



JESSICA WATKINS
presents

My Love
Under is Arrest
2

BEST SELLING AUTHOR
CHARAE LEWIS

JESSICA WATKINS PRESENTS

MY LOVE IS UNDER ARREST 2

by **CHARAE LEWIS**

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“You tried to get a little tricky, turned my back and then you slipped me a mickey.”

-Erykah Badu

C H A P T E R O N E

Diar gripped the phone so tightly that her knuckles began to turn white. She was actually stunned as she listened to her sister, Stefani, reveal the person who had set up the robbery. A month prior, Diar and Stefani had been robbed outside of Stefani's clothing store. They never found the perpetrator who had violated them until now. Diar's stomach turned in disgust while trying to process the betrayal. Anger wasn't the correct word to describe her mood; she was furious.

"Stefani, let me call you right back," Diar said and then hung up without waiting for a response.

She slowly turned around and glared at the person before her. Roman, her ex-boyfriend, had come by earlier and brought her some food to work. He had been relentless in trying to get back with her, but Diar didn't want him. Now that she knew the truth, she was glad that she had dismissed him from her life because he was nothing but a snake. She couldn't believe that Roman had the audacity to sit in her face when he had orchestrated her and her sister being robbed. Her body was absorbed with so much rage that it was spreading like a wild fire.

Diar slowly paced toward him. “You mothafucka!” she hissed in disbelief.

Roman twisted his face in confusion. “What?”

“Don’t what me! You ain’t shit, with your shady, sneaky, fat ass!” she gritted.

“Diar, what the fuck are you talking about? We were just having a good time, and now you come over here with all of this rowdy shit.”

Without warning, Diar rushed him and drove her fist into his mouth. Roman’s head flew back from the impact of the hit. He looked at her in disbelief before she punched him in the face again. She continued to swing wild punches until Roman grabbed her arms and pinned her face down on the table.

“Calm the fuck down. What the fuck you hittin’ me for?” he grimaced almost out of breath.

“You had me and my sister robbed, you sloppy ass bitch! I can’t believe you’ve been sitting in my face when you know that you set me up!”

“Wh...what?”

“You heard me, bitch. You’re a dead man. Dash is on your ass as soon as I call him and tell him that you’re here.”

In a split second, Roman gripped her hair and roughly banged her head against the table. Immediately, Diar could feel blood seeping down her forehead. She tried her best to squirm out of his strong grasp, but Roman had her restrained tightly.

“Bitch, you ain’t about to call nobody,” he declared and banged her head on the table again.

“Get the fuck off of me!” she screamed, trying her best to escape him.

Her pleas fell on deaf ears because Roman continued to hammer her head against the wooden table. Diar felt like she was about to lose consciousness at any moment. The throbbing sensation rapidly filled her entire face. Blood was now smeared all over the table making it look like an actual crime scene had taken place.

“Bitch, don’t you ever threaten me! Do you know who the fuck I am?” he bellowed like a mad man.

“Let me go!”

The blows to her head were quickly becoming victorious as she finally slipped away. The darkness that surrounded her had her fearful, but she couldn't fight it as she slowly began to black out.

Case laid in the hospital bed still in an incredible amount of discomfort. After waking up at his brother, Big's, house he decided to go to the hospital. The night before, Case had gone to Big's bar to get a drink after his huge blowout with Diar. After downing a couple shots of Hennessy, he didn't remember much afterward. He was told by Big that the security guard brought him to his home drunk. When he awoke that morning, Case was experiencing terrible hangover symptoms that didn't feel normal. He didn't want to go home and lay in agony. Instead, he decided to get treated.

"I bet you're dehydrated. You can't be drinking all that alcohol and have no water in your system," his mother, Celine, chastised him.

Once he checked into the emergency room, he had called and informed his mother of where he was. She insisted on coming to the hospital for moral support.

"Ma, I already told you that I didn't drink that much," he spoke groggily.

"How do you know? You said that you don't remember anything from last night."

“I remember when I had my shots. I just don’t remember anything after that.”

Celine sat back in her seat and pursed her lips. Case was already regretting calling his mother. She always played like she was some kind of detective, and he hated that. He grabbed his phone and scrolled to Diar’s name. She never did contact him, and that left him feeling more down about their argument. The night before, he had said some hurtful things that prompted her to end their affair. He wanted to explain himself, as well as apologize, but she wasn’t giving him the time of day.

The physician who had been caring for him walked over and rested his hands on the bed rail. “So, we’ve received your results from the blood test and urinalysis. First things first, you’re very dehydrated.”

“See, I told you,” Celine told him.

“Secondly, when we ran your urinalysis, we found out that you had GHB in your system. Normally, I wouldn’t test for that, but because you said that you had been out drinking, I wanted to rule that out.”

Case jerked his head back, not understanding what he was saying. “What the hell is GHB?”

“GHB is a drug known as the date rape drug. How many drinks did you have again?”

“I think like two shots.”

“And you don’t remember anything that happened while you were there?”

“I remember going there and taking the two shots. After that, I don’t recall anything.”

The doctor nodded. “It’s possible that someone slipped this in your drink.”

Case shook his head in disbelief. It was hard to believe that he had the actual date rape drug in his system. It didn’t make sense to him at all. Why would someone want to drug him?

“What the fuck?” he whispered still in shock.

“Was there anyone sitting next to you who seemed suspect?” Celine asked. “Or were you not paying attention to your drink?”

Case shook his head still in deep thought. He was having trouble trying to comprehend that he had been drugged.

“I don’t remember anybody messing with my drink. All I remember was the bartender giving them to me, but she

was right in front of me, though.”

“Well, do you think it could’ve been her?” Celine asked.

He shook his head. “I mean, I don’t know. She wouldn’t have a reason to do that. Plus, Big would kill her ass if she even thought about slipping something in my drink.”

“Well, we need to get to the bottom of this,” Celine ranted. It’s dangerous that you were drugged unknowingly. You could’ve been allergic to the substance and died. Things really could have been worse.”

Case nodded his head, agreeing with his mother. He was all torn up by the news, but what made the hairs stand up on his neck was that he didn’t know who did it. Case needed to really think long and hard about who could’ve done this to him and what the reason was behind it.

Kesla laid back on the exam table with her legs propped up. After giving a heartfelt testimony of her “alleged” rape, the detective immediately suggested getting a rape kit performed. The examiner had already collected her clothing, as well as a blood sample. She was so happy that her plan had worked out perfectly. Kesla didn’t think that Tisa would go through and slip the drug in Case’s drink. She actually thought that she would have to go through with her plan of airing out Tisa’s dirty laundry to her aunt.

Kesla felt no remorse about what she was doing to Case. It was him who had murdered her cousin, Mariah, in cold blood and got away with it. It was him who had severed her relationship with Mariah, whom she was once very close with. She could’ve gone with a less harsh punishment, but she needed to see Case behind bars where he belonged.

The buzzing sound of the central air filled the dreary room. Kesla was receiving a pelvic exam, so they could collect any DNA evidence that Case had left behind. She hated to admit it, but when she’d taken advantage of Case in that

bathroom, she definitely enjoyed the ride. His dick was the perfect length, and he filled her insides just right.

The only thing that worried Kesla was Tisa. She was extremely weak, and she needed to play her closely so she wouldn't rat Kesla out. Tisa didn't do well under pressure, and she didn't need her messing things up for her.

“Okay, I need you to sit up so we can get pictures of your injuries,” the nurse informed her.

Kesla slowly raised herself up and stepped down from the table. Since she didn't sustain any injuries while she was raping an unconscious Case, she traveled back home and began to claw at her face and neck. She was aware that she needed some kind of bruises, so she thought that scratches would do the trick. Kesla held her arms up as the nurse snapped pictures of her body. Most of the pictures were of her face and neck since that was where her injuries were.

The nurse sat the camera down on the counter. “Okay, now that I've collected all of the samples that I needed, it seems like we're done here.”

Kesla wanted to smile so badly, but she had to stick to her act. “How long will it take the DNA results to come back?”

“Well, first we would have to get a DNA sample from the suspect. Then, it depends on the lab and their workload. Sometimes it can take anywhere from three to twelve weeks. Sometimes longer.”

A frown instantly formed on her scarred face. “That’s too long. On Law and Order, it usually takes a day.”

The woman shook her head. “That’s TV. This is reality, and DNA results don’t come back right away.”

Her internal smile had been altered into rage. She was certain that the results would be back in a day and Case would be on his way to jail. She couldn’t afford to wait weeks at a time. Case would probably have her murdered by then.

“I can’t believe you guys take that fucking long to test DNA. That’s bullshit. I shouldn’t have come to you guys at all,” she fussed.

“I’m sorry that you feel that way, but I thought the detective expressed that to you. They have to conduct a full investigation first. They can’t just go off of your word and arrest someone. There has to be evidence to support your claims.”

