



MAYBE  
*Next*  
TIME.

*A Vegas Nights*  
NOVELLA

*Christina*  
C. JONES

MAYBE NEXT TIME

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VEGAS NIGHTS

# CHRISTINA C JONES



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# DEDICATION

*To all my AIs since Day 1.*

*Thank you.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*I did not want to write a married couple.*

*I was adamant about it.*

*But, in an effort to make the point that I am not the one in control here, my brain gave me Denver and Kensa.*

*I love them, very much.*

*I hope you do too.*

—CCJ.

# ABOUT

What started as a wildfire has been diminished to a flicker by unspoken fears, perceived betrayal, and a breakdown in communication.

Can either of them tuck their ego away long enough to rekindle their flame?



ONE

*Kensa*

*WHAT A DAMN DAY.*

As soon as I was on the other side of my front door, a deep sigh pushed its way up from the depths of me, making my chest heave as I dropped my purse and keys into their appropriate places. I peeled myself out of my blazer next, grateful there was no one around to see the utter gracelessness of my mannerisms.

I was too tired to keep it cute.

I didn't plan on changing bags before tomorrow so I left it there, retrieving my phones—business and personal—from it before I headed to my bedroom to properly stow my blazer in the closet. I didn't even bother with the lights—no point, when I was heading straight for a vibe that required none. I kicked off my shoes on the way, tucking them under my arm in a delicate balance as I turned on the screen of my personal cell to check the notifications.

There were several, but not the one I was anticipating.

Wait.

*Anticipating* would imply that I was looking forward to the inevitable nasty text or phone call, which couldn't be further from the case.

No.

I was, in fact, downright *dreading* that shit, but... I was a big girl.

I could handle it.

“Long day?”

My heart lurched to the front of my chest at the sound of *any* voice other than my own in what should have been an empty condo, and everything in my arms went clattering to the floor. I swallowed, hard, and turned to the source of my disquiet.

“What are you doing here, Denver?”

Instead of answering my question, he simply smirked, barely illuminated by the glow of the city glittering on the other side of the windows encompassing most of the room. My eyes fell to the tumbler in his hand as he lifted it to his lips, taking a sip of what was undoubtedly *my* liquor.

Obviously, he'd decided not to text *or* call to voice his displeasure—he'd shown up instead, looking better than I wanted him to. He was probably not too far removed from the office himself, still dressed in slacks and a button up, with his tie gone, top buttons open.

Even half undone, he was dapper—his fingers and wrist glittered as he moved, shifting positions for another drink. I could tell by the way he was holding his shoulders—he wasn't pleased.

At all.

“I got an interesting visit today.”

His gaze locked with mine in a challenge—who would look away first?

“Oh?”

His eyes narrowed, dangerously, and his full, velvet-soft lips spread into the kind of slick smile that preceded the kind of chuckle that left little to no ambiguity—there wasn't *shit* funny. “Is *that* how we're doing this? Really, sweetheart?”

“I'm *not* your sweetheart,” I snapped, moving past him to stalk my way to the bar he'd apparently already helped himself to. “And *you're* not supposed to be here.”

“Okay.”

His voice came at a distance, letting me know he hadn't moved from his perch in the door to my home office, where he'd probably been waiting.

In the dark, like a fucking creep.

I'd walked right past that door and hadn't even registered his presence, too exhausted and distracted to be as *on my toes* as I probably should've been.

Otherwise, I might have tased him.

Instead, I just poured myself a drink—what I'd been planning to do anyway, after a long shower, before his rude interruption.

“You may want to eat something,” he spoke up, from closer this time. I could feel him moving in, the heat emanating from him making my nipples harden.

I hated myself for it.

“I can handle myself,” I snapped, tipping my hand to let a little more of the *Kimble* bourbon drop into my glass, as a way of making... some kind of childish point, I guess. When I turned around, drink in hand, he was right in front of me.

He was *pissed*.

Maybe not obvious to anyone else, but clear to me from the tight set of his jaw, the darkening of his irises, and just... his energy.

“So you remembered to eat dinner today then?” he asked, even though we both knew the answer to that.

Defiantly, I took a hearty swig from my glass, staring right at him as I did so.

And then I stepped around him, setting a course for my refrigerator.

An argument could be made that I was a brat, but I wasn't a *stupid* one.

“You're really a piece of work, you know that?” he asked, following me into the kitchen.

I huffed. “And *you’re* really a piece of sh—” I stopped, turning to face him, and he was right there, waiting on me to finish that statement. I didn’t, but shook my head. “Again, *you aren’t supposed to be here.*”

“Where *should* I be then, huh?”

“Hell, maybe? I’m sure they’re looking for you.” I shrugged, then turned back for my original destination.

“Funny.”

“Not trying to be funny,” I told him, pulling the refrigerator open so I could survey the contents. “I’m dead serious.”

Behind me, Denver chuckled. “Nah, sweetheart. I *definitely* think you’re trying to be funny. Because *why else* would I have gotten the visit I got in the middle of the *fuckin’* day, at my *fuckin’* office?!” he demanded, his volume lifting with every word.

I turned to him, schooling my features into as neutral of an expression as I could, refusing to give away the fact that my heart was racing.

“You don’t get to talk to me like that, like I’m some random bitch you can throw your weight around with.”

“And why the *fuck* would that be, Kensa, huh?” he asked, pushing away from where he’d perched against the counter to get in my face. “What privilege do you think you have with me?!”

“I’m your—”

*Shit.*

I stopped just short, but a smirk had already spread over Denver’s face, and he shook his head. “You’re my *what?* Huh? Say it *nice and loud.*”

“*Fuck you.*”

“Oh, *fuck me?*” he chuckled. “That’s where we are now?”

“That’s where *you* put us,” I countered, words that made his nostrils flare with anger.

“*I’m not the one who served goddamn divorce papers!*” he snapped, backing me practically *into* the open fridge behind me. “In my fucking office. In front of my employees. You did that shit—*not* me.”

“Because *you* said you weren’t going to chase me,” I reminded him. “You said you weren’t about to bend over backwards for *anybody*, remember that? Remember *why*?”

I clocked the exact moment he recalled *exactly* what I was talking about. His face relaxed, and for the briefest of moments, there was genuine remorse in his eyes. But then, his brows furrowed again, jaw tightened.

“So this is what... some kind of fucking game to you?”

I shook my head. “No. I’m not *playing* in the slightest.”

“This is how it is then?”

“It’s how *you* made it,” I challenged, unwilling to let him lay the blame for this at my feet. Not solely. “You only say what you mean, right? Well... I’m holding you to what you said and acting accordingly. Or... did you think I’d sit around somewhere sad and insecure, waiting for you to decide you wanted me again? You thought wrong, love. Just because *you* don’t see it, doesn’t mean it’s not clear to everyone else that I’m *that* bitch.”

His eyes narrowed. “Because *I* don’t see it?” he tipped his head, leaning in to get right in my face. “Why does that sound like another man has been in your face?”

I smirked. “I have a better question. *Why are you surprised?*”

“*Stop fucking with me,*” Denver growled, fisting the front of my blouse to drag me up against him. The refrigerator was still hanging open, spilling golden light that cast a soft glow onto his hardened features.

Yeah.

I’d *thoroughly* pissed him off.

“*Or. What?*” I snapped right back, my defiant glare stuck on his, refusing to back down.

A slow smirk spread across his lips as his grip on my shirt tightened, and I... *fuck*.

I hated the traitorous arousal building between my legs. His free hand slid down my thigh and then back up under my skirt, palming my ass. The heat of his skin was a delicious contrast against the frigid air emanating from the open fridge door.

“You are *still* mine, Kenni,” he sneered, just inches from my face.

I reached up between us, grabbing him by his undone collar. This close, I could smell the bourbon on his breath, and wondered just how many he’d had while he waited for me in the dark.

“For now, yes. But not for long.”

I wasn’t surprised that he kissed me.

Not at all.

In fact, a sick part of me welcomed the invasion of his tongue in my mouth, the brusqueness of his hand at my throat. He edged us backward, either unaware or indifferent that he had me braced between the inner wall and door of the refrigerator.

He was too busy trying to devour my mouth, for the first time in... forever.

Fine.

Maybe not *forever*.

More like months, not since before the argument that had ended with his fateful declaration.

*I’m not gonna fucking chase you like we’re kids, Kensa. Grow the fuck up.*

I didn’t even want to *be* chased.

But the fact that he’d reduced the actual issue to that, and then declared it beneath him... well... life was too short.

What he was unwilling to do, another man certainly would.

I was pissed off too.

And since he was here, I channeled that anger into getting Denver out of his shirt, not giving a shit about the future condition of his buttons as I snatched the two sides apart. He didn't care either—his tongue was too deep in my mouth, hands too full of my ass, fingers too busy tugging my panties aside for access.

I gave his belt, his pants, the same treatment—ruined buckles, zippers, whatever, not my damn problem. I just wanted him free from his boxers, and I got that, gripping him in my hands for barely a moment before he'd lifted me from the floor, hiking my legs around his waist.

My skirt rode up over my ass, bunching around my waist as he entered me, unexpectedly foreign and deliciously familiar all at once. I clamped my lips together, trying not to gasp as he pushed deeper, stretching my pussy to accommodate him for the first time in months.

“*Fuck, Kensa,*” he murmured against my lips when he was finally, completely buried in me. I clenched around him, making him curse again before he fisted a handful of my hair, tugging my head back so I was looking at him. “You need me to remind you whose pussy this is?”

I *wanted* to respond to that.

Wanted *so badly* to antagonize him, but I couldn't.

Before I could even open my mouth to give back a response, he'd started moving—deep, steady, insistent strokes that snatched my breath away, keeping me from formulating anything coherent. Except, of course, the involuntary chorus of “*yes, Yes, YES,*” that spilled from my lips because it felt so good to have my husband inside me I just couldn't help it.

That praise was damn near compulsory, and certainly well-deserved, as much as I wished I could simply take his dick in silence instead of moaning, keening, crying my pleasure as I clawed into his shoulders, holding on for dear life.

The refrigerator was uncomfortably cold against my back, the shelves creaking to complain about our weight against

them, some discordant chime alerting us from somewhere within that the door had been left open. I held on to those distractions, trying my best not to lose my mind as Denver tried *his* best to achieve the exact opposite result.

“Go on and cum, sweetheart,” he growled in my ear, then nipped me there before soothing the sting with his tongue.

“*Fuck you,*” I gritted through my teeth, trying my best *not* to do exactly that.

He responded by fucking me harder.

Deeper.

Faster.

And then, it was completely out of my hands, my pussy reflexively clenching and contracting around him, milking him as I came.

So, *so* hard.

I tried to be quiet.

I really, really did, because I didn't want to give him the satisfaction.

I couldn't help it though.

It was too good not to scream, and moan, and dig my nails into his biceps as he slammed into me, his hips pumping as he emptied inside me.

I'd... *needed* that.

Badly.

But of course, I'd never admit it to him.

As soon as he'd let my feet back onto the ground, I pushed away from him, putting some distance between us.

“This changes nothing,” I told him, then promptly stumbled, since the feeling in my legs hadn't completely come back yet. I refused his help, catching myself on the edge of the counter for balance as I stood up straight.

“Kensa...”



“*No*,” I said, holding up a hand as I carefully started toward my room again, bypassing the mess of shoes and cell phones in the hall. “Just get out. And sign the damn papers.”

## TWO

# Kensa

I WOKE UP IN A DAZE.

Head pounding, sore between my thighs, back aching, and completely past the time I *should* still be in bed, if the light streaming in through the window was any indication.

I dragged myself up, suddenly conscious of the persistent blaring of my alarm. My mind first went to where I'd dropped everything last night, out in the hall.

I never had gone back out to pick anything up, opting for the comfort of my bed after a hot shower. Quickly though, I realized the sound was actually coming from my bedside.

Where both phones were perched on their respective chargers.

But... I *definitely* hadn't gone back for it myself.

I could only assume that Denver had been the one to do it. Denver who was not supposed to be in the condo at all. We'd made a silent agreement, and it wasn't even that I was necessarily *surprised* he'd broken it.

Just irritated.

After our blow up—our first truly, *truly* major one, through the whole seven years of our marriage—I'd retreated to my corner, the condo, and he'd stayed in his, the not-yet-furnished home he'd claimed was a gift for me.

One I hadn't asked for, or wanted.

With a heavy sigh, I reached for the personal phone at my bedside since it was ringing now. It was no surprise for me to see Nessa's name on the screen. I was sure if I looked for them, I'd find several missed calls from her, between both phones.

Because I was *not* the first person at the *Hamilton Luxury Transportation* offices, as we'd all grown used to me being.

"Yes, second one?" I sang into the phone as soon as I'd answered, smirking when my barely-little sister sucked her teeth.

"Don't start that shit," she warned, even as the clear laughter in her tone undermined her words. "Where are you?"

"Still at home." My eyebrows furrowed as a sound from somewhere in the apartment hit my ears—one that shouldn't have if I were actually alone. "Denver showed up."

"Good. It's way past time for y'all to make up."

I rolled my eyes. "I'm getting a divorce."

"No you're not."

"Nah, I *am*, though," I insisted, standing to grab the robe draped over a nearby chair. "Des did the paperwork for me. I had him served yesterday."

"*Shit*," Nessa breathed, then was quiet for a long moment. "So... It's just over for you? Just like that? You're not in love anymore?"

"Love isn't enough. It was never enough," I replied, shaking my head. "Hey, let me call you back though. I... think he's still here."

Of course, she had questions.

If this were the other way around, I would.

