbell.

"Jahzara!" I heard someone yelling my name but didn't turn to see who it was in fear that it might Honey, coming to do more damage to me.

"Oh, my god! Mama! Daddy! Open up!"

The door swung open, and there stood my mama, wearing a pink and white bathrobe. I pushed my way into the house,

slammed the door behind me, and locked it. "Call the police, Mama!"

"Jahzara! Oh, my god! Sweetheart, what happened to you?" my mama Jasmine cried out. "James! Oh, my god! James! Honey, get down here now!"

I tried to walk past my mama to get to a phone, but she kept grabbing on me, trying to figure out where I'd been hurt at. Every damn part of my body ached, especially the gunshot wound in my arm. Honey had caught me as I was driving off of her block.

"Jahzara? Princess, is that you?" my father asked as he came down the stairs. He rushed over to me and tried to help my mother with me when someone began banging on the front door.

"No! Don't open it!" I screamed out as my father walked towards the door.

"Is the person that hurt you at this door? I wanna see who the hell did this to you!" my father continued in the direction of the door, blatantly ignoring my warning. He unlocked the door, pulled it open, and was immediately knocked in the face by a powerful punch that sent him flying to the floor.

My eyes bucked wide open at the sight of the person that stood in the doorway. He stepped over my father's body and came towards my mother and me. He held a pistol by his side and there was a look of pure anger on his face. My mother held me in her arms trembling like a leaf, silently praying in my ear for God to protect us all. Although he looked like he was ready to fight and kill an army of niggas, I knew this man better than anyone. When it came to me, he wouldn't dare hurt me, no matter the amount of mistakes I may have made.

"Quin?" I questioned surprised to see him here since I wasn't expecting him to be released for, at least, another couple of months.

"Where the fuck is my shit and the nigga that you gave it to?" he questioned, bringing the gun up and pointing it at my

forehead.

“Quin, I didn’t—”

I tried to say but was cut off.

“Right here, nigga!”

My eyes shot towards the direction of the door where Imran stood with a pistol pointed at Quin’s back. Quin immediately swung around in his direction, and the two of them just stood there. Neither of them exchanged words for what seemed like forever. When Quin finally spoke up, the shit that he said stung me and penetrated my heart like only a hundred fiery knives could.

“Muthafuckin’ Imran Jackson. I should’ve known, when they said that somebody was trying to take my spot, that it was you. You always wanted to be me and had to go through my bitch in order to do so. Fuckin’ coward,” Quin said full of animosity.

Hearing Quin speak to Imran as if they had been rivals let me know that Imran had been straight using me all of this time. He had used me to get in the position to take Quin’s spot, and I had so blindly and foolishly picked him to do so. It was crazy how I only went back to Wet Dreams that night to find somebody to help me come up and ended up choosing Imran to be that person, but I wondered if, that same night, he was there to pick me. Hearing this affirmed to me that I’d made the right decision about getting an abortion. He never loved me like he said he did. This had been a game to him, and I had easily gotten caught in the middle.

Imran scoffed, “It’s funny how you still believe that I want to be you. I recall that it was you that followed me around everywhere when we were younger. It was me that taught you everything you know. It was me that broke bread with you when no one else would, but it was you that foolishly got caught with that dope in your car after you tried to put it in mine. Jah, no matter how bad this might sound. I had no idea that Quin was your husband until I came across your divorce

papers a couple of months ago. You never mentioned his name around me, ma!”

“Don’t speak to her, muthafucka! You address me. She might have signed them papers, but that’s still my wife,” Quin bellowed.

My heart pounced around in my chest. I looked down at the floor and noticed that my father was coming to after being cold cocked in the face. He swarmed around on the floor and made a few grunting noises before looking around at the men that stood over him with guns. I didn’t know what to do or what to say at this point or if I should say anything at all. My mind was completely frozen on the fact that Imran knew Quin all along and that the two muthafuckas didn’t like each other. That made the sting from the blow I delivered absolutely worse. I had dropped the connect in the lap of Imran, just like he wanted, and I had practically given up any opportunity that Quin may have had to get back on top.

“She ain’t your wife, nigga. That’s my baby mama. No matter what she did. That’s a fact that will always remain,” Imran vehemently said.

The harsh reality of Imran’s words started a fire in Quin’s brain and sent both me and my mama diving for the floor.

*POW! POW! POW!*

I pushed away from my mother against her protest and chased after Imran and Quin as they took the gun fight out of my parents’ house. Each of them went in their own direction, leaving me with the decision of choosing which man to go after. I’d just found out that Quin hated Imran with a passion from the way he was talking and that had me feeling more than a little slighted. I looked in both directions before stepping away from my parents’ house and going after Imran. I don’t know why I chose him just then, but I did. Things were about to get even uglier.

“Imran! Imran!” I yelled out.

“Jahzara!” Quin yelled after me. Once he saw that I was going for Imran, he began to fire at us, determined to kill us both. Shots hit everything around me as Imran grabbed my hand and pushed me towards his car. I quickly opened the door and climbed inside, jumping over to the passenger seat.

“Imran, come on! Let’s go!” I screamed.

*POW! POW! POW!*

HATED BY MANY, LOVED BY TWO COMING SOON  
GET READY AS QUIN AND IMRAN FIGHT FOR JAHZARA'S  
HEART THROUGH A STREET WAR THAT IS DETERMINED TO  
TURN THE SREETS OF DALLAS UPSIDE DOWN.