Kesla was done listening to her poor excuses. She wanted Case in jail immediately. She didn't have time to wait on the DNA results.

“Fuck this! I'm outta here!” she grabbed her keys off the counter and walked out of the room.

Kesla was dressed in nothing but a hospital gown as she stormed down the hallway. The nurse tried her best to catch up with her, but Kesla was walking a mile a minute.

“Ma'am, can you wait?” she heard the nurse behind her. “I think the detective wants to have a word with you.”

Kesla ignored her and walked out of the door. The nippy night time air chilled her body, causing goosebumps to cover her skin. She got inside of her car and grabbed her purse from the back seat. She dug inside of her bag and pulled out her phone. Kesla hurried and started her engine so she could turn on her heat. She had to call Tisa so she could coach her on what to do next. So, she dialed her number.

“What?” Tisa answered.

“Bitch, lose the attitude!” As Tisa sucked her teeth, Kesla went on, “Listen, I need you to go about your life like

everything is normal. Make sure you keep that damn mouth closed. Case should be arrested really soon.”

“I know what the hell I have to do. I don’t need you to coach me on anything. Why is he getting arrested?”

Kesla laughed. “Because Case raped me.”

“Bitch!” Tisa screeched. “I can’t believe this was your plan. You’re really about to claim that he raped you? What kind of fucking drugs are you on? You have literally lost your dumb ass mind!”

“Fuck you! I did what I had to do for my cousin!” Kesla argued.

“This had nothing to do with your cousin. You did this for you. I can’t believe you got me involved with this shady ass plan. After tonight, I don’t wanna hear from your stupid ass anymore,” Tisa declared.

“I’ll call your scary ass whenever I want to ... or maybe I will call your aunt.”

Kesla had been threatening to expose Tisa to her aunt for the last couple of months. Tisa’s uncle used to rape her during her teenage years. Kesla knew all about the trauma she had endured since they used to be best friends. The only way

she got Tisa to participate in setting Case up was to blackmail her.

“Bitch, call her, and then while you’re calling her, I’ll make sure that Big anonymously gets the text messages that will incriminate your ass.”

Kesla’s nostrils flared like a raging bull. Tisa had officially left her speechless at the mention of ratting her out. She had finally come to the realization that she had no more control over Tisa. Threatening to expose her to her family would leave Kesla in a heap of trouble once Tisa notified Big of the setup.

“Oh, your ugly ass is real quiet now,” Tisa taunted. “You don’t have shit on me no more, so stop calling my fucking phone, and figure out how you’re going to get out of the hole that you dug and threw yourself in.”

Tisa then hung up in her face. Suddenly, Kesla began to bang her fist on her steering wheel. She hated that she no longer had the help of Tisa anymore, but she couldn’t focus on that. She knew she would have to go into hiding until Case was arrested because she didn’t want him or his family coming after her. So, the next thing on her list was to go to her family and express what happened to her. Kesla needed them on her

side, and since they shared the same disdain for Case as she did, she knew that would be easy.

CHAPTER TWO

Diar was awakened by the shifting of her body. She winced as she opened her eyes and saw Roman standing over her. They were still in the storage room at Stefani's store. She opened her mouth to release a sound, but found it difficult when she realized that there was duct tape over her lips. Instantly, she began to panic. Diar desperately tried to move her limbs, but noticed that they too were taped up. Her muffled cries could be heard as Roman began to drag her.

Fear rippled through her body as if she had been shot with hollow tip bullets. She had no idea what he was going to do with her, and that left her terrified. When Roman opened the closet door that was located in the corner, Diar began to buck with fright.

“Stop fuckin’ fighting, Diar. I’m not playing with you,” he grimaced while trying to control her.

His demands fell on deaf ears because Diar wasn't going in that closet without a fight. She was claustrophobic and knew she wouldn't survive being placed in a tiny space like that. Roman roughly shoved her body inside of the itty

bitty vault and shut the door. Diar could barely move as she tried to kick her way out. Her stifled sobbing mixed with her salty tears filled the cramped space.

Diar was severely uncomfortable with her knees pressed against her chin. She was trying her best to battle with the door, but she couldn't escape. Her heart was pounding as if it were trying to flee from inside her chest. She was scared, downright fearful that she may die in the closet. Diar could feel the sweat drip from her pores as darkness encompassed her.

I have to get out of here, she thought as she continued to try and kick the door. She could hear movement and figured that it was still Roman. She couldn't give up, her mind wouldn't allow it. If she had to, Diar would fight until the door was eventually kicked down.

Roman frantically paced back and forth while trying to grasp what he had just done. He didn't know how Diar found out about the robbery. That was only supposed to be a one-time thing in a ploy to win her back. He thought that by getting her robbed, she would call him when she had become emotionally distraught. When Roman never received a call from her, he was disappointed.

The robbery wasn't set up so that he could hurt her. It was purely set up so that he could get back into her good graces. He hated seeing her dating someone else and couldn't help his envious nature. In his fucked up mind, he considered Diar to be his property, and no one was going to come in between that.

Now, he needed to cover his tracks. Diar should've never let the threat of snitching on him slip from her mouth. He didn't need to be looking over his shoulder on account of her, so he decided to take matters into his own hands. Locking her in the closet had become the most logical thing to do. He had put a chair under the door handle to keep her from escaping, but that wouldn't be enough. So, he rummaged

through her bag and found her pocket knife. He hurried to the door and removed the chair. Roman stuck the knife between the crack of the hinges, making sure to secure it tightly. He then checked to see if the door could possibly open, and when it didn't, he gloated.

“Yeah, bitch, you ain't breaking out of here.”

Roman then stacked boxes of clothing near the door so that he could block anyone from seeing the knife in the door. He actually didn't care what happened to Diar now that she was adamant about snitching on him. He couldn't care less about her or her wellbeing.

“Let me get the fuck out of here,” he declared and grabbed her purse, cell phone and keys.

Roman didn't want to leave any trace of him or Diar, so he made the decision to park her car at an undisclosed location. After parking her car in an abandoned lot, he called one of his friends to come get him so he could go back and get his car. The next thing to check off on his to-do list was to go into hiding. He wasn't going to get caught slipping on account of Diar.

Case sat across from Big reciting what his doctor had found in his system. When Big had called to check on him, Case had told him a brief story, which prompted Big to meet him at his house. Case was seething with anger knowing that someone had deliberately slipped a drug in his drink. He'd heard horror stories about people being slipped a mickey and never being the same person. He didn't mean to come off so aggressively to his brother, but he was extremely irate.

“So, you think it happened at the bar?” Big questioned.

“It had to. I was fine until I came up there. Like I told you before, I don't remember shit after those two shots. I can't even remember who was sitting next to me. Tisa was right in front of me when she made my drink, so I don't think it was her.”

“Big, you need to figure this out. I wanna know who drugged my son,” Celine added.

Big took a deep sigh, then swiped his hands down his face. “This shit is crazy. It's like it's not making sense to me.”

“This shit got me all fucked up, and on top of that, I still feel like shit.”

“Let me go talk to Zeke and see if he saw anything suspicious. He might even tell me who was sitting next to you. I’ll ask Tisa if she saw anything suspect too,” Big assured.

Celine shook her head. “Big, you need to take this seriously. There’s no telling how many people have been drugged at your bar.”

“What the fuck do you think I’m doing? Didn’t you just hear me say that I’m going to try and look into the shit?” he snapped.

“I’m just saying. This is my son that we’re talking about.”

“And he’s my brother. You think I’m about to sit around and not do nothing? You need to chill out.”

Case wasn’t in the mood to hear them bickering. He was already irritated, and he didn’t need to be even more angered by his mother instigating the situation. He had no doubt in his mind that Big would try and handle the situation. He always came through when needed. When his phone rang,

he noticed that it was his father, Dom. He answered immediately.

“Yeah, Pops.”

“Where are you?” he asked.

“At home.”

“I’m about to come get you. The police just came to my house looking for you. They say that they want to talk to you about a sexual assault that happened last night.”

“What?” Case barked utterly confused.

“Yeah, talking about the sexual assault of some bitch named Kesla. We’re going there with a lawyer, so I’m about to come get you, and we can go meet with my attorney. This is probably another way for the police to fuck with us since we have so much bad blood with them.”

Case had zoned out once his father mentioned Kesla. He didn’t understand why the police was questioning him about anything regarding her. He didn’t fuck with her and couldn’t stand her. Something was up. It was imperative that he know what the hell he had gotten himself into.

“Case, did you hear me?” Dom questioned.

“Ye...yeah, I heard you.”

“Be ready. I’m on my way.”

Case hung up the phone, and then without notice, he flipped the coffee table over. Celine jumped back while Big shot him a weird look. His temper was at an alarming level. The emotion he was experiencing was enough to take someone’s life. He had never been in such a messy predicament, and he was actually frightened. Hearing the word sexual assault had Case on the edge. He had never been associated with such an act and didn’t know what to expect.