Nessa and I—and our brother, Trace—were close. Too close for me not to have told them what I was planning to do. But if I'd told them, they would've talked me out of it.

I didn't *want* to be talked out of my feelings.

I wanted to lean fully into them.

So instead of entertaining her curiosity, I followed the distinctive sound of someone in my kitchen, fully prepared to curse Denver the fuck out for still being here after I'd made it clear I wanted him gone.

It wasn't Denver, though.

"Ms. Connie—what are you doing here?" I asked, startling the older woman from her hunched position in my refrigerator. Now that I was out here, the distinctive smell of bleach permeated my nose, making it itch as I looked around at the counter full of food.

"Good morning, honey. Mr. Benoit sent me over, said you needed the fridge disinfected," she explained, giving me her usual big smile, and an air kiss to boot. I was still processing her words when she turned back to what she was doing, her gloved hands already busy again with a bowl of hot soapy water by the time I got a little closer.

"Sorry—good morning," I corrected myself. "I just... wasn't expecting anyone here."

"Me either," she chuckled. "You're one of those renaissance women, usually up and out before the sun."

My lips quirked into a smile. Of course, she would know, considering she'd been with us for years, as our home manager. Before that, she'd worked just for Denver—though *work* was a bit of a stretch. Yes, she kept our home life running smoothly, but she struck a line closer to treasured auntie than strictly an employee.

"Just overslept a bit," I said, not getting into the cause of that abnormality for *obvious* reasons. But, without giving an excuse, I opened myself up to unfortunate speculation.

Her eyes went wide and hopeful, and I knew exactly what was about to leave her lips before she even said it.

*"Is there a bun in that oven making you tired?"*

It was like she was speaking from inside a vacuum, her words hollowed-out and eerie, ringing in my ears. I blinked

hard, trying to steady myself against the sudden anxiety and nausea that question set off.

“*No*,” was my terse answer, and Connie immediately put up her hands, offering a placating motion.

“I’m sorry, honey. I know better than to ask, I just—”

“It’s fine. Really,” I assured her, though it most certainly was not. “I need to get to the office. Thank you for coming by.”

“*Kensa*.”

The urgency in her tone made me stop my escape, but I didn’t want to turn around. There was exactly *none* of me that could bear the pity that would certainly be in her eyes.

“Let me fix you something to eat.”

I blinked, trying to hold back irritatingly sudden tears. “Thank you, truly, but no. I’ll just grab some coffee on the way in.”

Moments later, having successfully escaped what would’ve surely turned into mothering, I went to my bedside table for my other phone. It was then that I noticed a large envelope—the kind that might hold divorce paperwork—sitting right on my nightstand.

Torn in half.

*Ugh*.

I grabbed my personal phone, shooting off a text to Desiree Byers, lawyer—and friend—about serving him again, since he thought I was joking.

I was not.

With that handled, I moved on to getting ready for the rest of my day. To start, I stood naked in the bathroom mirror and closed my eyes. On a deep breath, I started the mental work to rebuild and patch the dam holding back... everything.

I didn’t need that shit clouding me—*crowding* me—when there was work to be done.

---

“I ALWAYS KNEW WORKING under you would be a good idea, Ms. Hamilton.”

I smirked.

Normally, I would correct that *Ms. Hamilton* thing, since it was really *Mrs. Hamilton-Benoit*, or just *Mrs. Benoit* for less of a mouthful. But, knowing what had been walked into *Benoit Financial* this morning, I wasn't particularly inclined to defend Denver's claim over me.

Especially not to a tall, pecan-skinned, incredibly handsome young man like Jeremy Crawford, who was currently flirting his ass off with me—bordering on inappropriately. The innuendo in that last statement hadn't escaped me, but I did nothing to dissuade him. Instead, I opted for a little extra sway in my hips as I walked ahead, knowing his attention was on my ass more than anything I was saying.

It felt... *nice*.

Jeremy hadn't been working here at *Hamilton Luxury Transport* long enough to know better, and the fact that I didn't wear a ring made it easy to pretend he'd “forgotten” I was married. I *probably* wouldn't let him touch me before the divorce was final, but once I was a legitimately single woman?

Jeremy was the very first thing I planned to do.

“Are you keeping up?” I asked him, in a sultrier-than-necessary tone that made his eyes narrow in obvious lust. He strode toward me with purpose, stopping just short of too close.

“You'll never have to worry about my ability to keep up, Ms. Hamilton. I understand the importance of stamina.”

I grinned. “Do you?”

He leaned in a bit. “Yes ma'am.”

*God, I was horny.*

And if I fucked this guy while I was still *Mrs. Benoit*, it would be all Denver's fault.

I was... *resigned* to my lack of sex, lack of intimacy, and accepting of that fate, very soon after taking my place *away* from Denver, in the condo.

And then he had to show up and remind me.

*Ugh.*

I cleared my throat, taking a step back from Jeremy before I encouraged this thing a little too far. "What do you have down so far?" I asked, referring to the tablet in his hands. We were out in the *VIP* garage, doing my weekly inspection on the specialty cars.

Was this someone else's job already?

Of course.

And they were very good at it.

But I'd always preferred to see every vehicle for myself, especially at *this* price point, making sure that once our customer slipped inside, there was a whole luxury experience.

"Let's see... there was a fingerprint on the back interior window on the Wraith, and a slight scuff in the leather on the front passenger side. You want a higher shine on the chrome accents across the board. Different rims on the Cullinan. And on the matte Maybach, you want the leather changed from black to..."

"Blush," I filled in for him now, knowing I'd just said I wanted it done, without giving specifics before. "The black on black is boring, and I want something more feminine."

"Okay, so pink."

I raised an eyebrow. "No, *not* pink. *Blush*. If I walk in here next week and there is pink leather in this car, your ass is outta here."

Unruffled by my threat, Jeremy stepped in again, giving me a nod. "Whatever you need, Ms. Hamilton—consider it done. Just say the word."

“*Ay!* Back the fuck up off my wife.”

*Holy shit.*

Jeremy looked up, confused, but didn't step away, even as Denver strode in our direction, anger practically radiating off him. He actually—bless his heart—stepped in front of me, *between* me and my husband, as if he'd assigned himself my protector.

“You seem very bothered, my man, let's hold up.”

*That* stopped Denver in his tracks.

In front of me, Jeremy's shoulders relaxed, but... no.

That was the exact opposite of what he should be doing right now.

Denver smiled.

Beautiful, but... *terrifying*.

The perfect ivory of his teeth against soft mahogany lips, and darker skin, the lush tapestry of coily, coal-black facial hair—Denver was, truly, magnificent. But the loveliness of his smile laid in direct contrast to the barely-bridled rage in his eyes, something Jeremy didn't know my husband well enough to pick up on.

*Me?*

I wasn't even a *little* surprised when Denver pulled the gun from the waistband of his exquisitely tailored, bespoke suit. Jeremy had no time to react to the sight of it before it was already under his chin.

“Did you just call yourself getting between me and my wife?” Denver asked, his face just inches from Jeremy's as he peered into his eyes. “I *know* that's not what you called yourself doing, right?”

“I... I... um... nah, man. I... I just...”

“Get your bitch ass outta my face,” Denver growled, moving the gun just enough that Jeremy could get free.

Wisely, he took off running.



“*Everybody* out!” Denver demanded, and I rolled my eyes as the few workers in the garage who’d been watching the scene unfold went scurrying in the same direction as Jeremy. Once the door closed behind the last person, he looked to me. “What the fuck is this, Kensa? You’re trying to get somebody killed now? That motherfucker in your face—that’s who you were talking about last night?”

“You’re the one holding a gun.”

He looked at the gleaming metal in his hand, then back to me, before tucking it back out of sight, where it belonged. “We need to talk.”

“I don’t have anything else to say,” I told him, turning to walk toward the Maybach that needed the interior redone. I wanted to imagine what it could be.

He followed.

“Well I do.”

I huffed. “Oh, *now* you want to talk, once you realize I’m leaving? Got it.”

“You’re not *leaving*. Stop playing.”

Turning with my arms folded, I looked him right in the face. “That’s the problem right there. You don’t *listen*.”

“I’ve tried, but the shit is impossible when you’re being ridiculous.”

“*I’m* ridiculous?!” I snapped. “Wanting my husband to want me, to pay some fucking attention to me, to come home at night—*I’m* ridiculous?”

“Here you go again, with shit you’re trying to turn into something it’s not!”

“Okay, so tell me what it *is* then, Denver!” I threw my hands up, waiting for a response, but all I got was that steady, unflappable gaze of his. His go-to when he’d decided there wasn’t a point to the argument. “Cool,” I said, after a moment had passed. “Sign the papers. Put us both out of our misery.”

“I’m not signing *shit*.”

I laughed. “Of course not. You won’t let me go, but you don’t want me—and me wanting you to want me, is childish. *Got it. Fuck you.*”

“You’re putting words in my mouth again.”

“Well, maybe if *you* would put some words there, I wouldn’t have to!”

Denver pushed out a harsh sigh, scrubbing a hand over his face as he took a step back.

“I’m not talking to you here. Go grab your stuff, and let’s go, so we can have a discussion.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Uh... I have shit to do. So that’s gonna be a *no*. I can look at my schedule and see what I have available though.”

“Stop fucking *playing* with me,” he insisted, moving toward me again. “We can’t keep doing this shit. *Get your stuff, let’s go.*”

I scoffed. “What is this, huh? I’m supposed to just drop everything and spring into action because big, bad, *Denver Benoit* says so?”

“Nah, sweetheart,” he chuckled. “You take action to avert this... let’s call it an environmental disaster... that this issue between us is about to cause. If I see another motherfucker in your face, everybody in this bitch is gonna feel it.”

“I’m *not* afraid of you, Denver.”

He shrugged. “I should hope not. I don’t want that. What I *want* is to have a private conversation with my wife, so we can dispel this *divorce* nonsense.”

“And what *I* want is a husband willing to worship at my fucking feet—mutually, of course,” I added. “But it is quite clear to me, that’s not you. So. What’s the goddamn point?”

Denver’s nostrils flared as he pulled in a rush of air, then blew it right back out. His dark eyes narrowed as he met my gaze. “Worship at your feet, huh?”

I blinked, rebuilding my dam. “You know what I mean.”

“Do I, Kenni? You think you’ve clearly expressed yourself? You’ve communicated your needs to me?”

“I don’t have time for this,” I snapped, moving to get away from him, but he grabbed my arm, pulling me back between him and the car.

“Nah. You stay *right* there.”

My brow furrowed in confusion as he removed his blazer, tossing it onto the hood of the car. The gun was next, placed carefully on top of his jacket once he’d confirmed the safety was on. It wasn’t until he started undoing his buttons—he wasn’t wearing a tie—that I grew impatient with whatever it was he called himself doing.

“What the hell is this?” I asked, just before he lowered himself in front of me.

“You said you wanted worship, Kensa. Here it is.”

“That’s not what I—”

Whatever denial I had to offer died on my tongue as he pulled my skirt up past my hips. From his kneeling position in front of me, he eased my legs apart, not bothering to push my panties aside before one thick finger pressed against the sensitive swell of my clit.

I couldn’t help it.

Immediately, I pushed into the feeling, even while admonishing myself not to. It was just so damn hard not to want more—a sentiment that must’ve been mutual, considering how quickly he abandoned teasing me through my panties to simply push them aside.

I gasped, my fingers desperately grasping at the much-too-short coils of his hair, looking for anything to grip as he pulled my clit between his teeth. There was no clamping down, no pain, just delicious pressure he compounded with his tongue, making me want to scream.

But I couldn’t.

Not if I didn’t want anybody to come running.

Finally, he released the hold of his teeth, leaving behind a sensitive sort of... *buzz*. Just beneath the surface of my skin, I was buzzing with pleasure and anticipation of what might be next; which was, apparently, more of his tongue.

*So* much more of his tongue, and his mouth, and his long, thick fingers in my pussy, encouraging me to cum. His mouth closed over my clit as he hummed into me, creating a vibration that threatened to send me straight through the roof.

He hooked his fingers into me as he stroked, knowing exactly the right depths to get me squirming helplessly against the sleek finish of the car. He sucked harder, matching each pull to the skilled rhythm of his hand as he pushed me closer, and *closer*, and...

*Fuck.*

That familiar well of pleasure inside me overflowed, and I bit down into my lip, hard, trying not to make a sound as the orgasm swept over me in a heavy wave. Through the aftershocks, I was vaguely aware of him licking me clean, slipping my panties back into place, and pulling my skirt back down over my hips.

And then he kissed me.

The kind I'd missed, the kind I'd cried over the absence of, over the last several months. With my back against the car, he devoured my mouth like he'd never get another chance, and then looked me right in the eyes.

"Can we talk *now*?" he asked.

And... damn.

Illusion shattered.

I slipped from between him and the car, straightening my clothes, smoothing my hair. "No, I don't think so," I told him, even though my dam was weak.

He scoffed. "Seriously, Kensa? After what I just did—"

"That's exactly the problem. You think I'm asking you for sex, when I... no. Just... no." I shook my head and started

walking away in fear that I might cry in front of him. “I don’t want to talk.”

“You know what... fine. You want games, fuck it,” he growled. I couldn’t see him, but I knew he was snatching up his blazer and the gun. “But don’t be surprised when you don’t like *my* rules.”

He stormed past me, out the door to the garage, and a moment later, Nessa appeared.

“I knew Denver wouldn’t do anything to you, so I made sure nobody interrupted, but... he looked pretty pissed just now. You good?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I nodded. “Of course.”

It wasn’t a lie.

I *was* good.

