

LEO SULLIVAN PRESENTS

*Black
Lace*

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Author of Black Butterfly Series

Black Lace
Book 4 of the
Black Butterfly Series
Nika Michelle

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Any similarities to any person dead or alive,
events or places are purely coincidental.

This book is dedicated to all of my loyal supporters.

I thank God for you.

Chapter 1

Seantay

“Damn, I could live inside of you,” Raheem said in a breathlessly as he held on to my trembling body.

He rolled over and grabbed a half smoked blunt from the ashtray on the nightstand.

I could barely catch my breath, because we had been making love off and on for hours.

“It must be something in that weed baby,” I was finally able to say. “What? We’ve already used four condoms?”

“Shit, we got eight more,” he said giving me a serious look.

I rolled my eyes. “Yeah right. You won’t have my stuff all worn out.”

He chuckled. “We’ll just get that thang reconstructed. It’ll be like new.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at that fool as he passed me the blunt.

I took a deep pull and relaxed against his rock hard chest.

“Sorry babe, but your home has been foreclosed on,” I joked.

Rah wrapped his strong arms around me. “I’ll just pick the lock.”

“That’s against the law you know. Rape is a heinous crime.” I thought about Dean and shuddered.

“I thought we were talking about a house. That is breaking and entering,” he said playfully.

I laughed. “You know damn well we weren’t talking about a house.” I gave him the blunt back.

“It’s my house.” He took a pull and suddenly we were both quiet.

Was he thinking about Dean too? Then my mind drifted back to Avery’s crazy ass. After that it was on to Nafis. Rah must’ve been the only sane man that I knew other than my father. I quickly pushed thoughts of my chaotic past to the side. Since my successful fashion show five and a half months ago, things seemed to be back to normal.

Nell had given birth to a healthy seven pound baby boy that they named Resean Charles Cory. Charles was Ricky’s father’s name. Seandra was still going strong with Ahmad. Cinnamon Star had wrapped up filming for the season and she was getting ready to start filming for the movie “Nothing Even Matters”. It was a romantic comedy and she had landed the starring role. Her movie debut was very exciting for all of us because it was an all-star cast. I was happy for my sisters.

Reba was also doing well. She was over what had happened with Aric and her relationship with Chang seemed to be going really good. She was preparing to get her BS in the fall and I was proud of her.

As for me, my business endeavors were going tremendously well. I had launched my men’s line, Black Onyx, a month ago as well as my signature fragrance Black Magic. The debut of Black Lace, my lingerie line, was right

around the corner. Although everything else I had ventured into had been successful, I was still a little nervous.

“What’s on your mind baby?” Rah asked breaking into my thoughts.

“Nothing really, just thinking,” I said cuddling up closer to him. “You smell so good.”

“Hmm...I figured you were thinking, but I want to know what you’re thinking about,” he said as he ran his fingers through my tangled hair.

“I was thinking about all that has happened. You know...the past.”

He leaned over and kissed my cheek. “Let the past go baby. All of that stuff is behind us.”

I knew that he was right. “I know,” I sighed. “I just feel like this peace is too good to be true. I got that what next feeling.”

Chills spread over my body and I could feel the goose bumps cover my skin.

“Don’t worry baby. You already know that I won’t let shit happen to you.”

His words were reassuring, but I wasn’t sure if they were enough.

“It’s like I’m traumatized. My parents say that it’s post-traumatic stress disorder. After Avery’s attempt to kill me and my father, I’m just always so...fearful. That’s not like me at all. I’m used to living my life to the fullest and being spontaneous. All of that has changed now.”

“It won’t always be like this babe. Time will take away the fear and you will be able to live your life the way you’re used to. Things will fall into place okay. Besides, you got me right here with you. I ain’t goin’ nowhere baby,” he said. “Now give me a kiss and let’s get some sleep.”

I turned over and kissed his awaiting lips. When we parted, I assumed the spooning position and he threw his arm around my waist securely. I glanced at the clock and noticed that it was after three am. Before I could even close my eyes my cell phone rang. It was on the nightstand right beside the ashtray and I had to lean over Rah to get to it.

“Don’t answer it,” he said groggily not wanting me to move.

“I have to babe. It’s a reason someone is calling me this late.”

He groaned, reached over to get the phone and passed it to me.

I looked at the caller ID and it was my mother’s number.

“Hello.” My blood pressure rose immediately because I knew that it was something.

“Tay,” my mother said in tears.

“Yes mother, what’s wrong?” I asked feeling my own eyes start to burn. My stomach churned in anticipation of something bad.

“He...he had a heart attack...”

* * *

Renell

I was feeding my sweet baby boy when my cell phone vibrated on my bed. We were in the rocking chair and I was glad that the sound didn't make him open his closing eye lids.

Instead of answering it and disturbing his peaceful state, I whispered to a sleeping Ricky.

"Baby," I hissed. "Ricky."

He looked up at me. "What?"

I shook my head. There I was up with our newborn and his ass was sleep like he had just had a damn baby.

"Answer my phone," I whispered. "And keep your voice down."

He picked up the phone and pressed the button. "Hey Tameah," he said softly after looking at the caller ID.

Why the hell was she calling so damn early in the morning?

Suddenly Ricky sat up and was wide awake.

"Ok," he said as he glanced over at me.

I already knew that something was wrong. Was it one of my sisters, or was it my father that time? I could feel the butterflies fluttering in the pit of my stomach. What was it now?

He ended the call. "Your father had a heart attack. He's in the hospital."

I jumped up with my half asleep son in my arms. Shit, I had to remain calm.

“So, what the fuck are we waiting for then? Let’s go!”
I wasn’t whispering anymore.

Resean was wide awake after that, but it didn’t matter. It wasn’t like anybody was going to get any sleep anytime soon. Tears filled my eyes.

“What did she say?” I asked in a panic stricken voice.

Ricky rubbed my arm and spoke to me in a soothing voice. “Lay Resean down and get dressed. We’ll find out what’s going on when we get to the hospital. Okay. I know this is hard, but you have to stay calm baby. Relax.”

I caught my breath and nodded as I laid our son down on the bed. He was right. I had to stay calm.

* * *

Seandra

Ahmad and I were both night owls, so it was no surprise that we were making sweet love in the infinity pool on his sprawling estate.

“Ahhh...baby...yessss...” I closed my eyes and enjoyed the tingles I was experiencing as he delivered multiple orgasms to my body. “Damn...I’m cuming!”

He held on to my waist and each stroke was even more incredible than the last.

“Damn, you feel...soooo good Seandra...fuck...” His breathing was faster and more erratic.

It was obvious that he was close to the edge, so I decided to give him a boost. I tooted my fatty up and threw

that shit back at him. When I glanced back, he was staring at me like he wanted to eat me alive. Shit, I was giving it to his ass, but I felt that dick the whole time. Damn, he was huge and I was trying to show out, but if he didn't come soon I was going to have to stop.

“Arggghhhh...keep doing that shit with your sexy ass...mmm...damn,” he groaned as he held on to my ample hips.

“Pull out baby!” I yelled knowing damn well we shouldn't have been fucking in that damn pool.

It was a spur of the moment thing and we usually used condoms, but we had got caught up in the moment. I knew I loved that man if I was breaking my damn protection rule. Instead of pulling out, he held on to my hips firmly and continued to thrust that incredible dick into my wet, tight heaven.

“Fuck!! Seandra...ohhhh...fuuuuuccckkk!!
Shiiiiiiiiittttt!”

His warm tongue on my neck was a distraction, but it wasn't enough to make me not be pissed at him. When his body started to calm down from his massive nut, I was ready to go off on his ass. He finally pulled out of me and literally collapsed on the pool's top step.

“Wow,” he breathed. “That was fucking incredible.”

I was so mad at him for nutting inside of me. “Why didn't you pull the fuck out?”

“Baby, I couldn't...shit. You were feeling too damn good and it's not like I get to hit it raw every day. The worst

case scenario is that you get pregnant and that's okay with me. I love you Seandra. We'll get married and raise our child if that's the case. Calm down. I *am* your damn man. What the fuck? We just fucked in a pool. You wanted me to cum in the pool?"

"Rather you came in the damn pool than me!" I snapped as I climbed out, grabbed a towel and stormed toward the glass patio doors.

Fuck that. I wasn't messing my body up with no kids right now. He had to wait for that shit. He knew that I had a movie career that I wanted to pursue and kids weren't part of it at the moment. Maybe later, but damn, not while shit was just falling into place for me on the big screen. I would finally be starring in my first feature film. He knew how important that shit was to me.

When I got upstairs to the master bedroom, I took a quick shower and then checked my cell phone. There were four voice mails and six texts from my mother and sisters.

When I read the text and saw that my father was in the hospital after having a heart attack, I nearly collapsed to the floor.

"Baby," Ahmad said as he grabbed me.

I was always passing out over some shit. Damn, a heart attack though? Was he still alive?

"My father is in the hospital," I managed to say.

"Which one?" He asked as I passed him the phone so he could read my messages.

I was out of it. That nigga was going to have to carry me to the damn car.

Chapter 2

Seantay

Raheem and I were the first ones to get to the hospital. My mother was pacing the floor and rubbing her hands together in anxiety. I made my way over to her and pulled her into my arms for a comforting embrace.

“Is he okay?” I asked when I pulled away. I was searching her face for some kind of reassurance.

Raheem gave her a hug next.

“I’m still waiting,” she said just as Renell strolled over to us.

She hugged mother and then me.

Ricky also walked over and hugged us.

“Well,” mother started just as Seandra and Ahmad rushed in.

“Mother, is father okay?” Seandra asked with a look of horror on her face. She was the last one to get there although she lived the closest to the hospital.

The men went to sit down while our mother updated us as best she could.

“I don’t know...” she started.

“What happened?” Renell asked putting her hand on mom’s shoulder.

Mother’s face turned bright red and I just knew that she was going to break down into tears. After what she told us, I found out that she was flushed, not out of grief, but out of embarrassment.

“Well, your father and I were...well...you know...”

We were just staring blankly at her.

“What?” Seandra asked all stupid like when it occurred to me.

“Ewww.” I grimaced when I realized that they had been fucking.

Mother rolled her eyes and continued. “He’s been taking Viagra, but he does not have ED. I told him to stop taking it, but he said he wanted to last... longer...”

Nell cut her off. “Uh, spare us the details mom. So, the heart attack was brought on by the Viagra?”

“Yeah, and I guess the excitement that comes with... you know. We’re not as young as we used to be, although I

still look like I'm thirty five," she bragged although my father was in a hospital's ICU possibly fighting for his life.

"Was he talking when he got here?" I asked anxiously looking out for a doctor to appear.

"Yes," she confirmed with her French manicured hand pressed against her chest. "He had scared the crap out on me when he collapsed. He came to a little while before the paramedics arrived. I was freaking out."

"I bet," I said still frowning my face at what my mother had said led my father to the hospital.

Viagra and he didn't have ED? My father knew that was risky. Men and the things they'd do to fuck just a little bit longer. I never knew my father was a freak like that. I guess that wasn't meant for me to know, but I thought he and my mother had slowed down over the years. True, I figured they got it on from time to time, but damn. He was making sure she never strayed again. Was it worth him possibly losing his life though? I prayed that it wasn't that serious.

Lord, please let this just be a small scare to get him to leave those little blue pills alone. There was no way I could live without my father.

* * *

The doctor finally came out to tell us father's status. She was a tall, attractive woman with pecan brown skin who appeared to be in her mid-forties, or early fifties. Despite how old she seemed to be, her skin was flawless and there was only

a little gray around her temples. Her wavy hair was pulled back into a shoulder length ponytail.

“Beauvois family,” she acknowledged.

We all greeted her with anxious nods, but mother spoke up.

“Yes,” she said as she walked closer to her.

The doctor proceeded to update us. “I’m Doctor O’dell. Mr. Beauvois is stable and resting comfortably. The heart attack wasn’t major, but it wasn’t minor either. In my opinion a heart attack is never a small thing. In his case we’d like to keep him overnight to evaluate him and run a few tests. We have to be sure that his heart is in good condition, and everything is under control. He also has to maintain a healthy lifestyle at home when he is discharged. That means no more Viagra. I don’t know what doctor in his right mind would prescribe that to him.” There was a stern look on her face and I believed she wanted to say more, but she didn’t because we were all standing there.

Mother nodded in agreement. “I told my husband that it wasn’t a good idea Dr. O’dell. Is it possible for us to see him?”

She nodded. “Yes, but it may be a few minutes. He hasn’t been moved to a room yet, but as soon as he is there will be a nurse sent for you.”

“Thank you,” mother said as she shook Dr. O’dell’s hand.

Once the doctor was out of ear shot mother let out a loud sigh of relief. “Thank God.”

“Yes,” I said in agreement before walking off to sit beside Raheem.

“What’s the word?” He asked looking exhausted as hell.

“Babe, why don’t you go home and get some rest. I’ll get one of my sister’s to drop me off,” I said knowing that he wouldn’t be able to stay awake for another second.

He shook his head in protest. “Nah,” he said and grabbed my hand. “I brought you here, so you’re leaving with me. Besides, sleep doesn’t matter to me right now. You do.”

“Aww babe, thank you,” I gushed as I squeezed his hand.

About ten minutes later the nurse came out to tell us we could see father.

* * *

“You gave us a big scare old man,” I said playfully after kissing my father’s cheek.

He was awake, but barely as he fought to keep his eyes open to look at us. There was a nasal prong to aid his breathing with oxygen and an IV hung over his bed. I was glad there weren’t all types of tubes everywhere. Seeing him like that would only have freaked me out.

He grunted. “Sorry baby girl,” he said in a hoarse whisper.

“The doctor said no more damn Viagra daddy,” Seandra scolded him jokingly. “Mother told us all about it.”

He managed to smile as mother held on to his hand.

“You can’t tell him nothing. He’s always been hard headed, but not this time. We’re all going to make sure that you not only throw away the Viagra, but you also eat right and exercise,” Renell added for good measure.

Daddy rolled his eyes then and we all laughed. For the next two hours we all just sat there surrounding him with as much love and joy as possible. Of course he was drifting in and out due to the medication, but most of the time he’d smile, or nod.

Once we all filed out of the room we headed out to the parking lot knowing that the media would be camped outside. Just like we thought cameras were flashing and reporters ran up to us like a stampede. We avoided them like the plague. Before we all dispersed to our cars we hugged and promised to be back later to do it all over again.

* * *

After going to visit daddy the next day, I met Reba downtown at our favorite coffee shop. Starbucks didn’t have shit on Eternity Coffee Roasters. We went there regularly, so the staff was always ready to wait on us hand and foot. I mean, I was a Beauvois, so I was treated like royalty everywhere I went. At that spot, the people who worked there just did that for their regulars anyway. It wasn’t about my wealth and so I liked the place.

I was sipping on a mocha latte with extra almond milk. It was so good that I was about to need a second cup.

Reba was drinking a green tea. I guess getting with Chang had put her on that healthy kick. Well, she could have that bullshit. I lived for my damn caffeine.

“So, how is your dad?” Reba asked as she pulled her lap top out. “You already know it’s all over the internet. It’s even trending on Twitter.”

“He’s doing much better. When we first saw him he was out of it, but now he’s wide awake and talking. They said there are no signs of heart disease. Daddy’s healthy as a horse. Just his over use of Viagra without needing it,” I whispered quietly filling her in on the part that we were trying to keep out of the media.

Reba’s mouth fell open. “Let me find out that Mr. B is a closet freak. Shit, you had to get it from somebody. I always thought Mrs. B was a prude, but she’s probably a closet freak too if he felt the need to use it.”

I scrunched up my nose in utter disgust. “That is the nastiest, sickest mess I’ve ever had the non-pleasure of hearing.”

“Oh, c’mon bitch. You know your parents fuck. How else did the Beauvois divas get here?” She smiled at me and then it faded when something on her computer’s screen caught her attention.

“What is it?” I asked as I peered at the screen.

She was on Media Take Out, so I rolled my eyes and looked away. I hated that stupid, no credibility having ass website from hell. Every time I turned around they had something to say about me and my sisters. The so called

reporters were bi-polar as hell because one minute they were worshipping us and then they were trying to sabotage us with gossip the next. TMZ could kick rocks too for the very same reason.

“Uh...it says that Dean hired a new lawyer and has been awarded an appeal for a new trial. He claims that...”

I cut her off. “He what?” I almost broke my neck trying to see the screen. It was Media Take Out, but the link went to a real news story from the Miami Herald. “Fuck,” I breathed as I read that Dean’s new lawyer was convinced that he would be a free man soon due to new evidence that would prove his innocence.

It felt like my whole world was ending. Not even six months had gone by and Dean had been given the opportunity to be set free. What kind of evidence did they have and would it incriminate any of us? I could only imagine what he had up his sleeve if he did get out. It would be back to the old drawing board, but I was sure that it was going to be worse than before. He would surely be out for revenge.

“You okay?” Reba asked as I sat there in shock and dismay.

“Yes, I’m...I’m fine. That just threw me for a loop. That’s all.”

Reba didn’t even know about what we had done to Dean. I pushed my empty cup aside and thought about LaTisha, Elise and her mother. What did that mean for all of them? Shit, what did that mean for me and Raheem? What if our plan had backfired and all of us ended up locked up for

obstruction of justice and fabricating a crime? Damn, it would be the scandal of the century.

There was no way in hell that I was going to allow that shit to happen. Hell no. I loved being rich, successful and free. My freedom meant more to me than anything and I would stop at nothing to make sure that it was secured. Prison was not for a woman like me and knowing that fact alone had my brain churning. I made a mental note to call Raheem asap.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter. The truth will always come out in the end,” Reba said with a reassuring look on her face.

I gulped and signaled for a waiter to come over to our table.

“Let me get another,” I said flatly.

The tall, slim built white man with dark, oily looking hair and green eyes nodded. He already knew my order because I always got the same thing. In the case of Dean Monross’s rape conviction, I hoped the truth would do just the opposite.

Chapter 3

Seandra

I was still pissed at Ahmad's ass for what he had done. It was a good thing we didn't live together, because all I had to do was keep sending his ass to voicemail. I knew that was a lot easier than having to ignore his fine ass in person. Damn, what the fuck was he up to? I had weeks to find out if I was actually pregnant or not and I was dying to know if that sneaky motherfucker had knocked me up.

I loved my nephew Resean, don't get me wrong. I had nothing at all against beautiful, bouncy babies. The good thing about those gorgeous blessings was the fact that I didn't have any and I wanted to keep it that way. Renell was cut out for that motherhood shit, not me. I was too damn spoiled and selfish. Shit, I was fine with that. I could accept me just the way I was, but something told me that Ahmad wouldn't.

Admitting to him that having children had never been part of my life's plans was going to be hard. I knew for a fact

that he wanted to have children, but I hadn't admitted that I didn't. True, I hadn't told him that I wanted kids either, I just nodded and never really said anything about it. What if I had unknowingly led him to believe that I wanted the same things in life that he did.

When my doorbell rang forty five minutes after Ahmad's last call, I peeked and saw that it was him. I contemplated pretending that I wasn't home. Then my phone started blaring loud as hell. It was Ahmad calling, so there was no point in playing games. Hearing my phone on the other side of the door was a dead giveaway that I was there. I swung the door open with a nonchalant expression on my face.

"Why are you avoiding me?" He asked as he pushed past me and stepped inside without an invitation.

"Uh, and how are you sir?" I asked as I closed the door and then followed him into the sitting room.

He plopped down on the sofa with a weary look on his face. "You would know if you had talked to me when I called."

"Is something wrong?" I quizzed him with a frown.

"How's your father?" He asked being that he didn't go with me back to the hospital.

"My father's fine. Now, what's wrong with you?" I reiterated the question I'd asked before he changed the subject.

He cleared his throat and then sighed before he spoke. "How serious are you about our relationship Seandra?"

His question caught me off guard. Usually it was the woman in the relationship who asked those type of things.

Where the hell was our conversation headed?

I rolled my eyes in annoyance. “Why the hell would you ask me that Ahmad?”

“Because you act like the world ended when I came inside you. I’m your damn man. I want us to get married one day and have...”

I cut him off. “One day...but not right now. Besides, marriage should come first.”

“Nell and Ricky have a son and they’re not married yet,” he objected.

“That’s them. I’m not Nell and you’re not Ricky. Besides, they’ve been together longer,” I pointed out.

“We’ve known each other longer, so that counts for something.”

He was really frustrating me at that point, so I rubbed my temples and closed my eyes. I had to relax and try to get through our little disagreement without pissing him off too much.

“Look baby, I really don’t want this to turn into an argument okay. What is done is done now. I was pissed off then, but I’m over it now. I’m probably not even pregnant okay. How about we just cross that bridge when we get there? Let’s not fight.” Little did he know, but I had already taken a Plan B. It was just a matter of waiting to see if that joker had worked.

His features seemed to relax when I told him that I was over it. I really wasn’t, but I was willing to let it go...for now. There was no way I was letting him up in my snatch raw

again. Hell nah. I didn't take birth control because I didn't want the hormones to interfere with my body. In my opinion I felt that condoms were enough. With how Ahmad was talking and acting lately, I had to make an appointment to get some pills or something. He was not going to impregnate me before I became a movie star. I had dreams of blowing up, but not because I was with child.

“Alright baby. You know that I do want to marry you and have a family. I respect that you want to wait until after we're married and settled into our lives. If I have to choose, I'd rather you be ready to be a mother. I don't want to force that on you. I know how important it is for you to advance in your career. It is cool sexy. We have enough time.”

He stood up and pulled me into his strong, hard body for an embrace. I melted into him as he kissed the top of my head and then my lips.

“I love you,” he declared as he stared into my eyes to let me know the depth of his words.

“I love you more,” I returned before kissing the tip of his nose.

He smiled and then pulled a gold foil square from his pocket. I couldn't help but laugh as he winked at me.

“Can I make it up to you? I promise to be good and keep it on.”

I glanced over at the Magnum condom wrapper and a sly grin stretched across my face. As I sexily bit my bottom lip, I grabbed his hand and led him up the stairs.

* * *

I was lounging by the pool allowing the sun's rays to kiss my mango, oil enriched skin, when the sound of a loud crash caused me to open my eyes. The whine of a car's alarm followed, which made me jump up from my seat to see what the hell had happened. I entered my house through the glass patio doors and made my way to the front door. As I pulled it open I noticed that a dark blue Audi had crashed into my Benz.

“What the fuck!” I screamed knowing damn well I should've parked my car in the garage.

I had even thought about doing it when Ahmad left, but decided against it because that good sex had me lazy as hell. Without a second thought I ran over to the wreckage yelling in a rage.

“Are you crazy? You ran into my fucking car! Can you drive you idiot? What the hell! I'm going to sue your drunk ass!” I was ranting and raving like a mad woman as I watched the smoke rise from the Audi's hood.

The houses in the gated community I lived in were spaced out for miles, but I figured the person who had hit my car lived out there somewhere. Maybe they had got drunk or high before going home. It was only a little after four pm, so it was pretty early to be fucked up. Rich, pompous bastard.

After all of the noise I was making, the person in the car still hadn't got out. As a matter of fact, as I stared into the tinted windows, I could see the person slouched over the steering wheel. That's when I decided to see if the door was unlocked. Maybe he, or she needed some help.

My heart was beating in my ears as I grabbed the driver door's handle. It was unlocked, which was a good thing. As I opened it, I noticed that it was man driving and no one else was in the car.

“Are you okay?” I asked feeling his wrist for a pulse.

He was alive, but appeared to be unconscious. I moved his head back from the steering wheel gently and noticed that his nose was bleeding and his eyes were closed.

“Can you hear me?” I asked slapping his cheek gently.

I could tell that he was a very good looking man who was probably in his mid-twenties. His skin was chestnut brown and smooth, with a tiny splash of freckles across his prominent nose. He had nice, full lips and with his eyes closed I could see that he had long, beautiful lashes. It wasn't the time to admire his features, so I tried my best to get him to respond.

“I'm going to call an ambulance for you okay,” I said quickly forgetting about the fact that he had rammed into the back of my luxury vehicle.

At the moment it was more important to get him some help. Apparently he had crashed into my car for a reason. There were no other cars on the lone road and I figured maybe he had been under the influence of something.

I ran into the house to get my cell phone and dialed 911 before rushing back to the man. At that point he was still unconscious.

“911 what is your emergency?” The dispatcher asked.

“Uh, a man just slammed into my car while I was sitting by my pool. He is unconscious, but I don’t think it was just the accident. It’s something else going on so the paramedics have to hurry,” I explained as quickly as I could.

“Okay, what is the address where you are?” She asked.

I hesitated knowing that once the paramedics came it was going to be pandemonium. Still, he needed help, so I relented and ran down my address. When she asked for my name, I hung up. The man looked familiar as hell and as his eyelids fluttered open, I knew exactly who he was.

Chapter 4

Renell

“No mother, I do not want to have my wedding in the Hamptons. Neither of us want an extravagant wedding. Just a private ceremony on Ricky’s secluded part of the beach. All white with beautiful flowers and bare foot bridesmaids. I want simple,” I told my mother for the hundredth time.

She was determined for my wedding to be as extravagant as she could make it.

“Well, if that’s what you want. I was just thinking we could fly everybody out to our estate in the Hamptons and make it the social event of the year.” I could hear the disappointment in her voice. “If you want simple, simple you shall have my dear.” When she said that her tone was sarcastic.

I sighed and tuned my attention to the baby monitor that sat on the glass coffee table in front of me. Ian was quiet and I kind of wished he would cry so I could make up some excuse to get off the phone.

“What is my little munchkin man up to?” Mother asked referring to her grandson. For some reason she wouldn’t call him that. I figured it made her feel old to be a grandmother.

“He’s asleep,” I said as I grabbed the remote control and turned to CNN.

“Give him some kisses from his Glam Ma.”

I laughed. “You’re a trip. Why can’t you just be a traditional grandmother?”

“Because I’m *not* a traditional grandmother,” she said and then let out a laugh of her own.

“When are you going back to the hospital?” I asked knowing that she wasn’t going to leave father’s side for too long.

“I’m actually on my way there now. As much as I love my own bed, I think I’m going to spend the night perched right there by his side. Your father is going to be okay, so I want you all to tend to your own lives and let me take care of him. He knows that the three of you love him. Don’t worry. They’re going to discharge him tomorrow. All of his tests look fine.”

“Good. The old man had me worried for a minute there,” I admitted right before my baby boy started wailing.

“I will call you back mother. Resean is up and ready to be fed.”

“With his little cute, chubby self. Okay, well I just got to the hospital. You have to bring him over tomorrow. It would be good for your dad to see him,” she suggested.

As I made my way up the stairs to the nursery, I agreed, “Okay. That sounds great. How about we all just have dinner tomorrow.”

“Sounds like a plan honey. I will call you as soon as your father gets settled back in tomorrow.”

“Give him my love.”

“Sure thing,” she said before hanging up.

I picked my cranky baby up out of his crib and cuddled his softness into me as I descended the stairs. He cooed and reached out to touch my face as I warmed his bottle full of formula and Gerber oatmeal. He absolutely loved that stuff.

When I was comfortable in my favorite recliner and Resean was feasting on his evening meal, I saw Dean Monross on the television screen. I leaned over to grab the remote and turned the volume up as I held my son’s bottle with the other hand.

“Dean Monross’ lawyers claim that he was framed by the family of the alleged victim and has been granted an appeal for a new trial. This means that the underage woman who claims that he raped her will be subjected to testifying once again. If you think the first trial was sensational, you haven’t seen anything yet. It’s going to be a three ring circus. Back to you in the studio...”

I grabbed my cell phone and called Seantay.

* * *

Since having my son, I mostly worked from home, but I had to go into the office. We were having an important meeting to discuss an ad proposal for a new client. It was late,

but I planned to keep it short and sweet. When I stepped inside the building, I could feel the tension in the air and could instantly tell that something wasn't right.