“What’s wrong with you?” Celine quizzed.

“Pops just called and told me that the police are looking for me. Kesla is trying to say that I raped her. I swear, if I go to jail because of this bitch...”

Big put his hands up. “Wait a minute. Slow down. This bitch is really trying to say that you raped her?”

“That’s what Pops just said.” Case covered his eyes with his hands and scoffed. This had to be one of the worst days of his life. He didn’t know what kind of game Kesla was playing, but he knew for sure that it was bound to get her killed.

“Oh my God! They think you raped someone! I have to call a lawyer!” Celine screech while jumping from her seat.

“Ma, calm down. Pops already got it handled. He’s coming to get me.”

Big stood from his seat and grabbed his keys. “I’m about to go see Zeke. I’ll let you know what’s up.”

When Big walked out the door, Case went up to his bedroom. He needed to be alone, if only for five minutes. He was so distressed that his heart began to palpitate. He couldn’t go to jail for something as serious as a rape. Not only was Kesla trying to destroy his good name, but she was also trying to ruin his life. He never anticipated something like this to arise. If he could, he would go find Kesla so he could whoop her ass, but he knew that wouldn’t be smart. For the time being, he would pray that something would work in his favor to get him out of his sticky predicament.

“I can’t believe this happened to you, baby,” Cheyenne spoke softly as she held Kesla close to her chest.

Kesla wept as if she had been starring in a feature film while she told her family about her exaggerated encounter with Case. So far, they seemed to believe her every word, except Myron. He had been giving her an expression that she couldn’t quite read. He showed no emotion as she hysterically cried her eyes out.

“So, you did go to the police, right?” her uncle, Roy, asked.

“Yes,” she sniffled. “They did a rape kit on me and took some pictures. I’m so scared that he may come back for me. I never wanna go through this again.”

“You won’t. His ass thinks that he’s really invincible and above the law. How much pain is he going to cause my family?” Cheyenne cried.

Roy walked over and gently massaged Cheyenne’s shoulders. “It’s going to be okay. Kesla, you have our support, and we’re going to make sure that Case is sent to prison. I

think you should stay here with us, so you can be closer to your family.”

“So, where did the rape happen?” Myron blurted out.

“I told you already; he caught me as I was pulling up to my house.”

“How did he know where you lived?” Myron quizzed.

“I don’t know. He probably looked up my address online,” she replied, becoming annoyed.

Myron nodded. “So, there weren’t any witnesses? I mean you live in a big ass apartment building. Nobody heard you screaming?”

“Why are you questioning her like you don’t believe her?” Cheyenne asked.

“Yeah, why the fuck are you acting like I’m not the victim? I just told you the story, so why are you asking me more damn questions!” Kesla snapped.

“How did you pull it off?” Myron asked as he ignored her rant.

Kesla angrily jumped from her seat. She didn’t appreciate Myron interrogating her about her story. Whatever she did was for the benefit of her family, including him. It was

because of Case that Myron now had permanent nerve damage in both of his hands from being shot. He had never told her what happened, but Kesla knew that Case had something to do with it. Now, Myron was agitating her with his twenty-one questions.

“I didn’t pull off shit. Case raped me, and that’s the end of the story. You’re acting like he’s not capable of this. He killed Mariah, he shot you in your hands, and now, I’m his third victim. Stop acting like you don’t know how he gets down.”

Myron smirked. “Kesla, I really hope you know what you’re doing. A rape charge is a serious crime. I don’t want this shit to blow up in your face.”

“It won’t. His semen was inside of me. That should be enough to charge his ass.”

“Yeah a’ight,” he scoffed and then walked out of the room.

Kesla sat back in her seat replaying Myron’s words. She was in too deep to back out now. She was a woman, and she was confident that the law would be on her side. Case was a young black man that didn’t stand a chance going up against

her. She knew that her claims wouldn't be hard to prove, especially when his DNA was inside of her.

“Don't mind him, baby. He's still depressed about his condition,” Cheyenne assured.

Kesla nodded and laid her head on her aunt's chest. She was drained from all of the fake crying and emotional episodes. Her hopes were high, and she was determined to do whatever she needed to do to see Case locked up.

CHAPTER THREE

It had been almost twelve hours since Diar had been locked inside of the closet. After hours of relentlessly trying to escape, she had forfeited her energy. She had cried so much that she would have sworn that she had lost a gallon of water weight. Diar was terrified, hurt and mentally drained. She had already suffered two panic attacks and knew that more were on the way. Thoughts of dying inside of the closet had begun to torment her mind.

The unsettling feeling in the pit of her stomach had taken her to places so dark that it caused her to burst into tears. She knew crying wouldn't solve anything, but it had become like second nature to her. Diar had given it her all to escape from the closet, but she couldn't. She knew her family was way past worried by now. She never went all of this time without contacting at least Stefani, her mother, or Kayla. Praying had become almost like a ritual. It was said that God would never put more on you than you can bear, but this had her damn near second guessing her faith.

Thoughts of her parents, Stefani, and Kayla ran through her psyche. She missed them terribly and prayed that

they would come and rescue her. She'd even thought about Case. Even though she had been pissed at him for playing with her heart, she would give anything to hear his deep, smooth voice. Diar needed him to assure her that everything would be all right, and that she would make it out of her situation okay. He'd always had a way of making her feel secure and protected.

When Diar felt warm liquid seep through her pants, she tried her best not to cry. She had been trying to hold her urine for hours and her bladder had finally won. Once again, tears rolled down her face as she quietly wept. She didn't know how long she would survive in the closet with soiled pants and no food or water. Her stomach had been singing to her for hours, and she felt that she was dehydrated because her limbs had been cramping up on her.

God help me, she prayed while squirming to get into a comfortable position. The stench from her urine attacked her nose with force. Diar was becoming weaker by the hour. She didn't want to be found dead in the closet, so she mustered up the little bit of energy she had left and tried to kick the door open.

Case sat back in the chair while inside of the interrogation room. He had finally arrived with his lawyer, Nick, and Dom. So far, the detectives had been treating him as if he were guilty of his accused crime. He had expected this since Dom had informed him that the Milwaukee County Police Department would treat him differently because of his last name. Dom had been public enemy number one when it came to the MPD. They had tried everything in their power to take Dom's empire down, but when they failed, they began to attack his sons.

So, when Case arrived at the precinct, Dom coached him on how to deal with them. He instructed Case not to say much and allow his lawyer to speak for him. He also advised him not to volunteer any information that wasn't needed. Now, Case had to stare at the smug detectives as they attacked his character. He wanted to jump over the table so badly and smack the shit out of both of them.

“So tell us about your whereabouts last night?”
Detective Williams asked.

“I just fuckin’ told you where I was?” Case snapped.

“Well, tell us again,” Detective Carter smirked.

Case released a deep breath while trying to control his temper. “I was at work all day. Then at nine o’clock, I went to my girl’s house, but she wasn’t there, so I went to my brother’s bar.”

“And where does this girl of yours live?”

“On 69th and Vliet.”

“The victim claims that my client raped her at her house when he doesn’t even know where she lives,” Nick interjected. “Did you guys dust her car for fingerprints? Are there any witnesses to corroborate her story? It just seems like the victim is trying to set up my client. Did I mention that he was drugged last night?”

“Drugged? According to who?” Detective Williams asked.

“According to the fuckin’ hospital. They found GHB in my system, and if you don’t believe me, then call and get my medical records. I’m the one who’s the victim. I don’t even know where Kesla lives, so how did I supposedly rape her

outside of her apartment building? She's trying to set me up!" Case barked.

"Why is that?" Detective Carter quizzed.

"Because her family thinks that I killed her cousin, who was my ex-girlfriend. They've been blaming me for her death since the shit happened. It was an accident, but they think I did it, so she's trying to find ways to put me behind bars."

"All you have to do is look into my client's alibi, and you'll see that the victim's claims are false," Nick chimed in.

"Oh, we will definitely look into his alibi, and we're also going to get a copy of your medical records."

"Yeah, do that," Case hissed with an irritated expression on his face. "Do what the fuck y'all gotta do to clear my name. I can't believe y'all actually believing this bitch."

"Oh, are we supposed to believe you?" Detective Carter snapped.

Nick chuckled. "I can't believe that you guys don't see that this is a setup. Once you conduct your full investigation,

you will see that she's telling a lie. He's the real victim. How else would you explain him being drugged?"

Detective Williams shrugged. "We don't know anything about him being under the influence of any kind of drug. That's hearsay, until we get his official medical records."

"Is my client being arrested? If not, then we have nothing else to speak about."

Detective Carter shook his head. "No, we're not arresting him yet. Is your client willing to provide a DNA sample?"

"Absolutely not," Nick answered for Case.