I just... wasn’t sure how long that would be the case.

If I didn’t know anything else about Denver, I knew he wasn’t a man who made idle threats.

## THREE

# DENVER

I WASN'T a man who dealt well with games.

I lacked the patience for all that.

A deck of cards, a pool table, a basketball court – cool, see me there any time.

But this emotional manipulation shit my wife was trying to pull with me?

Non-fucking-starter.

“I don't know what the fuck she thinks this is,” I fumed, taking another pull from my cigar. “But you know what I need, since she's got her damn friend running shit? I need a lawyer who can eat Des Byers for breakfast.”

A few feet away, Kingston chuckled, blowing out a plume of smoke before he shook his head. “I don't know about that man. That's a tall order.”

I grunted, annoyed, but... He was right. There likely wasn't a lawyer in Vegas that – on legal grounds – inspired more concern than Des.

Kensa had lucked out with that one.

Desiree was her college roommate and current good friend. *Of course* she'd use that relationship to her advantage in this tantrum she'd been on.

I was tired of this shit.

Completely exhausted of being immersed in friction with my damn *wife*.

Fine.

I didn't have a lawyer I could intimidate hers with, but that didn't mean I couldn't just enlist my usual legal team to call her fucking bluff.

All it would take was the threat of me actually going along with the dissolution of our marriage to get this bullshit to stop.

I told King, my cousin, as much too—pouring out my thoughts for him to quietly absorb as he smoked. I had no concerns about fucking up his vibe; that was what I'd called him here for.

Away from his own wife, currently pregnant with their second child. They were lovey-dovey goals and all that now, but I knew what their origin story was like—knew this man understood firsthand what it was like dealing with a headstrong woman.

Among other things we had in common.

“Let me ask you something,” King spoke up, once I'd finally stopped raging enough to take another furious pull from my cigar.

This shit was supposed to be relaxing.

“What?”

“You're really about to lose your wife cause you don't know how to listen?”

My face pulled into a scowl. “Nigga, what?”

“I'm just telling you what I see,” he shrugged. “Yeah, you've been married longer, so maybe the shit looks different for you, I can't say. But what I *can* say is, unless you actually want a divorce, ‘calling her bluff’ is about the worst fucking thing you could do.”

Still scowling, I settled further into the plush leather backing of the chair, letting my gaze lock on the ceiling. The textured detail there, thin wooden planks laid in a herringbone pattern, had been Kensa's idea.

*Plumes* was my business, my playground, but her touch was everywhere here, actually. From the ceilings to the chairs to the air-cleaning plants she'd insisted on, helping me create the energy I knew I wanted, but couldn't see clearly in my head.

She was always like that.

Always had been, since the moment we met. Always with the perfect complement, the missing piece, the... missing fucking *peace*.

She hadn't been on *that* in a minute though.

"So what the fuck am I supposed to do then?"

"Well... a good place to start would probably be figuring out first *why* Kensa wants a divorce."

I sucked my teeth. "That woman doesn't want a divorce."

"I think that's part of your problem right there," King chuckled. "You're taking for granted that she's playing—but what if she's not?"

I was quiet for a moment, then shook my head. "I can't even engage that as a possibility right now."

"Fair enough. Let's say you're right though, and she *doesn't* actually want a divorce. But she had you served with the papers. *Twice*. Why?"

I momentarily abandoned the cigar to opt for the bourbon I'd damn near forgotten on the table next to me. I took a mouthful of the cold liquor, swallowed, then hiked a shoulder. "Who the fuck knows? Making sure I know she's pissed? Seeking attention?"

King whistled. "*Shiit*. A wife who needs more attention is a *dangerous* thing. Real dangerous. What is she pissed about?"

"We fought. A few weeks ago. Never really got past it."

"What was the fight about?"

I blew out a sigh, returning my gaze to the ceiling. "About me not paying enough attention."



“Wow. You *really* are a fuck-up.”

My whole face pulled into a frown as I dropped my gaze back to him. “The fuck?”

“Your wife has been begging your ass for *weeks* to give her some face time, but you’ve got your ass in here acting confused about divorce papers. Yo—you’re deadass with this? Like... for real, nigga?”

“Fuck you,” I grunted, shaking my head. “I didn’t say she was on me about it for weeks. I said the conflict was weeks ago. The shit she came to me with was out of the blue—claiming I wasn’t spending enough time with her, asking me if there was somebody else, acting like she didn’t think I was attracted to her anymore. Which... the fuck? Like, has she *seen herself*?”

King smirked. “Kensa is fine. Like... been bad, *still bad*. Respectfully, of course.”

“*Right*. So... I wasn’t trying to hear that shit. I had a lot going on with *Benoit Financial*, two of my clients being audited—”

“You *do* have a lot going on with your job—you’ve been a hard man to get ahold of, for like... a nice little minute. Not downplaying the importance of your business, but... shit, man. Maybe you’ve gotta scale back some so your lady knows you still see her.”

I shook my head. “Maybe I’d buy that, if she herself hadn’t been on *her* shit all the time too. Kensa has been eating, sleeping, breathing *HLT* since...”

When I let that trail off without finishing, Kingston frowned.

“Since... what?”

I drained the rest of my glass down my throat. “Since last year.”

As soon as King caught on to what I was talking about... there was an instant shift in the energy of the room.

“*Shit*,” he muttered. “How are you—”

“I’m good,” I spoke up, before he could even get the question out.

His raised eyebrow told me my words weren’t very convincing.

“Look... I know the shit is rough, aiight? Like, firsthand. You remember the shit I went through with Robyn.”

I nodded.

His unfaithful fiancé, though it was much more complicated than that.

Yeah, I remembered.

“I’m just saying,” he continued. “You don’t get past it overnight. Shit like that... it hangs over you, and it takes more than just wishing it away. You’ve gotta really... like... *tackle* it. Even now, with me and Asha... man, I worry. *A lot.*”

“Marriage has made you emotional as fuck, nigga.”

King sat back, chuckling. “Yeah, try to play the shit off—I can take whatever you throw over here, bruh.” He shrugged. “I’m just saying... just because you claim you’re good, doesn’t mean Kensa is. Maybe she’s struggling, and crying out to you for help the only way her stubborn ass knows how.”

I frowned. “By asking for a divorce?”

“Nah. By picking a fight about you being too busy, even though she’s busy as fuck herself. By asking if there’s someone else. By questioning your attraction to her. Maybe none of those things are wrong, but *something* is, and instead of addressing the shit, you brushed her off. So she asked for a divorce.”

I swallowed, hard.

More than anything, I wanted to give his assertion some pushback, but... there wasn’t any room for that.

Not when he was right.

*I’d* escalated this situation.

Not her.

“Ay... I’ve gotta get back to *my* wife,” King said, pulling himself from the lounge chairs we’d been occupying while we talked. “Let me be clear—I’m not trying to put the shit all on you, or act like I’ve never fucked up with mine. Cause...”

“That shit is a fantasy?”

He laughed. “Yeah, exactly. I’m just saying... between Asha, and Alicia, and listening to my mother, Zoraya, all that... Kensa just wants to be heard, and taken care of. Whatever that means for her. I *know* you love that woman, right?”

Standing to meet him, I scoffed. “*That* shit ain’t even in question.”

“Okay then. I don’t wanna hear shit about no lawyers, you calling her bluff, whatever. Maybe it’s not all on you, maybe she’s wrong too. Hell, maybe she’s *more* wrong—who gives a fuck? That’s your *wife*.”

“Heard you,” I nodded, extending a hand in his direction. He clasped it, pulling me into a quick hug that I easily—gratefully—returned.

“So... what’s up? What are you going to do? You need me to do something?” he asked, as we headed to the door.

“I don’t know yet,” I answered. “I’ve still got some shit to think through.”

He nodded. “Just let me know. You and Kensa are family, and I don’t... I don’t want to see this shit happen if it doesn’t have to. And you *know* mama will kick your ass over her Kenni.”

I shook my head, chuckling. “It ain’t Aunt Angie I’m worried about, it’s that damn sister of yours. I’ve still got beef with her over Kensa’s bachelorette party.”

“Let that hurt go,” King laughed. “I’ll catch you later.”

Once King was gone, I moved back to my desk, where I poured myself a fresh glass of bourbon. Just on the other side of the wall, music was pounding, drinks flowing, smoke filling the air as my patrons enjoyed themselves.

It gave me no pleasure.

Usually, I was thrilled to have a packed cigar bar, especially on the days I'd spent wringing all my mental energy into client accounts at *Benoit Financial*.

*Plumes* was a haven.

For a while now though, I'd gotten no joy from it—it was just a given.

I wasn't sure she believed it, but when my wife wasn't happy, neither was I.

So... I sat back in my chair, with my drink and a fresh cigar...

Plotting.

I'd given Kensa my word, she wasn't going to like how I played along with the energy she'd been giving me lately.

I had no intentions of letting her down.

## FOUR

# Kensa

WAS tiredness just my default state now?

*Shit.*

The words on the too-bright screen in front of me swam, rendered unrecognizable by excess moisture my fatigued eyes were producing to keep from drying out. I'd been actively engaged in work way past my reasonable threshold and awake even longer than that.

But... what else was to be expected when your trusty assistant quit because your husband pulled a gun on him?

Denver's ass was *gonna* pay me back for the check I had to write Jeremy to keep him from pursuing charges.

Not that the money was relevant; it wasn't. It was just another way I'd get to poke at Denver, making sure he felt the full weight of my wrath.

*Is that what having his face buried in your pussy was about too, sis?*

Ugh.

My face flushed with heat, thinking about *that* moment in the garage.

It was pitiful, I knew.

As angry as I was at my husband, as hurt as I was by his actions, as *done* as I was with the marriage? None of that seemed to hold up against the fact that Denver absolutely

*ruled* my body, and I had a hard time finding any shame about it.

Him not touching me for the last... however many months... that shit had been excruciating. So, who could blame me, really, for not being immune to the allure of Denver Benoit? From the looks he got, to the looks *I* got for being on his arm, there was little doubt in my mind that a tall, chocolate, handsome, *rich* man could have anybody he wanted give themselves gladly to whatever he wanted.

There was a time when I'd been certain all he wanted was me.

Now?

That certainty was a distant memory.

Sure, he'd looked very devoted when he was kneeling between my legs to worship at the altar of my pussy—I'd been the one to scrub the security video from the garage—but it was *so* easy to pretend in moments.

Harder, though, to keep up the façade long term.

Like the length of a marriage.

Frustrated now by the path I'd let my mind travel, I closed my computer, pushing out a long, heavy sigh. I let my eyelids fall, intending to take just a moment of rest, but when I next opened them, a whole five minutes had passed.

It was time to call it a night.

*Past* time.

For the few days since Jeremy's abrupt departure, I'd been working too long and sleeping too little... which, actually wasn't much different from what I'd spent the last year doing anyway. Only, having an assistant had lessened the workload.

Now, it was all on me, and I couldn't pass any of the burden to Nessa or Trace, since they each had their *own* shit to handle.

*Suck it up, buttercup.*

I pulled myself from my seat, stepping into my private bathroom where I relieved myself, washed my hands, then wet down a few paper towels with cold water. I pressed them to my neck and chest, letting the frigid water give me a little shock to wake me up. Just enough to get home, where I would put my fresh new tranquilizer prescription to use.

Nessa had called in my private doctor, Loren, to check on me here at the office. She'd taken one look at me and insisted I *needed* to sleep before it started taking a real toll on my health.

I didn't need those problems.

Once I'd finished up in the bathroom, I stepped out to my office to grab my things. One of the perks of running a business like this one with my siblings was twenty-four-hour car service. The amenity we'd brought on as an additional offering had come in handy more than once for our own personal use.

The back seat of the vehicle I'd chosen was a little *too* comfortable though.

That was the only explanation—other than my utter exhaustion—for why, almost as soon as the vehicle took off, my eyes drifted closed and I found myself fighting sleep. This was exactly what I'd been trying to avoid with that little splash of cold water, which was not doing much for me at all.

Definitely a good idea for me to *not* try driving myself home.

Now, if only it was this easy at the *right* times to fall asleep.

Eventually, my body gave in—I just accepted my fate. I gave up trying to force my eyes open, and simply gave way to the overwhelming urge to relax into the soft leather of the back seat and nap until the driver had pulled up at my place.

Luckily, I came awake as soon as the vehicle came to a stop, taking away the tranquilizing effect of the steady lull of motion. It would've been a little embarrassing if the driver had to wake me up.

I opened my groggy eyes, and reached for my purse, ready to take the short trip upstairs to the condo. Only when my door opened, it wasn't the driver on the other side.

It was Denver.

“Long time, no see, sweetheart.”

First of all, it had *not* been a long time at all.

It had only been a couple days since he popped up in the *HLT* garage. He'd been conspicuously absent since then, not responding to any attempt at communication through my lawyer, so I'd really just been waiting for whenever he was going to pop back up with some bullshit.

“Whatever this is, we're going to have to do it another time,” I told him, shaking my head. “I don't have the energy for it right now.”

Instead of reacting to that, he offered me a hand to help me out of the car. Reluctantly, I took it... and just a few seconds later, I wished I hadn't.

“What the *fuck* is this?”

I was not outside of my building at all — instead I was at the *HLT* airfield.

*Damn, just how long was I asleep in that car?*

“Come on, sweetheart,” Denver said, pulling at my hand. “We've got a flight.”

I snatched away from him. “I'm not going anywhere with you until you tell me what the hell this is.”

“This is me making an attempt to fix whatever is happening between me and my wife.”

I scoffed. “So... what, you think a bit of light abduction is going to lead me back to your arms?”