When I whipped around the corner, I ran right into the barrel of a gun. With my hands up in front of me, I instantly paused and focused in on the gunman. He was a tall, white man with a stocky build, black wire rimmed glasses and a five o' clock shadow.

"Grady? What are you doing?" I asked feeling my body trembling from the thought of losing my life in that way.

"Why the fuck did I get fired?" He asked with the handgun firmly in his grasp.

My eyes hadn't even registered that he had tied up my assistant and about a dozen other employees. They were all sitting on the floor in a circle with duct tape over their mouths.

"Uh...look, I can explain..."

"Shut up you rich, silver platter bitch! All of us don't have it like you. I have a mortgage, a wife and kids to take care of!"

The truth was that Gary had once been a good, solid part of the structure that held my business together. He was the Vice President of Sales and was making big money and bonuses because he was a real grinder. After the success came, his performance at work started to decline. It was later found out that he was strung out on cocaine and was also a heavy drinker. Sometimes when he came in to work he reeked of booze. His numbers started to drop drastically and after his wife left with the kids a few months ago, he really hit rock

bottom. After his wife got him arrested for threatening her with a gun that was it. He had to go. He was mentally unstable and was becoming a liability for me and my business. I fired him a little over a week ago.

“You already know why you were fired Gary. It’s not like you didn’t get a great severance package.” I tried to reason with him by pointing out that he had got a healthy pay out from me just so he would leave quietly.

“Severance package my ass!” He snapped before hitting me in the head with the butt of the gun.

The blow made me lose balance and almost black out for a minute, but I managed to stay on my feet. Why the hell did he want to hurt me over a damn job? It wasn’t like I had just thrown him out there on his ass. He had enough money to take care of himself and his family while he got help for his issues. It wasn’t my fault he was probably spending that money on alcohol and drugs.

“I have a son and I’m getting married soon. Please. Think about what you’re doing.” Tears stung my eyes and then slid down my cheeks. My head was throbbing and I reached up to feel the blood oozing from an open wound.

“Fuck that shit bitch! I don’t give a damn about your bastard son, or that monkey you’re going to marry! I should’ve known better than work for some black, entitled bitch who doesn’t deserve anything that was handed to your ass! Shit, it’s bad enough that you’re a woman in a man’s world! This business is going to go to shit because you’re black and you’re a woman! That’s already a recipe for disaster!” As he yelled I could feel his nasty ass spit hit me in my face.

It was crazy because when he worked for me I had no idea he was a racist, sexist pig. I thought about my baby, my family and the man that I loved with all of my heart. All I knew was I had to make it back to them. What Grady had just said to me was fucked up, but I knew better. Nothing in my life had been given to me. Shit, I worked hard as hell and busted my ass to get to where I was.

“Look, Grady, this is not about me, my money, my color or my sex. You’re standing here with a gun on me because I fired you. Think about it. You used to work for me and I hired you back then for a reason. It has to make sense that I wouldn’t have fired you just to be evil, or some spoiled rich bitch; which I’m not. You lost your job because I felt you needed time to get yourself back to the Grady that I knew. What if...”

“Stop trying to butter me up and insult me at the same time you nigger bitch! I’ll kill everybody in here right before I kill you and then kill myself. Shit, what the fuck do I have to lose right? I’m sitting here with a gun on Renell Beauvois. One of the richest women in the world. You can’t even make sure that my kids are taken care of while I’m alive. Maybe they’ll get what they deserve if I’m dead, but I’m taking all of you motherfuckers to hell with me!”

The empty look in his eyes told me that he was no longer himself. He was just a shell; a reflection of the man he once was. There was no life there anymore and it was as if his soul had escaped into oblivion. Mental illness was something that was so real in the lives of so many people. If there was a way for Grady’s life to be spared for him to get the help he needed, I was for that. Still, my life was hanging by a thread. It

was more important for me to return to the ones I loved. The question was how with that damn gun in my face and a crazy man who was making threats on my life?

I felt that I had to keep trying to reason with him, so I continued. “Grady, I’m sorry okay. Nancy and your children love you. They wouldn’t want you to throw away your life for them. I will make sure they are taken care of. You don’t have to die for that. How about I set up an account for Greta and Adam. I will make sure they are well taken care of for the rest of their lives, but you don’t have to kill anybody. It’s not worth it Grady. You have made your point and I understand. Just let me help you, please.” I started into his eyes and pleaded with him silently.

As I looked around at the teary eyes of my employees, my heart sank even lower. Not only did I owe the ones I loved, but I owed them too. None of them deserved the wrath of a disgruntled ex-employee of mine. They were all excellent at their jobs and that was why they were still there. They had families and loved ones, so it was my mission to make sure that they made it home to them too.

Grady stared me down with pure malice in his eyes. He did not intend for me to make it out of there alive. Shit, his plan was to make sure that everyone inside that room was dead, including himself.

He shook his head and pointed the gun at the circle of people that I saw at work every day. They were all crying, well, except for this guy named Brock who worked in the mail room. He was a young, extremely handsome, brown haired, blue eyed recent college graduate. He kind of reminded me of

Stephan from Vampire Diaries, but with ocean blue eyes instead of brown. There was a look on his face that let me know he was trying his best to come up with something.

We locked eyes and then he quickly looked away. The whimpers of the women who were sobbing as they sat there on the floor with their wrists tied with ligatures and their mouths covered filled the space around us. The duct tape didn't stop the sound of their cries and it tore at my soul.

“Who should I shoot first?” He asked looking around the circle as he rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Hmmm, who got on my nerves the most?”

I couldn't believe him. “Grady, please...don't...”

He turned to face me with the gun pointed at my chest. “You don't have a heart do you?” His hair was stuck to his forehead because the adrenaline rush had him sweating. It was cool in the room, so the sheen of sweat on his face wasn't from being hot.

“I do have a heart Grady and that's why I don't want anyone to die. Not even you. It doesn't matter what you say or think, I want you to be alive and well for your children.”

“You don't give a damn about me or my children Miss Beauvois. All you give a damn about is yourself and your business. This isn't about them.” He waved the gun around before pointing it at me again. “This shit is about you.”

Yeah, I needed to keep him talking until I figured something out.

“We can fix your financial situation Grady, but if you kill someone we can't bring them back. That can't be fixed. If

you die your children are left without a father and they need you.” I stared up at him and watched as he lowered the gun and started pacing back and forth.

“Shit! Shut the fuck up bitch before I shut you up!” The anger that came from each word made me shudder in fear. He wasn’t pointing the gun at anyone anymore and I watched as Brock slowly stood up from his sitting position. Before Grady knew what was going on Brock had his hands around his throat. He had got loose somehow and as he spun Grady around that gun was just waving around too. I was scared that somebody was going to get shot.

“Get the fuck off me before I start shooting!” Grady managed to say as they wrestled over the gun.

Then there was the sound I was dreading to hear.

Pow! Pow! Pow!

Chapter 5

Seantay

“What the fuck are we going to do Rah?” I asked in a panic as I maneuvered through the thick traffic leaving the coffee shop. Time I got in the car I called to tell him about Dean’s appeal going through. I was sure that my life couldn’t get any worse.

“Calm down Tay. It’s going to be handled,” he said sounding all calm and collected.

“It’s going to be handled? Is that all the fuck you have to say?” I asked getting more anxious by the minute.

“Baby, look, we’ll talk when you get here. You’re all worked up and we both know what happens when you get worked up when you drive,” he said.

I rolled my eyes and popped off with attitude. “Don’t even go there! Just because I wrecked a few cars and shit...”

He cut me off. “Okay babe. I was just fuckin’ wit’ you now get your ass home so I can give you a full body massage. I want you to know that this shit will be handled okay. Just let it go for now. Tomorrow we’ll come up with something and then we will meet with Elise and her mother okay.”

I sighed. “Alright. I guess.”

“You guess? Are you questioning your man?”

“I’m not questioning you Rah? I just don’t know what to think right now.”

“Then let me do the thinking. I’m here for you babe. There is no way I’m going to let anything happen to you and I mean that, okay. Now get your fine ass home in one piece. I love you ma,” he said sounding all sweet and shit.

I submitted. “Okay baby. I’ll be there in twenty minutes. I love you more.”

Less than ten seconds after I hung up, my phone was vibrating. A smile stretched across my face, but when I looked at the screen it faded quickly. I thought Rah was calling me back, but I didn’t recognize the number, so I didn’t answer. The number flashed across the screen again, warranting a frown to replace the smile I once wore. Who was so hell bent on speaking to me and their number wasn’t in my contacts? I thought about the fact that it could possibly be a business opportunity and opted to answer.

“Seantay Beauvois.”

“Yes, the voice mi been wantin’ to hear for so long,” a deep Jamaican accent roared in my ear.

Ahh shit, Nafis. How the fuck did he get my number again? I'd changed it since the last time he'd called me. My heart dropped and I felt dizzy all of a sudden. Oh my God. What if he was free? I mean, it wasn't like he had called me from a phone in jail. He had called me straight through, so it had to be a cell phone.

“What do you want?” I asked trying not to sound as intimidated as I felt.

“I want you.” He chuckled. “Ya know mi always wanted the bad, little rich girl wit' da sweet, juicy pum pum”.

I rolled my eyes and felt them suddenly burn with fresh tears. How the hell did my luck have to turn out so bad? I thought I have got rid of Nafis and Dean, but apparently I hadn't. It seemed to me that things were about to get so damn out hand. I'd already escaped death multiple times. Maybe I was destined to be destroyed one way or the other.

“You disgust me. I regret the day I met you. I wish I had never let you touch me! Leave me the hell alone! I don't want to see you, or hear you voice, so don't fucking call me anymore!” I yelled trying my best to convince him that I wasn't afraid of his ass.

He let out that menacing chuckle again. “Don't worry sexy one. Mi not home just yet muh dear, but mi soon come. One of mi flunkies decided that mi freedom was more important than dem right before mi go to trial and took the charge for mi. Mi be out in a few weeks and ya pretty face is the first one mi wanna see.”

A chill traveled down my spine and the tears were really falling by the time he finished talking. I felt nauseas as

hell, so I pulled over. The panic that had settled in had me shaking like a leaf on a tree. I dropped the phone on the ground as I leaned over to let all of the coffee I'd consumed rise and escape from my throat. By the time I finished throwing up my throat felt raw. I picked up my phone and grabbed a bunch of napkins from the dash. After cleaning my phone and hands with sanitizer, I picked up another napkin and wiped the tears from my eyes. It looked like me and my man were about to go to war.

“Ya dere beautiful?” He asked sounding like he was smiling from ear to ear.

“Yes,” I said trying to sound like I was in control. Shit, I was sure that he knew better. Damn, it was just my luck to find out that Dean and Nafis were both potentially being released back into civilization to ruin my fucking life.

“Ya sound like ya got sick at the mention of mi freedom. Why you not happy for mi? Now mi can find da chink mufucka who put mi here.”

“What are you talking about Nafis and why the hell are you telling me?” I asked playing dumb. As much as I wanted to hang up, I just couldn't. I needed to know what he knew.

“Mi got a big surprise for ya, okay sweetie?”

I swallowed hard and finally steered my car back on the road. That was only because I didn't want Rah to worry. At that point I didn't know how my weak legs were able to even press the gas. That shit had me fucked up. Then add the fact that Dean could be possibly getting out too. Why the hell would somebody take the blame for what Nafis was locked up for.

“He knew how bad mi wanna kill the mufucka dat set mi up, so he said the shit was his. Now mi wan stop at nuttin’ to make sure mi murda dat Chinese bati boy!” It was like he had read my mind.

There was no way he’d ever figure out who Chang was. How the hell would he know? His delusions of grandeur were really off the charts. If and when he got out, he wasn’t going to see my pretty ass. Hell to the no. I would just pacify him for the moment, change my number again, hire mad security and keep my distance from his crazy, psycho ass.

“Well, mi see ya soon beautiful.”

Just like that he hung up.

* * *

By the time I crossed the threshold of my downtown loft, almost forty five minutes had passed since I’d talked to Rah. He walked up to me with a worried look that had caused lines to form on his forehead. When he saw the look on my face, he pulled me into his arms and held me tightly.

“Damn babe, I told you not to worry about Dean... it’s...”

I cut him off. “Nafis called me.”

He pulled away from me and stared deep into my eyes. “Dread called you?” He asked as if he didn’t hear me correctly.

“Yes, he fucking called me and said that one of his flunkies claimed the coke that was found in his crib right before his trial and he will be getting out in a few weeks. Not only that, but he also said he is going to kill the chink who set

him up. Shit, Dean is the least of our fucking worries right now baby,” I said in all one breath.

“Damn!” Rah yelled before running a hand over his smooth, close haircut. “I’m sorry baby.” He pulled me close to his hard chest again. “I’m gonna handle all of this shit.”

The look on his face told me that he didn’t know how yet.

“This is so crazy Rah. I thought all of that shit was over. After Avery was killed I thought it was all really over and now it feels like it is all just beginning. I have too much to lose baby. Shit, *we* have too much to lose. We have to do something and we have to do it fast.” I was desperate to make sure that Nafis and Raheem stayed behind bars as long as possible. I didn’t give a damn how much money I had to pay.

“Look, Nafis was just fucking wit’ you baby. There’s no way he can just get out of jail like that. Either way the drugs were found in the house while he was there. Dean isn’t out. It’s a possibility that he could be found guilty again. Have you heard anything from Elisa or her mom?” He asked narrowing his eyes at me like he was in deep concentration.

“No...which is surprising. I’m sure they saw the news,” I said feeling another anxiety attack about to come on. “Look babe, I have to go brush my teeth okay. When Nafis called I threw up.”

Without explaining any further, I simply made my way to my bedroom’s bathroom. As I brushed my teeth I thought about what Dean and Nafis being free meant for me and Rah’s future. They were both threats and although Avery had been eliminated, I still had them to worry about. If they were dead

too, it would all be over. When I gargled with some minty flavored mouth wash I had it all figured out. We would just have to hire someone to take them both out. Then it occurred to me that even that plan could backfire.

Chapter 6

Seandra

“How are you feeling?” I asked sitting beside Pierre Reed’s hospital bed.

“Better. I’m so sorry about your car,” he said with that beautiful accent.

As I stared into his brownish green eyes, I couldn’t help but sigh. He was a very sexy male supermodel who was from Paris, France. That was my favorite city other than Miami. Of course he was a black man and he was beautiful. There was no other word to describe him.

“Don’t worry about the car. The insurance will cover it,” I said with a flirtatious smile.

That wasn’t what I was saying at first, but that was before I knew that *he* had slammed into my car. Damn if I wasn’t a fan of his. He was famous beyond words and I had no idea that he lived less than ten miles from me. I had followed the ambulance to the hospital in my Range Rover just to make sure that he was okay. I didn’t know what had led to the accident at that time, but I was damn interested.

“I’m epileptic,” he had explained when he first opened his eyes. “I had a seizure and so this is the result.”

His voice was weak, but I reassured him that help was coming.

“I called the paramedics and they’ll be here in no time,” I explained just as the sound of sirens approached.

He nodded before passing out again.

When he got to the hospital he was still unconscious, but after they treated him he was just fine and would be discharged soon. For some odd reason, I was intrigued by him. There was something about him that drew me closer and although Ahmad was calling me I couldn't answer. I wanted to know more about Pierre.

"I insist on paying for the damage Miss Beauvois. I am a huge fan of yours," he said with a smile on his handsome face. "I wouldn't want to piss off the Beauvois family."

I couldn't help but laugh. "You can't help what happened Pierre. You had a seizure. Of course I was pissed at first, but that was before I knew about your medical condition."

"I hadn't had a seizure in a years and I must admit that I haven't been taking my medication. It was like I was hoping I was cured or something. Well, now I know better," he said as he sat up in the hospital bed.

"So, you don't live far from me. I didn't know that you had permanently moved to the US," I said as if I knew him. We had only met once over six years ago at a charity benefit in New York City. There was an instant attraction, but due to the distance neither of us acted on it. It was just a little mild flirting and that was it.

"I've been in Miami for over a year now. I just moved into my new house about a month ago. Never in a million years did I think we'd meet again this way. I knew we'd see each other again, but not like this."

I managed to smile despite his situation. From the look of things he didn't have any major injuries. His nose had

stopped bleeding of course and the mild bruising on his face didn't take away from his features.

“Really? Well, I'm just glad you're okay.” I smiled back. “Uh, I have to go. I hear they're discharging you tomorrow.”

“They are, so can I have your number?” He asked boldly. “I'd love to keep in touch with you.”

As fine as he was, I knew that would be a bad idea.

“I'm sorry, but I'm in a relationship and you would definitely be a temptation,” I admitted.

“Wow,” he said with a disappointed look on his face. “I thought we'd connected. We had a connection when we first met and we do now. It's a reason I slammed into your Mercedes today.”

The anxious look in his eyes made me flinch.

“It just happened Pierre. I'm glad that you're okay, but I have to go.”

He grabbed my hand in a gentle, yet firm grip.

“Please stay,” he pleaded with those sexy eyes. “I don't have anyone here in the States.”

“What about your girlfriend...”

“Nicki and I aren't together anymore.”

I couldn't stand that little stick figure Victoria Secret's Model. She was Australian with blonde hair and blue eyes.

“Ohhh...ok...” I cleared my throat and sat back down.

“Besides, I prefer curvier women anyway,” he said with a smile that displayed a sexy dimple in his left cheek.

I couldn't help but smile back, because I was damn sure curvy. Then I thought about Ahmad.

“I'll stay for a little while, but I do have a man and it wouldn't be a good look if the paparazzi caught me leaving.”

Pierre didn't take his penetrating eyes off me. “I already know about your man and I don't care about that.”

“I'm starting to wonder if you ran into my car on purpose.” I laughed, but he didn't.

“Either that, or it was meant to happen,” he stated as he stared up at me in longing

I cleared my throat. “I'm in a relationship.”

He smiled. “You don't have to keep saying that. I'm aware of the fact *mon cherie*.”

Did he just call me his sweetheart in French? Damn that accent.

We started talking some more and we got on the subject of having children. I couldn't recall how.

“That was why Nicki and I broke up. She was ready for children and marriage and I wasn't. I mean, she wasn't really my type. I liked her and we were dating, but like I said before, I like my women a little more...exotic and with some weight on them. I do want kids one day. Maybe when I'm in my mid-thirties and after I do the things I want to do, I'll be ready for fatherhood. Why rush it you know?” He asked with a shrug of his shoulders.

Oh how I knew. He just didn't know how close I was to that very dilemma.

"Hmm, yeah. I understand that. Everything in due time," I agreed trying my best not to keep staring at his fine ass.

Ohh, it was too damn hard.

As I tried to ignore my physical attraction to him, he continued to talk.

"I'm really hoping to get used to being on this side of the pond. It's kind of like a culture shock in a way." He let out a chuckle.

"Hmm. I love France. Do you go home often?" I asked remembering when Maurice and I had gone to France. We French kissed at the top of the Eiffel Tower. As doggish as he was, it was a romantic trip.

"I've been home a couple times. My folks love the States, so they've visited as well, but for the most part, I'm alone."

The look on his face made my heart go out to him. "Well, maybe you need to make some friends. My..." I cleared my throat. "My boyfriend Ahmad is close to your age. Maybe the two of you can hang out. I have a few girlfriends I can introduce you to."

He gave me an intense glare. "No thanks, I'm interested in you. Not your boyfriend, or your girlfriends for that matter."

I took in a big gulp and gave him a wide eyed look. It was probably not a good idea for me to stay there, but it was

like I was plastered to my seat. There was no way I was going to risk my relationship for a simple physical lust. Besides, the man was in a hospital bed. There should not have been anything sexy about that, but he was still sexy as hell. After all that I had been through with Ahmad, Pierre wasn't worth it.

As I stood up I let him know that I had to leave. "Look. I really do have to go Pierre. Uh..."

"I apologize if I offended you...really," he said quickly as he pleaded for me to stay with his gorgeous eyes.

Instead of giving in that time, I stuck by my guns. "I'm sorry Pierre, but I really do have to leave. Maybe I'll see you again. Take care of yourself," I said sincerely.

He nodded and then pursed his lips together. "Okay and you will see me again. I'll make sure of that."

I didn't turn back around as I left his room. When I got outside there were reporters bombarding me with questions.

"Was Pierre under the influence?" A short, blonde haired woman asked thrusting a microphone in my face.

I brushed right past her and the rest of the media mob before rushing to my Range. Once I was buckled in I high tailed out of there. There was no way I was going to be suddenly connected to Pierre. The sound of my phone ringing made me reach inside my purse to answer it. It was Ahmad.

"What's going on Seandra?" He asked sounding all angry and shit.

"What do you mean what's going on?" I asked surprised by his tone.

“I just saw the news. Pierre, the model ran into your car today and you were at the hospital. Why?” He asked.

“Baby, that shit was random.” I sighed and then explained further. “He lives a few miles down the road. On his way home he had a seizure because he’s epileptic. I followed him to the hospital to make sure that he was okay. It’s no biggie. He’s fine and I’m on the way home. It isn’t like I knew him before now.” I let out a nervous laugh following the little lie I had told.

He cleared his throat. “I’m on my way to your house.” His voice was stern, but I sensed some insecurity.

“Baby, it was nothing. I promise,” I reassured him that Pierre was not an issue. “Damn, don’t you trust me?”

“Yes honey, I trust you. See you soon,” he said and hung up.

I just shook my head as I placed my cell in the cup holder. There was just something about Ahmad that was starting to get under my skin lately. It was like he had was trying desperately to hold on to me. Pierre wasn’t a threat to our relationship, but for some reason he thought he was. As much as I thought I wanted him at first, I was starting to question my feelings. Was Ahmad really the man for me?

* * *

When I got home Ahmad’s car was already parked in front of my house. I let out a breath before turning the car off. He had a key, so I knew that he was inside. I parked in the garage and went inside to face the music. As I closed the door behind me, I could smell the sweet fragrance of roses. The

scent was so strong and I realized why when I saw my living room full of red roses.

I couldn't help but smile. "Baby," I gushed.

"They were just delivered," he grinned. "You wasn't here, so I figured I'd run over to make sure you got them."

"They're beautiful," I said looking around in amazement. There had to be at least two hundred roses arranged in beautiful vases

"Not nearly as beautiful as you are," he said as he slowly walked over to me. When he was finally in front of me he cupped my chin in his strong hand and leaned over to kiss me.

I closed my eyes feeling the sparks that still existed between us. Pierre was a distant memory.

"Now, there was something I didn't get to do earlier," he said in a deeply seductive voice.

"What's that?" I asked as he wrapped his arms around my waist.

He lifted me up off my feet and I wrapped my legs around his back.

"I was so busy trying to feel you that I didn't taste you first. Can I taste you now?" He stared into my eyes as he asked. The look on his face was intense and full of undeniable passion.

"Do you think I'm going to say no?" I asked before I kissed him deeply.

“Even if you did I was gonna eat that pussy anyway.”
He softly kissed my neck and carried me up the stairs.

Chapter 7

Renell

My heart was still beating a mile a minute when the police arrived. Brock had been the hero of the day. He and Grady had wrestled with the gun, but fortunately the bullets had hit Grady when it went off and not Brock. When Grady's body hit the floor we were all relieved. Brock immediately untied everybody as I called 911.

“Are you okay?” Brock asked me with a look of concern on his face.

They had already wheeled Grady's body away and everyone had been questioned and released. I was on the way to my car on shaky legs. All I wanted to do was get home to my son and fiancé. Just knowing that I was alive at the moment was enough to make me believe that God was real. The way I saw it, I should've been dead.

“Yes, considering what happened I am more than okay. Thank you so much Brock. You risked your life for us.” I was really grateful and didn’t know how to repay him.

He nodded. “I had to do something,” he said. “You drive home safely now.”

“I will,” I said before heading toward my black Navigator. I had traded the Escalade in.

Once I was in the driver’s seat, I pulled out my phone to call Ricky. Resean was at home with the nanny and my next call would be to check on him. When I heard Ricky’s voice I busted into tears.

“Nell, what’s wrong?” He asked. “What is it baby? Talk to me.”

“Ricky, I’m just so glad to hear your voice baby,” I sobbed. “Are you at the office?”

“Yes, but I’m about to be on my way home. I have the feeling you need me right now,” he said knowingly.

I closed my eyes and tried to calm down. “Okay,” I breathed “I do...I do need you. I’ll tell you all about it when you get home.”

“Are you going to be alright baby? Why don’t we talk until you get there? I can tell that something happened, but if you want to wait to tell me about it, that’s fine. Let’s talk about something else for now. Okay?”

I agreed with a nod like he could see me as I started the SUV’s ignition. “Okay.”

* * *

Of course by the time I got home the situation with Grady was all over the news. It was the hottest thing smoking next to the story of Pierre hitting Seandra's car after having an epileptic seizure. That was all trending right along with the story of Dean's appeal. Damn, it was always something.

Ricky rubbed my feet as I sat on the sofa with Resean in my arms. He was asleep, but I couldn't bear to put him down.

"Do you want me to put him in his crib baby?" Ricky asked in a gentle voice.

"No," I said as I held my baby boy close to my chest. "I want you and him right here with me."

"I'm so sorry that happened to you sweetheart. I wish I had been there to protect you from that coward."

I looked down at my man thanking God for giving me one more chance to have a life with my family. "I'm glad you weren't there."

"How's your father doing?" He asked trying to change the subject.

"He's home now. We were all supposed to do dinner tomorrow, but with everything that's going on, we postponed it until the weekend. Instead of Diva's Day we're doing dinner with the folks."

"Glad your old man's doing better."

"Hmm, me too."

"How's Seantay taking the news of Dean getting a new trial? I know she had some problems with him in the past."

“Not good. She says she knows that he’s guilty and takes it very personally that he’s getting a new trial. I just hope that young woman is okay after having to go through the trauma again.” I shook my head.

Ricky let out a sigh. “Everything is going to be fine baby. We’re getting married in two months and then we’re going to finally take that vacation we both need so badly.”

I thought about leaving my baby and my heart sank. There was no way I could leave him after what happened. Ricky gave me a look that told me he could read my mind. That was one of those things that let me know that we were soul mates.

“Baby, Resean will be well taken care of,” he said kneading and rubbing the soles of my feet like a masseuse.

“I just don’t feel right leaving him Rick. You know he’s my first child. I’m going to be protective,” I explained.

“He’s my first and only child too Nell and I do understand that. Believe me. If you want we can take him with us. Would that make you feel better?”

I smiled at the love of my life. “I’ll think about it babe. I mean, who knows how I’ll feel in a couple months right? Who takes a child on their honeymoon?”

He laughed. “Paranoid parents of an only child.”

I couldn’t help but laugh too. “Yeah. I guess you’re right. I’m really paranoid now.”

“Well, just think about it because either way, we’re going to Fiji.”

I closed my eyes and thought about the beautiful, clear turquoise water and white sand. I was from Miami, but Fiji's beaches were on a whole different level of exquisite.

"I'm so ready baby," I said breathlessly. "Mmm, that feels soooo good."

He was still giving my feet the rejuvenation they needed.

"I want to do something else to your body, but you won't put Resean in the crib."

I rolled my eyes at his obvious set up. "Babe," I whined as I buried my nose in my baby's sweet smelling neck. I just loved his fragrant, baby powder scent.

"He will be just fine baby. Let me put him in the crib so I can please you. You deserve it my love."

I reluctantly put Resean in his outstretched arms and waited for him to lay him down in his crib. When Ricky returned, I had an empty feeling. He held me in his arms and soothingly whispered in my ear.

"Relax baby. I'm going to make sure that nothing ever happens to you or our son."

I nodded wanting to feel like he could protect us, but something told me that some things were just beyond his control.