"If it's not required, then I ain't giving y'all shit," Case grumbled.

"This could help clear your name, but you're telling me that you don't want to volunteer a sample that may get you out of this situation?" Detective Williams asked incredulously.

"I'm not doing shit. Do your fucking job and investigate this bullshit ass claim. I'm not helping y'all with anything," Case declared.

"Gentlemen, if you're done here, we would like to go. Please contact me if you have anything further you would like

to discuss,” Nick stated and then stood from his seat.

Case followed suit and walked out of the room with Nick. When they boarded the elevator, he turned to Case and said, “We need to send the results of your blood work and urinalysis over to them. They need to know that you were drugged. You were at the bar, and then went straight to your brother’s house, right?”

“Yeah, his security guard took me to his house.”

“Okay good. This is definitely a setup from the victim. I’m sure your alibi is going to check out. Don’t worry; I’m going to make sure we prove your innocence.”

Case nodded, hoping that he would do exactly what he said. There was no way he was going to do hard time for a crime that he didn’t commit.

Big sat at his desk while texting Case to see what the police had said. A knock at the door had snatched his attention away from his phone. He walked over and opened the door where he was greeted by Zeke, his security guard.

“What’s up, Big? You wanted to see me?”

“Yeah, have a seat.”

Zeke sat in a chair while Big sat in his seat. Zeke was someone who Big had known for years. He was loyal and always went above and beyond for Big, which was one of the reasons he trusted him.

“Did you notice anything strange with my brother last night?”

Zeke quickly shook his head. “The only thing I noticed was that he was fucked up last night. I have never seen Case like that.”

“Do you remember who was sitting next to him?”

Zeke paused for a moment while looking up at the ceiling. “I can’t even remember, I think it was a female

though. Why? What's going on?"

Big tugged on his beard and shook his head. "He was drugged last night, and he believes that it happened at the bar. That's why I asked if you remembered who was sitting next to him."

"Word?" Zeke asked in shock. "So, he really thinks that it happened here?"

Big nodded "That's what he said. Now some bitch is trying to claim that he raped her. I think somebody helped her ass set him up."

"For real?"

"Yeah, and that's why I'm trying to see who it was. When you called and told me that Case was wasted, I knew something was off because he doesn't get pissy drunk. Then when you brought him to my crib, I couldn't believe how gone he was."

Zeke's eyes widened in shock. "Damn, Big, I had no idea that this shit happened. You know I would've never let anything happen to him on my watch."

"I know, man. I'll probably go over the footage from last night to see if I know who was sitting next to him. Aye, I

need you to do me a favor and call Tisa to see if she noticed anything strange.”

“I got you.”

“Oh, and the detectives will probably be here to talk to you about last night, since you were here and you brought Case to my house,” Big informed him.

“A’ight. I’ll help in any way that I can. I’m about to go call Tisa now.”

“A’ight cool.”

Big watched Zeke walk out of the office. He prepared the video footage from the night prior, hoping that he would see when Case’s drink was spiked. He was determined to do whatever he had to do for his brother because he didn’t want to see him behind bars for a crime he didn’t commit.

Stefani dialed Diar's number for the umpteenth time with no luck. The day before she had gone by her house to look for her, but she wasn't there. She'd called everyone who Diar was associated with, but no one had seen her. All night, sleep had evaded her because she had been trying to get in contact with her. She hadn't spoken to Diar since she had informed her that Roman had set them up to be robbed. It was now seven o'clock in the morning, and Stefani was past worried.

Dash came into the bedroom with Amuri in his arms. Ever since she had been robbed, Stefani had been staying over at his house.

"You still can't find her?" Dash asked.

She sighed. "No, and I feel like something isn't right. I just called her best friend, Kayla, and she said she hadn't seen her. I've been trying to hold off on calling my parents, but I can't. I have to call and tell them that Diar has been MIA."

"You think she went to ol' boy and confronted his fat ass?" Dash asked, referring to Roman.

“It’s possible. She was pissed when I told her.”

“You better hope he ain’t tried to do nothing to her. If he’ll set her up to be robbed, then he wouldn’t have a problem killing her either.”

Stefani’s heart dropped at the mention of killing. She couldn’t fathom anything bad happening to her sister. That’s why it was essential that she go and find Diar.

“Do you think I should go file a missing persons report?”

He shook his head. “You usually have to wait forty-eight hours before you can do that.”

“Well, forty-eight hours will be this evening, and I’m going to file a report. In the meantime, can you have your people look for her? I really need to know if my sister is okay.”

“Yeah, I got you. I’m going to have them find that fuck boy too. He’ll never get the chance to set nobody else up. I can assure you of that shit.”

Stefani knew that he meant every word that had fallen from his lips. Dash was a man of his word. When he said that

he was going to make something happen, it was going to be done.

“I’m closing the store today. I can’t deal with any customers right now. I am going to go in and ship the online orders though. I need something to do so I can take my mind off the bullshit.”

“I don’t want you going by yourself, Stefani. I’m going to have my driver take you, and you need to have someone working with you. I gotta make sure you’re safe at all times.”

Stefani smiled at Dash’s protective nature. He had been by her side ever since the robbery, and she appreciated that. Although they weren’t together at the moment, she still loved him a great deal.

“I’m going to see if Laina will come in and help me. But first, I need to go to my parents’ house and let them know what’s going on.”

She walked over to him and attempted to grab Amuri from his arms. “I’m going to drop him off with my mom.”

“Nah, I got him. Go ahead.”

“I thought you had to go in to the office?”

“I do, but I’m going to take him with me. Don’t worry about us. Just go handle your business with your people and make sure you answer your phone when I call.”

She nodded and then walked in the bathroom to take a shower. She said a silent prayer hoping that Diar was okay. It would kill her if something tragic happened to her sister.

CHAPTER FOUR

Case woke up with the most painful migraine. He hadn't slept very well the night before, since his thoughts were consumed with his recent dilemma. Despite not hearing from the detectives again, he was aware that this issue was far from over. He knew that Kesla's claim was going to develop a snow ball effect of problems for him. When Case had spoken to Big, he informed him that he was looking into the footage from that night. He'd also informed him that the detectives had come to question Zeke to confirm his alibi.

Case's feet padded to the bathroom, where he brushed his teeth and washed his face. His reflection showed stress and worry. He hadn't been to the barbershop, so his usual crisp waves had formed into tight curls. His goatee was now in need of a fresh line up. Case usually kept his appearance up, but he had been too engrossed in his recent woes to even bother.

Thoughts of Diar instantly flooded his mind. She still hadn't reached out to Case, and that left him sick. He needed her badly and couldn't go another day without seeing her. He was fully aware that he had broken her heart, but he was willing to do whatever he needed to get back in her good

graces. Case's craving for Diar was so powerful that he could smell her sweet scent. He couldn't quarrel with the urge anymore. He had to act on his thirst to see her.

So, Case jumped in the shower and got dressed. Within thirty minutes, he was ready to attempt to beg for Diar's forgiveness. He hopped in his Camaro and drove toward Diar's house. Midway through his drive, he saw flashing lights following him.

"Shit," he gritted while pulling over.

He hadn't given the officer any reason to pull him over. He wasn't speeding or driving recklessly. Case was fuming as he waited for the cop to exit his vehicle. It actually took him over ten minutes to approach his window.

"License and registration," the officer requested.

"Why did you pull me over?"

The cop ignored Case and then said, "License and registration."

Case grumbled. He was not in the mood to be dealing with the police. He dug into his pocket and pulled out his license. He then opened his glove compartment. He grabbed his registration and insurance information before passing it to

the officer. The cop gave all of the documents a once over before walking back to his car.

“I can’t stand these mothafuckas,” Case fussed as he pulled out his cell phone.

Case sent Dom a text, alerting him that he had been pulled over. Ever since he started driving, his father always told him, as well as his brothers, to inform him when they would get pulled over. Dom knew that a simple traffic stop could result in death, and he wanted to always be aware.

“Hurry the fuck up,” Case mumbled as he watched the officer through his rear view mirror.

The officer sat inside of the patrol car for close to twenty minutes. When he walked back to Case’s car, he handed him his documents along with a citation.

“I pulled you over for speeding, sir. You also cut off a mail truck.”

A frown immediately formed on his face. Case knew for a fact that he hadn’t been speeding.

“How was I speeding when there was a car right in front of me? Y’all get on my fuckin’ nerves always fuckin’ with people,” he scoffed before rolling up his window.

Case cranked his engine and drove off. The officer had definitely killed his mood, but it wasn't enough to deter him from seeing Diar. When he pulled up to her house, he noticed that her car wasn't there. He got out anyway, walked up to her door, and rang the doorbell. When he didn't get an answer, he decided to go to her parents' house. Case was desperate and had no problem going from pillar to post to find his love.