Denver's handsome face twisted into a thoughtful scowl for a moment as he considered my words. Then he looked me right in the eyes, answered, “Yes,” and instead of waiting on me to agree to a damn thing he simply picked me up, tossing



me over his shoulder to make his way to the private jet that was waiting for us.

“Put me down!” I screeched, doing as much struggling and fighting as I could with my purse still clutched in my hand. Denver ignored all that — as did the driver, and presumably the pilot, and flight attendant if any was on duty — easily getting me onto the plane and tossing me into the seat.

“You may as well calm all that shit down, Kensa,” he told me, smirking. “Nothing you can do or say is going to stop this from happening.”

“You’re a fucking criminal,” I snapped, watching as he went to close and secure the door himself, meaning there likely wouldn’t be a flight attendant on with us; we both knew all the protocols. It wasn’t until after he’d poked his head into the cockpit to speak to the pilot that he turned back to give my accusation a response.

“Okay,” he shrugged. “You didn’t mind that when we met,” he teased. “You too good for it now?”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m not above *anything* except staying with a man who’s made it clear he doesn’t want me.”

“Here you go with this shit again.”

“Yeah, Denver, *here I go*,” I snapped. “I don’t know why you’re expecting something different. I’m suddenly supposed to believe you give a shit because you’re... what? Taking me to Paris for a night or something? How original,” I huffed. “You can do all this, but not something as simple as just fucking listening when I came to you to tell you I was hurting.”

“You didn’t come to say you were hurting,” Denver barked. “You came to me with some bullshit and you’re goddamn right I wasn’t trying to hear that.”

“Well I *demand* to be heard, and if you aren’t trying to do it, then how about you just get out of my way? Cause you’re not trying to fix anything; you’re trying to preserve your image. Losing your wife? *Ha!* Denver Benoit couldn’t possibly take another blow like that to his ego.”

His mouth twisted, confused. “*Another* blow to my... what are you even talking about?”

“You know *exactly* what I’m talking about,” I snapped, giving him a pointed glare until his eyes went wide with understanding.

And then, they narrowed, accompanied by a harsh tightening of his jaw. “That’s really what you think of me? That’s what you believe?”

I tossed my hands up. “Well it’s not like you’ve given me anything else, so what *should* I believe? I know what happened, and how you treated me after. You could barely look at me, wouldn’t touch me. I embarrassed you — *betrayed* you. I get it. And I get that we’re done. So why can’t *you*?”

“Because there ain’t shit for me to *get*,” he retorted. “I said ’til death do us part, and I *meant* that shit. I’m not interested in running away just because it’s getting a little grimy instead of the picture perfect, squeaky clean existence you’re looking for. We haven’t even *tried* to muddle through it, and yet you’re in my face talking about we’re *done*. *Ain’t no done*, Kensa!” he asserted, with a harsh growl in his tone. “You are my wife, and nothing about that has changed. Whatever shit we gotta deal with, buckle up sweetheart and let’s do it. But what’s not about to happen is you walking away from me like those vows didn’t mean shit.”

“You are really talking some *big shit* to have told me you weren’t gonna chase me. *Grow up*. That’s what you told me,” I bitterly reminded him, blinking back tears. “Or are we acting like I made that up?”

He huffed. “You’re not making it up, no, but I didn’t... I didn’t mean it *like that*. It wasn’t meant to be a goddamn *dare*.”

“Right,” I nodded. “You expected me to... what, just take it? Just accept it? I’m supposed to just swallow whatever you toss my way and ignore the fact that I’m... fucking... I’m *starving here!*” I admitted, then instantly buttoned my lips closed, knowing I’d said too much. But it was out now and I couldn’t just sweep it back up to be tucked away.

Denver... said nothing.

Maybe because he couldn't.

Maybe that admission was as gutting for him as it was for me.

Maybe he didn't understand how we'd gotten *this* far from where we used to be.

Me neither.

"I need water," I said. "And sleep."

He looked up, meeting my gaze. "You haven't been sleeping?"

"Well, you kinda threatened to kill my assistant, so my workload has been a bit rough," I snidely reminded him, then instantly regretted my tone. I wasn't *trying* to escalate things, but I was just so...

Angry?

Brokenhearted?

Dejected?

All of the above?

Whatever it was, it made it nearly impossible to tamp it all down and just be neutral. But, before Denver could respond, I amended my statement with another truth.

"I was having trouble before that too though."

He nodded. "You should rest."

He got up to get the water for me, delivering it to my hand just before the pilot came on to let us know he was about to take off. I moved quickly, retrieving the bottle of pills Loren had left for me and tipping a first... then second and third pill into my hand.

I swallowed them, then chased it with a long swig, putting the glass down in the cup holder just before we started moving. My gaze went to where Denver was sitting, head back, one hand pressed to his temple, eyes closed.

He wasn't asleep though.

He was thinking.

About what... I couldn't say.

*I* was knocked out before the plane's wheels left the ground.

## FIVE

# Kensa

WHEN I WOKE UP, I had no clue where I was.

Not like, I didn't remember going to sleep—I literally had *no clue* where I was.

The last thing I could recall was the argument with Denver on the jet, but now I was ensconced between decadent white sheets, in a room that was completely unfamiliar.

I could hear... *water*.

As in, waves lapping over solid surfaces.

That sound was coming in through wide open windows draped in white curtains, beckoning my gaze to the brilliant turquoise water stretching as far as I could see.

For a moment, I thought it was a boat—the stillness of the bed underneath me quickly dispelled that notion. I sat up, thoroughly confused by both the setting and my lack of clothes—I was in my pre-abduction panties, bra, and camisole, but my skirt, blazer, and shoes weren't anywhere in my immediate sights.

And I was *starving*.

I glanced at the bedside table, hoping by some miracle to see at least one of my phones.

*Nope.*

Pushing out a sigh, I maneuvered out of the soft embrace of those sheets and planted my feet on the floor, intending to go looking for... someone.

*Something.*

Instead, I made a pitstop by the bathroom first, allowing myself a moment of awe over the luxury spa-like décor as I relieved my bladder. When I got to the sink to wash my hands, there was another surprise waiting for me in the mirror.

A satin bonnet, covering my hair.

My mouth gaped open as I used a soaking wet hand to pull it off—*thank God* it wasn't a mess underneath. I dried my hands and then raked through my half-flattened wand curls, making them at least look presentable for... whatever was next?

I could go digging for other necessities later. For now, I left the bathroom, intent on figuring out where the hell I was. I shouldn't have been surprised to see Denver strolling into the room, a pair of linen pants slung low around his waist, wearing nothing else.

Holding a tray decked out with breakfast offerings, emanating a smell that made my empty stomach rumble.

“You have *got* to be hungry, Sleeping Beauty,” he teased, situating the tray on an oversized bench at the foot of the bed. “Come here.”

“What the hell is going on? Where are we?” I asked, not moving.

Denver popped a few grapes in his mouth, carefully chewing before he answered. “What's going on is, you've been asleep for... basically two days. You want to talk to me about how many of those pills you decided to take?”

“I just needed sleep—I wasn't trying to... do anything,” I assured him, even though it really wasn't his business anymore. “I didn't expect them to work quite so well.”

“Do you feel rested?”

I took a deep breath, doing a quick mental inventory before I nodded. “Yes, actually. I do.”

“Good. Come on and sit down and eat then, to get the rest of your energy up. We've got plenty of arguing to do, I need your ass ready for it.”

I rolled my eyes, but... the food smelled too good *not* to take him up on it. Taking a seat on the opposite end of the bench from him, I grabbed a fork and went straight for the fluffy scrambled eggs and country potatoes—my favorites.

“Damn,” Denver chuckled after a few moments of me stuffing myself had passed. “The last time I saw you eat like this was when you were—”

He cut himself off, but the damage was already done.

Now, I felt sick to my stomach.

I put my fork down, grabbing one of the napkins he’d brought along with him to wipe my mouth before taking one of the juice glasses from the platter.

“Kensa... you don’t *have* to shut down every time that’s brought up... you know that, right?”

My gaze shot up to his. “What?”

He ran his tongue over his lips, propping an elbow against the bed as he scrutinized me, then answered. “Every time I bring up what happened, you immediately slam that door closed. And I wish you wouldn’t.”

I nodded. “Yeah, I bet you do.”

“What the fuck does *that* mean?”

I shook my head. “Nothing. Never mind. Where are we, and where’s my phone? I need to figure out how to get home.”

“You aren’t going anywhere. *We* aren’t going anywhere,” he amended. “You don’t need your phone. The room has a landline we can use for emergencies, and anybody that might need to get in touch with either of us has the number.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard what I said. I don’t have any of my cells either—no distractions.”

I raised an eyebrow. “No distractions from *what*?”

“From us pushing out whatever the fuck is driving this wedge between us,” he answered, sitting forward with his

elbows propped on his knees. “You said you wanted me to hear you, Kensa—here I am. So... spit it out. What is your issue?”

I smirked. “Wow. This is *exactly* the energy I need to feel comfortable talking to you. Where did you learn this technique? Fuckboy Psychology 101?”

“Goddamnit, woman,” he grumbled, scrubbing his hands over his face. “I’m... I’m *trying* here.”

“Well, you may want to go back to the drawing board, because *spit it out, what is your issue?* Doesn’t make me want to tell you a damn thing.” I put my empty juice glass down, pushing up off the bench. “And you *still* haven’t told me where we are.”

“Paradise. Trace arranged our travel, Nessa made sure you were appropriately packed.”

I huffed. “Right. Of *course* you roped my siblings into this.”

“*They* believe me when I say I love your stubborn ass.”

“That makes two of *them*.”

Denver’s eyes narrowed enough that I knew I’d struck a nerve.

*Good.*

“Kenni... you can stand there being difficult, pretending to be impenetrable, all you want. But I promise you, sweetheart... we aren’t leaving this place until this shit is worked out.” He stood, stalking toward me with all the dark authority of a panther, stopping with barely an inch between us. “You do whatever you need to do, just know—I ain’t going nowhere.”

I... couldn’t think of a rebuttal.

So I didn’t even bother trying.

I turned and headed back for the bathroom, closing the door behind me. I hadn’t realized I was holding my breath, but



my lungs were grateful when I finally exhaled, propping my hands against the vanity mirror.

*Why the fuck is he doing this?*

I truly didn't understand what his angle was.

It was so fucking rich of him, pretending to want to know what my "issue" was, as if I hadn't *tried* to talk to his ass.

He was always out late at *Plumes*, after spending late hours at his *actual* job. The cigar bar was always only supposed to be a hobby, with *Benoit Financial* serving as his main source of income.

He made good money from both—*great* money actually, enough that he didn't have to spend those hours there.

He was working late because he *chose* to, surrounded by young, beautiful women who I... well, I kinda *had* to believe he was touching someone.

Cause it wasn't *me*.

Before I served the divorce papers, he hadn't touched me in months, and once I added that to his not coming home, what was happening seemed obvious to me.

And he hadn't denied it, not really.

He'd treated me as if the thought of this all was just *so* ridiculous.

But it *wasn't*.

There was a reason for the way things had changed between us, and the only logical conclusion was exactly what I'd presented—he didn't want me anymore.

At least... not until it was clear *I* was willing to go.

I pushed out a deep sigh, and then peeked into one of the decorative baskets on the counter. Sure enough, my toiletry bag was there, and packed with everything I needed thanks to meddling ass Nessa.

I'd have words for her *and* Trace later.

For now, I just wanted to wash away the staleness of having slept for two days. I started with getting my mouth back to a fresh-feeling state, then stripped down to nothing to luxuriate in a steamy eucalyptus shower.

Between the sleep, the food, and getting myself cleaned up, I was actually starting to feel better again.

Then I felt the shift in the air of Denver invading the space.

My first thought was that he just needed the toilet, so I didn't say anything—just closed my eyes and turned toward the back of the shower to continue what I was doing. When I didn't hear anything though, I turned to look in the direction I expected him to be.

He wasn't there.

Instead, he was inches away from me, just... watching. His gaze was intense and unwavering, lust interspersed with some deep sorrow I didn't want to understand.

*My* pain was taking up all my mental energy at the moment.

But then, my breasts were in his hands as he stepped into the shower with me, backing me against the wall. Steam built around us, making it a little hard to breathe. And then once he brought his mouth down to mine... breathing was damn near impossible.

I... was strangely okay with that.

What mattered most was his citrusy-sweet tongue in my mouth, searching and probing in tandem with one of his hands between my legs. His other hand quickly found the rhythm too, plucking and squeezing my nipple while he plucked and squeezed my clit. In both places, he was being a little too rough.

But I didn't want him to stop.

Not even when he clamped down so hard a whimper of pain bubbled up from my throat, only to be muffled by the crush of his mouth against mine. When he finally released my

nipple, he immediately dropped his head to take it between his lips, soothing the sting as the feeling came rushing back.

And then he dropped to his knees, doing the same thing when he released my clit.

I came, hard.

*Instantly.*

This was our dynamic—the thing he did to me all the time—how the hell was I *not* supposed to be a little crazy about it when he'd stopped?

Denver kissed his way back up my body—my thighs, my pussy, lingering at my navel before he came up my ribs, my breasts, back to my mouth. His hand snaked into my soaked hair, fisting it as he kissed me like he was trying fuse us together. And then, when he finally pulled back, he pressed his forehead to mine to deliver a demand.

*“Turn around.”*

I did.

And I followed his other directions too—*“put your hands right there, put your foot up here, don't you dare hold back a single fucking sound.”*

I did, I did, and I didn't.