"Why don't we just take advantage of the fact that our son is down for a little while. It's not like we get to enjoy each other that often now," he added as he softly nibbled on my earlobe.

I closed my eyes and enjoyed the sensations that were traveling up and down my spine. Maybe making love to my man would get my mind off of what had happened earlier. When he leaned over to kiss me passionately, I didn't hesitate to grab the back of his head as I kissed him back.

He suddenly pulled away and stared into my eyes. "Damn, I love you." His voice was husky and breathless.

"I love you too Ricky," I uttered with a moan as his hand traveled up my shirt to my already hardened nipple.

As he pinched and twisted it gently, I could feel myself getting wet. When he dipped his head low and took my sensitive nipple into his warm mouth, my body shuddered with desire.

"Damn," I whispered as his moist, hot tongue traveled down to my belly button.

He stared up at me as he got down on his knees and removed my soaked panties. Once they were out of the way he put them up to his nose for a sniff. The look on his face let me know that my aroma was his arousal.

"Mmm, you always smell so good baby," he said spreading my thighs. His hands held them firmly in place as he moved down to clasp my erect clitoris between his soft lips.

His tongue softly flickered across it before he used it along with his lips to suckle ever so gently. I grabbed his head and watched as he pleased me to no end.

"Ahhh...yes...like that Ricky...ohhh baby," I moaned sexily while he stared up at me.

He liked to watch when he ate me out and when we made love. It was something really erotic about seeing the faces that your lover makes when you're giving them the business. Hmm, my man was definitely putting it down and I couldn't contain my reactions.

"Mmmm mmm mmm...so sweet..." he let out a few moans of his own as he really started to get into it.

When he had me spread eagle and his face was literally buried in my pussy, I couldn't take it anymore. He kept slurping my clit over and over and was literally devouring my pussy.

"Rick, I'm about to..." My leg started to shake and my whole body flushed.

"You taste so good," he said in a sexy raspy voice.

One of his hands was cupping my ass and the other one was three fingers deep inside me. He went back to licking, sucking and slurping and my body was trembling with orgasmic spasms.

"Shiiiiitttt!!! Ahhh...fuck...yessss Rick...ohhhh... mmmm." After I came he didn't let up. He just kept right on eating me out all good and I just laid there and let him take me there over and over again.

By the time he was done my body felt as light as a feather and relaxed. Damn, I had really needed that shit.

"Oh my God....damn..." I was out of breath when he kissed my lips.

"You taste so good. I didn't want to stop," he said between kisses.

“Mmmm, now it’s my turn.” I licked my lips as I went for the bulge in his pants.

He smiled and caressed my face lovingly. “You’re the sexiest woman in the whole world. You know that?”

I pulled his nice, thick dick out and stared at the tip. He was already hard as hell and as I took him into my mouth the sound of Resean’s piercing cry interrupted us.

“Fuck!” Ricky cursed with a disappointed look on his face.

I immediately stood up and put my panties back on.

“I’ll take care of you after he settles back down baby. I promise,” I said as I bolted up the stairs.

Ricky just stood there with his hard dick still pointing straight ahead.

“Well, guess I might as well put this thing away,” he mumbled.

I couldn’t help but laugh.

* * *

When I went into the office the next day, things seemed to be pretty much back to normal. Still, the tension from the previous day’s events was apparent in the air. None of us really wanted to talk about it, so we didn’t. We just went on with the daily tasks that were at hand. My plan was to let everyone off for the day, but they weren’t having it. They all insisted on coming to work despite what had happened. Talk about dedication. I didn’t plan to be there for long, but I wanted to personally show Brock my gratitude.

There was an anxious look on his face when he stepped inside my office.

“You wanted to see me Miss Beauvois?” He asked as he passed me my mail.

“Thank you and yes. Please have a seat,” I said as I pointed to the chair right across from me.

He sat down and nodded.

“I know I thanked you yesterday, but I don’t think that was enough. Gratitude does not have a price, but I do know that you’re too qualified to be working in the mail room. I would like to offer you a promotion and a bonus.”

There was a huge smile on Brock’s face and I knew that he was satisfied with my way of showing my appreciation.

“Really? I mean, I did just get my BS a few months ago. I was waiting for this. Thank you so much.” His Adam’s apple bobbed up and down as he spoke.

“You’re welcome. You are now in sales, so I want you to show what you learned in all of those business and economics classes. Soon you may be in management. You have definitely showed that you are a man of action.” I smiled at him as I clasped my hands together on top of my desk.

Brock cleared his throat and then fixed his aqua blue eyes upon mine. His demeanor changed suddenly as he nervously rubbed his hands together.

“You’re right. I *am* a man of action and that’s why I *have* to do this. What happened yesterday further proves that life is too short for regrets.”

When he reached across the desk to grab my hand, I knew where the conversation was headed. There was no way to avoid the inevitable. As much as I wanted him to shut up, he continued with his confession. Before he could protest, I moved my hand out of his reach and waited for the train wreck that was about to happen.

“I’m in love with you. I have been since the moment I laid eyes on you. That was before I even came to work here. There was no way I was going to let Grady take you away from me. You may look at me and think I’m just some young man who is still wet behind the ears, but that’s not the case. I know what I want and that’s you. There’s no way I could let another day go by without telling you how I feel. Please, just think about it. I know that this is overwhelming, but...”

I cut him off before he could embarrass himself any further.

“I’m so sorry Brock, but my feelings are not the same as yours. As you know, I have a child and a fiancée. Our relationship is strictly professional. I am grateful to you for saving my life, but I cannot reciprocate those feelings. Now, let’s forget that you even said any of that if you want to keep your job and your bonus. Okay.” I had agreed to let him keep his job although I knew I should’ve fired him. Still, the fact that he was the office hero made that hard.

He looked hurt, but pulled himself together quickly. There was suddenly a smile on his face, despite the fact that I had rejected him.

“I would like to keep my job. Don’t worry. I’m not some psycho like Grady. I just figured it was a chance worth

taking. I kind of knew in my heart that there was no way in hell I'd be lucky enough to get you. Thank you for everything Miss Beauvois." He stood up and quickly left my office.

After that, I decided that it was time for me to head home. On my way there a feeling of uncertainty washed over me. Had I made a mistake by keeping Brock on board? There was just something about his sudden expression of feelings for me. For some reason I felt uneasy, but obligated to let him keep his job. Something told me I would live to regret it. His claim to not be a psycho made me question just that.

Chapter 8

Seantay

“No, I’m not putting my child through that again,” Angeline said giving me and Raheem a scrutinizing look.

We had decided to meet her at an upscale seafood restaurant in South Beach. Elise was away at Howard University in Washington, DC, but was aware of the fact that Dean was getting another trial.

“But she will have to if we want to avoid any... trouble,” Rah pointed out.

Angeline placed a finger under her chin and stared off into space like she was in deep thought. After letting out a deep sigh she relented.

“I guess you’re right. I just didn’t think it would come to this. I thought we had an open and shut case. I guess it is coming back to haunt us now,” she said as she shook her head.

“If Elisa sticks to what she said before, it should all work out fine,” I said not really believing that myself. I just wanted to make sure that there were no holes in her story to make it look like a lie.

“They say that they have evidence to prove that he’s innocent. Is there any way we can find out what that is, so we’ll know what we’re fighting against,” Elise said looking like she wanted to just throw in the towel at any second.

The stress she’d been under since her husband’s public scandal and Dean’s first trial had taken its toll on her and it was obvious.

I looked up and made eye contact with her. “Money talks, so getting that information is actually the easiest part. Believe me Angelina, I’m on it.”

She managed to smile as she put on a pair of black, oversized sunglasses. “I have to go, but please keep me posted on that.”

“I will,” I agreed to her back as she sashayed away.

Rah squeezed my hand and gave me a quick peck on the cheek.

“It’s going to be okay baby. Everything’s going to work out,” he whispered in my ear reassuringly.

“I hope so...” Even as I said that, I didn’t think it would.

* * *

Later on that evening I was lounging on the balcony overlooking the beautiful view of the city with LaTisha. We were taking shots of coconut 1800 and smoking a fat ass blunt. It was a much needed session because we were both feeling the pressure about Dean’s new trial.

“I can’t believe that bullshit though Tay!” LaTisha yelled as she flicked ashes from the blunt into the crystal

ashtray that sat on the patio table.

“Me either. It hasn’t even been that long. Where the fuck did he get the money for a lawyer? I thought Elisa got most of his estate and shit,” I said before taking another shot of the sweet liquor.

“Hmm, I read on Media Take Out that he has a fan club of women who had set up a Fundme.com account to raise money for him. Shit, I heard that he got almost a hundred stacks the first month.” She shook her head. “Thirsty ass bitches trip me out. They’d do anything for a damn man. If one of our asses were locked up we’d just be shit outta luck. Ain’t no niggas goin’ be lined up to devote all that time and effort to get us out. I mean, your folks got you, but the average chick would rot in fuckin’ prison.”

I sighed and took the blunt from her outstretched hand. As I took a pull, I heard the glass patio doors open and close.

“Baby, do you and Tisha want something to eat? I know you haven’t had anything since lunch with Angelina,” Raheem said as he made his way closer to me.

“I am a little hungry babe. Are you going to cook?” I asked rubbing my stomach for emphasis.

He let out a chuckle. “Nah, I was going to get our personal chef to do it.”

“Well, that is what I’m used to,” I said giving him the eye.

“I know,” he said taking the blunt from me. He took a couple pulls and continued. “So, what do you ladies have a taste for?”

“Uh, I don’t know,” LaTisha said. “What can you cook?”

“If you can say it, I can cook it.”

I shook my head at my man. He was always bragging about what he could do.

“I’m really not that hungry, so something light will be good. How about a tossed salad. There’s some Romaine lettuce in there. Make sure you add some cucumbers, tomatoes, shredded cheese and add some of that grilled salmon we got yesterday. That shit was amazing. Oh and is there still some Balsamic Vinaigrette in there?”

“A whole bottle.”

“Is that cool with you Tisha?” I asked as Rah passed her the blunt.

“Yeah. Sounds good to me.”

Rah went back inside and left us to continue our conversation.

“So,” LaTisha asked with a sly look on her face. “What’s the plan? I know you got one.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “For now just remember what you initially said. I have something in mind that will have the DA like putty in my hands.”

“Word?” The curious look she was wearing told me that she wanted to know exactly what the plan was.

Since she’d been in on that shit with me since day one, I didn’t hesitate to tell her. So far she’d been loyal as hell, so I felt that there was a level of trust between us.

“Damn,” she squealed once the scheme I was going to pull was out in the open. “You think it’s gonna work?”

“I have no idea, but it’s damn sure worth a try.”

Tisha filled our shot glasses and then raised hers for a toast.

“To making sure the past stays locked in the past,” she said clinking her glass with mine.

“I second that one boo.” I took the shot like a champ.

“It has to work Tay, or we’re fucked,” she said all of a sudden sounding skeptical.

I didn’t say anything. All I could do was think about the repercussions of our actions.

* * *

Panic set in as I looked around frantically in the pitch black dark. I couldn’t see anything in front of me, so I started to use my sense of hearing to make observations of my surrounding. There was nothing but the sound of quiet. I had to be in my bedroom, but usually the room was a lot brighter being that I lived in the city. There was also a strong smell of something burning.

When I tried to move my legs, I realized that they were tied up behind me and so were my hands.

“Arrgghh!!” I tried to yell out, but it was muffled by something over my mouth.

I thought about Rah. Where was he? I had fell asleep beside him in a drunk stupor right after LaTisha left.

Something told me that I wasn't in my apartment anymore. Then the smell of smoke got stronger and I could see bright orange embers dancing around me. The fire lit up the room and I could see that I was in a strange place. I was on a bed, but it wasn't my bed in my apartment and Rah wasn't there.

Tears burned my eyes as the flames licked the bedding and then spread quickly. When I looked up I spotted Dean and Nafis walking into the room.

"I wish we could watch that bitch burn alive, but we have to get out of here before the place blows," Dean said with a sly grin on his face.

The flames glowed on their faces making them look like the devils that they were. All I could do was cry and pray. It wasn't like I could move, or plead for them to let me go. Then I thought about my family, Reba and Rah. I wouldn't even be able to say goodbye to them.

"Mi ravished the pum pum while she was out," Nafis said with a cackle of laughter.

That asshole had raped me when I was passed out? If only I could get my hands loose. I was scared, but the fear had brought out the fight in me. I tried to free my hands and ankles, but it was to no avail.

Nafis and Dean just stood there laughing at me as the flames started to get closer. I closed my eyes and prayed harder at that point. There wasn't anything else to do. The flames were on my flesh and the burning sensation made me scream out in agony as the two men stood there with malice in their dark, empty eyes.

“Baby, it’s okay. It was just a nightmare,” I heard Raheem whisper in my ear.

My eyes jerked open and I realized that I had been having a bad dream. The white, sheer curtains swooshed around the opened window. The bright lights from the city casted a glow into the room that illuminated Rah’s face. I could feel the sweat that had accumulated on my body and face from the fear I’d just experienced. Tears also fell to my lips as Rah kissed me softly.

“It’s okay baby. I’m gonna get a wet cloth for your face and something for you to change out of those sweaty clothes,” he said getting up to do what he’d said.

I was still shaking and hadn’t said anything at all. I was just sitting there thinking about how real that damn dream seemed. What if it was a revelation of what was bound to happen? Damn, I had to do something and I had to do it fast. Either that, or I was going to go fucking crazy worrying about what they were going to do to me.

* * *

Two days had passed and Chang finally had something for me and Raheem. The new DA was named Richard Monroe. He was a handsome white man in his mid-fifties. With salt and pepper hair and sexy light brown eyes, he resembled George Clooney. It had been rumored that just like Franklin Williams, he was also a lady’s man. I knew that with the right dirt on him, I could get exactly what I wanted.

“Our “*lady’s man*” has a huge secret,” Chang filled me and Rah in.

We were at the loft and I was hoping he had something I could really work with.

“Okay. What is it?” I asked ready to move my plans forward. If I could black mail the DA, I could find out what evidence Dean had to clear himself. If what he had was bad enough, I could ensure a guilty verdict in Dean’s second trial. All I wanted was for him to serve his sentence out.

Chang pulled out his lap top and started clicking away and shit as he talked. “So, I hacked DA Monroe’s email accounts and found out that he has been corresponding with some prostitute that he met on Craigslist. The thing is, the prostitute is an eighteen year old man. Come to find out, the DA has a thing for young boys. I accessed his bank accounts and found out that he’s been paying a pretty penny for the young man’s services. That’s all the proof I have though. I emailed one Chris Love in hopes that he will help you set Monroe up.”

My thoughts were way off base with what Chang exposed. Never in a million years would I have been prepared for that. All I thought we were going to find was maybe an extra marital affair with some younger woman. Shit, what Chang had to say was not expected at all and left my mouth hanging open. I had to consider the fact that you really couldn’t put anything past anybody.

“Damn, he’s gay? Eww. I wouldn’t have ever thought. To think he’s fifty and his man whore is eighteen. He’s a perv,” I said with a disgusted look that contorted my beauty into pure ugliness.

“Yup,” Chang agreed. “It’s called Ephebophilia.”

“Huh?” I asked glancing at Rah, who was studying what Chang had pulled up on the computer screen.

“It’s when a middle aged man is attracted to males from the ages of 15-19. Shit, never mind,” Chang chuckled.

I wished he’d just leave the scientific terms out of the conversation.

“Has he responded to your message yet?” Rah asked.

“Not yet, but I’m sure that he will soon. From the messages between them, I gather that Chris is trying to pay his college tuition and he has not come out to his family yet. The black mail can go both ways and with a little money thrown in the pot, I’m sure he’ll be down to do whatever you ask,” Chang replied with an awkward look on his face. “You don’t want to read any further Rah. I promise.”

Rah looked away from the computer and then grabbed my hand for a squeeze. “Well, set up a meeting with him and let me know when.”

“Okay,” Chang said as he closed his lap top and glanced at his watch. “I have to pick Reba up from class in fifteen minutes, so I’ll hit you up asap.”

“Tell Reb to call me,” I said as an afterthought. We hadn’t really talked since I got the news about Dean.

“Will do,” Chang said on his way out.

“Well, I have dinner with the folks in a couple hours, so I’m going to take a shower. You want to give your girl some of that good dick first?” I asked Rah as I nibbled on his earlobe.

He grabbed me around my waist and pulled my body into his. “You think I’m gonna refuse that good good?”

“You better not,” I smiled and kissed him. It was all in an effort to forget about what was going on with Dean and Nafis.

I had changed my number and hoped that Nafis would just leave me alone. Maybe my man was right. There was no way Nafis could just get released from jail like that. He was just trying to fuck with me. Raheem stood up and followed me to the bathroom. I figured a love session with my man would be just what I needed to put my mind and body at ease.

Chapter 9

Seandra

I was bursting to tell my sisters about what Ahmad had done and how I really felt about it, but I kept quiet instead. They had a million questions about Pierre though, but I played it off like it was nothing. Deep down inside I was intrigued by him. We had just had a dinner of smoked brisket, rice pilaf, grilled asparagus and fresh baked sour dough bread with our parents. On the way to our vehicles, Seantay started the line of questioning again.

“Fine ass Pierre.” She shook her head. “Are you even tempted?”

“No,” I said quickly

Renell gave me an accusing glance before focusing on Seantay. “Stop it Tay. Don’t put ideas in her head.”

“Don’t talk about me like I’m not right here. I swear,” I spat as I got behind the wheel of my car.

“I’m not. It’s just...well...I know how a man like him can be very enticing,” Renell said looking regretful all of a sudden.

“Whatever. You act like I’m some thirsty ass chick or something. I’m happy with my man. If you’d be tempted that’s you. I guess Ricky isn’t hitting it right, or something since you’re so damn worried about me and what the hell I’m tempted to do,” I said getting all offended.

“I didn’t mean anything by that Seandra. It wasn’t like that, but since you want to get all serious...”

“Look, calm down ya’ll. Damn. What the hell?” Seantay spoke up with a worried look on her face. “Now, we’re not going to do this. I know we all have a lot going on, but this is not the way to deal with it.”

I sighed and closed my car door. “I’m leaving. Fuck this shit. Bye.”

Renell wore a regretful expression as she stared down at me. “Look, Seandra...”

I cut her off as I started the ignition. “Save it. You can feel whatever you want to feel about me. Just know that your shit stinks too.”

As I drove off I could read the look on Seantay's face. It was that caught in the middle look. The one she'd worn most of our lives. Yeah, my sisters and I had been bonding lately, but Renell's little remark reminded me of why we didn't get along in the past. She was so judgmental and self-righteous. Fuck her.

* * *

When I pulled up to my house I noticed that a red BMW convertible was parked in front. I had no clue who was in the car, but when I passed it to get to my driveway, I spotted Pierre sitting behind the wheel. My heart skipped a beat, but I reminded myself of what Renell had said. I mean, truthfully I was attracted to him, but I would never act on it. I was with Ahmad and despite what he pulled a few days ago, I was still madly in love with him. The way I saw it, Pierre was not an issue at all.

As I grabbed my purse and stepped out of my car, I spotted Pierre walking toward me. There was a friendly smile on my face as he stopped a few inches in front of me, or was it flirty. I immediately straightened my face in an attempt to not give him any mixed messages.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to impose. Uh, I was just about to leave. I would've called first, but I don't have your number," he smiled as he wringed his hands together nervously.

"It's okay. Uh, to what do I owe this...visit?" I asked as I put my purse's strap on my shoulder. All I could think was damn his fine ass and that accent.

“I just wanted to personally thank you and let you see for yourself that I’m okay. I’m taking my meds like I’m supposed to and if you need me to take care of the expenses for your car, I wanted to make sure you knew how to contact me.” He passed me a business card that I didn’t bother to look at.

“No worries. The insurance company will take care of it. I told you that already.” I laughed nonchalantly before I continued. “I’m sure everything will be covered due to your medical condition.”

He nodded and then gave me an intense look with those sexy ass eyes. I had to look away.

“I guess I’ll be on my way then. I’m not going to hold you up. I’m sure that you’re a busy woman, as well as a taken one. I wouldn’t want your beau to get the wrong idea.”

“You’re not holding me up from anything and Ahmad is aware of what happened, so you stopping by for a friendly thank you wouldn’t alarm him.” That time when I laughed it was a nervous one. I brushed my hair out of my face with my hand as he stared at me with what was obviously longing in his eyes. If he didn’t stop I was sure he was going to start drooling. I cleared my throat.

“Uh...well, I guess I’ll get going. Thanks again Seandra, and you take care,” he said still lingering there as if he had no intentions of leaving at all.

“No problem Pierre. You take care of yourself too.”

He turned on his heels slowly and then headed to his car. The man’s walk was even sexier than that accent of his.

His legs were slightly bow and the dark blue jeans that he wore fit his muscular ass perfectly. I let out an exhale as I walked off toward my front door. One thing was for certain, that man was without a doubt alluring as hell.

Before I could get in the house and close the door my cell phone rang. It was Ahmad, so I quickly answered wondering why I hadn't heard from him all day. He knew that I had dinner with the family, but that had never stopped him from checking in before.

“Hey babe,” I said with a smile on my face as I pictured my fine ass, super sexy boyfriend. Shit, my ass was trying hard as hell to erase any attraction that I had for Pierre. It wasn't working because I was still imagining his ass in those damn jeans.

“Hey. Who is that I just saw leaving your house?” He asked with an edge of jealousy in his voice.

I was immediately on guard at that point. “Where are you?” I asked.

“Pulling up in the driveway...”

“Well why the hell didn't you just wait to ask me that when you got inside?” I hung up the phone feeling like my body was on fire.

What the hell kind of shit was that? He was questioning me and shit like he was accusing me of something. A few minutes later the front door opened and Ahmad stepped inside with a contemplative look on his handsome face. As he stepped closer to me, I prepared myself for a confrontation.

Lately he'd become more possessive than usual, so I had a feeling he wasn't going to take Pierre's visit that well.

"So, I haven't heard from you all day and the first thing you do is ask who is leaving my house?" I broke the awkward silence instantly.

"And I still want to know," he snapped with an attitude. "I know it was a man, but he went in the opposite direction and shit, so I couldn't see him."

"So the fuck what if it was a man? Do you really think I'd be up to some shit and you have a key to my house?" I shook my head in disbelief. "Really Ahmad? Have our relationship come to that. Have I given you one reason not to trust me?"

He stared at me and shook his head. "You're still avoiding my motherfucking question Seanda."

"Don't start cursing at me! What the fuck is wrong with you?"

He didn't say anything, but the look in his eyes said it all. For some reason he thought I was up to something and I didn't know why. When had our relationship gone left? At first things were all good. There didn't seem to be an insecure bone in his body. Suddenly he was acting like some pussy whipped asshole who just knew that I would go elsewhere.

"That was Pierre. I had just pulled up after leaving my parents' house for dinner and he was here. He told me that he was about to leave, but wanted to give me his contact information for the insurance claim. The insurance company has to get his medical information for the damages to be paid

for. It was nothing Ahmad. We stood right outside for less than three damn minutes.” After my explanation I walked off toward my bedroom.

It had been a hot day in the city of Miami and all I wanted to do was take a shower and relax in front of the television. After the disagreement with Renell, I wasn't in the mood for another confrontation.

“Okay babe. I'm sorry,” he said behind me.

I could hear his footsteps as he caught up with me, grabbed my arm and turned me around to face him.

“I love you Seandra,” he said with tears glistening in his eyes. “I don't know why I'm tripping. I just...well, I'm so in love with you.”

“I love you too baby,” I confirmed as I looked into his eyes to let him know that I was sincere.

“When I look at you I see a woman who is every man's desire. You're gorgeous and talented. Not only that, but you keep me on my toes. I love how strong minded you are. Shit. You're the only woman I know who tells it like it is. You don't let me get away with shit and I love that about you. I have never been an insecure man Seandra, but you bring out something in me that no other woman ever has. I'm actually afraid that I might lose you. It's like you were attainable, but how do I keep you.” He caressed my cheek as his eye contact with me remained.

“Just keep making me happy Ahmad. I'm not going anywhere okay. Don't let your insecurities push me away. I love you so much and I've wanted you for so long. I won't

risk what we have. Shit, we've been through enough to keep us together for a lifetime. Please trust me." I pleaded with my man to not give me a reason to prove him right.

He grabbed my hand and held it tightly before planting a sweet kiss on my lips. "You're right. I should trust you. I mean, I do trust you."

"Good. Now I'm going to take a shower. Care to join me?" I winked at him before flashing him a sexy, alluring look.

"Hell yeah," he said as he grabbed my ass cheeks and squeezed.

I had to pacify Ahmad although I wasn't really in the mood for sex. His suspicions alone were a turn off, but I did love him enough to do whatever I had to do. Knowing that my physical attraction to Pierre was just a phase that would pass made me think of the long term. The love I had for my man was enough. Besides, I had gone to my doctor to get some birth control pills the day before. It was better to be safe than sorry.

Chapter 10

Renell

My disagreement with Seandra had me on edge when I got home. I wanted to tell Ricky all about it, but he wasn't there. When I called to check up on him the phone went straight to voicemail. It was a Saturday, so I knew that he didn't have to work. Claudette, my nanny, walked up to me as soon as I entered the foyer.

"Hello Miss Beauvois. Sean is asleep, but I'm sure he'll be up in a little bit," she said flashing a dimpled smile as she tossed her jet black hair over her shoulder.

Claudette was a middle aged Scandinavian woman who had come highly recommended by the Agency she worked for. I'd done an extensive back ground and mental check on her. I had to be very careful about who I let around my child. That was something Ricky and I were both very adamant about. It wasn't easy to entrust someone who wasn't family, so it was very important to take all of the proper measures.

"Thanks so much Claudette," I said quickly passing her to check on my son.

Once I was standing over his crib staring down at him, I instantly felt better. The situations with Grady and then Brock had me on stress overload. I had to shake my head at the fact that my sister didn't seem to be at all concerned about

what I'd just been through when she snapped on me. Of course I'd gone into detail about what had happened with Grady at dinner, but I would think after that Seandra would have some kind of concern for me. Shit, I was feeling way more sensitive and anxious than normal. Maybe I was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

I left my sleeping son's room wondering why Ricky's phone was going straight to voicemail. Not that I had any reason not to trust him, I was just hoping that nothing was wrong. It was a Saturday evening and maybe he needed a little wind down time. I could understand if he needed to meet up with the boys and relax. At least I hoped it was that. It just wasn't like Ricky not to be available for me.

When I opened the door to the master suite I noticed that his laptop was open and sitting on the bed like he'd just left. The screen saver was a picture of me and Resean. I walked over to see if I could find a clue about where he was. I slid my finger across the mouse to wake the computer up, but noticed that it had a password. Why the hell would he do that? When I thought about it, I'd never really used his computer. Maybe there had been a password on it all along, but what did he have to hide? It wasn't like anyone other than me had access to his lap top.

That shit was fishy as hell. On a Saturday evening my fiancé wasn't home, his phone was going straight to voicemail and there was a password on his computer. What the hell was going on? I didn't want to read anything into it, but something was telling me that something just wasn't right.

I picked up my cell and dialed Ricky's number again. I'd noticed during our relationship that there were often times when he wasn't accounted for, but they were far and few between. He'd always have a logical explanation and I wouldn't really question him otherwise. I had no reason to believe that he would be stepping out on me, but I also didn't put anything past a man.

Once again, the call went straight to voicemail.

"Ricky, baby, where are you? I need you to call me back asap."

I hung up and sighed as I escaped to the master bedroom to take a calming bubble bath. After turning on the water, I adjusted it to the perfect temperature and then added my favorite lavender fragranced bath salts. The calming aroma seemed to instantly relieve some of my anxiety. As I exhaled, I walked out of the room to let Claudette know that I was about to take a bath.