After a short drive, he had arrived to Diar's parents' house. He took notice that her car wasn't there either, but he still found himself getting out and going to ring the doorbell. Seconds later, Diar's mother, Tina, answered the door wearing a robe and her hair scarf.

"Is she with you?" she asked Case.

"Who? Diar? No, I had come over to see if she was here."

"Oh my God," she gasped and covered her mouth. "She's missing. When is the last time that you saw her?"

He had completely zoned out when she revealed that Diar was missing. His heart had begun to do a familiar dance inside his chest. This bizarre, frightening feeling was the same one he'd experienced right after Mariah had shot herself. It

was the emotion of feeling like he was sitting on pins and needles.

“Case, when is the last time that you saw her?” Tina questioned again.

“Um... I saw her the night before last.”

“Come in.”

Case walked in and saw a man sitting in a chair while Stefani sat on the couch next to Kayla. They all wore somber expressions.

“Baby, this is Case, Diar’s friend. Case, this is Diar’s father, Dave,” Tina introduced him.

Case and Dave shook hands before he took a seat. He had become so worried that sweat beads began to form on his nose. It wasn’t like Diar to stay away from her family. For a moment, he wondered if their argument caused her to go away for a while. He prayed that it wasn’t the case.

“I think Roman did something to her. I bet she went to confront him and things took a turn for the worst,” Stefani claimed.

“So, he was the one that had y’all robbed?” Kayla asked.

Stefani nodded. “Yeah, it was his sneaky ass.”

Diar had never told Case her ex’s name, but judging by their conversation, he would bet money that Roman was her ex-boyfriend. What kind of man would set a woman up to be robbed? Case could tell that Roman was a hoe when he allowed him to slam the door in his face. He had already known he was bitch-made at that point.

“I can’t stand that build-a-bear looking mothafucka.” Kayla turned to Tina and Dave. “Oh, I’m sorry for cursing, but I’m pissed off,” she seethed.

“It’s fine. I need to know where this Roman cat lives. I’ll go by his house and shoot that bitch up if I have to,” Dave threatened.

“I know where he lives,” Kayla announced. “I’ll take you right over there.”

Tina hopped up from her seat. “Good. Let me go slip some clothes on so we can go over there,” she said and walked away.

“I’m going to go ship orders, and if she doesn’t turn up, then we should go file a report,” Stefani suggested.

“Did y’all try tracking her phone?” Case questioned.

“Yeah, my son’s father is doing it now. He also has some people looking for her.”

Case stood and then said, “I’ll be back.”

He walked out of the door without saying another word. There was no way that he was going to sit around and allow someone else to look for his lady. He was going to comb the streets until she finally surfaced.

“We checked into his alibi, and it looks like Case is telling us the truth about his whereabouts. Are you sure this happened outside of your apartment?” Detective Carter asked Kesla.

Kesla swallowed hard as she felt a sudden heat flash wash over her body. All eyes were fixated on her as she sat in the kitchen with her family and the two detectives.

“Yes, it did. Did you do a thorough check? His brother could be lying for him.”

“Well, we didn’t talk to his brother since he wasn’t there that night. We actually talked to the security guard, as well as one of the bartenders, who confirmed that he was there most of the night. The security guard also confirmed that he was the one that drove the suspect to his brother’s house. We want to help you nail him, but things aren’t adding up.”

“Well, did you guys get any physical DNA from him? That may help things,” Cheyenne added.

“He declined to give us a sample, which is his right.”

“How?!” Kesla barked as she stood. “Didn’t you bring him in for questioning? I thought you were supposed to get his DNA to test it.”

“We can’t get DNA unless he is placed under arrest. We have no real evidence to present to the prosecutor.”

“This is bullshit!” she screamed. “I get raped, and now I have to prove that he did it to me? His semen was inside of me! Do you see these damn scratches all over my face and neck? Case did this and you guys aren’t helping me!”

“Kesla, calm down,” Roy spoke.

“No! They’re just gonna let him get away with this, and I’m not having it!”

“Listen,” Detective Williams stated. “We have been working diligently to help you, but your claims aren’t adding up to his facts. We dusted your car for fingerprints and found nothing. We want to help you, but we can’t arrest someone when there isn’t any sufficient evidence.”

“You can if you get his DNA,” Kesla countered.

“They just said that they can’t get his DNA because he’s not under arrest. Damn, girl, what part don’t you understand?” Myron scoffed.

“Fuck you! You haven’t been supportive of me this entire time! I don’t need to hear your funky ass two cents!”

Kesla stormed off, not in the mood to hear anything else the detectives were saying. She didn’t think she would have to work this hard to prove that Case had raped her. *Maybe I should’ve said he raped me outside of the bar. That may have worked out in my favor,* she thought to herself. She needed to think of a way that they could get his DNA. That was the only evidence that Kesla had to tie Case to the “rape”. She had come too far with her plan not to follow through, so she had to think of something else that would get Case arrested.

Tisa had just pulled up to her class and put her car in park. She grabbed her book bag and turned off the engine. Just as she was about to get out of her car, her phone rang. She looked at the screen and noticed that it was Zeke calling, so she answered.

“Hey, Zeke. What’s up?”

“What’s going on, Tisa? Big told me to call you and ask if you remember who the person was that was sitting next to Case the other night.”

“Um... not really. I think it was a woman. Why?”

“Because he was drugged the other night, and they think it happened at the bar.”

Suddenly, Tisa’s mouth had become dry. She couldn’t control the shaking of her hands if she’d tried. The nervousness ran through her body like a fatal disease.

“Dr... drugged?” she stammered. “How does he know that he was drugged?”

“Shit, he went to the hospital the next morning. I guess the doctors told him.”

“What kind of test did they do? Do they know what kind of drug was in his system?” she rattled off.

“Damn, girl, I don’t know,” Zeke shot. “I just need to know who was sitting next to him.”

“Oh, well, I don’t know.”

“A’ight, well I’ll see you later.”

“Okay. Bye.”

Tisa hung up and immediately called Kesla. She needed to let her know that Case was now fully aware that he had been drugged. She also wanted to make sure that Kesla wouldn’t go running her mouth and put her in the situation.

“What the fuck do you want?” Kesla answered.

“Case knows that he was drugged.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because one of the guards just called me and told me that he’s trying to see who the person was sitting next to him.”

“Fuck!” Kesla gritted. “That’s not good for me.”

“Well, at least he doesn’t think I was the one that did it. You should’ve thought of a better plan. Has he even been arrested yet?”

“No, bitch! I’m trying to make that happen now. The police are bullshitting.”

“No, *you’re* bullshitting with that dumb ass plan. Did you not think this through, or did you think that because you were a woman that they would automatically believe you?” Tisa snickered.

“Bitch, shut the fuck up and get off my line. You better hope this shit works out or else you’re going down with me.”

Immediately, Tisa’s smirk had been wiped off her face. She had feared that Kesla would bring her down with her if she was to ever get caught.

“I swear, you better keep my name out of this shit,” Tisa warned.

“Or what? What the fuck are you going to do? You’re not going to do anything, so stop talking shit and leave me the fuck alone.”

Kesla hung up leaving a frantic Tisa sitting in her car. Her anxiousness had her not even wanting to attend class. She

was terrified that her participation in Kesla's scheme to frame Case would land her in big trouble. For the first time in her life, she was filled with regret and wished that she could go back and change her mind about helping Kesla.

CHAPTER FIVE

It had been day two of Diar being locked in the closet. Weak wasn't the word to describe her condition; she felt like she was knocking on death's door. She could literally feel her body shutting down, and it terrified her. Diar attempted not to let her current situation get to her mentally, but it was impossible not to. She desperately tried to think positively and believe that she would escape the nightmare that was now her reality. But with forty-eight hours passing by, she'd finally come to grips with the fact that she would die in the closet.

Her feeble and sickly body was on empty. She had become so hungry that her stomach didn't even growl anymore. Her mouth was so dry that her tongue felt like old carpet. Diar felt her life slipping away with each minute that passed. She had prayed until there were no more words left in her mind. She had hoped that she would be rescued and everything would be okay, but nothing happened.

The strong smell from her urine attacked her nose with force. She wished that she could breathe out of her mouth so that she wouldn't smell the awful stench. Diar felt like a contestant on the show *Naked and Afraid*. She now knew how

people felt to be on an island with no food or water. Her heart throbbed profusely at the thought of her family finding her dead. Diar wondered why no one had come to look for her and why was she still trapped in a closet for two days?

Her mental health was declining terribly. The trauma she had experienced would forever alter her. Being in the dark with no food or water had scared her mentally, as well as emotionally. Diar was tiring of sitting and just feeling her life drain away. She actually just wanted to die quickly.

When she heard the faint sound of a voice, Diar's eyes popped open. She thought her mind was playing tricks on her, but she heard it again. *Oh my God, please let it be my sister.* She had no energy whatsoever, but she was going to try her best to make a sound, so she could alert whoever it was that she was in the closet.