*I couldn't.*

Not with the weight of his dick filling me up from behind, his arm gripping me around the waist, his other hand in a firm hold around my neck. Every stroke seemed so impossibly deep, felt so divine, hurt *so fucking good*.

“Who else is gonna fuck you like this, huh?” Denver's voice rumbled in my ear, making me whimper as he nipped me with his teeth.

*Nobody.*

*Nobody.*

*Nobody.*

Not even if I wanted them to.

My pussy was too permanently molded *exactly* to Denver's dick, my orgasms too inextricably tied to my skin against his.

He didn't need me to give a verbal answer.

He already knew.

We *both* knew.

"I *love* you. I fucking *love* you. How do I get you to understand?" he muttered into my hair, driving into me hard as his arm around my waist slipped. He pushed his hand between my legs, finding my sensitive clit—torturing me with pleasure at this point.

"Denver, *please*," I begged, struggling to hang on to... hell, *reality*. My knees buckled as he stroked me harder, deeper, as he tightened that grip around my throat. I tried to speak again, but couldn't find anything coherent—just the nonsensical, gibberish patois of bliss.

All at once, all my defenses dropped, and a dual rush of pleasure and emotion hit me, so intense that everything around me was still for a moment.

And then, there was the orgasm *and* the tears, together.

Denver caught on quickly, pulling out and letting my leg down and turning me around to face him. Then hiking my legs around his waist and pushing into me again, stroking as he wiped away my tears, and kept that orgasm going.

And going.

And *going*.

Going while I screamed my enjoyment and cried my emotions.

Going while I cried my enjoyment and screamed my emotions.

Until I couldn't feel my legs at all, and my throat was sore, and I'd barely registered that he'd cum too.

He kept me pressed against the wall, still hard, still filling me up, as he tried to catch his breath. And then he brought his

mouth back to mine, for a tender, sweet kiss that completely contradicted what had just passed between us.

“*I love you,*” he whispered against my lips, as if I hadn’t heard him any of the other times.

Maybe... maybe I hadn’t.

Because I... met his gaze, and whispered something back—words I hadn’t spoken in months.

“*I love you, too.*”

## SIX

# DENVER

IT WASN'T HOPELESS.

I hadn't gotten *much* out of Kensa since we arrived, but I'd at least been able to gather *that*. As much as she swore she was done, she wasn't *actually* done—she just *wanted* to be.

That was different.

The fact that there was still hope for some sort of resolution between us, that was a start.

I just wanted her to *talk to me*.

In fact, I demanded it.

But that had only resulted in her shutting down even further, which was the exact *opposite* of what I was trying to accomplish here.

Which meant... I was going to have to alter my approach.

Kensa Hamilton was not a woman who could be forced into much of anything—*subtlety* would be required.

A little... finesse.

“What the fuck are you looking at me like that for?”

Okay.

A *lot* of finesse.

I'd been so lost in my head I hadn't even realized she'd woken up, and caught me staring at her. She was *barely* awake as a matter of fact, but somehow had the energy to have an attitude.

“How am I looking at you?” I asked, not backing off from my careful scrutiny of her pretty face.

Her nose wrinkled, brow furrowed as she sat up, meeting my gaze. “Like you want to kidnap me and keep me locked away—oh, *wait*.”

I chuckled at her dramatics, still watching when she climbed out of the bed to head for the bathroom. “You realize there’s a full-fledged resort a few miles up the beach, right?”

“So you claim,” she called through the door, making me shake my head.

I thought about it for a bit, then got up too, walking up to the door. “You know why I brought you here, right?”

I listened for a response, but none came. I heard the toilet flush, then the water turned on in the sink, then after a moment, the door pulled open just enough for her to peek out. “Why?”

“We got married on the beach. Honeymooned on the beach...”

She raised an eyebrow at me. “So you thought since our marriage was born on a beach, we may as well bring it back to one to die?”

“Kensa.”

She closed the door.

When the water came on, I could only assume that meant she knew she’d be a while. I tried the handle, but after our little shower session the day before, I guess she knew to lock it if she didn’t want me invading her space.

I could’ve just knocked the shit down, but... I could take a hint.

For now.

I blew out a long sigh, trying to get my head right, knowing I couldn’t expect to get much out of her until I gave her what she needed. But how the fuck was I supposed to know what that was if she wouldn’t just *tell me*?

*She already told you.*

I shook away *that* nagging voice in my head. Because I couldn't stress enough that what she'd claimed was some bullshit.

I didn't want anything or anybody like I wanted my wife, and that had been true since the day we met. Back when *Plumes* wasn't even a thing, and *Benoit Financial* wasn't yet exactly... uh... a paragon of legitimacy.

I *needed* legitimacy.

I loved working with numbers, and had always been good with them—numbers made sense when nothing else did. So, it had been natural—damn near second-nature—for me to find myself in a position of manipulating them, navigating my way from pocket change to balling a little, with the backing of a local... street pharmacy.

Those days were well behind me though.

Partially because of Kensa's willingness to become one of my first clients whose money was *already* clean. She took a chance with her business—her *family's* business—then fed my obsession with her fine ass to the point that when she told me I had to choose a life... I didn't even blink.

Without a second thought, I chose the blowback that came with dropping any clients that couldn't handle a visit from the FBI.

It wasn't insignificant, but *I* wasn't a bitch, so I did what was necessary to ensure my future with Kensa. And I'd never—not even now—regretted that shit.

Never regretted her, never wanted anybody *but* her, since I laid eyes on her. In a city like Vegas, yes, there were women who didn't give a damn about the tattoo on my ring finger. Hell, there were those who saw the “ring” as a damn *perk*.

That didn't have shit to do with me though.

And I didn't have shit to do with them.

The way my loyalty was set up, it wasn't just about my family or the niggas I called my friends—my damn *wife* was



my one and only, the person I'd ride hardest for, the one I... never wanted to fucking *hurt*.

But here we were.

I'd never stopped wanting her, never violated our promise of fidelity, and as far as me never being home... hell, I'd been following cues from *her*. Instead of talking to me, Kensa had buried herself in work—so was I supposed to sit around looking stupid?

*Nah.*

I found my own distraction.

Which... had apparently been the wrong thing, but... I wasn't trying to beg her ass to be somewhere she didn't want to be. Not after what happened.

*"I'm not gonna fucking chase you like we're kids, Kensa. Grow the fuck up."*

I hoped she didn't think those words were burned much too clearly only in *her* mind.

At the time, I'd been so damn frustrated by what I saw as ridiculous complaints that I couldn't even stop those words from flying out of my mouth—*knowing* the shit was wrong as I said it.

But I'd felt justified.

Truthfully, I hadn't even meant it as harshly as it was delivered—or taken. But once it was said, it was said, and I couldn't back down from it.

*Wouldn't* back down from it.

Because none of that shit she believed was true.

It wasn't *my* truth.

I understood though, that didn't stop it from being hers.

So...

*What the fuck do I do?*

I mulled over that question for a long time, until Kensa finally emerged from the bathroom, in nothing but a towel.

The white popped against her luminous, dark mahogany skin, hugging her ample curves as she went straight for the closet.

*Approach from **her** truth—not yours.*

My ego bristled at the idea of it—why the hell should I put myself aside when I was the only one even trying? Logically though, it was easy to come to the quick conclusion that if I was the only one trying, I'd better be giving the shit all I had, if I wanted a desirable result.

“Will you have breakfast with me?”

I posed that question from the bed, and sat there silent, waiting for a response.

None came immediately.

But then, Kensa peeked out of the closet, her natural hair piled in a high bun on top of her head now, and an oversized summer-weight sweater covering her top half. “You’re... *asking?*”

“Yeah.”

Her eyes narrowed. “What does it entail?”

“Breakfast. *Just* breakfast,” I assured. “I already made a standing order for what I thought you would want—it gets delivered at the same time every morning. But if you want something else, you can just say the word. I’ll have it changed.”

“Are those potatoes, and the cheesy eggs... they’re in there?”

I grinned. “Supposed to arrive in about ten minutes.”

“Bacon?”

“Yes.”

“And the pineapple-papaya juice?”

“A whole carafe of it. I noticed you seemed to like that one yesterday.”

She pulled a lip between her teeth, nibbling at it for a moment. “I guess we could eat together. If you want to.”

“I’d like that, very much.”

She blinked, then shrank back into the closet some. “Okay. Then... yes. Sure.”

“Thank you.”

Her only true response was a quick nod before she disappeared into the closet again, but I caught the *briefest* flash of a smile. It wasn’t much—it was barely anything—but shit... I’d take it.

When the knock came announcing that the food had arrived, I was quick to the front door for the handoff. I took a moment to wash my hands, then unpacked the specialty tray from the box it arrived in, placing it at the center of the table to set it all up. I grabbed plates, cups, and whatever else we might need, and I was just wrapping up when I felt a shift in the air.

When I looked up, Kensa was in the doorway, watching.

“Come on,” I urged, taking the step of pulling the chair out for her, before I settled into the next seat. It was quiet between us as we both grabbed what we wanted and started eating.

Awkwardly so.

Which... wouldn’t get us where we needed to go.

“You remember that diner we went to, in the *Heights*?”

Her mouth was full, but Kensa’s lips turned up as she chewed, and nodded.

“These remind me of those.”

She swallowed, and took a drink as she agreed. “*Stacks*,” she confirmed. “And... yeah. Me too.”

“What were we even doing out there?” I asked, narrowing my eyes as if it would help me think harder.

“The record store that’s there—*Grown Folks Music*. I wanted that Songbird Dani vinyl, but it was limited—they wouldn’t sell it to me, but it was on display. So you took me to go listen to it.”

A smirk spread across my face as I remembered, and let the details start flowing back. “Yeah. We were... new. Very new.”

“And yet... you bought first class tickets to take me to listen to that vinyl. And then you took me to that coffeehouse... and she came out to sing with Logan Lewis.” She was *really* smiling now, fully connected to the memory. “That was... damn... like ten years ago?”

I nodded. “Yep.”

She shook her head. “*Wow*. Hey, you still maintain that you had no idea she was going to be there?”

“I *swear*,” I answered, tossing up my hands. “I took you there purely on a whim, no real plans. Shit, I was sweating bullets the whole way, hoping the owner would actually at least put it on. Us lucking up on a surprise appearance was just... icing.”

I really *hadn't* planned it.

It was pure serendipity, and honestly... watching her pretty ass singing and dancing to the sultry vibe of that music, so fucking happy, not a care in the world...

That was the moment I *knew* I was in love.

Hopping on a flight for something small, nice hotels, gifts... I could write that off in my mind as just trying to impress her—shit I was just doing for continued access to her pussy.

It *wasn't* that, but I tried to convince myself it was, instead of the *damn-nigga-you-caught-feelings* alternative.

But that *feeling* I had, in that moment—the thrill it brought me to see *her* so fucking joyful...

Yeah.

That was the moment.

“I really always just thought you were tricking on me,” Kensa laughed. “I mean... I liked it though.”

I smirked. “*Really* now?”

“Oh yeah. You were... *that nigga*,” she giggled. “I knew who you were before you stepped through the *HLT* doors.”

My eyes went wide. “*Wow*. So... you played me, is what I’m hearing. Because you definitely acted like you did not know who I was, or what I wanted.”

She shrugged. “I had to play it cool. You were there seeking clients—not pussy. At least... not until you saw *me*. I took a gamble on you being the type to want a challenge. To want a woman who made you work for it. So... I made you work for it.”

“And I loved every damn second of it.”

She laughed. “*See?* I knew what I was doing.”

“You definitely did.” I nodded. “But if you wanted me because I was *that nigga*, why did you start demanding I become... *this nigga*.”

Her gaze dropped to her glass, unfocused before she shook her head. “Because... *that nigga* wasn’t the type you can build a fam—” she cleared her throat. “Build forever with.”

“I could see that. And... I don’t disagree. My clientele wasn’t pleased about it though. A couple of them wanted my head.”

A smile played on her lips as she met my gaze again. “But did you die though?”

“Because of my connection to the Whitfields, no,” I chuckled. “It was a little iffy for a minute there though.”

“A *huge* risk,” she agreed, then looked past me, out the window, to the water. “But at the time... it felt so worth it.”

I raised an eyebrow. “*At the time*. So... what... are you saying you don’t think it was worth it anymore?”

“You tell me, Denver.” Her eyes connected with mine, glossy and distressed for reasons I didn’t understand. “Do *you* still feel like it was a good risk? Like I was worth it?”

“I’ve never thought otherwise. Not even for a *second*.”

I didn't have to think about that answer—it was immediate. Still, it didn't seem to please her, or make that sorrow in her face any better.

She pushed away from the table, rushing back into the bedroom of the suite where we were supposed to be reconnecting, and yet... *goddamnit*, here it was again.

Another wall.

I knew better than to follow her, but I did it anyway, easily finding her curled up in the bed. *Every* fiber of me wanted to demand answers, but I tamped that down, opting instead to just take a seat on the bench where we'd had *yesterday's* breakfast disaster.

We sat there in silence for a while before I realized she was crying.

Not full-blown sobs, but quiet, solemn tears that, if I had to choose... shit. These were *more* heartbreaking.

And I did not know how to make this any better.

I reached out a tentative hand, touching the closest thing I could reach—her ankle—hoping she wouldn't pull away. When she didn't... I took the chance and ran with it, doing something that felt ridiculous, but... I didn't know what else.

So I rubbed her feet.

After a while, she sat up a bit, scrubbing a hand to dry her face. "What are you doing?"

"A terrible fucking job at a foot rub, if you have to ask."