She was walking out of the nursery when I stepped out into the hallway.

"I'm going to take a bath, but you're free to go after that," I said with a smile.

"Are you sure Miss Beauvois? You look really tired. Maybe you should take a nap. I'll stay until you wake up." She had a hint of an accent, but it wasn't that strong. She'd been in the US since she was a teenager.

The mention of a nap did sound pretty good. "Uh, did you see Ricky leave? Did he say where he was going?"

“He ran out of here like a bat out of hell,” she said like she’d just remembered. “No, he didn’t say anything.”

“How long ago was that?” My heart suddenly fell.

“Uh, it was right after you left. He played with Resean for a little while and then went into the bedroom. He was in there for a few minutes and then ran out with the phone glued to his ear,” she explained. “I figured it was an emergency or something. Have you spoken to him?”

“No, that’s why I was asking.” I sighed and ran my fingers through my hair. “Okay. Well, I’m sure he’s fine. Thanks Claudette.”

I walked off with that sinking feeling that my man was up to no good. There wasn’t really any concrete evidence. At that point everything was circumstantial, but why would he rush out of the house on the phone. He damn sure hadn’t called me. Why wouldn’t my fiancé call me if there had been an emergency?

As I made my way back to the bathroom, I ducked in to check on my sleeping son again. He was the most important person in my life and I really wanted to give him the world. I wanted his father to be a part of that world, but if he was doing some foul shit I wouldn’t hesitate to let him go. The thing was, I had to find out what he was up to before we got married.

So, I decided to let Claudette stay a little bit longer, but I wasn’t planning to take a nap. Nope. My plan was to crack the password on Ricky’s computer and do some snooping. There had to be something on it that he didn’t want me to see and I was determined as hell to find out what it was.

* * *

About an hour had passed and I was still wrecking my brain trying to figure out what that damn password was. Just when I decided to give up Ricky came strolling into our bedroom like it was nothing. It was a good thing I'd closed his laptop and placed it on top of the nightstand on his side of the bed. He had no idea I'd been snooping. Instead of mentioning the computer, I decided to stay quiet about it. If I alarmed him, he wouldn't be willing to leave it around for me to go at it again.

“Hey baby,” he said with a huge grin on his face. “Claudette told me that you were resting. I thought I was going to come in here and sneak in bed with you.”

I managed to smile up at him and hide my suspicions. “Yeah, I just woke up. I tried to call you earlier, but your phone went straight to the voicemail.”

He sat down on the bed and leaned over to kiss my forehead. “Carl called and challenged me to some pool, so I went over there for a little while. I didn't realize that I didn't have my car charger. Remember I let you borrow it?” He narrowed his eyes at me.

“Yeah, that's right. I'm sorry babe.” I did have his car charger, but that still was no excuse for him not calling me before his phone died. “That still doesn't explain why you didn't call me.”

“I was on the phone for hours with mom dukes and shit. She's all excited about the wedding and well...you know how that goes. I didn't realize how low my battery was until I pulled up in Carl's driveway. I was going to just let it charge in

the car, but of course the charger wasn't there. Carl has an iPhone, so his charger doesn't work with my phone. I figured you were busy with your folks, so I didn't think you'd miss my call anyway."

There was something in his voice that made him sound nervous. I could also detect a subtle hint of dishonesty in his tone. Why I felt that? I didn't know, but I felt it. Damn, to think that the man I was about to marry was deceiving me was killing me inside. Still, I pretended to not notice. Not because I was stupid, or naïve, but because I didn't want him to suspect that I was on to his deception.

"Yeah, you're right. Dinner with the folks fulfilled my entire day to the point where a call from my fiancé, and the father of my son, was not necessary at all," I said sarcastically.

Ricky gave me a look and suddenly there was a defensive expression on his face. I had a feeling that we were headed for an argument and I didn't have time for that. My son was on my mind. Initially I had planned to take him with me to my parents', but he had a little cold and I didn't want to take him out. I promised my folks that as soon as his congestion went away I'd bring him over.

"So, you're mad because I didn't call you?" He asked as he stood up and paced the floor.

"No, I'm not mad. It's just been a crazy week. That's all." I decided not to even mention the words I'd had with Seandra. "I'm going to check on Resean."

He didn't say anything, so I left the room and headed for the nursery. Claudette was sitting in the white, wooden rocking chair with the baby blue cushion humming a lullaby to

Resean while she bottle fed him. He was clutching her finger with his little hand and I felt a twinge of jealousy. Those moments were important for a mother to bond with her child. There I was letting my nanny do it while I spied on my husband. I had to get my priorities straight.

“Claudette,” I said softly. After the jealousy passed, I realized that it was actually a tender moment. My son knew who his mother was, but had taken a liking to Claudette. That was fine with me being that she would be aiding in taking care of him.

She turned to look at me. “Yes, Miss Beauvois.”

“Uh, I’d like to finish giving him his bottle. Thank you so much. You’re so good with him and well...I’ve used enough of your time today. You’re free to go.”

Claudette was just a part time nanny, so she didn’t reside in the house. I didn’t feel the need to have someone there twenty four seven since Rick and I intended on raising our son ourselves. The reason we’d chosen to hire a part time nanny was because we didn’t want inexperienced baby sitters keeping him, I didn’t trust daycares when my child couldn’t talk and I already knew that our parents wouldn’t be available to help as much as we needed. As for my sisters, they didn’t know shit about babies.

The smile was still on Claudette’s face when she stood and waited for me to take her place in the rocking chair. “No problem at all Miss Beauvois. He’s such a good baby and it sounds like he’s breathing better.”

She placed him in my arms and I held the bottle in place as she let go. That way we didn’t have to disturb his

meal. When my son's eyes locked on me, I could tell that he recognized his mommy. His little arms started moving all fast and he seemed excited. I couldn't help but laugh.

“Aww, I missed you too munchkin.”

“Well, I'll let you two be. Do you need me tomorrow?” She asked anxiously.

“I think I'll be in most of the day tomorrow, so enjoy your Sunday. Thank you again Claudette.”

She nodded. “You're welcome. Have a nice evening Miss Beauvois.”

“You do the same,” I said as she left the nursery.

I looked down at my son again and noticed that his eyes were getting lower.

“You're falling asleep on me already? Stay awake and play with mommy.”

His eyes opened like he understood what I said and was trying to fight Mr. Sandman. I kissed his chubby cheeks and inhaled the sweet aroma that babies possessed. He was the greatest joy that anyone could ever be blessed with. As I thought of his father I cringed. What was he hiding and why? Was it another woman and if it was why were we planning to have a wedding in less than two months.

I had no proof that he was cheating though. Truthfully, I didn't know what was going on. All I knew was that my intuition was telling me that something wasn't right. The feeling in my gut never lied or led me astray, so I wasn't going to second guess it. What I did plan to do was get to the bottom of it before I walked down that damn aisle.

Chapter 11

Seantay

I was literally breathing down Rah's neck when he walked in from his meeting with the DA's undercover lover. There were a million and one thoughts running through my head and I needed to put my mind at ease. Shit, I needed to know that my life was not going to be flushed down the drain right before my eyes.

“So, what happened bae? How'd it go?” I asked anxiously awaiting some confirmation that things were going to go as planned.

If Dean was released from prison he would stop at nothing to make my life a living hell and I didn't want to think about what the hell Nafis would do. Thank God he wasn't contacting me anymore. Rah was keeping his ears to the streets and there was no word of him getting out of jail anytime soon. I was relieved.

“Well hello to you too beautiful. How was your day?” He asked playfully avoiding my question as he pulled me close for a kiss. When he pulled away he gently nibbled my bottom lip and then sucked it.

“Hmm, I take that as a sign that things went well,” I said following him to the plush, white, authentic lamb skin leather sofa.

I especially loved the sitting room because its décor was black and white. The modern furniture and funky art work gave the apartment a jazzy, sophisticated flare. It kind of reminded me of the room in the house Tommy and Kesha had on the movie *Belly*. Rah made me wait for a response as he reached for the remote to the 72 inch flat screen smart Samsung television that was mounted on the wall above the electric fireplace.

“Babe, come on...really?” I pushed him playfully.

He swayed a little and then laughed as he turned the TV on. “Chill out lil’ ma. I’m ‘bout to tell you what happened.”

“Okay, so what the hell happened? I do have something to do in a couple hours.”

“What’s that?” Turning the TV back off, he turned to face me.

“You know I told you that I have to choose the models for the Black Lace promo and fashion show. It’s in less than four months and I’m so behind. I hope Camille can handle all of the crazy shit I’m about to throw at her.” I sighed as I thought about trying to top the Black Magic and Black Onyx runway shows. It was going to be hard to do, but I knew that my lingerie was fire. Not only was it sexy, but I planned to feature models of all sizes, shapes and colors. Vicky’s so called secret didn’t have nothing on me, because my designs were the truth.

“Mmm. Can I go with you? I would love to help you pick out models. Maybe we could bring one of them home and...”

Before he could finish I had my fingers around his throat. As I squeezed he pretended to be choking to death.

“Don’t play with me Raheem. I will kill your ass in here. You already know that there will not be a third party allowed in our bed. Well, not here in Miami anyway. I mean. I see if we were in like...Hawaii...or the Bahamas or something and that bitch was miles and miles away. Most of the time when a couple has a threesome close to home, one or both of them will dip back on the low.” I let his neck go and laughed when he acted like he was finally able to breathe.

He was exaggerating because I wasn’t really choking him that hard.

“Okay damn. That was a bad idea, but you don’t have to get all abusive and shit baby. To hold you to that, I guess we’ll be taking a trip somewhere exotic after your show.”

When I shook my head at him he laughed and slapped his leg. “You’re all the woman I need baby. Don’t second guess that.”

“Where the hell has all of this threesome talk come from all of a sudden?” I asked as I gave him the side eye. He had got me all off track with that shit.

“Nowhere babe. Just fucking with you. That’s all.” The skeptical look on my face made him grab my hand and kiss it.

“Mmm hmm, now back to the subject at hand. What the fuck happened with Chris Love? Tell me now and stop

playing.”

“Well, me and Chang met up with him and laid everything out on the table and shit. He could A, do what we told him to do and continue to keep his secret while getting compensated for his troubles, or he could B, be exposed to his family, locked up for solicitation and broke as shit at the same damn time. Of course he chose option A. I mean, babe, what did you expect? I’m a good negotiator.”

I wrapped my arms around his neck lovingly that time and he flinched like he was afraid that I was going to choke him out. A giggle rose from my throat as I kissed his neck, then his cheek, then his lips.

“Don’t worry baby. I won’t hurt you. I love you and you are a great negotiator. I just hope we won’t have to use this dirt on Monroe. The gay ass perv should be exposed, but just like Frank, he has a wife and kids. If we destroy his life, we’ll be destroying their lives too. I mean, truthfully, two wrongs don’t make a right. Maybe we’re just as bad as Dean for what we’re doing, but to what extent would anybody go to save their own life? We’re not the only ones who’re just trying to survive. You feel me baby? It’s like survival of the fittest out here. Dog eat dog.” I shook my head.

“I wish things were different baby, but truth be told Dean tried to kill us. If I had got him killed, things would probably be even worse. Being who he is, or *was* at the time, the police wouldn’t have given up until they found out who did it. I ain’t tryin’ to be the one locked away. Shit, I ain’t leavin’ you for shit mami. Believe that. So, I’ll do whatever I gotta do to ensure that you’re safe. Even if it involves framing

and black mailing mufuckas. Shit, if Dean's released, I'll just have to take extreme measures. It's not like I haven't had to do that shit before."

A chill traveled down my spine as I thought of the goons who had tried to murder him and kidnap me. It was all a devious plot by Dean to finally have me all to himself. It backfired when LaTisha told me all about his plot. From that moment I knew that Dean's obsession with me was deadly. The thought of paying someone to kill him had crossed my mind, but what if they were sloppy and the shit came back on me. There was no way I could chance that, so making sure that Dean was locked away seemed to be the most logical solution.

The same went for Nafis's crazy, deranged ass. He was delusional and hell bent on using me and my family's status to expand his drug empire. How the hell did he expect me to risk everything my family had worked so hard for, for him? He was so much bigger in his head than he was in reality. It was like he couldn't fathom the thought of someone not being at his disposal to do whatever the hell he wanted.

"So, when does everything go down? Dean's trial is a month from now. I just need to know that everything will be smooth sailing when Black Lace is launched."

"In a couple days sweetheart. Don't worry. Chang's going to put a few hidden cameras in the room and record all of the action. After that we're gonna fuzz out old boy's face, since he was cooperative. Then we're going to anonymously send the DA an email from a dummy email account from a computer at the library. Chang has a card with a fake name and address, so it can't be traced to us. If he doesn't release the

evidence that they have to clear Dean to us and doesn't guarantee a guilty verdict without Elisa having to testify again, the video will be leaked to his wife and several media outlets. I have a list for him. Chris is worried that he will come after him, but I told him to go ahead and put in his transfer to a college out of state. For a million dollars that queer would've done just about anything. So, it's on baby and if this doesn't guarantee that nigga stays in jail, then it's on to Plan B."

Shit, I knew what Plan B was and the risks that I had thought about before all came crashing back into my mental like ocean waves. Lately the stresses of life were getting to me. I could recall a time when things were so simple. It seemed like all I had to do back then was wake up and simply be me. Oh how things changed so fast and not always for the better.

I managed to put a smile on my face. "After what happened to Renell, I have a whole different state of mind about life. It's too short to be second guessing things. Your life can be snuffed out so quickly and so we have to always stay on our toes." As I caressed his face softly, I continued. "I love you Rah and I'll do anything to make sure that we stay together. I do mean anything."

When he leaned over to kiss me that time, he unleashed the pent up passion he'd been holding in since he'd walked through the door.

"Shit, you know I love your fine, fancy ass too. I'll do anything for you too mami and that's my word. If I have to kill that nigga, then it's just goin' have to be that. I just hope you can live wit' it."

I thought about it for a second and decided that it was something I could definitely live with. “I don’t want you to get hurt or locked up baby, and if it’s a way that you can ensure that, I’d live with whatever you choose to do. Dean is not only a threat to me, but he’s a threat to you too. Nobody would understand that we’re just trying to defend our own lives. Because of who I am, the whole thing would be so sensationalized. My family would be destroyed and so will our relationship. Shit, what if he actually tries to kill you again. I am most certainly not taking those chances,” I assured him.

He nodded. “Okay, well it is what it is then.”

I looked at my gold and diamond Chanel watch and noticed the time. “Oh shit, I have to hurry up. Damn. I forgot that I have to pick Reba and Samara up. They’re going to help me with the casting.”

When I stood up, Rah pulled me down on his lap. “Ride it for me real quick baby,” he said in a sexy, deep voice.

I looked over my shoulder at him and protested. “I can’t baby, but I promise to take care of you when I get home. Okay.”

He pretended to pout and then swatted my ass when I got up. “Don’t come up in here actin’ like you’re all tired later. Either way that pussy’s gonna get beat the fuck up.”

I laughed as I walked toward the bedroom. “Yeah, sure. You know I ain’t never tired and I puts it on your ass.”

“Shit, you damn sho’ do baby!” He yelled after me.

* * *

Me and my sisters had finally sat down and agreed to the terms for VH1 to feature us on a reality show called Black Butterflies. We were kicking it off with a special episode that would show footage of the auditions and Black Lace runway show. It was scheduled to air a few weeks after the actual fashion show. After that we would start shooting the actual reality show. I was so excited about that, but lately what was going on in my personal life was trumping the professional part.

“Earth to Seantay,” Samara’s voice interrupted my thoughts.

“Yeah, you keep spacing out and shit,” Reba said as she flashed a concerned look my way. “What’s going on with you?”

I sighed and stared down at the headshots that were spread out in front of me. We had already seen all fifty girls and were trying to narrow it down to twenty. After that I would do call backs and from there narrow it down to ten. If I couldn’t get all ten from that bunch, I was going to do another model call.

“Well, you know that Dean is getting out and it’s been on my mind heavy. Not only that, but Nafis called me,” I said finally telling my friend the second part. We had talked, but I had left out the part about Nafis.

“Wow. What did he say?” She asked.

Samara just sat there looking confused. She was aware of the beef with Dean, but she didn’t know about Nafis. I filled her in quickly and then continued. I did leave out the part about me, Rah and Chang setting him up. They had no idea

about our involvement in Dean's case either. As close I was I was to Reba, I felt that the least amount of people who knew, the better off we were.

“He said some fool is taking the charges for him and he'll be out in a few weeks.” Reba didn't know about any of our involvement in his arrest either, but she did know that he wanted to use my father's private jet to move his weight. As much as I wanted to tell her about Chang's life possibly being in danger, I didn't mention it. I was hoping that Rah had already filled Chang in about it though. I made a mental note to ask him.

“Damn. I know you don't want to have to deal with his nutty ass. When I say he takes cuckoo to a whole new level, I mean it. He's fine, but something is just not...right about him,” Reba said shaking her head and moving her pointer finger around in front of her ear in a circle.

“You ain't never lied Reb. I should've known something was wrong when he used to always want me to choke him with a silk scarf while we fucked. He had asked me if he could tie me up and stick a huge anal plug in my ass. That was the last time he got any of this pussy,” I laughed although I was in no mood for amusement.

“Well damn.” Samara wrinkled her nose. “Some men are just down right shameless.”

“I'm good though, so let's look over these pictures and get this over with. I'm hoping we find our twenty in this bunch,” I said focusing my attention back to the photos that were on the table in front of us.

“I really liked Meaghan,” Samara spoke up and pointed to her picture.

Meghan was tall and thick with hips for days. Her stomach was unusually flat for her frame. Her mahogany complexion was beautifully smooth and flawless. The closely cropped, curly hair that framed her oval shaped face was a blazing red color and I thought it made her look edgy.

“Hell yeah. I like her too. Her shape is crazy. She’d look so sexy in my designs.” I added her photo to the other two we’d chosen.

Three down and seventeen to go. It was going to be a long night.

“Who wants to grab a drink after this?” Reba asked.

“I’m down,” I said a little too quickly.

“Shit, me too,” Samara chimed in.

I guess it was going to be another night of me drowning my sorrows, but first there was work to be done.

Chapter 12

Seandra

A few days had passed since dinner with the family and I had decided to hit the beach with Seantay. Of course Renell and I still weren’t talking and I needed to vent to my baby sister. The paparazzi were snapping away. I should’ve been used to it, but I got tired of their asses. After a few more

shots they moved along in hopes of finding someone else who was rich and famous.

“So, what’s up big sis?” Tay asked with her dark, oversized Michael Kors sunglasses perched on her nose.

I laid back in my fuchsia lounge chair and let out a long, deep sigh. One thing about me was I was known to be overly dramatic. That was why I became an actress I guess.

“When it comes to relationships I have the worst luck. It’s like they always start off good, but then boom, here comes the fucking problems. I thought after the shit with Kristie was finally over Ahmad and I would be happy and shit. Damn, I was wrong. He has really changed Tay and not for the better.” I filled her in on everything from our session in the pool, to his apparent jealousy over Pierre.

“He seems to be regretful when he does that type of shit, but his insecurity is turning me off. He admitted that he felt like he won’t be able to keep me. Knowing that he feels that way makes me wonder if I should wait around for shit to get worse.” Tears burned my eyes, but I willed them away. “If this doesn’t work out I’m swearing off all men and becoming a lesbian.”

Tay laughed hysterically. “Yeah right woman. You love dick too much.”

“They make strap ons,” I said making a point.

“True,” she agreed. “Speaking of girl on girl action, Rah brought up the two of us having a threesome.”

I sat up and peered at my sister over my Chanel shades.

“Uh and what did you say. I know that you haven’t been with a woman before.” I wasn’t really surprised by Rah’s request, but I was fishing to see if my sister was down.

“I haven’t been with a woman, but Reba and I used to share men. It was when we were younger and neither of us were really serious about the guys. Now that I’m older and I really love Rah, I’m not really down for sharing. I told him that I would never do that shit close to home, but maybe I’d consider it if we were somewhere hundreds of miles away from Miami.”

“Oh, okay, so there’s hope,” I said with a teasing smile.

“I don’t know how I would feel about seeing my man with another woman. I have to be honest though, I’m kind of curious about how it would be to...you know...” Her voice chimed off.

I relaxed again and put my hands behind my head.
“Well sis, I have a confession.”

A huge smile flashed across my sister’s face. “No you didn’t,” she said already guessing what I was going to tell her.

“When Maurice and I went to France we met this beautiful artist named Denice. She had no idea who either of us were, so that worked out in both our favor. It was really funny how we’d met her in a café and casually asked her if she’d be interested in a threesome. She agreed and explained that she was bisexual. We took her back to our room and well...you know the rest.” I blushed and then confirmed what she was probably thinking. “And yes, women are very good at pleasing other women. Not that I’d do that on a regular basis, or without a man, but it was actually very....erotic.”

“You got secrets and shit,” Tay said with an accusing look on her face.

Her hair was pinned up, which gave her a classy look in her bright red and black striped high waist two piece made my Louis Vuitton.

“Well, don’t we all,” I said.

Tay let out a grunt and then sat up in her red lounge chair. “So, what are you going to do about your man troubles?”

I shrugged my shoulders and closed my eyes. All I could see was that sexy ass Pierre in my mind. “I don’t know. Shit, I love his stupid ass Tay. I’m hoping that he gets his shit together and acts right. I don’t plan to cheat on him with Pierre or anybody else, but if he keeps pushing me...”

My cell phone played the tune of a classical symphony by Mozart that I didn't know the name of. "Damn, who the hell is this?" I asked out loud as I retrieved my phone from my dark blue oversized beach bag. I was rocking a fuchsia and dark blue Chanel bikini to match.

I didn't recognize the number on the screen, but the caller was in Miami.

"Hello?" I answered with a question in my voice.

"Seandra?" A sexy male voice asked. I didn't recognize it right away.

"Yes and who's calling?"

"This is Pierre. Uh, is this a bad time?" He asked and I didn't recall giving him my number.

"No, it's not a bad time, but how did you get my number?"

"Well, your boyfriend called me from your phone last night. The number came up on my cell as S. Beauvois. Of course when I answered I thought it was you. He told me not to come around you, or call you anymore. I figured he called from your phone because he thinks we've been messing around and he wanted me to think it was you. Little did he know, but I didn't even have your number, but thanks to him, now I do. He told me that if he catches me near your house, or find out that I'm calling you, he's going to put one in my head. What have you done to that man?" He let out a chuckle like Ahmad's threats had him amused.

I was shocked and livid at the same time. How dare Ahmad call and threaten Pierre? The nerve of his jealous ass.

Nothing was even going on, so he was acting all macho for nothing.

“I’m so sorry Pierre...”

The mention of his name made Tay’s eyebrow rise. I knew that she was dying to know what that call was all about and I couldn’t wait to tell her.

“It’s not your fault,” he said quickly cutting me off. “All it has really done is make me more curious about you. I mean. There has to be a reason he’s acting like that. Obviously he has something that he is trying like hell to keep me from having. That means you’re worth holding on to.”

My body was hot as hell and it wasn’t because I was on the beach at four pm. Pierre’s voice alone was enough to send my temperature soaring through the roof. Shit, my pussy was wetter than the ocean and at that moment it was at its highest tide.

“I promise you that I’ll get to the bottom of this shit. He had no right to threaten you. You haven’t done anything at all to disrespect him, or our relationship.”

“Not yet. Oh, but it’s on now. It’s no secret that I’m attracted to you, but I was trying to respect your man. If he wants to believe he has some completion, then that’s what he has. That’s only fair. Right beautiful?”

“Uh...Pierre, look, I can’t...”

He interrupted me. “I’m in no rush Seandra. I’ll be waiting until you can. Until then, have a good day mon cherie.”

He had hung up, but I just sat there with the phone still glued to my ear. When I finally moved it, I just stared at it in disbelief.

“What was that all about?” Tay asked looking at me like I’d lost it.

“Pierre said that Ahmad called and threatened him. He actually thinks there’s something going on between us,” I explained.

“You must’ve put that Beauvois grind on that man. With that all that ass, he couldn’t have known what to do with himself.”

I couldn’t help but laugh although the situation wasn’t funny. “Well, I’m about to go check his ass. Are you ready to go?”

Seantay nodded. “Hell yeah. I have to get home to my man. He sprained his ankle playing basketball yesterday and he acts like he killed himself.”

I rolled my eyes. “Why are men such babies?”

“I know right,” Tay agreed as she got up to gather her things.

When we were on the way to our vehicles, I couldn’t help but wonder what the hell I’d be facing when I confronted Ahmad. All I knew was I was going to get in his ass about what he’d done. He had no right to be trying to check someone that I wasn’t even dealing with like that and to threaten the man. That shit was making me wonder if I had made a huge mistake by getting in a relationship with him. I saw the signs, but was I ready to call it quits?

* * *

When I walked inside my house the smell of Italian herbs and spices ignited my senses. I knew that Ahmad was cooking because his car was parked in my driveway. Well, his attempt at romance wasn't going to keep the quarrel that we were about to have from happening. He needed to know that he couldn't just threaten Pierre like that and get away with it. It wasn't like he had done anything wrong. True, he let me know that he was interested in me, but once I told him that I was taken, he had backed down.

I walked into the kitchen and a smiling Ahmad turned around to face me. He had on an apron and had been stirring something in a big pot.

“Hey babe. How did you enjoy the beach?” He asked looking all jovial, which was the exact opposite of what my face looked like.

“Don't hey babe me. What the fuck has gotten into you? First you try to get me pregnant on purpose, then you start acting all jealous and now you want to start threatening to shoot people. What's next Ahmad? Are you going to beat me up, or lock me up in the closet? I don't know what the hell to expect from you anymore!”

His smile had faded a long time ago, but he simply turned around to continue tending to the meal he was preparing.

“So, he told you that I called him huh? I knew that he would,” he said it as if it was no big deal.

“Yes he told me, but that was the first time I’ve ever spoken to him on the phone. What? You went in my purse and got his card?” I shook my head in disbelief. “I’m so upset with you, but that’s what I get. What did I expect? You’re just a fucking man. Maybe my expectations were too damn high. Maybe I thought that I’d finally got it right after all I’ve been through. You know what Ahmad? I guess I was wrong as hell.”

He took the apron off and put it on the counter before walking over to me. When he tried to hold me in his arms, I moved away.

“Don’t touch me! What was the point of doing that? Nothing is going on between me and Pierre! I told you that!”

The guilty look on his face dissolved into regret, but I didn’t care. Nothing he could do or say would make me understand why he would call Pierre. It was not flattering at all that he would overreact like that.

“I called him because there was no way I was just going to sit back and let him blatantly try to steal you from me. I won’t apologize for doing what I felt needed to be done to solidify my position in your life. You’re my woman and I won’t let some man just come in and take what I’ve worked so hard to build. You know that I’m not capable of really...”

“Shit, I have no fucking clue what you’re capable of right now Ahmad. You have been pulling all types of surprises out of your ass lately. I don’t know what you might do Mr. Unpredictable,” I spat sarcastically.

He narrowed his eyes at me and then his body language showed that he was frustrated. “It’s not that serious

Seandra. I'm an alpha man okay, so sometimes I do shit that comes back to bite me in the ass. So what, I'm possessive. I love you and I'll never do anything to hurt you, or anybody else. I won't hit you, or lock you up in a closet just like I won't shoot that man. I'll kick his ass, but I won't kill him."

I rolled my eyes. "You won't be kicking his ass either. He didn't do anything! Look. Just get out okay! I want to be alone!"

"Hell no. I'm not leaving! We're having dinner..."