Diar's body was still in an uncomfortable position. She was unable to stretch her legs or her arms. So, she used her knee to make a knocking sound against the door. With each hit against the steel door, she was losing the little bit of energy she had left. *Please someone hear me,* she prayed silently. Diar heard the voices drawing nearer to the door. She became excited and knocked a little harder than before.

“What the hell is that?” she heard someone say on the other side of the door.

Diar’s heart pumped with joy when she heard someone twisting the door handle. Her mouth was still taped up, so she was unable to utter a single word. Still, she was determined, so she continued to bang her knee against the door. Minutes felt like years before the door opened and she saw Stefani and Laina.

Panic flashed on Stefani’s face before she said, “Oh my God, Diar.”

Tears the size of puddles poured from Diar’s eyes once Stefani and Laina helped her out of the closet. Her body fell out like a rag doll. She had never been so happy to see her sister’s face in her entire life. Stefani ripped the tape from Diar’s mouth with tears in her eyes as well.

“Diar, we’ve been looking everywhere for you! How long have you been in there? Who did this to you?”

Diar wanted to answer her, but she was still reeling on the fact that she had been discovered. She had been for certain that she would die in the closet. She was so sure that she would never see her family again. Although her body was in terrible condition, Diar’s heart was so full of joy.

“I’m so sorry,” Stefani cried as she hugged her. “I didn’t know you were here.”

Diar still hadn’t spoken a single word. Instead, she continued to bawl her eyes out.

“Come on, Laina. Help me get her to the car. I have to take her to the hospital.”

Diar was so glad that Stefani suggested going to the hospital because she knew her body was in horrible shape.

Roman looked out of the blinds and then walked back to sit on the couch. He had been hiding out at his cousin's house trying to come up with his next move. Once he got rid of Diar's car and belongings, he went back to his home, packed a bag, and drove all the way to Whitefish Bay. Roman didn't inform his cousin on what had happened between him and Diar. He made the decision not to tell anyone. He was actually hoping that Diar was found dead in the closet.

Roman loved her so much but hated her at the same time. She'd broken his heart into itty bitty pieces. For years, he had always put Diar first and showed her that she was the person who he wanted. He had been proving himself to ensure that he could be the man that she needed, but when he saw that she had moved on, it left him livid.

Roman had put so much time in with Diar that he was unwilling to let someone else come in and capture her heart. Yes, from time to time, he would dip off and fuck with other women, but it was always Diar who held the key to his heart. When she completely shut him out of his life, it pained him tremendously.

“Your Pops called looking for you. How long are you going to dodge him?” his cousin, Carey, asked.

“I’ll call him back soon.”

Roman knew that his father was boiling due to his absence. His father owned a car factory, and Roman had a lot of responsibilities there. He was certain that things were backed up at the factory because he wasn’t there to handle his duties. However, Roman needed time to clear his mind and come up with a solution once Diar was found. Whether she was dead or alive, he knew that the police, as well as her family, would be looking for him.

“Keep it G, fam. Are you hiding?” Carey questioned.

Roman chuckled nervously. “Nah, why you ask me that?”

“Because you’ve been here for two days now. You don’t ever come to my crib to spend the night. Shit, you barely come to my crib period. So, tell me, what’s the deal with you?”

Roman contemplated if he wanted to let Carey in on his dilemma. He trusted his cousin not to tell his business, so he decided to open up to him.

“I got caught up in some shit. I got my ex-girlfriend robbed, and she found out. So, I locked her in the closet at her job.”

Carey burst into a fit of laughter. Roman gave him a curious expression, not understanding where the humor was in his confession.

“You’re lying, right?” Carey asked.

“Nah, I’m telling you the truth. We were fighting, so I knocked her ass out and used duct tape to secure her arms, legs and mouth. I stuffed her in the closet and left her dumb ass there.”

“Damn, you’re just going to leave her there? She’s probably hungry as fuck.”

“Fuck her,” Roman spat.

“Why did you get her robbed? You’re not even that type of guy, so what did she do to you?”

“She started fucking with some other dude, so I set the robbery up thinking that she would run back to me.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Carey snapped. “You did this because the bitch didn’t want you anymore? That was some hoe shit you did.”

“So,” he shrugged. “I’m glad I did that shit too. Now her ass is probably dying in that small ass closet because she wanted to shit on me.”

Carey shook his head in disgust. “I’m disappointed in you, cuz. We don’t do shit like that in our family. That was some sucka shit.”

“Listen, I don’t give a fuck about your opinions right now. Just let me stay here a couple more days, and I’ll be outta your hair.”

Roman got up from his seat and walked to the room where he had been sleeping in. On the outside, he seemed unbothered by his cousin’s comments, but internally, he was fuming. The men in Roman’s family lived by a certain code, and what he had done was frowned upon. Setting people up to be placed in bad situations was deemed unacceptable. Roman felt like shit, but he couldn’t take back what he had done. He just hoped that when things really hit the fan that he would be prepared for the oncoming storm.

Case rubbed his hands down his face while sitting in his kitchen. He was frustrated and highly irritated. His lawyer had called and told him that the detectives were still conducting an investigation. In his mind, there was no investigation because he hadn't laid one finger on Kesla. He also knew that the police had checked into his alibi and confirmed his whereabouts on the night in question. Case truly wanted this to all go away so he could move on with his life.

On top of that messy situation, he still hadn't found Diar. The day before, Case had combed the city in hopes of finding her. All night, he made sure to stay in contact with Stefani and Tina. He felt bad for them because he could hear it in their voices that they were beyond worried about Diar. Case was also, and he kept praying that she was alive and well. If something were to happen to her, he knew that he would never be the same.

When his phone rang, he looked at the screen and noticed that it was Stefani. He hurried and answered.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Case, it’s me Stefani. I wanted to let you know that we found Diar, and she’s in the hospital.”

His heart sank to his feet at the mention of hospital.. He didn’t even wanna know how Diar’s condition was because he was fearful that it may be critical.

“Before you ask, she’s very, very sick, but she is stable. We’re at West Allis Memorial. Call me when you get here, so I can give you her room number.”

“A’ight.”

Case hung up, jumped from the stool and went to get dressed. Within ten minutes, he was out the door and heading for the highway. Once Case arrived at the hospital, and parked, he had to sit in the car so he could get his mind right. Flashbacks of when he was at the E.R. waiting on an update for Mariah tormented his psyche. He tried not to let it plague his mind, but he couldn’t help it. That horrible memory would forever be embedded into his soul.

Case texted Stefani for the room number, then got out of the car to walk inside. The anxious disposition that consumed his body caused his heart to beat erratically. His sweaty palms mixed with the unsettling feeling in his stomach

caused him to feel sick. *Just be cool*, he coached himself as he arrived on his desired floor.

As Case was approaching the door, he saw two officers walk out of the room. He knocked on the door and let himself in. Diar's parents along with Stefani and Kayla were there. There was also a man with a suit on sitting in the corner. When Case's eyes fell on Diar, he unconsciously clenched his jaw. She looked like she had been in a fight and lost the battle. Her face was severely swollen and bruised. Her once golden skin now lacked moisture and was dull. Case was furious and was ready to kill anyone who had something to do with her current state.

Stefani walked over to him and rested her hand on his shoulder. "She's very ill. She was locked in a closet the entire time we had been looking for her, so she's extremely dehydrated. Her glucose levels are dangerously low also."

Case was still stuck on the fact that she had been locked in a closet. "Who the fuck locked her in a closet?" he whispered through gritted teeth.

"Her fat ass ex-boyfriend. She just gave the police a statement, so hopefully they find his ass."

Not before I find his bitch ass, he thought to himself. Case walked over to the side of Diar's bed and stared at her briefly before he kissed her cheek. She didn't even acknowledge him. He wanted to talk to her, but with her family being in the room, he decided not to; not to mention, their last encounter wasn't a pleasant one, and he didn't want to make a scene. So, Case grabbed a chair and sat.

He closely watched Diar, wishing that he could take away her pain. He actually blamed himself for everything. If he hadn't said those hurtful words, it wouldn't have prompted Diar to run back to her ex.

"Diar, baby, we're going down to the cafeteria. Do you want anything?" Tina asked.

She shook her head no. Everyone exited the room, leaving Case and Diar alone. He was actually speechless and didn't know what to say. He wanted to explain what he had said at his shop, but didn't know if Diar would be open to his explanation.

"We've been looking everywhere for you. I'm sorry this happened," he said and grabbed her hand.

She angrily cut her eyes at him and then looked away. He could sense that she was agitated by his existence.

“Why are you here?” she grumbled lowly.

“Why would you ask me that?”

“You don’t even care about me. Why are you here trying to act like you’re concerned when we both know the truth?”

Case sighed deeply and tried to find the right words to assure Diar that he genuinely cared about her.