That pulled a soft laugh from her, before she shook her head. "I know, I'm just... it's been a really long time since you've done that. Not since..."

She let the sentence perish.

As she always did with this topic, with me.

"I'm sorry."

Just two little words, and when I said them, it was as if the whole world had suddenly gone silent—no gentle lap of the

waves, no birds, no stray sounds of civilization traveling across the ridge from the resort.

Just me and my wife, neither of us moving, or breathing.

Until Kensa's lips parted to whisper, "Sorry for what?"

"Sorry that... you can't talk to me about this. Sorry that I made it that way. You should've been able to... pour yourself out about it—to cry, scream, whatever you needed to do. But you couldn't," I murmured, still absently caressing her skin as I spoke something aloud I'd never been able to bring myself to admit.

Even internally.

"I... failed you. And you suffered for it because I wasn't somebody you felt like you could share your pain with. And I'm sorry."

"What are you talking about, Denver?"

I scoffed. "I'm talking about the baby—*our* baby," I barked, making her cringe. "We lost something, when we lost her. Not *only* her, but something... more. And we just... never talked about it. You were... thrown overboard. Dying because *she* died, and I was there, and I thought I had my hand out, but... you didn't reach for me, Kensa. You made me watch you almost drown, and then you... saved yourself, I guess. And you never did come back to this boat. Which I get—I'm not *blaming* you. I don't blame you. *I* fucked up. Because... why would you come back to somebody you couldn't reach for when you were drowning?" I shrugged, feeling crazy as fuck for this metaphor I'd pulled out, but... *shit*.

It was what happened.

Getting pregnant in the first place... took a while.

When it wasn't happening the "natural" way, we'd talked to doctors—*so many doctors*—before we found Loren. She was a private doctor, so we could count on discretion, and her vibe was a good fit for us. She calmed us down, walked us through the next level of interventions that would get us where we needed to go.

Injections, pills, smoothies, exercise, plenty of rest, no stress, we tried it all.

And then, *right* before we were ready to try the next level, the even more invasive—even more *expensive* stuff... we got that positive pregnancy test.

Kensa was *ecstatic*.

I was too—I loved the fuck outta Kensa, so building a family with her was a given. But Kensa's joy was on a whole other level, which made the whole thing so much bigger.

And a much taller pedestal to fall from.

We hadn't named her yet, when it happened. We didn't actually *know* it was girl, but Kensa insisted. She'd also insisted on not finding out beforehand, or even choosing *possible* names until we'd really seen her, and held her in our arms.

A week into her second trimester, we woke up, and... the baby was gone.

And really... so was Kensa.

“Denver...”

She pulled her feet away from me, and tried to slip a hand in mine, but I pulled back, shaking my head.

“I need to step out for a second,” I told her, not waiting on a response before I headed out the French doors to the balcony. There, I gulped in deep lungfuls of air, trying to get my shit together.

*Failing* to get my shit together.

Just like I'd failed my wife when she'd needed me most.



## SEVEN

# Kensa

I WASN'T one of those women who *aspired* to be a wife and mother.

Not that anything was wrong with that by any means—it just wasn't... *me*.

By the time I'd hit my mid-twenties, I was so disenchanted with the available men in my purview that I'd started wondering if I even actually *liked* men. I just didn't see what the rest of my heterosexual sistren saw that incentivized building a life with just *one* of them. Surely it made more sense to use them for the hip action that came along with their dicks and then keep it moving when they wouldn't shut up about how much of a man they were.

But then I met Denver Benoit.

And *goddamn* I understood.

My mother's tutelage left me well-prepared—I knew to not be too available, but still within his reach. It was hard though, when he made it obvious he wanted me, and I *surely* wanted him.

But balance was key.

I liked to think we got swept up in each other, and... Denver wouldn't disagree. That moment he'd reminded me of—that trip to *Mahogany Heights* before we were even “official” ... that had been *the* spark for me. That one incident that really set this thing between us ablaze.

Maybe that was how we'd ended up... *here*.

A fire that hot couldn't possibly sustain itself, right?

We'd been obsessed with each other, obsessed with the concept of us as a unit—I didn't just love my husband, I loved *being his wife*. But it wasn't enough. We needed something *more*—something *deeper*.

What that *something* was came to me in the middle of the workday, and by the time we'd both made it home and I could actually talk to him about it, I was already *aching* with the desire to have Denver's child.

We started trying *that* night.

And we tried.

And tried.

And tried.

All the supplements, all the specialists... we did everything we could.

And then, finally—a positive test.

After *years*.

There was joy, then trepidation, and then a *heartbeat*, and then... waking up soaked in blood.

I never did take inventory of everything I lost that night.

And now... well... I didn't know how to explain to Denver, he couldn't be *more* wrong.

Once he'd dropped that bombshell on me and left, the emotional drain of my tears had lulled me to sleep. When I woke up, it was dark, and he was still gone—or maybe he'd left again, I wasn't sure. He wasn't in the room though, which was maybe for the best.

I had no idea what to say.

One thing was for sure though—I'd have to make it clear that I wasn't *making* him watch me drown.

I was... *letting* him.

According to Loren, according to the internet, according to the books... miscarriage just “happened” sometimes. It was a

signal of... a glitch, basically, and there was nothing anyone could do to stop it, and wasn't necessarily triggered by something the mother had done "wrong".

I didn't accept that.

Of course the logic of it all made sense, so I nodded along in the therapy sessions Loren insisted on, saying everything I needed to say to be left alone. Early pregnancy loss was approached as such a normal, regular thing, and again—I *got it*. I understood the science, understood the emotional aspect of managing the expectations and all that, but after trying so hard, and waiting so long...

It destroyed me.

And maybe he'd already worked through it, or maybe he'd never admit it, but it ruined Denver too.

He couldn't look at me the same anymore.

*Every* time, all I saw was the pain of what we'd lost in his eyes, consuming him.

I *hated* that.

*Hated* that I'd caused that depth of grief.

I had no right to be comforted by him, when this shit was my fault anyway. How fucking callous would it have been of me, to seek relief of my sorrow from the person I'd hurt?

I wasn't punishing *him* by not talking about it with Denver.

I was punishing *myself*.

"*Couldn't even do that right,*" I muttered, pulling myself up from the bed. As wrong as he was about the more current state of our marriage, I knew I had to correct his misconception about what happened between us before.

*That* was on me.

It didn't take much to find Denver.

Flickering light drew my attention through the window, and I followed it outside to where Denver had lit the firepit on

the expansive deck. He was focused on the fire, staring into the flames as they danced against the night sky.

My approach was slow—I did not know what mood I was about to get. When my presence got his attention though, he looked up at me, extending a hand in my direction. The other patted his thigh.

“Come here.”

I moved a little faster.

He watched me the whole time, his expression inscrutable. When I reached him, he pulled me down into his lap, wrapping his arms around me from behind.

I hated how easily I just... *melted*.

Eyes closed and all.

“I’m sorry I’ve disappointed you,” he murmured, right against my ear, and I shook my head.

“It was... it was never about feeling like I couldn’t talk to you,” I said, shifting positions and angling my head so I could meet his gaze. “Not in the way that you’re thinking, as if it was something you did. I didn’t... I didn’t feel like I deserved to put my burdens on you.”

“We’re *married*, Kensa. Sharing the burden is... kinda the whole point.”

I shook my head. “Not when I saw how you looked at me. Like your heart was broken. And it was my fault.”

“My heart *was* broken,” he admitted, grabbing me under the chin to keep me from looking away from him. “I was fucked up, and you’re probably right—it was probably all over my face, whenever I looked you. But not because it was your fault—I *never* thought that. Not *ever*,” he insisted. His eyes locked with mine as he spoke, like he was trying his best to get through. “The shit hurt. It *still* hurts. But whenever I looked at you, what kept coming up was... if it feels like *this* for me, I can’t even imagine what it’s like for her. That’s why I *kept* trying to get you to talk to me. If I blamed you, why would I do that?”

“Because you loved me,” I answered, with a wry smile. “It was what a husband *should* do.”

Denver blew out a sigh. “I... I don’t disagree with that. Yes, it was what I should do, and yes, it was because I love you. But there was no resentment or anger to overcome in offering you my shoulder to cry on. I saw the heaviness of your grief and wanted to help take it off your shoulders. And instead, you... went to work.”

“I didn’t know how else to deal with what I was feeling.”

“I know,” he assured, pulling me tighter into his arms. “I know that *now*. But at the time... it felt like a *fuck you*. So I let you have that—I just distracted myself with work too, instead of wallowing in whatever the hell all that was.”

And... that became our pattern.

Just drifting further and further away, neither of us knowing what to say, when to say it, how to say it. Until one day, something shifted for me, and I realized I *needed* to talk to him, and he wasn’t there.

So I got mad.

“You stopped touching me,” I whispered, averting my gaze. “Even when we were... so at a distance with each other, we still had *that*. But then you stopped. Why?”

Denver pushed out a heavy sigh. “Honestly... I was afraid you’d get pregnant again. Afraid we’d have another loss. I saw what it did to you the first time—I lost you emotionally. I feared that if it happened again... it would have killed you. Which would’ve killed me.”

What he’d said wasn’t funny at all, but I still laughed, because...

“*Wow*. We are really good at not just fucking talking to each other, aren’t we?” I asked, shaking my head.

“Experts. Obviously.”

I let my head drop against his chest, nuzzling my face into his neck to breathe in his cologne. “I don’t want to do that anymore.”

“So let’s not, then.”

“It’s not that easy.”

“But it *could* be.” He tipped his head, leaning in to press a kiss against my lips. “I love you, Kensa. Anything you want from me—*anything*. Sweetheart, all you’ve gotta do is say it. It’s yours.”

I believed him.

Fully.

But what I needed right then wasn’t exactly something I knew how to say. I shifted my position so I was straddling his lap instead of draped across it, then brought my mouth to meet his.

He got the picture.

Slipping his hands under my oversized sweater, he grabbed the waistband of my panties to peel them off. It took some careful maneuvering on the chaise where we were situated, but a few moments later I was sinking onto him, eyes closed.

It wasn’t enough.

He stripped that sweater completely off me, his greedy hands going straight for my breasts when he realized I wasn’t wearing anything underneath. I tugged *his* shirt off, desperate to be skin to skin with him as I started moving, riding him.

It felt like old times.

I didn’t resent him for how damn good he felt—I *relished* it, riding him harder and faster as tension built in my core. His mouth replaced his hand, hot and insistent on my sensitive nipples. The hand, he put between my legs, pressing my clit in firm, fast, tight circles as he moved too, meeting me with upward strokes that made keeping my rhythm next to impossible.

So I didn’t try.

I just rode him with abandon, giving myself over to whatever felt good. I held onto his shoulders, digging my nails

in as I rocked my hips into his. He grabbed a handful of my hair, pulling my mouth down to his to entwine our tongues.

I was going to suffocate.

I was *sure* of it.

But... fuck it.

I was full of my husband, and what a way that would be to go.

His hand dropped to my ass, roughly gripping a handful as his strokes grew as reckless as mine until he finally pushed us *both* over the edge of release.

Afterwards, I stayed right where I was—still full of him, but panting against his chest. His arms came up to surround me, helping keep off the chill of the night air, and I smiled.

A smile that quickly faded when I remembered what had brought us here in the first place.

Thinking about those divorce papers now—how *insistent* I'd been, when everybody was trying to tell me to slow down—it just felt so... silly.

“Whatever you're building up in your head to be more than it is... how about you just... *talk to me.*”

When I didn't immediately look up, he made his dick twitch, which made me laugh.

So I met his gaze. “You were serious about us talking, huh?”

“Dead ass, sweetheart. So spill it.”

I sighed, then pushed myself up from his chest. “I filed divorce papers.”

“You did,” he nodded. “It pissed me off.”

“Well, you'd pissed *me* off. I didn't think you wanted me.”

Denver's hands went to my hips as he pushed further into me, like we weren't already still connected. “And you know now that's not the case, right?”

I closed my eyes as he stroked me again, and nodded.  
“Yes.”

“So where do we go from here?”

Peeling my eyelids apart, I met his gaze. “You tell me. Where do *you* want to go?”

A shriek ripped from me as he suddenly stood, his arm around my waist to keep me against him. I threw *my* arms around his shoulders, holding on as he kicked his pants and boxers from around his ankles, then started for the door.

“What are you doing?!” I gasped, biting down on my lip as his dick plunged deeper into me with every step.

“This is where I want to go,” he answered, pulling open the door and stepping inside. We never parted as he lowered me onto the bed, positioning on top of me for another deep, breath-snatching stroke. “I want to get further reacquainted with my wife.”



## EIGHT

# Kensa

I WOKE up with his head between my legs.

Which, really—I couldn't think of a lovelier way to part with my dreams.

No sweet sorrow here, just abundant, back-arching pleasure as my husband ate his fill of me, his arms hooked around my thighs to keep me wide open at the mercy of his tongue. I was a shivering mess on the bed as he licked the metaphorical plate clean, then kissed his way up my body.

“Good morning,” he rumbled against my lips as he slid into me, with a little *extra* push of his hips to ensure he was fully entrenched in my pussy.

“*Mmmm*,” I groaned, draping my arms over his shoulders. “Good morning to you, too.”

It didn't matter much that we'd had more sex in the last few days than the last several months—I was still hungry for him.

*Always.*

I hooked my legs up around his waist, welcoming him to go deeper—an invitation he simply obliged at first, but then he ran with it, positioning me so that my feet were somewhere up past my head. There was nowhere for me to go, nothing for me to do except *take it*.

Which I *happily* did.

Until he stopped, declaring that he wanted me on top.