"We are not having shit! You are getting the fuck out of my house right now!" I yelled and rushed over to turn all of the pots off that were simmering on the stove. That shit smelled good as shit, but I was in no mood to break bread with his jealous ass.

"And like I said, I'm not going anywhere." He went right behind me and turned all of the eyes on the stove back on.

"This is my house Ahmad and I don't want you here. As a matter of fact, give me my damn key!" I put my hand out with a stern look on my face because I meant it. Calling Pierre was the straw that broke the camel's back. That was just too much for me.

"For real Seandra?" He shook his head and then sucked his teeth. "You have to be fucking kidding me."

"Do I look like I'm kidding right now? There is not even a hint of a smile on my face. I am not amused by that dumb ass shit you did. You would think we're both too old for those type of games. Don't make love to me and then call and

threaten a man when I'm in the shower. That's that underhanded bullshit that I don't like. You should just trust me when I say that it's nothing. You had me thinking we were pass that shit, but you were still stuck on it. I'm done Ahmad. So, yes, really. This is real. Now give me my key and get out of my fucking house."

He reached in his pocket and pulled out his keys. "I can't believe your ass is taking shit to this extreme. Can't we work this out baby? I fucked up okay and I'm sorry..."

"I've had enough of your apologies Ahmad. I want my key and I want you out of here. Please, do not make me repeat myself again. There's nothing left to say. There is no working it out. It's best for you to just cooperate with me right now."

"You sound like the cops and shit. Cooperate. This is some bullshit. I love you and you just want to throw it all away like we haven't been through fucking hell and high water. Come on Seandra. You know me baby. You know how I do. I'm good to you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Don't punish me for loving you baby. Don't give up on me like this." His eyes were pleading for me to give him a chance, but I couldn't.

"I'm not punishing you. You couldn't leave well enough alone. We didn't have any problems until you made them. I just need some time. I don't know what's going to happen with us right now."

He took my house key off his key chain and put it in the palm of my hand.

“Everything I do is because I love you baby. Just know that, okay.”

I nodded. “Okay. Can you leave now please?”

He casted his head down and slowly left the room. When I heard the front door slam the tears started falling. Why the hell did I always have to go through shit like that? Men always ended up being my down fall, but not anymore. That time I would stand my ground. My foot was down and I was not going to lose myself for the sake of love ever again. That time I wasn't going to run into the arms of another man for comfort. If I was meant to spend the rest of my life alone, so the fuck what. To hell with all men. Even Pierre. I was done.

Renell

It was after eleven pm and the house was quiet. Resean was down, hopefully until at least five am. I had just taken a shower and after Ricky oiled my body down, we were all snug under the covers. I was reading Addicted by Zane. Reading books by her was my guilty pleasure. Ricky was lying beside me with his computer in his lap.

When he put in the password, I tried to sneak a peek to see what keys he pressed, but he did that shit too fast. I still had no clue what it was. When he looked over at me, I pretended to be into the book.

“What are you reading?” He asked as if he was really interested.

I entertained him anyway. “Addicted by Zane. I read it before a while back. It’s about a woman who is addicted to sex.”

“Hmm.” A sly smile crept on his face. “Can you relate to the main character?”

I laughed. “In some ways yes and in some ways no.”

“I’m curious to know why that’s your answer.”

“Well, I wish I could be as sexually open as she is. I can relate to the want and desire that she feels. What I can’t do is fuck random men. Besides, she finds out later in the book that her father molested her and she had been suppressing the memories. After going to her therapist she finally remembered and that explained her unusual sexual appetite.”

“Damn, that’s a twist,” he said with a shocked look on his face. “I could never understand how a father could do

something like that to his own child. That's a reflection of him and he should be protecting his daughter, not being the man who damages her."

I nodded my agreement. "You're absolutely right." As I took my glasses off, a yawn escaped without warning.

"You're sleepy baby?" He asked glancing over his shoulder.

"Yes, as hell," I mumbled. "I have to go to the office in the morning."

I wasn't looking forward to seeing Brock. As a matter of fact I'd been avoiding him. Still, I knew that I'd have to face him eventually. A nagging feeling deep down inside kept telling me that I had to fire him too. His confession couldn't have come at a worse time. When I felt like I owed him my life, he just had to tell me how in love he was with me. Damn, could things get any more complicated?

"I'm sorry babe. I have to finish this," he said staring at the computer screen in deep concentration. "If the light's bothering you I can go in the study."

I grabbed his arm. "No, stay. I'm fine. I want you right here." After what had happened with Grady, I couldn't stand to sleep alone.

He smiled and then leaned over to kiss my lips. "Night baby." His focus was back on the computer's screen.

"Night." I closed my eyes and drifted off into a restless slumber.

* * *

I was out of the office the next day before noon and as I got in my Navigator I heard someone calling my name. When I looked up and spotted Brock, I pretended to not hear him. My Bluetooth was on my ear, so I acted like I was talking to someone on my cell phone. As I started the ignition and high tailed it up out of there, I didn't miss the disappointed look on his face. At that point I knew for sure that I had to let him go. The thing was, I didn't know how. After what had happened with Grady, I was afraid of what he'd do.

* * *

When I got home I dismissed Claudette and then fed Resean. My parents had stopped by unexpectedly to see him. As happy as I was to see my father back to his old self, I was anxious for them to leave because Ricky had left his lap top again. He was supposed to be at work a long time ago, so I had no idea why he'd left his computer at home. Either way, I was ready to see if I could figure out his password since I had the opportunity.

“Well honey, we're going to head home,” mother said as she glanced down at her iPhone. “We have a charity dinner to attend tonight. Will you and your sisters be at the brunch I'm having for The Ladies' Tea this weekend?”

The Ladies' Tea was a social group that was made up of some of the richest, most entitled women in Miami. I for one was not up for that bourgeois ass shit. “Well, I wasn't planning to attend. I don't know about Seantay and Seandra.”

Mother sighed and turned her nose up at me. “I don't know what's gotten into you lately missy. You act as if you've forgotten where you come from. Just because you've given

birth does not take away the fact that you are my child. I need you to come back to earth and act like you're a Beauvois. You and your sisters have left home and lost your ever loving minds. I swear."

Father ushered mother toward the door and mouthed, "I'm sorry", before kissing me goodbye.

Seandra was just like her if you asked me. It was like they could be cool one minute and then they'd just explode into a fit the next. I shook my head and took a seat on the sofa after they left to collect my thoughts. Then it hit me that I had a chance to hack into Ricky's lap top again. I made my way up the stairs and laid my sleeping son down in his crib.

When I got to the master bedroom the computer was sitting there on the nightstand where Ricky had left it the night before. I grabbed it and sat down on the bed. Every number and word combination that I could think of had been tried and after almost an hour, I decided to take a break.

I checked my cellphone and realized that I had missed calls from Seantay and Ricky. Ricky had called to tell me that he would be a little late because he had a meeting with an athlete about some potential endorsements. It was already after four, so I wondered what he meant by a little late. Fuck it. It gave me time to crack his computer. Then I thought about it. Raheem had a friend named Chang who knew how to hack into anything. I picked up the phone and dialed his number.

"Hey Nell. What's up?" Rah asked.

"I'm fine and you?"

"I'm good. Is everything okay?"

I laughed to put him at ease. “Yeah. Everything’s fine. I was just calling because I need your friend Chang’s number. Uh, I need him to help me get into this computer. It’s pretty old and I forgot the password. The thing is there is some important information that I need to get from it and well...I can’t.”

“Okay, cool. He can help,” he said before giving me his number.

As soon as we hung up I called Chang. Less than an hour later he was in my living room. I only hoped that Ricky wouldn’t walk in. After almost another hour of trying a victorious smile finally broke across his face. I knew he had to have it figured out because he’d been so serious the entire time.

“Finally,” he breathed. “We’re in there.”

“Thank you so much Chang. How much do I owe you?” I asked anxious to start navigating.

It was six fifteen and I didn’t know how long it would be before Ricky got there. I needed Chang to get paid and be on his way.

“Oh, no worries. This one’s on the house.” He passed me a business card. “But if any of your friends need me that’s a different story.”

I couldn’t help but smile because he was so charming. “I will definitely refer you.” He was cute too.

After he left, I wasted no time getting back to Ricky’s lap top. Thankfully Resean was still knocked out, so I was free to snoop. After thirty minutes or so of boring emails, and an

uneventful Facebook and Twitter page, I came across something rather interesting.

* * *

“Hey beautiful,” Ricky said leaning over to give me a peck on the lips.

I had no idea if he noticed that I hadn’t kissed him back. He seemed to have not, because he went right on about his merry little business while I sat there fuming. What I had discovered let me know that I had no fucking clue who he really was.

“Who the fuck are you?” I asked as I stood up to follow him into the study.

He turned around and contorted his face as if he was confused. “Excuse me?” It came as if he was taken aback by my question.

“I said who the fuck are you? Is your name Ricky Cory, or is it Raymond Mosley? Wait, hold up. Is it Ricardo Emory, or Brad Quincy? Why do all of your so called last names end with the letter y? Does that mean something?” I let out a sarcastic laugh. “I can’t believe you’ve been misleading me all this time. We have a child together and we’re supposed to get married...” My voice trailed off because I was sure that I would burst into tears.

“We’re still going to get married baby. I love you and our son. Please, just let me explain.” He reached out for me, but I lunged at him like I was going to slap the shit out of him and he backed away.

“Explain what?!” I laughed sarcastically. “We’re getting married? Yeah right. What is your first name? What the hell will my last name be? Huh? Our son’s last name is Cory? Is that even your real last name? Oh my God!” I suddenly felt like I was about to faint.

What the hell was I going to tell my parents? How would I explain why there was not going to be a wedding? I couldn’t marry a man like that. Shit. When my son grew up what would I tell him about his father? The tears couldn’t be contained anymore and they fell like the dam had exploded.

“I don’t know what you’ve been up to, but I know...I know something’s not right about it. You...you left your computer here and I...I know about the off shore accounts in two of the names I found. There were pictures of fake IDs with your face and those names. What...what the hell are you into Ricky? Shit...I don’t even know if that’s really your fucking name. No wonder you didn’t want our son to be a junior.” The sobs made my words incomprehensible, but I was sure he understood me.

The look of regret that covered his face didn’t move me one bit. If anything it just made me want to hurt him even more. When I went through the files on his computer I found bank information about two off shore accounts. One was in Switzerland and one was in Belize. The passwords and account numbers were also saved in files and it didn’t take long for me to access them.

“One account has over a hundred million dollars in it and the other has two hundred and fifty million. Now, as a sports agent you should not be grossing that much revenue. As

a matter of fact you told me that you were worth five million. I need you to explain where that money came from and why you have accounts in two different names. I'll wait." I tapped my foot and positioned my arms across my chest.

"Nell. Look. Babe."

I could tell that he was caught up because sweat was pouring from his face and the AC was on full blast.

"What Rick? Start fucking talking now, or I'm going to call the police and let them find out what the fuck is going on. Are you a drug dealer? Huh? Are you using me and your so called career as a cover up? What? You're a fucking king pin?" I asked wiping the tears from my eyes with the back of my hand. Shit, I had no idea what he was doing. Nothing would surprise me because at that point I'd seen and heard it all.

He held his hands out in front of him as if he was surrendering. I didn't know what that was supposed to mean, but I wasn't falling for any of his bullshit. It was obvious that he was doing something illegal and part of me didn't even want to know what it was. Shit, I wished it had just been cheating. That was what I'd expected. Damn, that would've been so much easier to deal with.

"Fuck!" Ricky yelled and ran his hands across his face and head. "Why the hell did you have to go looking for shit that you know you don't want to fucking deal with!?"

I had never heard him take that tone with me and I was shocked. Although I had discovered something that I didn't expect, hearing him yell at me was even more surprising.

“Who the fuck do you think you’re talking to! I have the right to look for shit when it comes to the man I planned on marrying! We just had a child you son of a bitch! I’m entitled to know what the fuck I’m getting myself into and what genes my damn son may have inherited against his will!” I yelled wishing I had something to hit him with other than my hands.

Ricky walked over to me and grabbed my shoulders. He literally shook me and the look in his eyes scared me.

“Get your hands off me! Are you crazy?”

“Yes,” he said as he stared deep into my eyes. “I’m crazy about you and I have been since the moment we met. I remember when you invited me to your sister’s engagement party. I fell in love with you that night Nell. There is not one thing I regret about us. Not even the fact that I haven’t been truthful with you about everything. I’ve been the same man the whole time baby.”

He wasn’t shaking me anymore, but he hadn’t loosened his grip on my shoulders either.

“I knew that if I told you everything we wouldn’t have ever made it this far. In that case we wouldn’t have had the wonderful times we’ve shared and we wouldn’t have our son. You have made me the happiest man in the world baby and all I want to do is marry you and be a family.”

I just stared at him like he had pure lost his mind. He still hadn’t explained where all of that money had come from and why he’d been using aliases. All I could do was think he was some kind of menace who was involved with organized crime.

“Are you even really a sports agent?” I asked as I stared up at him with a look of disgust on my face.

He looked down for a second and then regained our eye contact. Shaking his head, he let out a low, “No.”

I could feel my heart sink and the tears came even faster. “What?” It came out as a croak. “I...you were one of my...clients.”

“It was just a cover up baby, but falling in love with you was real. Shit. The fact that I am in love with you right now is real. I love you and Resean more than anything else in this world baby. Even more than that money.” He pulled me into his body, but I was stiff as a board.

“How can I say that I love you when I don’t even know you?”

“Shit Nell. You fucking know me!”

I pulled away from him. “Okay, so is your name really Ricky Cory?”

“Yes,” he said with a nod.

I sniffed and tried to hold back the tears. He didn’t deserve them, so I held them in and tried to get some answers.

“Tell me the truth Ricky. What the hell are you into?”

He cleared his throat. “Are you sure that you want to know the truth? Can you handle that?”

“Hell fuck yeah!” I snapped before he could get it out good.

“Okay. Please, sit down.”

“Fuck that. You better start talking now, or you’re out of here.”

“Is our son asleep?”

I looked at him like I was going to murder his ass if he didn’t start explaining what the hell was going on.

“Okay,” he said quickly and then took a deep breath. “Here goes...”

Chapter 14

Seantay

I was doing an intense workout with Randy, but my mind was on what was going on in that hotel room between Chris Love and the DA. All I could think about was the possibility of something going wrong. What if he noticed the hidden cameras, or what if he just had a bad feeling and didn’t go through with it? Shit, anything could happen and if that new evidence was against us, it was going to be over. Even if the evidence only proved Dean’s innocence and they didn’t know we’d framed him, I still had to deal with Dean’s insane obsession with me.

“Okay baby Beauvois. I don’t know what’s been going on with you, but you damn sure don’t seem focused. Do you want to end the session early, because...”

I cut his flamboyant ass off with an annoyed, “Damn, if you don’t get my undivided attention you start crying like a bitch. This is just a damn work out session. Not a dance routine for a Beyonce concert.”

Randy put his hand to his mouth which was formed into the shape of an O. “No the fuck she didn’t.” He looked around like there were other people in the room. “She has an attitude with me and for what?”

I rolled my eyes, but I couldn’t help but laugh. “Why the hell are you so animated? I’m sorry Randy. I just have a lot on my mind.”

“The runway show, or your sister’s upcoming nuptials?”

“Both,” I lied before taking a long gulp from my water bottle. If only he knew that I had bigger fish to fry.

“Mmm. Well, I know it’s going to be extravagant!” His voice was full of excitement.

“Uh, I hate to burst your bubble, but Nell’s going for simple.”

Randy’s facial expression changed into an over exaggerated frown. “Why the hell would she be going for simple? She’s a Beauvois for heaven’s sake. Well, there’s hope with you and Raheem. I know ya’ll are going to go all out with that Beauvois money.”

I laughed. “What about Seandra?”

Randy giggled and then fanned himself with his hand. “Shit. What about her?”

“Well, she’s in a relationship and she’s older than me. Wouldn’t you expect for her to get married first?”

“Hell no.” Randy rolled his eyes. “That chica changes men like she changes her underwear.”

“Don’t ever let her hear you say that.” I thought about the exchange between her and Nell. They still hadn’t made up yet.

“Well, it’s the truth. I wonder if she’s going to slip up with that fine ass Pierre. I heard about what happened in the news. You think he really had a seizure, or he was high on something? Maybe he was sipping on that sizzurp like Lil’ Weezy. He claimed to have a history of seizures too, shit. Yeah right. He has a history of sipping on that sizzurp. Sizzurp and seizure sound damn close to me.” He laughed and slapped me five.

“Get the fuck out of here Randy.” Tears were in my eyes I was laughing so hard. “That man is really epileptic. It was confirmed at the hospital.” I shook my head at Randy as I wiped my eyes.

“Mmm hmm. Rich folks can pay doctors to say anything child. I ain’t buying that shit.”

That damn Randy was a fool.

“Are we going to finish this work out or not?” I asked suddenly ready to get my adrenaline pumping again.

“Alright, but I see that I got to do some insanity type moves so you can stay focused,” he threatened with a straight face. The jokes were over.

“Bring it!” I yelled before turning the music back up.

* * *

After a long, hot bubble bath, I lounged across my California King sized bed butt ass naked. The ceiling fan was on low and the balcony doors were open to let the balmy, late

evening air in. I lit my freshly rolled joint and held it between my perfectly manicured fingers. For the first time in a while, I actually felt relaxed.

When Raheem strolled in the room and flashed a sly smile at me, I had a feeling that my night was just about to get even better. He didn't say a word as he quickly undressed down to nothing and laid down on the bed. As he rested his head on my ass, I passed him the blunt.

“So...”

He took a long pull and then exhaled. “All I have to say is damn I'm glad I love pussy the way I do. Just knowing what's on that video makes me wanna url. Everything went as planned baby. Chris got the room with a credit card he just happened to have because he's a student. They'd always do it like that so that Monroe wouldn't be traced back to the room. Of course he pays Chris's credit card bill. So, we met Chris a couple hours before everything was supposed to go down. He gave us the room key. Chang rigged the room with three hidden cameras. They did their thing and left a few hours later. We went back in the room to get the cameras and that was it. Poor Chang has to go through the footage tonight and put a nice video together. It's going to look like a real damn porn once he's done with it. Tomorrow we'll go to the library and email the video to him from an email address that can't be traced. Of course Chang knows how to do shit like that. After that we'll wait for the DA to send us Dean's entire case file. We'll go over it and see what we need to do to destroy the so called evidence and then Dean will be found guilty and finish out his sentence. By the time he gets out we'll be married and

living on an island somewhere far away from here. If it doesn't work, well, we'll just have to go to plan B."

I sighed at the thought of plan B. Murder was not what I wanted it to boil down to, but we had to do what needed to be done. There was no way I wanted to have to look over my shoulder for the rest of my life. It was bad enough that Dean thought we belonged together. I could only imagine how psychotic he'd become if he found out I'd taken a part in framing him. He'd probably come up with a hit list and knock us all off one by one.

"I hope it doesn't come to plan B babe. As much as I hate Dean, I don't want you to have to do something like that. If you get locked up, or hurt...I...I...don't know what I'd do." Shit, I got choked up just thinking about it.

"Nothing's going to happen to me baby. I'm a...well, just put it this way, I know what I'm doing. I'm a street bred nigga and just 'cause my pops had money doesn't mean I'm soft."

He moved so that he was lying next to me. As he stared into my eyes I knew that he'd stop at nothing to protect me.

"I love you Tay. I've never been able to honestly tell any woman that other than my mamma. When you came back into my life I knew that it was for a reason. Fate put us back together again, because although we both tried to defy it, this shit right here was meant to be. So, I ain't gonna let nothing fuck up what we have. Not Dean, not Nafis and not nah other mufucka out there. I ain't goin' nowhere mami. I mean that shit. And shorty, you ain't either. So, whatever it comes down

to is a'ight wit' me, cause I got you. Know that. A'ight." He inched closer to plant a soft kiss on my lips.

"You know that I love you too Rah and I don't have any regrets when it comes to us. I'm just glad you put your foot down with me and made me see what was right in front of me."

"How about we get away for a few days. I think we both need to relax and shit. You know...shop...make love...shop...eat...make love...shop...sleep...fuck."

I laughed and closed my eyes as he kissed me again and again and again.

"Damn baby. You sure do know how to treat your lady." I couldn't help but flash him a sexy smile.

He passed me the blunt and I took a deep pull before placing it in the ashtray.

"I know what that means." He grinned at me.

"What?" I asked innocently before straddling his sexy, naked body.

"You're ready for some dick now." He sat up and held on to me tightly.

I laughed as I wrapped my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. "How'd you know?"

"Shit, I know my lady," he said before grabbing a condom from the nightstand.

It was a good thing it was an arm's length away because neither of us wanted to move. As we kissed he opened the condom wrapper and slid it on quick as hell.

“Anxious are we?” I asked playfully as he grabbed my hips and squeezed.

“Cause I know how good it is,” he said in a throaty voice.

I lifted my pelvis and positioned myself so I could take him inside nice and deep. When I lowered my wet, moist, tightness onto his shaft, he let out a deep breath and held on to my waist.

“Mmm...damn. You be tight as hell every time like I ain't just beat that pussy up,” he whispered in my ear like that shit was hard to believe.

“Uhh...that's those kegals baby.”

Shit, I worked them on him for about forty five minutes before he succumbed to the pleasure. It was cool because he always navigated to my G spot right away. After cleaning our bodies in the shower, we both dried off and got nice and comfy under the covers. My mind was heavy, although my body was relaxed. I knew that I would probably not get a good night's sleep again until I was sure that Dean and Nafis would not see the light of day anytime soon.

* * *

Less than eight hours after the video was sent, Raheem was excitedly telling me that DA Monroe had responded to the email.

“That mufucka was shook. I could tell by his message. He was like oh my God. He set me up.” Rah laughed. “He kept asking who knows about the video. I assured him that Chris didn't set him up and was a victim just like he was. Of

course I told him that no one else knows about the video and in order to make sure it stayed that way he would have to comply with my demands. In five minutes flat I had the file that contained all of the information about Dean's appeal. He also promised to somehow counter attack the defense's evidence and ensure a guilty verdict. Elise and LaTisha will not have to testify again. He said it's a motion that he can use that will allow their testimonies from the first trial to be played instead."

He passed me a manila folder. "That's the entire file. I haven't even looked at it yet. I was waiting to do that with you."

I nodded and bit my bottom lip. "Damn, I'm fucking nervous. Did the DA even ask who you were or why you were doing this to him?"

"He kind of hinted around those questions, but I told him that shit didn't matter. I let him know that the important thing was the fact that I had something that could destroy everything he's worked so hard for. That was all I needed to say."

I opened the folder and took a deep breath. You could say that I didn't know what to expect. What if the evidence that would get Dean off contained evidence against me, Rah and Chang? How would I explain that shit to my family? Reba would hate me for putting Chang in that position.

There was a thick stack of papers and my eyes widened.

"All of this?" I asked pulling them all out.

Rah laughed. “Baby, this is a very important criminal case. What did you expect?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know. I guess we have our work cut out for us huh?”

He nodded and sat down beside me. “Yeah, but I’m down to do this shit with you. Chang and Reba are having a romantic night and I guess we’ll be having the opposite.”

I laughed “Once we’re done it’ll be romance time.”

He leaned over and kissed my puckered lips. “A’ight, boo. Let’s do this.”

I sighed. “It’s going to be a long night.”

Chapter 15

Seandra

I was so glad that Cinnamon Star was a wrap because I didn’t want to see Ahmad’s stupid ass. I hadn’t told anyone about our break up and I assumed that he hadn’t either since it wasn’t all over social media and the news. We’d finally gone public about it and as soon as we did our love thing crumbled right before my eyes. Maybe it had been best to keep things quiet. It seemed that our relationship was fine then.

It was a little after one pm and I was excited about reading with my co-star, whoever he was. The person who was playing my love interest in the romantic comedy “Nothing Even Matters” had been kept secret from me. The director claimed he didn’t want us overthinking things, so my co-star didn’t know who I was yet either. We would finally be meeting

and going over some lines to see if we had that movie chemistry.

I damn sure hoped we did. The thing was, I didn't want to be tempted by another man. Pierre hadn't called since that day I was on the beach. As much as I wanted to reach out to him to say thank you, I hadn't. I didn't want him to read anything into my communicating with him. Shit, I also didn't want to end up tangled up in the sheets with his fine ass. No longer wanting to be that chick who seemed to be so desperate to be loved, I pushed Pierre out of my mind. Just because he was fine didn't mean that I had to jump in the sack with him. That wasn't me anymore. I guess I was finally growing the hell up and it was about damn time.

* * *

I pulled up to the studio and parked beside a hot ass canary yellow Ferrari. The sun's glare shined off the candy paint job making me want to buy a new whip. Hmm, maybe that was exactly what I needed to get over my break up. I'd stopped my compulsive shopping slowly, but surely. I thought I deserved an impulse buy.

The thought made me smile as I grabbed my sunglasses and put them on. When I stepped out of the car the afternoon wind immediately whipped my short, white dress up. Holding it down, I closed the car door and sashayed to the entrance of the building like the star that I was.

We would be meeting with the casting director, so I walked up to the front desk for instructions. The guy at the counter was a short, chubby dark skinned man with wire rimmed glasses and a huge, white smile.

“Hello, I’m...”

“Seandra Beauvois. I know.” He chuckled. “Lauren is waiting for you. Just go down that corridor.” He pointed. “Once you get to the end make a left. It’s the first door on the right.”

I nodded. “Thank you very much...”

“Aaron,” he said quickly.

“Aaron.” I proceeded to follow his directions and opened the door to what looked like a small boardroom.

There were several people sitting around the square, mahogany table. My eyes scanned the faces. A few were unfamiliar and then I spotted Lauren, the casting director.

“Seandra, you’re here great,” she said as she stood and made her way over to me. “Please, have a seat.”

She cleared her throat and moved her hands over her peach colored pencil skirt. The white, collar shirt and blazer she matched it up with were killer.

“I love that outfit,” I just had to say.

She smiled, which lit up her almond colored skin. The Halle Berry short cut she rocked suited her round face to the tee.

“Thank you,” she said as I took a seat.

“Okay everyone. The star is here. I would like for you all to introduce yourselves to her and get acquainted. We are still waiting on the man of the hour, which will be her co-star. We’re keeping it on the hush until he gets here...”

Just as she said that the door opened.

“And here he is,” Lauren said wearing that bright smile again. “I love the fact that the both of you are punctual. You should get along just fine Seandra.”

I made eye contact with my co-star and blushed. The man who would be playing my love interest in the movie was non-other than Pierre himself. Now wasn't that some cruel ass coincidence.

When Pierre spotted me a huge grin dominated his features and he looked like he could hardly contain himself.

“Hello Pierre,” I laughed.

“Hi Seandra,” he beamed as he made his way over to sit beside me.

“Well, we all know that the two of you had a chance encounter recently. We had already planned to keep your identities secret until today, so it was very fitting,” Lauren explained.

There were slight chuckles and nods around the table.

“It's good to see you again,” Pierre said still wearing that damn seductive ass smile of his.

I damned his fine ass to hell for the millionth time. Why the fuck did he have to smell and look so damn tasty? I didn't hear a word he said as his mouth moved. All I could do was imagine kissing those thick ass, succulent lips of his. Mmm mmm mmm. The more I saw him the sexier he seemed to get. *Snap out of it Seandra*, I thought to myself.

Hmm, I had a feeling that things were about to get interesting.

* * *

I'd managed to make it through our initial reading without making a complete and utter fool of myself. If I should say so myself, I thought I did a superb job. Lauren and the rest of the crew did too. Pierre and I definitely had movie chemistry. He ended up being a great actor and although I didn't know, acting was his first passion. He had become a model by accident.