“I know you’re still mad at me, but I’m here because I do care.”

“Bullshit,” she spat weakly. “You don’t love me, and you never will. You need to leave and stay out of my life. I don’t need your fake ass concern.”

Case had to admit that her words had stung. He could hear Diar’s disdain for him in her voice. Suddenly, a panic-stricken feeling absorbed his body. He was hoping that she didn’t actually mean the words that she’d spoken.

“You really want me to leave?”

“Yes, and please stay away from me.”

Case rubbed his hand down his face, contemplating if he wanted to grant her request. He wanted to be there for her, but he also didn't want to worsen her condition by causing her more stress. As much as it would pain him, he had to leave so she could get some peace.

He stood and leaned over the bed to plant a kiss on her forehead. Diar turned her head so his lips wouldn't grace her skin. Case shook his head and then left out of the room. His feelings were hurt, but he had brought it on himself. He should've never played with Diar's heart and led her on when he knew that he wasn't ready for anything exclusive with her. But Case was determined to make things right. That was the reason why he decided he would come back the next day. Case knew she wasn't in her right frame of mind, so he decided to let his presence speak volumes. Even though he was going through his own tribulations, he made a vow that Diar would become his main priority. He had shattered her feelings, so he felt that it was his duty to make it up to her by being there for her mentally, emotionally and physically.

CHAPTER SIX

Later that evening, Case sat at his tattoo shop along with Keece and Big. To say that he was stressed was an understatement. His encounter with Diar did nothing to calm his nerves. His brothers were trying their best to cheer him up, but it wasn't working.

“Don't be worried about this bullshit ass case, bro. That bitch doesn't have any evidence,” Keece said.

Case shook his head. “I still wanna know who drugged me. Big, did you find out anything else?”

“I looked at the footage, and it was a girl sitting at the bar, but she was two seats away from you. There's no way that she could've slipped something in your drink.” Big explained.

Case was extremely frustrated with the entire fiasco. Someone had to do it because he didn't start feeling like shit until after he had arrived at the bar and drunk his shots.

“What about the bartenders?” Keece questioned.

Big gave him a funny look. “Nah, I don't think they would be on that. They know better.”

Keece scoffed. “Yeah you think they know better, but it could’ve been them. One of them made Case’s drink and passed it right to him. You said there wasn’t anyone sitting next to him. Can you look at the footage again?”

Case pondered Keece’s words. He definitely wasn’t going to rule the bartenders out. It could’ve been one of them that had spiked his drink, but he couldn’t understand what their motive would be for doing so.

“I can look again,” Big offered. “But they know I’ll kill them if they even thought about doing some shit like that. To be honest, they wouldn’t even have a reason to do that to him.”

“You never know. Shit, one of them hoes could be helping Kesla on the low. Everybody is a suspect in my eyes.” Keece declared.

“I’m definitely going to look into it,” Big said as he stood. “I’ll get up with y’all later.”

Case shook hands with Big and watched him walk out the door. Case had some appointments set up, so he needed to get his mind right so he could work.

“So, what is the lawyer saying?” Keece asked.

“He said they don’t have enough evidence to charge me yet, but that shit could change. This shit got me stressed, and on top of that, Diar ain’t fuckin’ with me no more.”

“Why not?”

“Because I said some shit that hurt her feelings. She’s in the hospital because some crazy shit happened to her,” Case revealed, leaving out the details of Diar’s assault. “She doesn’t even want me to be there for her. I’m mad about the shit, but I really don’t have a right to be.”

“Damn,” Keece stressed. “That’s fucked up. Maybe you should give her some space until she gets out of the hospital.”

“I don’t know if I want to do that though. I’m scared that she might be done with me for real.”

“You must’ve said some foul shit to her. You like her for real, don’t you?”

Instead of denying his love for Diar like he had done in the past, Case decided to be honest with not only Keece, but himself.

“Yeah, I do. I actually love her ass, but I kept playing with her feelings. Now, she doesn’t want me around.”

Keece smiled, which caused Case to chuckle. He knew his brother would find his relationship woes humorous.

“I can’t believe you fucked it up with her. She was a good a look for you.”

“She *is* a good look for me,” Case corrected him.

“My bad,” Keece replied as he threw his hands in the air. “So, what you gon’ do? Are you going to let her go or fight for her?”

Case didn’t have an answer to Keece’s question. Every part of his being wanted to fight for her, but at the same time, he didn’t know how much of her rejection he would be able to take.

“I don’t even know, bro.”

“If you love her, then you should fight for her. Stop thinking about Mariah, ‘cause she’s not coming back, and I mean that in the nicest way possible.”

Case nodded but didn’t respond verbally. He wanted to express to Keece that he’d tried to let Mariah go, but how could he when she had been a part of him? He had been holding the memory of Mariah hostage for so long that he didn’t know how he would be able to part ways with it. Letting

her go would be extremely challenging, but if he wanted his love affair with Diar to continue, then he knew it would have to happen.

Big glared intensely into the screen trying to see if he could find anything that would link the bartenders to Case's spiked drink. He was a little irritated because on the video, Tisa and Cady would step out of frame quite often when they made the drinks. So, Big didn't have a clear sight of the girls slipping the drug in the shot of Case's Hennessy.

Since Tisa had been the one serving Case his drink, Big decided to call Cady in to see if she saw anything suspicious. In the beginning, he didn't think that his bartenders could be the culprit, but after Keece mentioned it, he decided to take a further look into things.

A knock at the door pulled him away from the video. He turned off the screen and then went to open the door.

"Hey, Big. You wanted to see me?" Cady asked as she stepped inside the office.

"Yeah, I need to talk to you about something. Have a seat."

Cady sat in the chair that was located in front of his desk while Big sat on top of the desk. She was an attractive

woman with chocolate skin and deep dimples. He had never had any problems with her and hoped for her sake to keep it that way.

“So, did you hear what happened to my brother?”

She nodded with a somber expression. “Yeah. That was fucked up. Did you find out who did it?”

“Not yet. That’s why I actually brought you here. You and Tisa were the bartenders that night. What happened? I know you know something,” he accused with cold eyes.

Her eyebrows immediately furrowed as her eyes held worry. “I didn’t do shit. Tisa was the one serving him drinks.”

“Did you see her do something to the shot?”

“I didn’t see anything, but he didn’t start getting fucked up until she served him the drink. I remember when I tried to refill his glass, and she snatched it from my hand,” she rattled off.

Big had her right where he wanted her. He needed her to keep talking, so he could obtain the missing piece to this bizarre puzzle.

“So, you’re saying that she specifically wanted to refill his cup?”

“Yes, it seemed that way. She had only served him two shots, so when I saw how fucked up he was, I thought it was strange. After he drank his shots, Tisa helped him to the bathroom.”

“What was her reason for taking him to the bathroom?”

Cady shrugged. “She said that it looked like he had to throw up.”

“So how long was she in the bathroom with him?”

“I don’t think she stayed in the bathroom with him because she came right back to the bar.”

Big shook his head because things weren’t adding up to him. “So, if he was so fucked up, why would she leave him in the bathroom alone?”

“You’re asking the wrong person, Big. I thought it was weird too, but after a while, she did go back to the restroom, which I’m assuming was to check on him. But then she came back out, and that’s when she asked Zeke to help her with Case. I swear, Big, I would never drug your brother. I know

how you feel about your family, and I would never betray you like that,” she swore.

Big felt like she was telling the truth. He could see the sincerity in her eyes when she spoke.

“I believe you. Don’t tell Tisa that we had this conversation, a’ight?”

“Okay. Can I go?”

When Big nodded, she jumped from her seat and hurried out the door. Big walked back over to the TV and resumed watching the footage. He needed to look at the entire surveillance video before he went to question Tisa.

Diar sat on the bed in her parents' house with a lost expression on her face. She had been released from the hospital after spending three days there. She still felt like crap but was happy to be home. Her family was being extremely supportive, but Diar just wanted to be left alone. She was traumatized and fearful. Being beaten and locked in a closet for days had done a number on her mentally.

The distressed emotion she carried on her shoulders was weighing her down. A sudden sound could trigger a flashback. Certain movement by one of her family members would startle her. Sleeping with the lights on had become a part of her nightly routine. Sleep was something Diar hadn't often received since the attack and when she did briefly fall asleep, she would have nightmares.

Diar thought that she was going crazy and didn't know what to do to escape her uneasiness. Thoughts of Roman returning to finish her off harassed her mind. She didn't feel like herself anymore. She felt like more of a shell of her former self. Peace of mind was something that Diar no longer

possessed. She felt trapped, like she didn't have a safe place to turn to.

Someone knocked on her bedroom door, and she jumped violently just as her mother walked in.

“Hey, baby, som...”

“Mama, why would you knock like that? You scared me to death,” Diar whined with her hand over her chest.