I smirked at him once we'd switched positions, sliding my pussy along his length but not taking the step of taking him in. Instead, I moved until my face was right in line with his dick. I took him in both hands, one stacked on the other. I covered the leftovers with my mouth, sucking hard as I squeezed.

“*Shiiiiit*,” Denver growled, digging a hand into my hair to grab a fistful. “That’s what you’re on this morning, huh?”

I moved my topmost hand, taking him further into my mouth for another hard suck that had his hips bucking toward me. I was *slow, slow, slow* about coming off it, finishing with a swirl of my tongue around his tip before I looked up at him with a smirk. “I aim to please.”

I was on him again before he could respond, moving the other hand to take him fully down my throat as I cupped and massaged his balls. His yanking at my hair, his curses, the reflexive surge of his hips—all motivation for me to go harder.

I purposely gulped him down, my eyes watering as his dick set off my gag reflex. I just swallowed and kept going, humming as his hand grew tighter in my hair. His hips started bucking in rhythmic strokes, fucking my mouth as I sucked.

That was all the warning I needed for what was coming.

Just because, I didn’t swallow as soon as the warm gush of his seed came spurting out; I kept sucking, letting it drip all over his sensitive dick before I playfully licked it all off.

*Then*, I swallowed.

“Bring your ass up here,” Denver grunted, reaching to practically drag me back up to be at eyeline with him. His hand came to my face, wiping a stray bit of cum from my chin with his thumb before lifting it to my mouth for me to lick off. “*Goddamn*, I love you,” he chuckled, then pulled my mouth to his, kissing me deep as he drove his dick into me from below.

“You saying you married me for my mouth?” I asked, planting my hands on his shoulders for leverage as I took over.

He slapped my ass, making me squeal before he soothed the sting of it with a caressing hand. “In more ways than one.”

I grinned, rolling my hips and grinding against him for increased friction. “Lucky motherfucker.”

Denver bit down on his lip, maintaining his grip on my ass with one hand as he tucked the other behind his head to relax, watching me ride his dick. “I couldn’t agree more.”

---

THIS WAS TOO EASY.

Right?

As I watched Denver pour what would probably be our last glasses of wine before we headed back to regular life, I couldn’t help thinking... it should’ve been more difficult than this, to get back to this place.

Not that I *wanted* to be in some ugly back and forth with him, I just felt... uneasy.

Uneasy about feeling so completely... over the bullshit.

I loved Denver—I didn’t want to fight with him anymore.

I was just scared that maybe...

“Whatever you’re thinking about, you’re thinking too damn hard.”

Denver took a seat beside me on the chaise, handing me a wine glass before he pulled my legs into his lap.

We’d already had dinner, and each other, so we were full and sleepy—a perfect time to bring some bullshit up.

“You’re seriously not mad at me about the divorce papers? At your *job*?” I asked, taking a sip for a little extra boost of audacity. “I mean... it was pretty disrespectful. On purpose.”

Denver shook his head, letting out a little chuckle. “It was. Especially the second time. But... hey... I didn’t marry you for your docile demeanor. This isn’t the first time I’ve pissed you off enough for you to do something wild.”

“Me? Wild?”

He lifted an eyebrow. “So I imagined the nigga in the slingshot all over you at your bachelorette?”

“Oh. Shit. Um... Blame Zoraya for that.”

“Oh, trust me, I *do*. Your ass ain’t innocent though.”

I took another long sip and shrugged. “Well, you shouldn’t have had that Sienna bitch all in your face after I said not to.”

“She was trying to make a damn movie, Kensa.”

“Yeah, on your dick.”

“You think everybody wants me.”

“Because they *do*,” I told him, draining the rest of my glass. “Especially if they know we’re married. Like Sienna.”

Denver laughed. “We weren’t even married yet!”

“But she knew it was fucking coming, and I told you about her, and because you didn’t listen, that bitch spread the rumor that she had your dick days before our wedding.”

“Which was a *provable* lie.”

“That’s not the point. You put me in a position to be embarrassed, so...”

“You acted a goddamn fool,” Denver chuckled. “Nice to know some things don’t change.”

“Asshole.”

“I’m *serious*,” he insisted. “You’re a passionate woman, who demands certain treatment. Your position has always been that I either meet you where you are or move out of your way. So... I act accordingly.”

I rolled my eyes. “By doing whatever you want, seeing my reaction, then pulling off some grand gesture to get me back? Getting Dani for our wedding reception back then, a tropical getaway now...”

“You’re saying you don’t like that?”

“I’d rather you just... do what I want,” I shrugged.

“*That’s* a damn lie.”

I laughed. “Fine. You’re right. But... as nice as the gestures are... I’d rather just feel like you’re *really* hearing me. I mean... I know sometimes that’s hard. I may not even be able to articulate what I need—like *this* whole thing, for example. I know I’m not the easiest woman in the world to understand, but as long as it’s clear you’re trying... I’m in this.”

“And so am I,” Denver assured. “I have no reservations about that commitment—I just need *you* to... talk to me. We’ve been through a lot—not even counting this. Shit that would’ve folded a lot of people. But we’re here. And I think that will remain, as long as we just... don’t stop talking.”

I nodded, then shifted positions so I could lay on his shoulder. “Yeah... I agree.”

We sat in comfortable silence for a moment, until Denver sighed. “So... no more grand gestures, huh?”

“I didn’t say all *that*,” I giggled. “Like, I don’t *need* them, but I’m also not going to turn them down.”

He nodded. “Good. Cause it may have been awkward as fuck trying to return this.”

“*This*” being the ring he was suddenly holding in front of my face, glittering invitingly from its cushioned box. It was lavish, but not over the top—a large pear-cut diamond as the main stone, flanked by smaller pear-cuts on either side, all in a delicate, platinum setting.

“What is this?” I whispered, reaching for it.

He moved it away from me though, taking my left hand.

“*This* is... me asking you to be my wife again—with the appropriate accessories this time,” he added, starting to put it on my naked ring finger. “That is—assuming you want that?”

“*Yes*,” I told him immediately, flexing my fingers. “Stop playing, put it on.”

Denver laughed, pulling the ring further away. “*Wow*—so you really *do* want to wear my ring now? You weren’t trying to hear that shit before.”

“I was stupid. Put the ring on me,” I demanded, which only seemed to make it funnier to him.

He was right though.

As much as I *still* considered myself a boss ass, independent-don't-need-no-man kinda bitch, I'd *definitely* come to regret my insistence at the time we'd gotten married that I didn't need anything marking me as “belonging” to someone.

I'd *been* off that shit.

But of course, it wasn't like I could just tell Denver that, not when I'd made such a stink about it. So, I'd settled for my little subtle ring finger tat, all while cursing myself.

But now...

“You know you could've had this sooner, right? By just...?”

“*Talking to you,*” I gritted through my teeth. “Who told you? Nessa or Trace?”

He grinned. “Both. Neither would agree to helping me with this unless I showed them a ring worthy of their precious third triplet.”

“My hittas,” I nodded. “Now... please stop playing and put that ring on me.”

“One more thing woman, damn,” he laughed. “Look.”

He turned the inside of the ring, behind the setting, toward me. At first, I couldn't tell what he was showing me, but then the ring caught the light in a brilliant flash of purple that made my heart slam to the front of my chest.

“That's... tanzanite, isn't it?” I asked, swallowing hard.

He nodded. “Yeah. It's what her birthstone was supposed to be.”

Dual feelings of joy and sorrow warred in me as I moved his hand closer to my face, to see. It was a tiny stone, polished smooth and set into the back of the ring, where no one would see it. In monetary value, it likely paled in comparison to any

of the stones in the main setting. But hands down... it was the one that meant the most to me.

Joy won.

I held my hand up in front of him, and this time, he slid the ring on. Of *no* surprise to me, it was a perfect fit.

“So... your answer was yes, right?”

I nodded, trying my best to hold back my tears.

“Yes. Absolutely.”

## NINE

# DENVER

“WOOOOOW, nigga. And you said marriage was making *me* soft,” Kingston cackled, taking my wife’s hand to examine the new ring on her finger. “How much you pay for this?”

“Probably about half of what it cost to put that damn rock on *your* old lady,” I teased him back, pulling Asha—the not at all *old* lady in question—into a hug as she laughed. As soon as I let her go, she grabbed Kensa’s hand, pulling her away.

“Come on, let’s eat while these dudes gossip,” Asha insisted.

Kensa shot me a grin, obliging her cousin-in-law’s pregnancy-fueled request to hit the refreshment tables at the brunch again. This bi-monthly meal was a family thing—one Kensa and I hadn’t shown our faces at since the miscarriage.

It felt good to be back now.

“I’m guessing you got your shit all the way together now?” King asked, as we watched our women walk away. “Kensa seems... *light*.”

I nodded, trying to keep my expression neutral so I didn’t come off like a bitch, but... *yeah*.

I had my shit all the way together now.

“We went to marriage counseling,” I admitted. “As *soon* as we got back. Thanks for the hookup on the little getaway spot, by the way. We needed that.”

King shrugged. “I told you man—anything you needed. And you were helping me anyway, I needed somebody to test



the private offering at *Escape*. When can I expect your comment card?”

“Fuck you.”

“What, I’m just trying to be a responsible entrepreneur—did I *not* support your ass when you opened *Plumes*? I was the one who set the shit in motion for that TV show that was going to film there, remember?”

I scoffed. “Yeah, which was how Sienna Sparks ended up in my face, which is a whole ass topic in counseling.”

“Damn,” Kingston laughed. “You *did* get in trouble for pussy you didn’t even touch, didn’t you?”

“Not funny.”

“To you.”

“Yeah, so cut the shit,” I said, trying not to laugh—because, it *was* a little funny. I hadn’t even realized Kensa was still *seriously* mad about that shit until it came up in that first counseling session.

I’d eat it, though, because I was man enough to handle my wife telling me what she would and wouldn’t accept—especially when she didn’t flinch at giving me the same courtesy. My needs were simple as shit—never worrying about money, my family having all they needed, and peace at home.

Which could’ve gone a bad way, considering that we were *both* on the “hot-headed” side of the personality spectrum.

We made it work though. Usually, we’d be able to each say our piece and then handle any residual anger in the bedroom. With this, the addition of grief had added a whole new element to our dynamic, making it impossible for us to hit the right note without something extreme happening.

Like somebody filing for divorce.

“Hey,” Kingston spoke up, his tone suddenly shifting to something much more serious than a moment ago. “Are you two going to... you know... try again?”

He wasn't looking at me when he spoke—I followed his sight line to where Kensa, Asha, and Zoraya were standing with my Aunt Angela, laughing about something. I had no idea what prompted it, but Kensa put her hand to Asha's swollen stomach and smiled.

Genuinely.

“In a year,” I said, nodding. “That was what we came to. So, we'll be eating our leafy greens and all that, trying to get into some good habits. Make sure me and her are solid, so that if... if what happened before, happens again... it doesn't destroy the unit or the individual.”

“Good shit, man,” King said, with quick incline of his head. “But it's not happening again, we're not claiming that.”

“Ay, make sure you send that one up for me,” I told him, dapping him as Kensa came strolling back in our direction.

“Red says her feet are hurting and she misses KJ,” she told King, who wasted no time giving us a quick goodbye before heading over to check in with his wife, while I checked in with mine.

“What about you? Your feet hurting, too?” I teased, wrapping an arm around her waist to pull her against me where she belonged.

“Nah, I went sensible today, remember?” she countered, gesturing at the four-inch heels of the boots she'd chosen for the occasion.

“You right—I forgot, you're a pro at the bad bitch vibes.”

The height her shoes offered put her much closer to equal height with me—something I took full advantage of to capture her mouth in a quick, family-event appropriate kiss.

“Love that you see the vision, but I'm lying through my teeth—these damn boots are giving me hell.”

I chuckled, shaking my head. “Let's get you home then, and out of them. And out of these clothes, too.”

“Can't keep your dick to yourself for a whole day, huh?” she purred, glancing around to see if anybody was watching

before she pressed into me.

“We already played *face down, ass up* this morning, remember?” I countered, with a wink. “So we can try that shit you’re talking tomorrow—that ass is mine for the rest of the day.”

“Denver, don’t you leave here without taking this bottle of wine to Connie for me!” my Aunt Angela spoke, from much closer than I was expecting anybody to be. When I turned, she was holding a bottle in my direction, and looking knowingly between me and Kensa. “The two of you look like you’re ready to um... get somewhere private.”

I cringed as I took the bottle. “Sorry Auntie, I—”

“Don’t apologize to me,” she laughed. “I’m trying to get all these damn people out of my house so I can talk nasty to my husband, too. Daniel! Tell these kids to go home!” she continued, yelling to my uncle as she walked away.

Kensa laughed, snaking her fingers through mine as we headed to say the rest of our goodbyes. Once we were done, I walked her out to the car with promises of what we were going to do at home, but to my surprise, she stopped me.

“Maybe... we should go by *Plumes*,” she suggested, reaching across the console to run a hand through my beard. “You haven’t been really since we got back two weeks ago. I know you miss it.”

I grinned. “And I know *you* hate it,” I said, shaking my head. “You’ve never been a fan of the smoke.”

She shrugged. “Eh. I know I wasn’t at first, but... haven’t you seen I can change my mind about things? I kinda miss you coming home smelling like sweet smoke.”

“You’ll have to get used to that sweetheart—I’m thinking about selling it.”

Kensa’s eyes went big. “Selling it for *what*?”