The story was, he had a movie audition in France, but ended up walking into a modeling agency instead by mistake. Once he realized that he was in the wrong place, he asked for directions to the studio. He learned that it was right down the street, but was also asked if he wanted to book a modeling gig. So, he ended up doing a major spread in Vogue for Dolce and Gabbana with no prior modeling experience. He didn't get the acting gig though. After that he stuck to a sure thing, which was modeling. He was getting back into the acting arena because it was his first dream.

Getting to know him a little better made it easier to not just see him as a piece of meat. In all actuality, he seemed like a really nice person. If we were going to be working together it was very important that we remained professional. He asked about Ahmad of course and I did tell him that we had a talk. I didn't tell him that we broke up because I didn't want to him to think that I was available. I knew that our break up would come out soon, but until then, I planned to be tactful about everything.

On my way home my phone rang and it was Ahmad of course. He'd called a hundred times since we broke up and that was no exaggeration. With a huff, I answered his call knowing that if I didn't he wouldn't have stopped.

“What do you want?” I asked with an attitude. Shit, he thought I was playing games with his ass.

“Is that really how you’re going to handle this?” He asked.

“Yeah, just like the way you handled our relationship. I’m going to be messy.” I rolled my eyes at the mere thought of getting back with him. How could he be so damn insecure? I hated an insecure ass man.

He sighed loudly and then cleared his throat. “Look baby, I don’t want to fight...”

“Baby?” I cut him off. “We’re not together anymore. Don’t you get that? It’s over.”

“It’s not over Seandra,” he said sounding crazy as hell. “Where are you? We really need to talk.”

“We don’t have anything to talk about Ahmad. You don’t seem to be understanding me. I’m done, finished. Maybe you’ll understand it if I put it this way. Curtains closed. Lights out. Cut. The end.” I shook my head at how oblivious he seemed to be.

“Why do you want to just give up like that?” He asked. “After what we just went through with my ex and shit. I thought there was something worth fighting for, but you don’t?” The tone of his voice told me that he was hurt. I didn’t mean to hurt him, but I just couldn’t take him anymore.

“I thought it was too Ahmad. I love you. I still do, but I can’t do this with you. You aren’t the same guy I fell for. You’re not the man I thought I knew. He was confident and secure about himself. You...you’re all jealous and possessive

now and I vowed to myself that I'd never get caught up in that type of drama. I don't need that shit in my life anymore, so no matter how I feel about you, I have to stay focused. My career is about to take off and..."

"That's what changed Seandra. You just don't see it. Since the day you got that call about "Nothing Even Matters" you changed. Your career is your top priority now and all you care about is being a movie star. I feel like you put us on the back burner. Don't get me wrong babe, I know how important your career is to you, but you always made me feel like I was too. Well, up until recently. I guess when I didn't pull out that day, I kind of hoped you'd get pregnant. I was desperate to get your interest back in me somehow and then when the shit happened with Pierre, I just snapped I guess. I'm sorry baby. I just didn't want to lose you. I felt that if you became this, this big movie star, you'd forget all about me."

I couldn't believe what he'd just said. Was he really intimidated by my career advancing? Did he want me to just be some sitcom actress forever? What the fuck kind of shit was that? I needed a man who was strong and would support me no matter what I chose to do.

"So you tried to knock me up on purpose?" I asked. Although I did think that first, it was different to hear him admit to it. "I thought it was just a spur of the moment thing Ahmad. I should've known better." I shook my head at him in disgust. "And as far as my career coming first, we talked about that before we even became a couple. You seemed to be okay with it all at in the beginning. We were friends, so I thought that was enough of a foundation for you to trust and support me. Your ass is obviously more concerned about yourself than

me. Of course Pierre is attractive, but I love you. Don't you see that you pushed me away with your attempts to keep me? Ironic isn't it? Well, guess what? I took the morning after pill, so I really doubt that your plan worked. Oh, and before the media lets the cat out of the back, Pierre will be my co-star in "Nothing Even Matters". How about that shit for irony?"

I hung up with a sly grin on my face. Shit, I didn't need or want a man who would hold me back instead of uplifting me. I needed and wanted a man who would let me spread my wings and fly, not put an anchor on me. I was a star and stars were meant to shine. A man was not going to dim that light anymore. I couldn't care less about what we went through to be together. Some shit just wasn't meant to be. Maybe that whole black magic thing I went through was supposed to deter me from being with him before it even got that far. Perhaps, Ahmad was never my soul mate in the first place.

Chapter 16

Renell

More than twenty four hours had gone by since Ricky's revelation and I was still stunned. I could not believe that the man I was planning to marry had misled me in such a way. Not only was he not a sports agent, but what he did do for a living made him the scum of the earth. My so called man, the father of my first born son, was a bottom feeder. My fiancé was a fucking scavenger.

It was crazy how he explained that shit to me. As I sat there and waited for the worst, I still wasn't really prepared for what he had told me. That shit changed everything.

“Babe, please don’t judge me,” he’d said giving me a look that begged for understanding.

“I can’t promise you that,” I had said and I really meant it.

He let out a deep breath and rubbed his chin before his confession.

“I’ve never been a straight laced square. I wanted you to think I was because I really fell hard for you. I’m deeply in love with you and I am willing to change who I am for you and our son. Deep down inside, I don’t want to keep doing what I’ve been doing,” he started.

I was getting frustrated because the waiting game was getting tired as hell.

“Get to the damn point Rick before I go the hell off in here!”

He closed his eyes and then balled his fists at his sides. It was like whatever he had to say was killing him. I could tell that he didn’t want to tell me anything else, but he had no choice.

“Just know that I love you Nell. Through it all there has never been a moment that I wasn’t real about how I feel about you. You and our son are the best thing that ever happened to me. You two inspire me to change.”

I rolled my eyes in annoyance. It was like I was a ticking time bomb that was about to explode at any minute if he didn’t just go ahead and tell me what the fuck was going on. He must’ve felt the heat coming off me because he finally let it out.

“For the past few years I’ve been the master mind of a fraud ring. I’m the one who calls all of the shots, which explains the millions that you were speaking of. I’ve done everything from scams with credit cards to my newest venture. A few months ago I actually figured out how to copy a website to make a dummy website and link my bank account to it. I did it with a Bentley and Mercedes dealership. When the cars are purchased the money goes directly into my account. I’ve also been automatically drafting funds from millions of personal bank accounts. I hacked into a few major banks’ websites and got access to the account numbers. All I have to take is a penny or nickel here or there to get millions of dollars.” There was even a smile on his face as if he was proud of what he had done.

My mouth was wide open. “What the fuck? Why the hell would you do some shit like that? How did you fool me into thinking you were a sports agent? I mean, you supposedly had this long ass client list and...” I was so disappointed in him. “How can you live with yourself? You take from people who work hard every day for what they have. You’re scamming people and bragging about it with a smile like it is okay.”

“I can live with myself because I feel like Robin Hood. The people I take from don’t even miss that shit. They’re rich and half of them have never worked a hard day in their lives. Because of me my parents could move out of the hood and my family is well taken care of. Nobody wants for anything, so I don’t feel bad at all. As a matter of fact having millions of dollars feel damn good.”

I had never thought he was a narcissist, but I knew better at that moment. Truth be told, I didn't know the man I'd laid down and procreated with at all. Damn, I really felt like a fool. How could I have been so easily misled? Was I really that gullible? I should've been more inquisitive. I should've been investigating the man I planned to spend the rest of my life with. The things he had just admitted to me made me question all of the feelings I thought I had for him. How could they be real if he wasn't really the man I thought I had fallen in love with?

“All this time I've been with you I wouldn't have ever thought. What makes you think just because you feel entitled, that is enough? You don't have the right to steal from people. My father works hard for everything he has and so do I. If someone took from me you'd be ready to defend my honor. What is the difference between me and the people you're taking from? Do you feel that I don't deserve what I have? Would you want someone to do that to Resean? What if we'd set up a trust fund for him and someone just wiped it all out? Do you think that would be okay?” I was really trying to understand him. What had happened to the man I loved? Was he ever real, or was he just an illusion?

“That's different baby. Besides, I've been getting away with that shit for years, but I know that it's time for me to retire now. I'm putting all of that risky shit behind me and taking the high road. We're going to get married and I am going to invest that money into something legitimate. I promise to make you happy. Think about it. If I was a sports agent would I be able to afford you?” There was a snide smirk on his face that made me want to sock his ass.

“You can’t be serious right now Ricky. I want you out of my fucking house! Now! You must be out of your damn mind if you think I’m going to marry your ass! You’re a fucking criminal and I don’t want anything to do with you! You are never to come near me or my son again! Do you hear me! I don’t know what kind of shit you’re involved in, or what type of thugs you’re involved with! I can’t with you right now!”

He just stood there like I hadn’t just told him to leave and there would be no wedding.

“Baby, come on. I’m still the same man. At least I told you the truth,” he said trying his best to level with me somehow, but it wasn’t working at all.

“I don’t want to hear it. Our relationship, or whatever you want to call this lie we’ve been living, is over!” I stumped off upstairs to the master bedroom.

Thank God Resean was still asleep because I knew I’d been loud as hell. I went in the walk in closet to grab a suitcase. As I threw his clothes in it, I heard him enter the bedroom. He grabbed my hands in an attempt to stop me.

“Nell. Baby. Please. Just think about what you’re doing. Please!”

“Get your damn hands off me motherfucker! I don’t need to think about shit! I don’t want a lying ass thief for a husband. You will not be in my son’s life because you don’t deserve to be! I can’t believe you!”

He backed away from me with tears glistening in his eyes. “You don’t mean that.”

“I mean every word. I cannot marry you and if I had known then what I know now, I wouldn’t have ever had a damn child with you! I should’ve known better. I should’ve known that I wouldn’t be so lucky. You were never the man I thought you were. As a matter of fact I have no idea who the hell you really are. Because of that, I want you out of my life. I don’t want to see your lying, scheming face again. If you come near me or my son again, I’ll call the police and tell them everything.”

He narrowed his eyes at me. “You wouldn’t.”

“Try me.” I gave him an intimidating look that made his face soften.

“Don’t take my son away from me Nell. Please.”

“Fuck you. I don’t feel sorry for your ass. You don’t have a son as far as I’m concerned.” I walked back to the closet and grabbed more of his clothes.

“Stop Nell, damnit! I’m not going any fucking where!” He opened the suitcase and started pulling clothes out as I put more clothes in.

“Move out of my way!” I yelled pushing him away from the suitcase. “You will leave and you are leaving now!”

“No the fuck I’m not! Now let my shit go woman!” He demanded with an expression on his face that I’d never seen before.

It made me let go of his clothes and just stare at him like I was at a loss. What had gotten into him? If I didn’t know any better I’d think he was going to hit me.

“I’m taking my son for a drive and when I get back I want you and your shit out of here and I mean it. If not, well, you’ll see if I mean it when I say that I’ll tell the police everything. I’m not afraid of you and I don’t give a damn how I supposedly feel about you. Our relationship has been one damn lie after another and I’m not building a future on that shit.”

I walked out of the room and headed into the nursery to get my son. When I came back his ass better had been long gone.

* * *

I had been driving around for about an hour before I decided to head back home. Ricky’s car wasn’t in the driveway, so I figured he’d gotten the point and went back to his house. I was so glad he hadn’t decided to sell it. We’d decided to keep it as second home. Well, that was out. It was his home and my home was mine. The tears I’d been crying had dried up and Resean was thankfully still asleep.

He was such a good baby and I guess he didn’t get that from his father. I couldn’t really say that Ricky was a bad person, but he wasn’t a good person either. If he was, he wouldn’t be able to just steal from people like that. I needed a man who was honest and made an honest living. If I couldn’t trust him to be who he said he was initially, how could I trust him down the line? I had so many regrets, but my baby was not one of them. He was the only good thing that came out of whatever it was that I had with Ricky.

I’d never done it before, but the first night that Ricky was gone, I put Resean in the bed with me. I was careful not to

roll over on him, which was a fear of mine, but I needed him close to me. I cried myself to sleep not believing that the love I thought I had was over. From that moment on I would pour all of my love on my son. No other man would be able to break down the brick wall I was going to put up. Unless it was for my son, love didn't live in my heart anymore.

* * *

I went into the office the next morning at ten because it had been so hard for me to get out of bed. As much as I wanted to reach out, I hadn't talked to my sisters at all about what was going on. Part of the reason I didn't call Tay was because I didn't want a pity party. Although I was the oldest, I seemed to have the worst luck when it came to love. She and Rah were still going strong, so she wouldn't understand how I felt anyway. Calling Seandra was a no go being that we still weren't on speaking terms. As far as I knew she and Ahmad were doing better than ever and that shit sucked.

I was the one who had a child out of wedlock and I was no closer to getting married than I was before I had him. Why the hell did the man I loved have to be a fucking criminal? All I could think about was if I married him and he got caught. How would that affect me and my son's future? Would they think I was involved? The shit had hit the fan and it had been so unanticipated.

When I walked inside everyone was bustling and moving around like the scare with Grady had never happened. The sight put a huge smile on my face. At least I had a successful business and maybe it was time for me to become focused again. Being with Ricky had kind of knocked me off

my square. I was a workaholic before him and well, my priorities had shifted a little bit. After what I'd been through I would never let a man do that to me again. Resean and my business were at the top of my priority list and I vowed to keep it that way.

“Hi Miss Beauvois,” Marianne, my marketing director, called out as soon as I crossed the threshold.

“Hi Marianne and how many times do I have to tell you all to call me Renell,” I said forcing a smile on my face.

“Oh, sorry Renell. Have a good one.” She walked past me and I ended up bumping right into Brock.

He held on to my arms in an attempt to steady me

“Oh, sorry. I, uh, sorry,” he stammered nervously.

“It's okay,” I said as I pulled away from his grasp. “No damage done.”

“I was trying to stop you the other day to apologize. I was out of line and I don't want that to interfere with our work relationship. If I offended you, please forgive me. I think I was being just a little overzealous. The last thing I would want is for you to be uncomfortable around me.”

When I looked down I noticed that he had offered his hand for me to shake. At first I was skeptical, but something in his clear blue eyes told me that he was sincere.

“Okay,” I shook his hand. “By gones are by gones.”

“Good,” he said with a smile.

I nodded in his direction. Hmm, maybe Brock was saner than I thought. His first day in sales had been very

productive and if I may say so myself, he was probably outselling everybody else. I was just wondering why he was still standing there.

“Well, have a good day Brock.” I was about to walk away when he stopped me.

“I also wanted to give you my two weeks’ notice. Things have been kind of awkward after my...confession. It was just a little crush. No harm, no foul. Maybe I was feeling like Superman because of what I did. I do apologize again.” There was a remorseful look on his face as he passed me an envelope.

I nodded in understanding. He was right. It would be best if he left, but I pretended that his news bothered me.

“I’m sorry to hear that you’re leaving. I’m so grateful for what you did. If it wasn’t for you...well, I don’t know. You did great on your very first day in sales, so I know that you’ll excel in whatever you do from here. Thank you Brock,” I said in gratitude and relief. There was no need to bring up his confession again.

He shook my hand. “No problem Miss Beauvois. Have a great day.”

When I headed to my office there was a smile on my face. It wouldn’t last long though. In my life, I had learned to expect the unexpected.

Chapter 17

Seantay

One month later

Of course the wedding between Ricky and Renell didn't happen and she never explained why. Seandra and Ahmad hadn't patched things up either. The media had been running with all types of speculations about the two very public break ups. On top of all of that Seandra and Renell still weren't speaking. Nell was pissed at Seandra because she'd been publically spending time with her co-star Pierre. That was causing even more buzz in the gossip mill. Everybody was trying to figure out the extent of their relationship. Seandra insisted that there was nothing romantic between them.

“We're really just good friends,” she'd said over and over again. “He's new to the States and he's my co-star. It's not like he has any friends or family here. Why not show him around? I'm single and I'm free to mingle, but it's innocent. I swear.”

Her explanation sounded fair enough, but it was hard to believe that she could just be friends with a man without benefits. We all knew how Seandra was and if she was telling the truth, I'd be shocked. Still, in my eyes she was grown and could do what she wanted. Who was Nell to judge?

As far as Dean, his new trial had started a week before and the evidence that the DA had was finally revealed to the public. The second trial was just as sensational as the first one. It was crazy how Dean's groupies were lined up to get inside of the courtroom. You would think that a man who was on trial for raping a young girl would turn women off, but it didn't seem to be deterring them.

That time I couldn't chance showing up at the trial out of fear of being spotted. There were too many media outlets camped outside and I didn't want my identity to be revealed. It was a good thing that the trial was being televised. Me and Rah sat there and watched it unfold in anticipation of the guilty verdict that we were waiting for.

When it was time for the defense to drop the bomb everyone had been waiting for, you could hear a pin drop in the courtroom.

“The state of the art security system that Dean's estate was equipped with monitored and recorded everything that happened inside and outside of the property. That even includes when he entered or exited any door of his house. On the night in question the defendant did not leave his home at all. He had returned home four hours before the alleged rape and did not leave his home again until six am the next morning. We also have evidence that none of his vehicles were

moved at that time. Please run the footage,” the defense attorney said with a stern face.

He was a tall, middle aged black man with pecan brown skin and a receding hair line. Everyone in Miami knew who Kevin Foster was because he was a defense attorney who was known for winning cases. My nerves were shot, but I was relieved that the evidence they had did not point to any of us.

The footage showed that Dean’s vehicles were all accounted for in his multi-car garage. It showed the video in fast motion to account for the hours before and after the rape. That and the evidence from the alarm company proved that he was at home. All we needed was for the prosecution to place doubt in the minds of the jury.

“My client never left home during the time before or after the rape and you all have the proof. Dean Monross was framed. At this point and time we have no clue who would do that or why, but he is not a rapist. His vendetta with Franklin Williams stopped with him and never crossed over to his daughter. I would like to call the next witness.”

I watched in silence as he called a computer expert to the stand.

“Bradley, you are a computer forensics expert correct?”

“Yes,” the short pale white man, with thick bifocals said into the microphone.

“What did you discover on Dean Monross’s computer?”

“There was no evidence in the history of the computer that supports the claims of the emails and Facebook messages. As a matter of fact his computer had not accessed those websites at the times that the correspondences were made.”

“Which means?” There was an anxious look on the defense lawyer’s face as he waited for the answer.

“That someone had to send the emails and instant messages from a different computer.”

“Thank you Bradley. That is all.”

We waited for the prosecution to cross exam the witness. DA Monroe stood up and ran his hand down his gray silk tie. He was looking dapper in a charcoal colored Armani suit. With his good looks and charm, no one would ever know that he had a secret fetish for young boys. I shook my head just thinking about it.

“The evidence that you found on Dean’s computer does not really prove that he did not send those messages himself, it only proves that they weren’t sent from that particular computer. Correct?” His eyebrows shot up at the end of the question.

Bradley nodded and then spoke up. “Yes, that is correct. There were two computers presented to us. One was his personal lap top and one was his business computer, which was a desk top. Neither of the computers could have been used in the exchange of messages between the victim and defendant, but it does not rule out the possibility that he himself could’ve used another computer. Therefore we accessed his cell phone and iPad and found that they were not sent from those devices either. However, it does not rule out

that he could have sent the messages himself from another device.”

“No further questions.”

The judge looked at Bradley and quickly dismissed him from the stand. The next witness was from the actual alarm company and it was time for the DA to debunk their so called evidence that would get Dean Monross off.

“So, was every door and window secured by the state of the art alarm system that Mr. Foster spoke of?” The DA asked with his eyes focused on the blonde woman who sat on the stand.

“Yes. Well, almost every window. There is a small window in the basement of the home and well, Mr. Monross felt that that window didn’t necessarily need to be wired to the system. He said that was because sometimes small animals like possums or skunks may end up tripping the alarm. Just a slight tap on a window could set the alarm off,” she said confidently.

“So, that means that the defendant could have exited the home from that window without tripping the alarm?”

She looked shocked by the question. “Uh, yes, I guess he could have, but why would he do that?”

I almost laughed out loud at the fact that she asked the lawyer a question.

“A person who does not want to go to prison for rape,” the DA shot back.

“Objection!” Kevin Foster jumped up from his seat like it was on fire.

Suddenly there was chatter in the courtroom.

“Order!” The judge said loudly as he banged his gavel twice.

A hush came over the courtroom again.

“On what grounds Foster?” The judge was a stocky, dark skinned man with salt and pepper hair and a stern face. He looked like he was in his mid-fifties or early sixties.

“He’s leading the witness.”

“Sustained. Okay Monroe. No more insinuations. Continue.”

“The surveillance that your company provided did not show footage of the outside of the estate. Would you say that it is possible that Dean had a car parked outside in the driveway, or that someone could have picked him up?”

The witness looked uncomfortable at that point. “Yes, I would say that is a possibility. We do monitor the outside of his home, but we were only asked to provide surveillance of the garage.”

The DA looked at the jury with a smirk on his face. “Now why would the defense only ask for surveillance of the garage? It may sound crazy, but it is a possibility that the defendant could have climbed out of the basement window and drove off in a car that was parked outside of the estate. Correct?”

She nodded. “That is correct.”

“Thank you. No further questions.”

I smiled because the jury appeared to be buying what the DA was selling. After that the court was recessed for lunch, so we decided to break too.

“What do you think?” I asked Raheem as I spread mayonnaise on wheat bread.

“I don’t think Dean stands a chance. Like Monroe said, anything is possible. People do crazy ass shit every day. I was feeling Monroe when he asked why this stuff didn’t come up in the first trial. It was obviously because Dean just knew he’d get off.” He popped a Lay’s original potato chip in his mouth.

I piled turkey and Swiss cheese on top of the bread. “I don’t know. It sounded farfetched even to me. Who would think to crawl out of their basement window to go rape somebody?”

“Like dude said, somebody who wants to get away with it.”

I pushed the plate over to him and made another sandwich for myself. “I just hope it works.”

Rah took a huge bite out of his sandwich. “Don’t worry babe. Even if it doesn’t work he has no idea who set him up.”

I sighed. “You’re right.”

“Chin up beautiful,” he said flashing a smile my way.

I smiled back. “I’m good babe.”

“You sure?”

“Positive.”

“So, I ran into this nigga named Jay who work a trap for Nafis and he gave me the scoop. I was gonna tell you

earlier, but when I got here you were stuck to the TV.”

He had my full attention. “Okay, so what did he say?”

“That nigga is full of shit. Ain’t nobody take no charges for him and he ended up taking a plea deal for two years.”

I frowned. “Two fucking years? He must’ve had a good ass lawyer.”

Rah shook his head. “Money talks baby. It’s cool though because all we need is two years. By that time we’ll be married and out of Miami.”

“Who says I’m leaving Miami?” I asked. “He or Dean will not run me away from my home.”

“Did you look into security? I can’t be with you every moment, so I need to know that you’re good.”

“I don’t want some big buff guy following me around. It brings unwanted attention. I’m more incognito without that extra shit.”

Rah shook his head. “You are hard headed.”

“But my ass is soft,” I said giving him a seductive glare.

“As hell,” he said giving me a matching look.

“Do we always have to have sex on the brain?” I asked with a laugh. “Even in the worst circumstances we be ready to get busy.”

“It’s the best medicine baby.”

“Hmm. I’ll just be glad when all of these dark clouds clear up. We don’t need Dean running around making our lives a living hell. I need to be worried about my runway show. Shit, and I need to get Nell and Seandra back talking. I don’t remember the last time we had a Divas’ Day. We have to start filming the reality show soon. I don’t need more drama.” I sighed.

Rah kissed my forehead softly. “I love you baby and I have a feeling that everything is going to fall into place. Stop stressing. I don’t need you getting all wrinkly on me and shit. Your forehead is all creased up and shit.”

We both laughed.

“You’re crazy.”

“Yeah. I’m crazy for you woman.”

All I could do was smile. My man always made everything okay. I just wished my sisters could have the same kind of love.

Chapter 18

Seandra

I checked my Instagram page while Pierre ventured off to the men's room. Ahmad had been such a nuisance since we broke up. In my heart it was official, but he had a hard time letting go. I noticed that he liked every single picture and video that I posted. As I rolled my eyes in annoyance, my phone rang. It was Ahmad and like always, I sent his ass straight to the voicemail.

“Decline,” I said out loud before taking a sip of my caramel apple martini.

It was the weekend and since my little disagreement with Nell, there had been no more Beauvois Divas' Day. So that Saturday, instead of sitting in the house bored to death, I decided to go out with Pierre. Truthfully, the two of us were

merely friends and nothing more. The more time I spent with him, the more I realized that I just wanted to be his friend. A sexual relationship would ruin that. After Ahmad, I didn't want to go that route again.

Pierre finally made it back to the table and sat down across from me. He sipped his drink and grinned.

“Damn, folks just don't believe that we're not together.” He shook his head and laughed as he stared into my eyes. “I guess it's hard to believe that I wouldn't snatch up a woman as gorgeous and talented as you are.”

I blushed. “Thank you, but you already know what it is Pierre.”

He playfully rolled his eyes. “You have put me in friend mode and now I'm stuck there.” There was a smile on his face. “It's okay. I'd rather be your friend than nothing at all. So, I'll take it. Just know that if you ever decide that you want to take it there, I'll be willing and waiting. Until then I'll be the patient friend that you need.”

I shook my head at him in disbelief. “Really? With all of the beautiful women in this city and all over the world, you're going to wait for me?”

“Yes, because they're not you. I've been around you constantly for the past month and I already know that I could fall for you Seandra. You're not only beautiful and sexy, but you're smart and classy. Then add the fact that you are super talented. It's like you're my dream manifested. Therefore, I'll wait, because I know that you're worth it.” As he spoke he didn't take those sexy ass eyes off me.

My skin immediately got hot as hell and I knew what that meant. I squeezed my thighs together and willed myself not to be turned on. Damn, that shit was so difficult. My kitty was wet and a whole month of masturbation wasn't cutting it. Having constant sex with Ahmad had spoiled me and that almost made me slip up with him a few times. My will power was better than ever though, so I was going to keep right on holding on to my guns. It was over between Ahmad and me, but I wasn't going to make the same mistake by moving right on to Pierre.

“I firmly believe that you never know, but right now I don't need to get into any kind of relationship. I'm focused on my career and well; I just got out of something. I do need you to be that patient friend Pierre, because right now, I can't give you anything else but my friendship in return.” I hoped he wasn't hurt by me saying that. It was the honest truth. Shit, the man pushed all of my sexual buttons and he had great conversation. He was talented as hell too, which was a plus. Pierre was a great catch, hands down, but the timing was fucked up.

“You know it's going to be pictures of us all over the internet tomorrow. We should be used to that by now, but all of the speculation just makes me want you more.” His smile immediately faded when he saw the look on my face.

“What's wrong?” He asked with concern.

“Nothing, really. Ahmad just keeps calling me. It's sad that he just won't move on. It's already been a month and he acts like it's been a few days. Get over it.” I was so frustrated that he wouldn't just leave me the hell alone.

“It’s not that easy when you really love someone. You’re not an easy woman to let go of. You’re too much to lose. Any man in his right mind wouldn’t let you go in the first place, or not give your fine ass a reason to.” He shrugged his shoulders and sipped his Hennessey again.

“But I’m done with him and that should be enough for him to move on with his life.”

“Well, if I was your man you wouldn’t have to worry about that insecure shit. I know that I’m the best man for you, so there is no competition. Usually I’m the one who has to deal with insecure women. I can tell that you don’t have an insecure bone in your body. Your confidence is very attractive. I can only imagine...never mind.” The lustful look in his eyes let me know exactly what he was thinking about.

I narrowed my eyes at him. “Are you imagining how I’d be in bed?”

He flashed a serious glare my way. “Guilty, but I also imagine holding you afterward and waking up with you in the morning”

My heart fluttered. I’d had too many martinis and with how I was feeling, I knew that it was time for me to call it a night. Damn, I was horny and needed to take a cold shower when I got home.

“I’m having a great time, but I think it’s time for me to get to the house and hit the sack,” I said with a slight yawn.

“Are you serious? It’s Saturday night and it’s only twelve thirty.” He smirked at me. “You just don’t want to hang

out with me now. It's cool. I'll tone it down. Can't knock a man for trying though right?"

I smiled at him. "That's not it at all. I'm actually flattered. You're one of the sexiest men I've ever seen. Why would I not want you to be attracted to me?"

"I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable Seandra. You're not ready for anything else right now and I respect that. I do. Let me get you home."

I felt relieved, but I also knew that he would probably keep right on trying. It felt good to be wanted even if I couldn't take advantage.

* * *

We were in front of the Martini Bar at the Raleigh Hotel waiting for the valet to bring Pierre's red Beemer, when a car pulled up screeching tires. I took a closer look. It was Ahmad's white Audi. All I could do was think about how crazy he'd been acting about me spending time with Pierre. Like everyone else, he was reading more into our relationship than it really was. We'd become close after working on a movie together. It was nothing more, but I didn't owe him an explanation.

Before the valet attendant could bring the car around, Ahmad suddenly hit the brakes and jumped out of his vehicle. He walked toward us and Pierre didn't back down one bit. By the time he made his way to where we were, I was ready for whatever and Pierre seemed to be too.

"Oh, so that shit is true! You are fucking him! I knew that shit! You're a fucking whore!" He yelled with malice in

his brown eyes.

They were the same eyes that had shown me so much love. When had it all changed for the worst? It was like some people couldn't accept love for what it was. I guess my love brought out the worst in Ahmad. Never in a million years would I have thought he'd be acting like he was at that moment; especially not with the paparazzi flashing away. With the new age of technology I just knew that someone had pressed record on their camera phone.

“What the hell? Why are you here Ahmad and how did you know where I was?” I was in shock. He looked like he was on something and at the moment I didn't know what to expect.

Pierre stood in front of me like he was attempting to protect me from Ahmad's irrational ass.

“Look man, it's not what you think. We were just...”

Before he could say another word Ahmad hauled off and punched him in the face. Pierre wiped the blood from his lip and then narrowed his eyes in anger. He rushed Ahmad and then it was an all-out brawl. All I could do was stand to the side and scream for someone to break it up. They were two men, so what could I do?

“Ahmad! What the...someone please...”

I actually tried to stand between them, but I got knocked out of the way. Pierre had Ahmad in the head lock and was punching him in the face. I watched as Ahmad swung and hit Pierre in the nuts. That made him let Ahmad go and I finally had the chance to grab him.

“What the fuck are you doing? Are you fucking crazy? You can ruin your whole career over this!” I was furious at Ahmad. He had a promising career as a director and there he was doing some reckless ass shit over me.

“I don’t give a damn about my fucking career right now. Unlike you, there are more important things to me. Like our relationship. I love you and I’m willing to fight for your ass! Okay! I’m willing to throw everything away for you.”

I shook my head feeling horrible because he had been fighting for nothing. “Ahmad, it’s over. Please just leave. This is not about Pierre. Regardless of what it may look like, he and I are just friends. It’s not up to you to accept that. I didn’t just break up with you because I wanted to hear myself talk, or to play games with you. I really meant to. I still love you, but I can’t be with you.”

He looked at me with eyes full of pain and then he looked up at Pierre.

“This is all your damn fault! If it wasn’t for you...!”

“Shut the fuck up with that bullshit man! You couldn’t keep your woman and that’s all on you! She only wants to be my friend, but if it was up to me she’d be going home with me tonight. Believe that!” Pierre said with his chest out.

“Fuck you, you seizure having ass punk!” Ahmad yelled as he lunged at him again.

During the scuffle we didn’t pay attention to the camera flashes, nor did we care. I just wanted to get the hell away from Ahmad. His behavior was so out of character for him and I didn’t know what the hell was up with him.

Just as they started to really get turned up security finally ran outside to break it up. Damn if it wasn't about time. I thought I was going to lose it out there trying to get two grown men to stop fighting like little boys.

“What are you going to do next Ahmad? Pull your dick out to see whose is the biggest! I can't believe you! You're a grown ass man and you're out here starting fights like you're in high school!” I yelled in anger.

“Fuck you bitch! I should've known you weren't shit if you fucked your sister's man! I don't give a fuck about you! If you didn't have a fat ass and your last name wasn't Beauvois nobody would fuck with you!”

I couldn't believe him. “Wow, really Ahmad? You're going to go there. Like you haven't been acting crazy as hell over this fat ass! Nigga, fuck you!”

“Go on to your vehicles or you're all going to jail tonight,” the tall burly dark skinned man said sternly as he held on to Ahmad.

Pierre was being sustained by a shorter, light skinned man who was just as buff. “You got that?” He asked him.

Pierre nodded despite his agitation. “Yeah,” he mumbled.

After the dude let him go we made it to his car which was literally parked right in front of us since the valet had pulled up while the confrontation was going on. All I could do was shake my head at how ridiculous Ahmad's behavior had been lately. It was really mind boggling that I'd ever loved

him. Still, he had been a great boyfriend...at first. Suddenly he had turned into someone that I didn't know.

"I'm so sorry Pierre," I said when he pulled off. When I looked back I noticed that the other security guard had let Ahmad go.

"It's okay. That wasn't your fault. Obviously your ex is obsessed with you. What the hell did you do to that man?" He looked over at me and grinned slyly. "You must have that good good."

I laughed. "I didn't do anything but be myself."

"At this point I can see that that's enough."

Damn, Pierre always seemed to know all of the right things to say. I wasn't going to let his way with words affect my actions, but he was making an impression on me. We rode the rest of the way in silence because we both knew that there would be repercussions for their actions. We would just have to wait and see what the damage would be.

He dropped me off just like I asked and walked me to the door. Of course there was no kiss exchanged; just an awkward embrace that both of us didn't want to interrupt. When I walked inside and locked the door behind me, I longed for something real; something that Ahmad couldn't provide and maybe Pierre could. Still, the timing was all fucked up and that was just my luck.

Chapter 17

Renell

It was another Sunday afternoon with nothing to do. I had taken Resean to see my parents and then stopped to grab something to eat on the way home. When I got there, it was just so quiet. I decided to call Claudette and see if she could come over to watch Resean for me to go do some shopping.

I wasn't one to go out and splurge, but maybe a new outfit or an expensive pair of shoes would lift my spirits. After grabbing a few things, I headed to my car. Parked beside me was a nice, rust orange Dodge Charger. I admired the car as I

opened the door to my own vehicle. The sound of a familiar voice broke me out of my trance.

“Miss Beauvois? Long time no see. How are you?”

I looked back and noticed that it was Brock. He was dressed to kill in a nice black suit, white button down and a money green silk tie. When I looked down I noticed his green Gators. Hmm. He seemed to be doing very well and he looked really good. Way better than he did when he worked in my mail room.

“I’m great Brock. From what I can tell, you’re doing great too.” I smiled as I put my bags in the back seat.

“That’s good. I was hoping you were finally past... well...you know.” There was a solemn look on his face.

“Oh, believe me, I am.”

He nodded. “I also heard that you and your fiancé broke up. I would like to say that I’m sorry to hear that, but I’m not.”

I didn’t know how to respond to that, so I didn’t.

“Well, I have to go. It was nice seeing you.”

He grabbed my hand and I felt a jolt of electricity travel over my body. It was probably just my lack of male contact. After a month of the single life, I was longing for something, even if it was just a quick glance at some eye candy. I had no idea why Brock was suddenly so tempting. He couldn’t be any more than twenty three years old and that was way too damn young for me.

“Here’s my card. I would love to take you out to lunch or something.”

I gave him a skeptical look.

“No expectations; just friends catching up.” His eyebrows rose. “Is that okay with you?”

Damn, his eyes were so damn blue. When did Brock get so sexy? I mean, he was always nice looking, but...maybe I was just horny as hell.

Offering him a smile, I simply said, “Take care Brock.” Then I climbed behind the wheel of my Navigator.

“You too beautiful,” he said and walked to the Charger I had been looking at.

Hmm. I guess he was doing okay for real, I thought as I pulled off.

* * *

Later that evening I sat down in front of the television with a galloon of Mayfield Butter Pecan Ice Cream. The fight between Ahmad and Pierre had been all over TMZ, Extra and E. It was trending on Twitter of course and everybody had been sharing the video on Instagram and Facebook. When I saw the footage for the umpteenth time that day, I turned and caught the end of a news story about a string of murders in Miami. I turned the volume up so I could hear the details.

“There has been a third victim. Miami Dade Police has been keeping it under wraps, but now it is obvious that there is a serial killer out there preying on women. The victims, all

between the ages of 20 to 25, have been strangled to death and there have been signs of sexual assault. The bodies have also all been dumped in the same place. Some details are being held from the public to not interfere with the investigation,” the reporter said in a monotone voice.

A chill traveled over my body at the mention of a serial killer being out there. It was going to be a high level of panic in the city, so I hoped the perpetrator would be apprehended soon. Just as I was about to turn the television off, my phone rang.

“Hello,” I answered and waited to hear Seantay’s voice on the other end.

“Hey sis. How are you?” She asked sounding all sweet. I knew that she was up to something.

“I’m fine and you?”

She sighed. “I’m okay. Just wish you and Seandra would talk. I miss spending time with you two on Saturdays. Come on, the argument was petty and you both know it.”

“Have you hounded her about this too, because she is the one who is so mad, not me.”

“I’m not hounding anybody. I just want the two of you to make up already.”

“Look Tay, I already tried to reach out to Seandra and we just ended up getting on each other’s nerves again. We just don’t get along. We both tried, but we just don’t...click.”

“You are sisters. You need to learn how to click. After all that we’ve been through together the two of you are just

going to let this shit be? You're not going to at least try again?"

I rolled my eyes and took a deep breath. It wasn't going to be easy to end that conversation, but I damn sure wanted to and soon.

"Tay, I have to go Resean is crying and..."

"Okay, go ahead and go, but we're going to finish this later." Her voice was stern and she sounded like our mother.

"Yeah, I'll talk to you later." I hung up the phone and placed it beside me on the sofa.

Suddenly I remembered my encounter with Brock. I needed someone to talk to who wouldn't judge me or ask a million questions. Reaching in the back pocket of my jeans, I pulled the card out that he had given me. It read Brock Newman, Director of Marketing and Sales at Harmon & Lowe. Harmon & Lowe was a very successful investment company. He had to make a hefty salary there. At his age, that had to be his dream job and a huge step up from the mailroom. I was impressed.

So, for once I did something spontaneous. I took a deep breath and dialed his cell phone number. After four rings I was about to hang up, and just as I moved my finger to press the end button, I heard him say something.

"Hello?" It sounded like a question and his voice was very sexy over the phone.

"Hi Brock, this is Renell," I said shyly, Damn, what the hell was I doing?

“Oh, Miss Beauvois. It’s a pleasure to hear from you,” he said. I could hear the smile in his voice.

“Please, call me Nell. You don’t work for me anymore.”

“Okay Nell. I’m really surprised that you called me.”

I let out a nervous laugh. “So am I. I mean, you did save my life, so I figured we could be friends.”

“That sounds good to me. I have a feeling that there’s something bothering you. I could see it in your eyes today. Do you want to talk about it? If not now, perhaps over lunch tomorrow. I could meet you somewhere...if you’d like.”

My heart was beating fast as hell as I thought about the possibility of being seen with the young, white man. Would it cause a media frenzy? Something told me that it would, so it was probably better for us to just talk over the phone.

“That sounds good and all Brock, but I don’t think that would be a good idea. I mean, as much as I would like not to be, I am a public figure who just got out of a really public relationship. The rumors would be flying and right now I have a lot going on. I think talking on the phone will do for now,” I explained.

“And I do understand that. Okay. The phone it is then...for now.”

Something about the way he said that made me smile.

* * *

I woke up that morning with some pep in my step. After feeding my baby boy, I made myself a nice breakfast and then noticed that I had a text message from Brock.

Good morning beautiful. I woke up thinking about you and our conversation. All I have to say is, I like you even more now. Call me when you get a chance. I can't get enough.

Damn, I had been smiling since the night before. I don't think I'd smiled that much in a long time. To be honest, it felt kind of good. My relationship with Ricky had become so redundant and to be frank about it, I was bored out of my mind. I was a mother now, so boredom seemed to be okay. After chopping it up with Brock, it felt like some spice had been added to my life. I was just about to text him back when I heard the doorbell ring. There had been no phone call prior, so I wasn't expecting anybody. Suddenly I felt my stomach drop. It had to be Ricky.

I got up and slowly walked toward the door. The doorbell rang three more times in a row and then there was the sound of impatient knocking. As I looked through the peep hole, I felt enraged. Ricky was standing there with a scowl on his face like he was ready to go to war. When I swung the door open I tore into him quickly.

“Don't be ringing my doorbell and knocking like that. I heard you ass the first time!” I snapped.

He stared me down like he was challenging me or something. “I’m here to see my son.”

I decided to be cordial and stepped aside for him to come inside. As much as I wanted to tell his criminal ass to leave, I didn’t have the heart to. No matter what he did, I wanted him in our son’s life. He didn’t say anything else to me, but he headed up the stairs to the nursery. Without a second thought about it, I walked back into the living room and plopped down in front of the television.

“Dean Monross’s second trial has come to an end. The defense and the prosecution have completed their closing arguments and the case has now gone to the jury. Deliberations have just started and so now the clock will remain in the corner of the screen until they reach a verdict. On to other news, a fourth victim has been found and now Miami Dade police are releasing more information about the alleged serial killer who is plaguing the city. They are dubbing him the “Black Lace Killer,” because the victims have all been found with a black lace veil over their faces and a thin wire around their necks. There are no clues or witnesses to these murders and we are relying on the public to help find this cold blooded killer. If you have any information, please call...”

At that moment I tuned the reporter out. They had dubbed him the Black Lace Killer and that was the name of Seantay’s lingerie line. That was most certainly an omen and not at all a good sign. Damn, her show was coming up soon and with the negative connotation behind the words black and lace, I thought maybe she’d want to rethink things.

“I’m taking him with me,” Ricky said walking into the room with Resean asleep in his carrier and a diaper bag over his shoulder.

“Oh no the hell you’re not! Put my son back in his crib now! He isn’t going anywhere. We didn’t discuss him leaving with you before your ass got here.” I tried to calm down the yelling to no wake my sleeping child.

“He’s my son too and I will take him wherever the fuck I want to,” he said through gritted teeth.

I jumped up from my seat and quickly walked behind him as he attempted to make it to the door. When I grabbed his arm, he turned around.

“I will sue your ass for custody!” He spat with his finger in my face.

“Oh really?” I asked with my hands on my hips. “Do you hear yourself right now? I can’t believe I ever thought I loved you. You’re a fucking fraud. If you try to take custody of my child, you will pay for that shit. I will tell the cops to check your computer. Then what? Are you sure you want to go there.”

He gave me a intimidating look and then shook his head before placing the carrier and bag on the floor. “Nell, woman...I fucking swear. I wish I had never met your bourgeois, judgmental ass! Any other woman would stand by her man, especially when there are millions of dollars involved.”

I had to burst his damn bubble. “You think millions of dollars impress me! If so, you’re a fool and I should have

never met your ass! The only good thing to come out of this was my son. I was born with millions and that shit doesn't matter to a woman like me! Go out there and find you some gold digger who is going to hold you down and be your ride or die bitch, because that is not me! I have a child to think of and I don't need your ass to raise him. I got that! However, if you want to be in your child's life, you call me in advance and let me know that you want to take him. If I feel that your extracurricular activities are negatively affecting him, I will not hesitate to have your stupid, greedy, lying ass arrested. I don't give a fuck who knows, or what the media leaks. My son is more important than you, or any of that. Get the fuck out of my house! Now!"

He wanted to say something. I could tell by the way his jaw muscle twitched. Instead of trying to defend himself, he turned on his heels, opened the door and left. I was so glad he had decided to just walk away. A feeling of relief washed over me and I could only hope we could co-parent without fighting.

I dialed Seantay's number to see if she had seen the news about the Black Lace Killer, but she didn't answer. The coincidence of it all felt eerie as hell and something told me that the drama had just begun. As much as I wanted to be able to have a social life, I knew that I couldn't publically. After putting my sleeping baby boy back in his crib, I called Brock. Telling him about my latest drama seemed to make me feel better. I knew that I was playing with fire, but it was something very intriguing about it.

Chapter 19

Seantay

Me and Rah had escaped off to the Florida Keys and got a luxurious suite at a five star resort hotel. It wasn't my father's because my baby wanted to spend his money on me. The Ritz Carlton was nice as hell of course, so I was fine with it. We didn't want to go too far because we knew that Dean's case would be going to the jury on Monday.

“Baby, I’m tired,” I whined with my head on his muscular chest.

“C’mon sexy, it’s our last night here. We’ve done everything but that.”

I looked up at the ceiling and sighed. All I wanted to do was climb between the sheets of the pillow top bed and sleep in the nude. We had plenty of sex, ate lots of good, greasy food, got massages at the spa, went shopping, hit up a few hot night spots, scuba dived, sky dived, visited the aquarium, and went skinny dipping in the ocean. When I was a little girl, I thought I was a mermaid, so it was only natural that water was my element.

“Okay, damn babe,” I sighed although I was feeling loved.

We got up and I stripped naked when we got in the bathroom. All my baby wanted to do was take a shower together. It was our ritual and we hadn’t done it the entire time we’d been there. The thing was; it wasn’t even about sex. Me and Rah would usually just wash each other down and fall asleep after a shower at home, but of course that night it was on. I had a feeling that the whole point of the shower was to wake my tired ass up.

“I want you to relax babe,” he whispered as he lathered the loofah and started to wash my back.

I closed my eyes and yawned. “I’m so relaxed right now. You just don’t know.”

He laughed. “I think you’re too relaxed.”

I smiled and kissed him passionately. “I love you babe and this little get away gave me life, but for some reason I am so damn exhausted.”

“You’ve just been working too hard and stressing too much. You can’t control everything around you as much as you would like to. Whatever happens is going to happen. I want you to stop worrying and let me take care of you.”

It was tempting to give him all of my issues to handle, but I knew that he couldn’t take it all away. I was a realistic woman and I knew that it wasn’t that easy. Deep down inside I was still worried about what Dean was capable of if he found out we had framed him. I wasn’t so worried about Nafis anymore.

Of course we made love after that shower, which took my mind off everything for a little while. No matter what happened, I hoped that we could maintain our love. There were all types of things that could happen and we knew that the odds were against us. My man’s arms were wrapped securely around me and I fell asleep basking in the warmth of love’s aftermath.

* * *

We were on the way back to Miami when we heard the news about Dean’s fate finally being put in the hands of the jury.

“No matter what happens babe, just know that I ain’t going nowhere. Don’t worry about what happened with your sisters and their exes. We’re not them okay? What we have is special and it’s real. Nothing is going to come between us.

We're always good. You hear me?" He asked staring into my eyes when he should've been concentrating on the road.

"I hear you loud and clear babe."

There was silence for a little while and then Rah's phone rang. He looked down at his cell and then over at me.

"It's your girl Reb."

"Hmm," I said thoughtfully. "Maybe she tried to call me first. My phone's been on silent for days."

He answered the phone. "What up Reba?"

My heart started racing when I noticed the look on his face. His mouth was open like he was at a loss for words. Suddenly he pulled over on the shoulder of the road and then I was really anxious to know what was going on.

"What is it babe?" I asked yanking at his arm. "Put her on speaker."

"When did this happen?" There was a pause and then he closed his eyes. "Try to calm down okay. We're on our way back now."

I was losing my patience. "What the fuck is going on! Let me speak to her!"

Rah passed me the phone and hit the steering wheel hard as hell with his open hand. "Fuck!"

I had no idea what could've made him react like that, but I knew that it was something. When I put the phone to my ear, I could hear Reba's sobs.

"Reba, what is it? Why are you crying?" I could feel my eyes start to burn. We were besties. When she cried, I

cried. It was automatic.

“Ch...Ch...Chang, Chang...he got shot...and I’m at the hospital now. Oh my God...what if...what if...I can’t do this!” She screamed causing me to break down in tears.

“We’ll be there soon Reb...I’m so sorry.” My body suddenly started to shake like my voice and Rah reached over to hold me.

“Calm down baby,” he whispered. “You gotta be strong for your girl.”

I nodded and took a deep breath. Reba was still crying uncontrollably and all I wanted was to be able to console her. Being that I couldn’t do that in person, I decided to talk to her as long as it took for her to calm down.

“I’m not going to get off the phone. I’m going to stay on with you as long as you need me to okay.” My voice was steadier and I hoped it would help her get herself together.

She sniffed. “Okay. Thank you.”

Raheem steered the car back on the road with a look on his face like he wanted to kill somebody. Something deep inside my being told me that shit was about to get real.

* * *

I stayed on the phone with Reba for over an hour and then she checked in with updates. Chang wasn’t doing good at all. He had taken a shot in his neck and face and he was unconscious when he first got to the hospital. At that point his condition was listed as critical.

By the time we pulled up to the hospital about four hours later, Chang was gone. Reba was a mess and I felt bad as hell that she had lost the only man that she ever loved.

“Nooooo!!!!!!!” She screamed as I held on to her. The news had just come to her about ten minutes before we got there.

“I am so sorry Reba,” I whispered consolingly in her ear.

As her body slid down to the floor, I tried to hold her up.

“C’mon, let’s sit down,” I said as Raheem and I led her to a chair. She sat down, but slumped over with her face in her hands as she sobbed loudly.

I rubbed her back as tears fell from my own eyes. There had to be a reason for Chang getting killed. He did a lot of snooping and digging for us, but I didn’t know what he did in his spare time. Hacking and cracking codes on the computer was what he did best. Maybe he had pissed the wrong person off. What if it was DA Monroe? If he had found out that Chang was the one setting him up, it was possible that he had him killed. Still, from what Rah told me, they had been extra careful about keeping their identities a secret from him. Even when they met with Chris they were disguised.

“The police are still here from earlier,” Reba finally said as she wiped her eyes. As she did so, the tears just kept coming. “I’m sure they’re going to have more questions now that this is a homicide investigation.”

“You were with him when it happened right?” I asked. Over the phone she was so distraught that I didn’t really comprehend the details.

She nodded. “Yes. We were on our way out for breakfast and as we left his house a car pulled up beside us at the light. It was not even a block from his crib. We were just laughing and talking when I noticed that the person next to us had rolled the window down. At first I thought nothing of it. I was driving and the light had just turned green. As I was about to pull off I saw the barrel of the gun and I screamed for Chang to get down. It was too late though. They let off two rounds and sped off. Of course I was in panic mode and the cars behind me were blowing and shit.” She broke down in tears again.

“Did you get a good look at the car?” Rah asked. He had been quiet as hell the whole time. I could tell that shit was fucking with him hard,

“Uh huh. Black box Chevy Caprice. The guy was dark skinned and he had long locks. Honestly, he reminded me of somebody, but I ain’t never seen him before. It was crazy how fast it happened. One minute I’m talking to him and he’s gone the next.”

She shook her head and the two police officers who were standing to the side walked toward us.

“Okay Miss Martin, this has now turned into a homicide investigation. We’re sorry for the loss of your friend, but we have to make sure that we have all of the evidence we need to find who did this. Can you remember anything else?”

The young, chestnut brown skinned officer asked. He was slim and tall with low cut, wavy hair.

“I told you everything,” she said wiping her nose with a tissue.

“Okay,” the older white officer said. His gray eyes looked compassionate, but he had a hard demeanor. With his broad chest and huge arms, it was obvious that he worked out often. “We’ll be getting back to the station now. If you need to give us a call you have our card.”

She nodded and then started crying uncontrollably again.

“I can’t believe this shit. I want to think that I am going to wake up from this nightmare any second, but I know better.”

I held on to my friend and closed my eyes praying for her heart to heal eventually. She didn’t deserve to go through that and I felt so awful. As I glanced over at Raheem he gave me an understanding nod. His face was tight, like he wanted to explode, but was holding it all in. We both had the same thought, but we couldn’t express it. It wasn’t the time nor the place.

As I looked around the hospital’s waiting room, I spotted a television mounted on the wall. It was on CNN and I saw the words Black Lace Killer flash across the screen. I read the subtitles and comprehended that some serial killer was killing women and dumping their bodies in the same ditch near a landfill outside of the city. Why the hell were they calling him the Black Lace Killer? Then the answer came next.

Apparently he was covering the women's faces with a black veil made of lace.

"Wow," I said as I rubbing Reba's back.

"What?" She asked looking up at me.

"Just something I saw on the TV just now. It's a serial killer out there murdering women and they're calling him the Black Lace Killer. What a fucked up coincidence," I said trying to keep my explanation short.

I had no clue what was going on, but when I glanced over at Rah he had a look on his face that I couldn't read. He suddenly jumped up.

"Gotta make a call babe. I'll be right back." He bolted out of the double doors and I continued to try and console my best friend.

"It's too much going on Tay. Can I stay with you tonight? I can't go home. I'm scared. What if they come after me? I know that Chang did some dangerous shit, but I never thought his life was really at risk."

"Okay, you can stay with me as long as you need to."

"Thank you so much Tay," she said in a grateful voice. Then she started crying again. "I can't stop."

I gave her a sympathetic look. "I understand that this is hard for you. Cry as much as you need to. I'm here and I'm not going anywhere."

She nodded and held on to my hand. "I think this is the hardest thing I've ever had to deal with."

I couldn't imagine what I would do if that had happened to Rah. Then I thought about Dean's verdict, but it wasn't important at the moment. The most important thing was making sure that my best friend was safe, as well as finding out who killed Chang and why.

Chapter 20

Seandra

I was out at a night club in South Beach with two of my female costars from “Nothing Even Matters.” I’d kind of pulled away from my “Cinnamon Star” cast members because I didn’t want to explain what had happened between Ahmad and I. So, for the moment Melody and Rochelle would have to do.

Melody was a tall, statuesque, almond complexioned beauty that had started out on Broadway. She played my nemesis in the movie, but we had hit it off in real life. Rochelle was shorter than Melody, but she was thick in all the right places. Her skin was the color of hot fudge and her beautiful caramel brown eyes were soft and alluring. Her nature was calm and laid back and I guess I needed that at the moment. She played my loud, boisterous best friend in the movie.

“So, what’s going on with you and Pierre?” Melody asked with a grin on her face. She was sipping on a Cosmopolitan.

“Nothing is going on with us. We’re just friends. You two have asked me that same question a million times and I still have the same answer.” My glass of Long Island Iced Tea was empty, so I walked toward the bar.

That’s when I saw a camera flash in my face. It temporarily blinded me in the darkness of the club. We’d been in the VIP of course, but it didn’t stop the media grubbers. Damn it, I couldn’t even go out in peace.

I'd tried to get Tay to come, but she was consoling her friend Reba. What had happened to her boyfriend was unfortunate, so I didn't press the issue. Of course I knew that Nell wouldn't go out with me. We still weren't talking and she chose to stay at home wallowing in her own sorrows. I was doing the exact opposite. Shit, if anything, I wanted Ahmad to see me enjoying life, not losing it.

As I ordered my drink, I noticed that Ahmad, of all people, was sitting at the bar. I tried to get away without him seeing me, but when I heard him call my name, I knew that it was too late.

“Seandra! Seandra! Wait!”

Instead of turning around to acknowledge him, I continued to walk over to my new associates. That was when I felt his hand on my shoulder.

“You know you heard me,” he said as he swung me around.

“What the hell is your problem?” I asked pushing his hand off me. “Are you stalking me?”