“Because... it’s not like I can come home with smoke on me once you’re pregnant—remember, I would shower and change last time, and that shit was a whole extra hassle. And

then especially once we have a little mini. I need some shit off my plate, so I can be about my family, you know. And—I won't lie—I'm expecting you to do the same. I know you've gotten used to certain long ass hours, but... you gotta figure out how to split your time. Boss bitch *and* trophy wife.”

Kensa laughed at that, her grin lingering after the sound had faded, and she nodded. “I think that's fair. If that's what you need, I can do that.”

“Thank you, sweetheart.”

She leaned in for a kiss, then finally sat back to strap her seatbelt in. “You're very welcome, Mr. Benoit,” she said, in a seductive purr that *had* me ready to get her ass back to the house. But then... “Okay, if you're thinking about selling, that's even *more* reason for us to slide through *Plumes*. Come on. Let's do it.”

*Shit.*

I couldn't pass up a chance like this, since Kensa *never* wanted to be at *Plumes*. Rejecting her obvious desire to do something for me wasn't about to happen, so I pulled out of the driveway and headed straight there, hoping nothing stupid had popped off.

*Plumes* was a nice place, but people were people, and once liquor and smoking and whatever the hell else got involved, sometimes shit happened.

It wasn't late yet though—in fact, it wasn't even dark—so chances of that were much lower. I helped Kensa from the car, escorting her through the VIP entrance I typically used.

I stopped dead in my tracks when I was met with some shit I wasn't expecting though.

“Ay!” I called, for any member of my staff who might hear it. “What the fuck is up with all these damn flowers?”

Again, *Plumes* was a high-end place, but I drew the line at frilly. I hadn't made any plans for new décor, so I wasn't clear on why I was walking into my business to find it done up in flowers like somebody was getting... married.

I looked to Kensa, who I finally realized was wearing a huge grin, just before Nessa appeared to take her by the arm.

“What is this?” I asked, following as Nessa guided her away.

Kensa stopped to smile at me, just before Trace walked up—presumably to take me in the other direction.

“You asked me to be your wife again, right? Well... welcome to the wedding.” She winked, then turned, giggling to her sister before they rushed off.

I looked to Trace, who clapped a hand on my shoulder. “You already knew she wouldn’t take being kidnapped on the chin, right?”

I shook my head, chuckling as the gravity of it all—a surprise vow renewal—really hit me. “Yeah,” I agreed. “Thank God I’m on the positive side of her getting me back for that.”

“You picked her,” Trace laughed, motioning for me to follow him. “Come on, we’ve got tux options for you choose from. Then you get to pick her again.”

TEN

*Kensa*

THE LOOK on his face was well worth it.

It could've been a disaster, planning a surprise for your partner when one of the biggest barriers in your marriage had been a lack of communication. But it was a chance I'd happily taken—with a little advice from our counselor, who thought our foundation was titanium—in order to do something for my husband.

It was hard with a man like him.

All of Denver's needs and desires were set in the abstract. He dressed impeccably—liked his little hints of bling, liked nice cars, all that. But all that shit was just frosting on this life he'd built where the people he loved had everything *they* needed, and a lot they wanted. Likely by virtue of the... *creative* money-management he'd been doing before going legit, he had none of the usual cravings for impulse and drama that fueled people whose lives were mostly consumed by boredom. He'd lived with ambiguity and apprehension.

Now, he just wanted peace, quiet, and my pussy.

*Everybody* liked a nice surprise now and then though.

And unlike *everybody*, I truly felt like Denver deserved this shit.

Yeah, he was wrong for brushing me off when I finally *did* open my mouth, but the thing about that was... he wasn't wrong in a vacuum. None of my justifications about my own feelings, however valid, made it any less selfish that I hadn't stepped outside of myself to see what he was going through as

well. Both of our asses were wrong, no matter how warranted our feelings or actions may have been.

I was wrong first, though.

Not even on any self-deprecation, or passing the buck, or hell... competition.

The *fact* was that I'd been so clouded with grief that it was able to do all my inner talking, to the point that in my head, I turned my husband into someone he'd *never* been—someone I couldn't talk to. I'd convinced myself he *had* to be mad at me about the loss of our baby because I was mad at myself.

Grief was a raggedy bitch who *lived* for drama.

I'd be better prepared if I ever met her again.

For now though, I shifted focus to my reflection in the mirror, knowing Denver was going to *love* me in this dress. The off-shoulder neckline accentuated his favorite—publicly visible—part of my body. The pale blush color made my dark brown tone seem even richer, especially since the tulle construction hinted at my skin underneath.

Obviously sexy, but not overt.

He'd love it.

“Who the hell are you so animated with on the phone over there?” I asked my sister. Her fingers were flying so fast she was making a steady tapping sound on the screen.

She looked up, eyes wide. “Sorry. Marti says a bunch of bikers showed up at *HLLT*, wanting to see the Ducatis. She's nervous, so I'm trying to walk her through it.”

“Just call her,” I insisted. “We're not due to start for another few minutes.”

“No.” Nessa shook her head. “She's gotta leave the nest sometime. She can handle it, and security is there. It's just...”

I lifted an eyebrow when she didn't answer at first. “Just... *what*? Do they look like they've got Ducati money? She knows we don't rent anything above the Panigale, right?”

“Yeah, she knows,” Nessa assured.

“Okay... then...?”

“It’s Blue.”

Instantly, a smirk crept over my face, as embarrassment crept over Nessa’s.

“Don’t be *shamed*,” I teased her, laughing. “Your biker-boi fantasies about that man aren’t anything new.”

“I don’t *fantasize* about Blue Garret!” she denied—lying right to my damn face, pointlessly. “I mean... if I did though... he deserves. That motherfucker is beautiful.”

“Mmmhmmm,” I agreed.

Because he *was*, with his tats and his grill and his biceps and general lack of respect for authority. Honestly, he was much more *my* type than anything I would’ve expected for Nessa—*she* was not-so-straight-laced, but she liked men to be.

She had a thing for corrupting them.

Blue though... he was much further left than any other crush she’d had that I knew of—and he was also, notably, the only one she’d never pursued.

“You know he probably showed up looking for *you*, right?”

Nessa blushed, shaking her head as she stood to hand me my bouquet. “That man doesn’t even know who I am.”

“Bullshit. A woman who looks like you, speeding around on a bike like yours? He knows.”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re only saying that because I look like *you*.”

“Fine recognizes fine, or however the saying goes,” I giggled, accepting the oversized bundle of flowers from her hands. A moment later, a knock sounded at the door, but before we could even answer, it opened for Trace and Desiree to peek in.

“Okay Ms. *Send That Nigga Papers Cause I Ain’t Playing With His Ass*,” she teased. “You ready?”



I sucked my teeth. “Stop bringing up old shit, Des, damn!”

“Oh honey, I will *never*,” she laughed, stepping in. “After you *insisted* on bringing me back into lawyer shit when I don’t do that anymore? You’re gonna get these jokes.”

“Fine, bitch—but only cause you’re my friend. Supposedly.”

“You know you luh me,” Des said, putting an arm around me for a quick hug. “Seriously though, you look beautiful. And everything is in place. Connie was running a bit late, but she’s here now and ready to officiate.”

I nodded. “Good. And... thank you. *So* much. For everything.”

“Anything for you, my dear. Come on, Nessa,” she said, looping her arm through Nessa’s so they could get into place. I didn’t miss the way Trace’s gaze followed Des until she was gone, then lingered before he looked back to me with a grin.

“You really do look beautiful, Kensa. I’m not even shamed to walk out there with you on my arm today.”

“Oh shut up,” I laughed, accepting his arm. Our parents were both long gone, so it felt quite appropriate to have my brother walk me down the aisle. “You know... you really should just tell her.”

His eyebrows knitted together in a frown. “Tell who what?”

“Des. That you love her.”

His frown deepened, so much that if I didn’t *know* my brother, I may have fallen for it.

“What? Kenni, I don’t... it’s not like... Des is like family,” was what he settled on, stumbling over the words, which was *completely* abnormal for my cool, collected brother.

“Yeah,” I laughed. “Like *my* family, and like Nessa’s. *You* want to know what her pussy tastes like though, so... you probably shouldn’t say stuff like that. That’s nasty, bro.”

“You’re supposed to be getting remarried right now—let’s focus on that,” he said, flustered, as he practically dragged me out of the office we’d used as my dressing room.

I laughed, but let him steer me back out to the main doors, where the ceremony was being conducted. As we waited for our cue to step inside, Trace leaned in to speak.

“Why did you even bring that shit up?”

“Because it’s a wedding, duh. Love is in the air. What better time than now?”

He was quiet again for a moment, then:

“Are you saying she feels the same?”

Before I could answer, the double doors opened, revealing the fully decorated space where my husband was waiting for me. I didn’t take a single step without smiling up at Trace first.

“If you don’t just say something, you might never know.”

And *now*, it was time for us to go.

An overwhelming sense of *rightness* swelled in my chest as Songbird Dani struck up the first notes of what Denver and I agreed was our favorite song—the one I’d danced to and sang to him so horribly off-key in *Grown Folks Music* that day in the *Heights*, so long ago. With Logan Lewis accompanying her on the piano, she sang about lovers finding their way back together through several lifetimes.

It took everything in me not to *run* to my husband.

I managed to keep my cool, though.

Partially because Trace had the good sense to keep a good grip on me, making me pace myself.

Our first wedding had been beautiful, for sure, but I couldn’t think of a way *this* day could be any better. So much smaller, but there was a depth here that wouldn’t have even been possible back then, without the *years* we’d put into this thing now.

When I finally reached the front of the large room where Denver was waiting, I let out a breath. He had Kingston, Trei,

Braxton, and Lincoln on his side; I had Des, Zoraya, Asha and Nashira on mine. Mrs. Connie was there, full-blown beaming with happiness—she'd been *so* honored when I asked her to bring her experience as a former pastor, and Denver's caregiver, into this event.

And right in front of me now, my husband, with such love and happiness in his eyes that I couldn't *wait* to recommit myself to him. Yes, we'd married already, and for some... this was pointless, not that big of a deal. But for us... it represented the new depths we intended to explore with each other because we were *in this thing*. I couldn't say that we'd never have another moment of reckoning because maybe we would.

This time, it had almost broken us.

Maybe next time, it wouldn't even scratch the surface.

Dani reached the crescendo of the song, and Denver reached for my hand.

I gave it immediately, lacing my fingers through his as I met his glossy gaze.

"*Emotional ass*," I mouthed at him, making him break into a grin.

I was one to talk, because no sooner than I did that, tears started leaking down *my* face.

Denver squeezed my hand as the song ended, and we turned toward Connie, who smiled at me, then him.

"You kids ready?" she asked, and Denver looked at me, then nodded.

"We've never been more ready for anything."

*the end.*

DID YOU ENJOY THIS BOOK?

If you enjoyed Kensa and Denver's story of reconnection,  
please consider leaving a review!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christina C. Jones is a best selling romance novelist and digital media creator.

A timeless storyteller, she is lauded by readers for her ability to seamlessly weave the complexities of modern life into captivating tales of black romance.

As an author, Christina's work has been featured in various media outlets such as Oprah Mag Online and Shondaland, and is the winner of numerous community awards.

In addition to her full-time writing career, she cofounded Girl, Have You Read - a popular digital platform that amplifies black romance authors and their stories.

A former graphic designer, Christina has a passion for making things beautiful and can usually be found crafting and cooking in her spare time.

She currently lives in Arkansas with her husband and their two children.

To learn more, visit [www.beingmrsjones.com](http://www.beingmrsjones.com).

## OTHER TITLES BY CHRISTINA JONES:

For direct links and more information, you can [visit my website](#).

Wonder (Post-Apocalyptic)

Love and Other Things

Eternally Tethered

Haunted (paranormal)

Coveted

Mine Tonight (erotica)

The Love Sisters

I Think I Might Love You

I Think I Might Need You

I Think I Might Want You

Sugar Valley.

The Culmination Of Everything

The Point Of It All

Equilibrium

Love Notes

Grow Something

In Tandem

Bittersweet

Plus One

Press Rewind

Frosted.Whipped.Buttered.

Five Start Enterprises

Anonymous Acts

More Than a Hashtag

Relationship Goals

High Stakes

Ante Up

King of Hearts

Deuces Wild

High Stakes Holiday

Sweet Heat

Hints of Spice (Highlight Reel spinoff)

A Dash of Heat

A Touch of Sugar

Truth, Lies, and Consequences

The Truth – His Side, Her Side, And the Truth About Falling In Love  
The Lies – The Lies We Tell About Life, Love, and Everything in Between

Friends & Lovers:

Finding Forever  
Chasing Commitment

Strictly Professional:

Strictly Professional  
Unfinished Business

Serendipitous Love:

A Crazy Little Thing Called Love  
Didn't Mean To Love You  
Fall In Love Again  
The Way Love Goes  
Love You Forever  
Something Like Love

Trouble:

The Trouble With Love  
The Trouble With Us  
The Right Kind Of Trouble

If You Can (Romantic Suspense):

Catch Me If You Can  
Release Me If You Can  
Save Me If You Can

Inevitable Love:

Inevitable Conclusions  
Inevitable Seductions  
Inevitable Addiction

The Wright Brothers:

Getting Schooled – Jason & Reese  
Pulling Doubles – Joseph & Devyn  
Bending The Rules – Justin & Toni  
Christmas With the Wrights

Connecticut Kings:

CK #1 Love in the Red Zone – Love Belvin  
CK #2 Love on the Highlight Reel  
CK #3 – Determining Possession

CK #4 – End Zone Love – Love Belvin

CK#5 – Love's Ineligible Receiver – Love Belvin

CK # 6 - Pass Interference