He looked at me and shook his head. “I don't have a problem and no I'm not stalking you. I had no idea you'd be here.” His speech was slurred and it was clear that he'd had one too many drinks.

“I can't believe that you've been reduced to this. Where is the man that I used to know Ahmad? You're pitiful and there is nothing that makes me want you anymore. As a matter of fact, I'm disgusted...”

Before I could get it all out he had slapped the shit out of me. Once I realized what had happened, I dived on his ass like I didn't have on a short dress. My thong was all up in the air as I attempted to whoop his ass.

“Stop Seandra, shit, baby, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that,” he said trying his best to restrain me.

It was no use; I was throwing punches left and right. Next thing I knew, somebody was pulling me off his ass.

“Let's get out of here before shit gets worse,” I heard Melody say as she and Rochelle dragged me out of the club.

* * *

When I got home I was still livid as hell. I couldn't believe that Ahmad had the audacity to put his damn hands on me like that. He had never hit me the whole time we were together, so once again he was acting out of character. By that time I knew that I would never take him back. As far as I was concerned, he could forget that he ever fucking knew me.

I peeled my clothes off and threw them on the floor on my way to the bathroom. After turning on the double showerhead, I jumped in and let the water beat soothingly on my weary body. Once my shower was over, I got out, grabbed a fluffy towel and wrapped it around myself as I walked to my bedroom. My phone was ringing on the nightstand and I grabbed it. It was Pierre, so I didn't hesitate to answer.

“What's up gorgeous?” He asked with no clue about what had just transpired between me and Ahmad.

“I just got into it with Ahmad at a club. It was crazy.”

“The club on a Monday night?” He asked.

“Yeah, it was a listening party for a local artist, so I took the invite. I forgot about the fact that if I got an invite Ahmad probably did too. He was at the bar and when he called my name, I tried to walk off, but he wasn’t having it. He had the nerve to grab my shoulder and then slap me after I told him that I didn’t see anything in him anymore. I jumped on his disrespectful ass. After that Mel and Ro pulled me off him and got my ass out of there. If it wasn’t for them I’ll probably be locked up. I just don’t want to deal with my mother after she finds out about it. Shit, of course somebody recorded it. It wouldn’t be black people if they didn’t.”

“Wow. He hit you? What the fuck is wrong with him? He must’ve lost his mind for real Seandra. He has no business putting his hands on you. I’m going to put my hands on him!”

I could tell that Pierre was really angry, but I didn’t need him and Ahmad getting into it again. The drama between them was not flattering and I didn’t want Pierre fighting in my honor.

“No, don’t worry about it. I’m okay. He just does not have to worry about me doing Cinnamon Star anymore. I don’t want anything else to do with his ass. That’s my good word. Even if the thought of taking him back had crossed my mind that shit is out now.”

Pierre let out a loud breath. “I don’t like for a man to put his hands on a woman. That shit burns me up!”

I remembered Ahmad telling me the same thing when he revealed his mother’s abusive relationship with his step-father. Well, that must’ve been some bullshit. Maybe it was some bullshit that Pierre was spitting too. After what I had

gone through with men, I didn't trust them as far as I could throw their asses. As far as I knew he was saying whatever he had to say to get me in bed.

“Thanks for your concern Pierre, but I'm about to go to sleep. I guess we'll talk tomorrow since we both have to be on the set.” The thing was, I wanted him to know that our relationship was strictly on a platonic level. There was no way I was throwing myself head first into some bullshit with another man.

* * *

The next morning I was up by six am feeling refreshed. I had promised myself that I wouldn't turn on the television, or get on line out of fear of seeing what had happened between me and Ahmad. When I checked my phone there was a text from Seantay that was some kind of website link. I pressed it and it took me directly to TMZ. Of course the video had gone viral, but what really pissed me off was the fact that it did not show him slapping me. All it showed was me jumping on him in a fitful rage.

Then that Negro had the nerve to Tweet that I had gone off on him because he was talking to another woman. He claimed that I was the jealous one who didn't want his career to advance. What really pissed me off was when he said I tried to trap him by poking holes in our condoms and not asking him not to wear them in an attempt to get pregnant. What the fuck? That fool had turned everything around to make me look like the psychotic one.

I was not the one who was jealous. He was. There was no way I was going to take that bullshit lying down. I was

so grateful that the Plan B pill had worked and I was not pregnant by him for real. There was no way I would've thought Ahmad would ever resort to that. Payback was a motherfucker and I was going to roast his ass.

When I got in my car I turned on the radio. Of course they were talking about my fight with Ahmad. I was just about to turn it off when I heard that the jury had reached a verdict in Dean Monross's trial. The only thing was, I had to wait until after the commercial break to find out what it was.

Chapter 21

Renell

Maybe I was treading dangerous waters, I didn't know, but there was just something about Brock that I couldn't shake. When he worked for me I didn't see him in that light, but I guess now that I was single and he was no longer employed by me, it felt okay. I had found out that he was twenty five and had got his Masters' Degree. I had assumed that with his boyish good looks, he had just received his BS.

“Why did you take such a low level position then?” I had asked him when we first spoke over the phone.

“Well, my course load was really heavy and I needed something easy. My father pulled some strings for me to get on with the company I'm with now,” he had explained.

His father was a pretty important man in the city of Miami. Not only was he a realtor who made millions, he also was the owner of a few major radio stations. Of course I didn't know any of that at first, which was just like me.

I was sitting in my living room with nothing to do when Brock's number popped up on my cell phone's screen. My parents had talked me into letting them keep Resean, so I was lonely. Although Grady was dead, I still felt like I couldn't relax. I missed having Ricky around and without my son there I was at a loss.

“Hello,” I answered anticipating another conversation on the phone with him like we were giddy teenagers. Although

I wasn't ready for a relationship, I liked talking to Brock. It was innocent being that we had only talked over the phone.

“Hi Renell. I just wanted to call and check up on you. I know you and your ex have been going through a rough patch and I wanted to make sure that you were okay,” he said sounding like he was genuinely concerned.

“I'm fine. To be honest I haven't heard from him since then, which is fine with me.” My heart fluttered when I imagined Brock's face. At first I was a little frightened by him, but that was probably because of what Grady had done. After talking to him he seemed to be more real than Ricky had ever been with me.

Ricky was affectionate and giving, but he didn't really talk about himself or his past. It was like I was always left guessing with him, but Brock seemed to be an open book.

“So, what are you doing?”

“Honestly, I'm just sitting here with a movie playing on Netflix. I'm not watching it. My son is with my parents and I'm all alone.”

“Come see me then. We can talk face to face.”

“No Brock, that wouldn't be a good idea.”

“No one will know that you're here Nell and you don't have to worry about me saying anything. I really care for you. I do. I have for a long time. I'm no longer your employee. I'm your friend. There is nothing wrong with us seeing one another. There is no pressure. I just want to be able to see your face instead of only hearing your voice.”

Damn, he was making it so hard for me to tell him no. I thought about it. He was right. Nobody would know that I was there and my son would be gone overnight. What better opportunity to see him? So, I gave in.

“Okay then, text me the address.”

* * *

Brock only lived about ten minutes from me in a nice one bedroom condominium. The view from the 25th floor was amazing and we sipped on Mai Tais as we sat on the balcony and talked.

“So, how old is your son again?” He asked as he glanced over at me.

“He’ll be three months old in a few days. This is the first time he’s spent the night away from me. I miss him terribly.”

“Hmm. Your parents did a great job with you and your sisters, so he’ll be fine.”

I nodded. “I know, it’s just the first time jitters I guess. They don’t get to see him often, so it’s great for them to bond. I called and checked on him before I got here and my mother said he was playing with his papa. I think that’s so adorable.” A smile lit up my face as I continued. “I’m so glad my father’s doing well. He really scared us with that heart attack.”

When I looked up I noticed the way Brock was staring at me. The look in his eyes was beyond friendly. He licked his lips as he spoke and I couldn’t help but notice that he had nice lips to be a white boy.

“You have a gorgeous smile Renell. It’s so radiant the way that it brightens your face. Even your eyes seem to dance when you smile. I would only want to see you look like that.” He leaned over to kiss my cheek and my entire body flushed.

“Thank you Brock,” I said trying not to show just how nervous I really was.

The thing was, I was a little too attracted to Brock. It might’ve simply been the lack of affection I’d been experiencing since ending things with Ricky. I wasn’t ready to move on with another man on an emotional level, but physical was a different story. Brock had sparked a flame and it was something I did not expect at all. Maybe I had been wrong about my smile not lasting. That time the unexpected was a pleasant surprise.

“So, I have a question for you,” he said moving his fingers along my palm softly. Something about that shit was really erotic.

“Okay,” I said before taking a sip of my drink.

“Have you ever been with a white man?” His aqua blue eyes stared into mine.

“Yes, I have actually,” I answered honestly. “Have you ever been with a black woman?”

“My preference actually,” he said without taking his eyes off me.

“Oh really? I never understood why anyone would have a preference. Why discriminate?” I asked thinking about how multi-cultural my family was.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Now, once again, I said my preference was black women, not that I wouldn’t date other races. I love women period. I can clearly tell that you are also of Asian descent. You’re beautiful Renell; everything about you. I just can’t help feeling the way I do. Don’t get me wrong, I understand that you just got out of a serious relationship. I’m not asking for you to make that leap with me. All I want to do is keep that smile on your face. Whatever I have to do, I will. Your pleasure’s mine and I do mean that.”

I couldn’t help but smile as I shook my head at him. “How the hell did you manage to make a sexual pass at me in a very innocent way?”

He chuckled. “Well, I am a gentleman, but I’m still a man.”

My smile faded as I thought about how serious and complicated a sexual relationship would make things. What if he didn’t know how to separate sex from love? There were men out there who fell in love quickly. What if I was the one who didn’t know how to separate the two? Was I too vulnerable for even a sexual relationship with no strings attached? I didn’t know. All I knew for a fact was that I was longing for the touch of a man and an orgasm would be even better.

“I am attracted to you Brock, but...”

“But what?” He asked a little too anxiously. “All that should matter is the fact that you are attracted to me.”

“I wish it was that simple, but things are moving a little too fast.”

“It is that simple Renell,” he said as he stood in front of me.

He took my empty glass out of my hand and placed it on the patio table. Then he dropped down to his knees and stared deeply into my eyes.

“What are you doing Brock?” I asked feeling the jitters mixed with intrigue as goose bumps covered my skin.

“Saving you from yourself, because you’re overthinking this. I just want to please you; nothing more, nothing less. Why don’t you just relax and let me.” His words came out in a sexy, lust filled voice.

It was tempting as hell to just relax and let him have his way with me. One thing I did know from experience was that the one white man I’d been with had been very, very skillful with his tongue. Hmm, he definitely didn’t mind licking and sucking on every inch of my anatomy. I wondered if Brock was well seasoned in that area, despite his age.

“I don’t...”

He put his finger to my lips. “I promise you won’t regret it baby. Nothing will change. We’ll still only be friends. This will go only as far as you want it. No pressure. I just want to taste you so bad.” His eyes drifted down to my thighs and he sighed. “My mouth is literally watering.”

What the hell, I thought as I let him gently spread my thighs. He pushed my skirt up to reveal my white, sheer thong. After removing it he shook his head.

“Mmm, you are one sexy ass woman. I swear.” He cupped my ass cheeks in his hands. “Don’t be scared baby.

Open your legs for me.”

My heart was beating out of my chest and although the moment should've been awkward, it wasn't. As a matter of fact, before he even put his mouth on me, I was turned on to the fullest. So, I did as he said and opened my legs.

He slid his warm, wet tongue up my thigh and my skin immediately ignited. Teasing me mercilessly, his tongue did a sexy tango up my other thigh. I felt his hot breath on the freshly waxed skin of my pussy. It made me tingle all over.

“Mmm...you smell so sweet,” he whispered before slurping my hardened clitoris into his mouth.

As he sucked and licked slowly and expertly, I couldn't help but open up wider. Damn, he was even better than Ricky and the white dude I dated.

“Ohhh...myyyy...” I grabbed his head and was grateful that he had his hair cute low.

“Mmm...Nell...” he moaned as he really got into it.

When it felt like the suction of his mouth was going to drive me over the edge, I couldn't help but gyrate into his hot, succulent mouth.

“Damn, you're good at this,” I said breathlessly as my legs trembled. “Mmm...uhhh...”

When he slid two fingers deep inside of me and pushed them against my G-spot that shit made my ass bolt up from my seat. I was literally fucking his face, but he simply stared up at me as I enjoyed what he was doing to me. His eyes told me

that he loved every second of it and that turned me on even more.

“Shit...I’m about to...uhhh...cum...”

He was working those fingers and sucking my clit like it was a juicy orange slice. “Mmm...yesssss...cum right on my tongue baby,” he coaxed me with those sexy ass eyes.

His lips were covered with my juices and I had more where that came from. I was feeling like I could let my freaky side out with Brock and I didn’t have to feel inhibited, or judged for it.

“Ahhh...yesss...right there....mmm...I’m cuming!” I screamed not giving a damn if anybody heard me.

“Yes...sexyyy...mmmm.”

As I came hard he lapped up every single drop of juice that escaped from me like he was a thirsty man in hell.

“Mmm mmm mmm...you’re so beautiful when you cum.”

I thought it was over, but he went right back down between my thighs and made me cum again and again and again. By the time he was done with me, my body was so relaxed that all I wanted to do was sleep. The alcohol and orgasms had me on cloud ten, fuck nine.

“How do you feel?” He asked after washing my body down in a luxurious bubble bath.

“Relaxed and drowsy, but damn good,” I said honestly as I climbed between the sheets of his comfortable looking king sized bed.

He smiled. “Good. If you want, I’ll sleep on the sofa and you can have the bed to yourself. I want you to be comfortable.”

I shook my head. “No, part of my pleasure is you holding me tonight. I haven’t had the pleasure of being held in a while and it would be nice.”

“My pleasure gorgeous,” he said climbing in the bed with me.

I had on a long t shirt that he had given me to sleep in. In no time I had cuddled next to him and was out. He didn’t even try to have sex with me and I kind of appreciated the fact that he had pleased me without even thinking of himself. Part of me was curious to know more about Brock. Maybe he was just what I needed.

* * *

The next morning I headed to my car at five thirty am. My plan was to go home, take a shower, get a few more hours of sleep in and then go get my baby. I didn’t even stop to notice the lone paparazzo that was lurking in the nearby bushes taking pictures of me without the flash.

Chapter

Seantay

“Not guilty! No!” I screamed as Raheem held me in his arms. “What the fuck happened? I thought the DA had that shit in the bag.” Not only was I disappointed, but I was actually hurt by all that was going on. After Chang’s death we also had to deal with Dean being released to make our lives a living hell again. Not only that, but some psychotic killer called “The Black Lace Killer” had tainted the name of my lingerie line. I postponed the show while I rethought the name. There was no way I could use it after that. Then Nell opted to get out of the contract for the reality show stating that the timing still just wasn’t good. Honestly, I agreed with her about that and so did Seandra.

Reba had gone to her parent’s house, so I didn’t have any fear of her over hearing our conversation.

“I already told you that if it didn’t work out it was on to plan B didn’t I.”

When he said that, it sent chills up and down my spine. I had seen him kill in my defense before, but to think he had to actually premeditate a murder was beyond my comprehension.

I shook my head and then felt his hands on my shoulders. As he massaged tears fell from my eyes.

“I feel so bad for Reba. She’s so...so sad. Chang’s funeral is in a few days and I know that she’s dreading it. We have to find out who killed him.”

Rah nodded in agreement. “Yeah, we do. I have a feeling I know who...”

I gave him a questioning look. “Who?”

He shook his head. “I don’t want you worrying about that shit right now. You have enough on your plate baby. When I know for sure you’ll know. Okay.”

I nodded and then focused back on the television. Dean was responding to the reporters’ questions.

“So what do you plan to do when you’re released?” A brunette woman with a wide mouth asked.

“I plan to get to the bottom of who framed me and why. The only crime that has been committed is against me and I will stop at nothing to bring them to justice.” He seemed to be staring right at me and I cringed.

“Do you think Elise and LaTisha will get in trouble now?” I asked. My nerves were shot by everything. “What if they give us up for a plea deal? Damn, we really fucked up babe.”

“I don’t think the police will investigate further. For some reason the jury fell for the defense’s bullshit and they acquitted him. Basically it means that they created reasonable doubt. That doesn’t mean he didn’t do it. An acquittal kind of means he might’ve and he might not have. The new evidence proved doubt. DA Monroe guaranteed a guilty verdict, but he didn’t deliver. Chang is gone, so I’m not even going to try to

expose him. I don't even have a copy of the video. I didn't want that shit."

"We don't need it. Maybe Dean will just leave us alone and never figure it out." I didn't believe that shit, but it felt good to say it out loud.

Rah caressed my cheek; then planted a kiss on my forehead, the tip of my nose and then my lips. "When I'm not with you I want you to have security. I will hire somebody today. If you have somebody you trust that your pops knows, then we'll hire them. I know you hate the idea of having a bodyguard, but I ain't gonna be able to be with you all the time. I need to make sure you're safe, okay babe. Until I can eliminate every threat, that's what the fuck it's goin' be. A'ight?"

I nodded reluctantly. "Okay babe. Whatever you say."

At that moment my cell phone rang and I noticed that it was Seandra's calling.

"Hello," I answered giving Rah a nod so he'd continue rubbing my aching body.

His hands traveled down my back and I closed my eyes.

"Tay, hon. I heard about Dean's acquittal. I can only imagine how much of a blow that is after all that's going on," Seandra said in a sweet, sisterly voice.

"Yeah, well, shit happens," I said pretending that it wasn't bothering me that much. Everybody else thought it was simply the fact that I thought he was really guilty, not that I had actually set the man up for rape.

It was hard as hell watching my so called plan crumble right in front of my eyes. If Dean went after Elise or LaTisha, I would really feel like shit. What if he had already started his murderous plot by killing Chang? He didn't have to be out. All he had to do was pay somebody to do it. His female fans made sure that he had anything he needed. What if they had found him a contract killer?

“I should be asking you how you're doing. Of course I know that Ahmad lied about everything he said. We both know who the insecure one was.” I was eager to change the subject.

“Hmm. I guess I keep on getting with the wrong men Tay. I'm attracted to Pierre, but it's way too soon. I can't keep making the same mistakes. Ahmad probably kept accusing me of cheating because that's what he was doing. In my eyes all men are fucking dogs,” she spat.

“That's not true about all men Seandra. Don't sound bitter. My baby is the perfect example of a good man. He's not a dog and...”

“Hmm, all men are dogs like I said,” she cut me off. “Rah's cool and all, but I can guarantee you'll see another side to him too. Look at Ricky. I just knew his ass was perfect. I don't know what he did, but it had to be some shit for Nell to call off the wedding. You just wait little sister. Don't put your faith in a man. They'll fuck you over every time. Our father is the last of a dying breed, but think about all of the times he's cheated on mother.”

“I'm going to act like you didn't just say any of that. I love my man and at this point he has only proven time and

time again that he loves me and he'll never do anything to hurt me. Other women are not an issue in our relationship." I thought about him bringing up having a threesome and suddenly I wondered if he did have the desire to be with someone else.

"Whatever Tay. You need to get your head out of that man's ass. He may have some good dick and some coins, but he's a man. He'll give that good dick and his money to another bitch and then blame you for it by acting all jealous and insecure. Nothing is ever what it seems. Look around you sis. How many perfect men do you see? None right. Not even our father. What makes you think your man is perfect? Do you really think your pussy is that damn good?" She let out a snooty laugh. "Yeah right."

The old Seandra was back. I wanted to curse her ass out, but I knew that she lashed out when she was hurting. What Ahmad had said was really getting to her and so, I tried to hold my tongue.

"Look, you're obviously going through your own shit right now. Let's talk when you are done being an insensitive bitch." Okay, I said that I *tried* to hold my tongue. That didn't mean that I would.

"Oh, so since I'm giving you some good ass advice about your little boyfriend you want to call me a bitch? You know what; you and your self-righteous ass sister can kiss my ass. I don't need you judgmental bitches anyway." With that said, she hung up on me.

Rah gave me a quizzical look. "What was that all about?"

“Seandra’s ass is just like our bipolar ass mother. Neither of them has been diagnosed, but the signs are there. When she first called she was sounding all concerned and then she started reversing the shit she’s going through on to me. In her eyes all men are dogs, even you. This isn’t about you though. It’s about the fact that Ahmad is slinging her name through the mud. Image is everything to her.” I shook my head and thought about the fact that we were back to square one again. What had happened to that sisterly bond we had found?

“Well, I can’t speak for any other man. I can only speak for myself. I don’t want another woman and that’s one thing I do know. When I brought up having a threesome baby, I was really joking with you. You’re all I want and need and that’s why I’ll do anything to protect you. Living without you is not an option, so I’ll never risk what we have. Don’t let anybody make you doubt that shit.” He stared at me and then gently cupped the back of my head with his hand. As he moved his face closer to mine he said, “I fucking love your ass. You hear me?”

When I nodded he kissed me passionately. After he pulled away, he smiled and said, “And your pussy *is* that damn good. I’m the one who be long stroking that mufucka, so I know.”

I laughed. “You heard her huh?”

He chuckled and kissed me again. “Not all of it, but I did hear that part.”

I shook my head. “That’s my sister.”

“You handled it well, despite all that you’re going through ma.”

A tear had fallen from my eye and he wiped it away before it could hit my cheek. “Thanks babe, for everything. I love you so much.”

“Don’t be sitting here with tears in your eyes having doubts about you man. I understand where your sis is coming from as far as warning you about men. The thing is you got it right with me. True, I’m not perfect, but I know that it ain’t one woman out there worth me losing you.”

At that moment I didn’t give a damn about Dean’s verdict, or anything else going on around me. I just wanted to bask in the love that my man was pouring on me. It didn’t matter what anybody said, I believed in him.

“I trust you Rah and I love you with all my heart. You’re not the average man and I know that. I’m not crying because I doubt you. I’m crying because I’m scared. Although I know you’ll do anything for me, I don’t want to lose you either. I couldn’t imagine having to go through what Reba’s going through right now.”

“Oh baby, damn.” He pulled me into his arms and all I could do was let the tears spill on his shoulder. “I’m going to do whatever I have to do to make sure that doesn’t happen. Chang’s death is fucking with me too baby. For some reason, I feel responsible. I just know he got killed over some shit he did for me.”

“For us,” I said feeling the guilt nagging at me again. What if my best friend had lost her one true love because of me?

* * *

Later on that evening, I decided to get out of the house before I had to be tied down with security. As a child we had body guards around us like we were the President's children. For some reason, I hated it. It was like it called for way more attention than any of us needed, or wanted. Well, except for Seandra. The concept of having a bodyguard meant that she was important.

Raheem had to go to his seven o' clock Calculus class, so it was the perfect opportunity for me to sneak out. Samara was waiting for me to come pick her up. I had no idea what we were getting into, but I just needed to get out of the house. It was too quiet. Reba was still at her parents' house and when I called to check up on her she was asleep. Her mother assured me that she would probably be ready to return to my place soon.

"I know how she is. She loves us, but you're her number one," her mother had said.

"And she is my number one. Have her call me when she wakes up."

"Will do," she said before hanging up.

As I walked to my brand new silver Range, my heart was heavy for my bestie. I loved her like she was my blood sister and well, I felt like Chang's murder was my fault. She didn't know about the danger Chang had been in and I didn't want her to find out. If she did she would hate me. All I could do at that point was try to stay alive. I had no clue if the person who had killed Chang was after me and Raheem. Then I had to think about what could possibly happen when Dean was released. On top of all of that Nafis was going to be a threat in

the next two years. Not even to mention the fact that my sisters' love lives were in turmoil and a deranged killer was named after the lingerie line I had planned to put out. Of course the show was called off indefinitely and that in itself was a sign of failure for me. My sisters were beefing and I was beefing with Seandra. When would all of the damn madness end?

I was probably a mile or so from my apartment when I heard a sound. After turning my radio down, I listened closely. It sounded like I had a flat, so I pulled over on the shoulder of the road. Damn it, I thought as I picked up my cell phone before getting out of the vehicle. After checking the two tires on my side, I walked around to the passenger side.

That was when I saw it. The words "You are next!" were keyed in the side of my Range Rover in huge letters.

Why hadn't anybody flagged me down or let me know. I had got in on the driver's side, I hadn't seen it until then. A chill traveled over my body and it felt like somebody was watching me. When I looked around, I didn't see anyone. It was getting dark, but it was the peak of twilight. My skin was covered with goose bumps when I noticed that the back tire had been stabbed with something.

My eyes starting burning with tears and I ran around to the driver's side to get behind the wheel. My first instinct was to call 911. Before I could even put in the pin for my locked phone, I felt somebody grab me from behind. My first instinct was to scream, but they had quickly stuffed something in my mouth. It had to be a man, because his grip was hella strong as he dragged me away. There wasn't much traffic on the road, so

before I could even think, he had tossed me in the trunk of a car that was close by.

When I looked up and saw his familiar face, I couldn't believe it. He wasn't even trying to disguise who he was, which let me know that his agenda was to kill me. Suddenly, the sound of a car passing by caught my attention. By that time it was too late, because from the view of a passing vehicle, it looked like he was just getting something out of his trunk. I couldn't move, because he had tied something around my hands and then my ankles.

I couldn't say anything due to the gag. Whatever it was that came out sounded like I was a wounded animal. All I could do was think and that was even hard when he put a cloth over my nose. After two breaths, I became light headed. When he put something over my face, I realized that I could see through it. It was black...black lace...and then everything went black.

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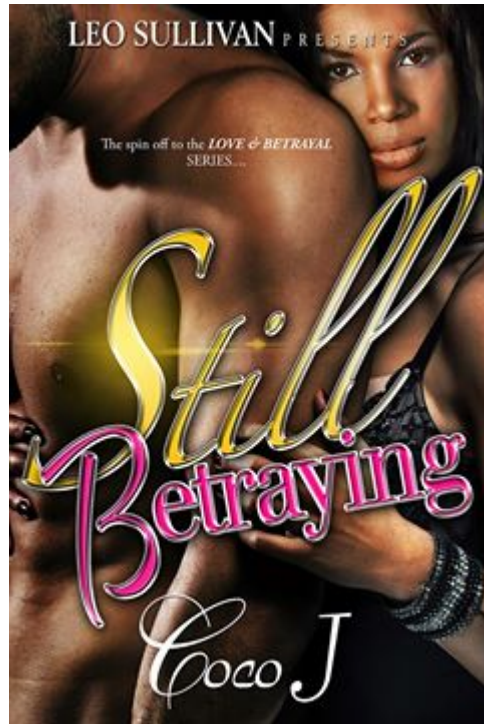
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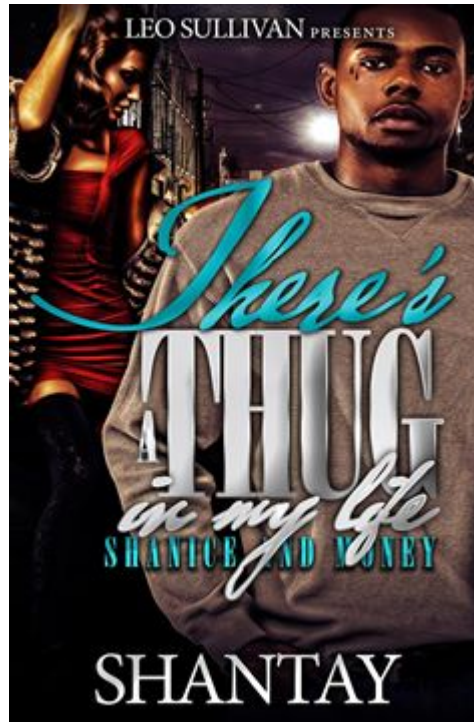
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