“What? All I did was knock on the door.”

“Yeah, but you didn't have to knock so loudly. That scared me so bad.”

Tina offered her a sympathetic look and gently grabbed her hand. “I'm sorry for scaring you. I didn't mean to do that. I was coming to tell you that Case was here to see you.”

Diar's eyes immediately fell on Case who stepped into the bedroom. His dark eyes held a look of concern as he stared at her intensely. There was once a time where her heart would skip a beat whenever she was in his presence. Now all she felt was pure resentment. When she was in the closet, she desperately wanted to hear his voice, but now that she was free, her anger had returned. Tina quietly exited out of the

room, leaving Case and Diar alone. He took a seat on a chair while Diar glared at him from the bed.

The couple said nothing as they stared at one another. Despite her feelings for him, Case looked good, wearing a blue Warriors jacket, black t-shirt, and black jeans. For his footwork, he sported some blue Jordan's.

Diar was the first to look away. She didn't want him around. She didn't want him sharing the same air as her. His entire presence irked her at the present moment.

“Why do you keep coming around?” she asked nastily.

“Why do you keep asking me that?”

“Because I wanna know. You don't give a shit about me. Stop acting like you care about my well-being. Just leave me the fuck alone.”

Case shook his head, visibly frustrated at Diar's nasty disposition. “How the fuck are you going to tell me how I feel about you? I know you heard me say some crazy shit at the shop, and I apologize for that. But you know that I care about you, Diar. Stop acting stupid.”

“I don't know anything!” she snapped with tears threatening to spill down her cheeks. “The only thing I do

know is that you strung me along for months and played with my heart. I have nothing for you.”

“I don’t want anything from you. I just want to be here for you.”

“Well, I don’t want you here, Case. Stay away from me. When you come around, it only makes me feel worse. Let me be depressed in peace, damn.”

Diar was so tired of telling Case to leave her alone. Each day that she was in the hospital, he would show up against her request. The fact that he’d actually revealed that he cared about her burned her up inside. She’d loved Case with the depths of her soul, only for him to not reciprocate the same emotion. Diar had compromised her entire being to show him that she could be the woman that he needed, but he didn’t take her serious. It pained her to know that she was just a rebound chick.

“I know you want me to leave, but I’m not. As much as you hate me right now, I still can’t walk away from you like this. I’ll just sit here and be quiet, but I’m not leaving you,” Case declared.

“I don’t know why the hell you’re going so hard for me now. When it was time to show and prove it, you didn’t do

shit.”

“I know, and I’m sorry for hurting you.”

Diar rolled her eyes and got under the covers. She made sure to pull the cover over her face. She was tired of hearing his apologies. It was too late in her book. Her mind was so consumed with the current state of her life that she had no room for Case anymore. He’d had his chance, and he’d blown it. Diar no longer wanted to try and fit into his life anymore.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Zeke: Bar is closed. No work tonight.

Tisa was ecstatic as she read Zeke's text. She had no idea why the bar was closed, but she was definitely going to enjoy the night off. The first thing she was going to do was take a nice, hot bath. School, as well as her dealings with Kesla, had her stressed out. Recently, Kesla had been calling her excessively, but she ignored each call. Tisa didn't want anything to do with her anymore.

Kesla had involved her in a shady scheme that was sure to backfire on her. She had no idea that she was trying to set Case up to accuse him of raping her. If she would have known that ahead of time, Tisa would've taken the chance on Kesla telling her family about her sexual abuse. She never wanted to be a part of seeing an innocent black man go to jail, especially for a crime that he didn't commit. Tisa hoped that when the shit eventually did hit the fan that she would be able to fly under the radar and go unnoticed.

She got up from the couch and went to her bathroom. She ran some water and lit some candles. She made sure to

charge her Kindle so she could catch up on some reading. Yet, before Tisa could get undressed, her doorbell rang.

“Who the fuck is this?” she whispered as she walked to her front door.

She looked out of the peep hole and saw Big standing there with two other women.

What the fuck is he doing here? she wondered. A wave of nervousness washed over her body as she opened the door.

“Hey, Big. What brings you by?” she asked.

“I was stopping by to talk. I’m not interrupting you, am I?”

“No, no, you’re fine. Come inside.”

Big stepped inside with the two girls following closely behind. They all took a seat on the couch while Tisa sat on the loveseat.

“Oh, these are my home girls, Meesha and Terri,” he said introducing them.

Both of the women gave her a head nod. Tisa didn’t like the weird vibe they were giving off. There was something about these girls that she didn’t like.

“So, what’s up, Big?” she asked anxiously.

“Did you hear about what happened to Case?”

“Yeah, Zeke called me and told me. I really can’t remember who was sitting next to him though.”

“Oh yeah?” Big asked while smirking.

“Yes. It’s fucked up that someone drugged him. I wish I had more information for you.”

Big stared at her with cold eyes. “I think you do.”

Tisa felt her chest tighten as Big’s eyes burned a hole into her. *What the hell is that supposed to mean?* she wondered silently. The mood in the room had shifted, and it left her worried. Even though she was a little on edge, there was no way that she was going to reveal herself as the culprit. She would lie until the end of time.

“Wh... what do you mean?” she stammered.

“Come on, Tisa. Tell me the real. You were the person who fixed Case’s drink. There was no one sitting next to him. It was you that spiked his drink, right?”

“I swear I didn’t. It wasn’t me. Maybe it was Cady. She was the one trying to fix his drink.”

“Bitch, stop lying,” Meesha spat.

Big cracked his knuckles before he spoke. “So, you know how I have the rule that employees can’t enter my office, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, the reason being is because I have cameras in my office. Sometimes I like to make sure everybody is doing their job correctly.”

Suddenly, Tisa had developed a severe case of cotton mouth. She was literally speechless as Big looked at her with eyes so dark that it almost caused her heart to stop. She was beyond fearful, and now Tisa was contemplating making a run for the door.

“So, when I viewed the footage from last night...” Big paused and chuckled. “Imagine my face when I saw you take Case to the bathroom and then let that bitch, Kesla in the back door.”

“No, wait...Big I... um.”

Big jumped from his seat and roughly grabbed Tisa by the hair. She winced as he gripped her strands tightly.

“Nah fuck that!” He cut her off and yanked her head, causing her neck to bend in an awkward position. “Did you really think you were going to get away with drugging my brother and setting him up to be charged with rape? You can’t be that fuckin’ dumb to think that shit would work! It’s bitches like you that make me sick, because you hoes are always preying on the good ones! You helped that bitch set my brother up, and now you gotta pay for that shit!”

“I’m sorry. She blackmailed me,” she cried.

Big scoffed, then turn to Meesha and Terri and said, “Get that bitch.”

Almost instantly, Meesha and Terri had rushed Tisa with punches to her body. She tried to shield herself from the monstrous blows, but they were too strong. Tisa was knocked out of the chair while still being beaten. Instead of battling punches, she was now being kicked on almost every part of her body.

“Ahhhhh!!” Tisa screamed, feeling like her body was on fire.

Her screams meant nothing to the duo, who continued to beat her to a pulp.

Five grueling minutes went by before Big finally intervened and took his gun out.

“Watch out,” he demanded to Meesha and Terri.

The women moved out of the way as he pressed the cold, steel gun to her temple while roughly gripping her hair.

“You see what happens when you do shady shit, bitch. I don’t hit women, but I’ll blow your fuckin’ brains out right now.”

“Please no! I’m sorry! Please don’t kill me!” Tisa screamed to the top of her lungs.

Big cocked the pistol and then decided to stuff it in her mouth. Tisa gagged violently, trying her best not to vomit.

“I should kill you, but I got something even better. Get dressed hoe, because you’re going to go to the police station. You’re about to help clear Case’s name.”

Tisa wept softly as Big let her hair go. Every muscle in her body ached terribly as she struggled to stand to her feet. The beating that was just handed to her was one of the worst she’d ever endured.

“Hurry the fuck up before it be a part two to that ass whooping,” he threatened.

She cried harder once she made it to her room. *What did I get myself into? Why couldn't I just say no?* she ranted to herself. Now, she had to face possible charges because she was the one that actually spiked Case's drink.

Tisa looked at her bedroom window and tried to make a run for it before she felt someone snatch her back.

"I know you didn't think it was that sweet. Aye, Meesha and Terri, she needs some more act right. Come beat her ass again before we go to the police station."

"No, no, no I'll be good. I promise," Tisa cried.

"That's more like it bitch. Now get your shit on and bring anything that relates to your shady ass scheme with that hoe."

Tisa couldn't do anything but weep. Everything that she had worked so hard for would be gone. How could she look at her mother and tell her about what she had participated in? She was supposed to be the one that succeeded in life, not be behind bars. Tisa was devastated and couldn't blame anyone but herself.

“When are you going to bring your ass back to work? I’m swamped because of you!” Roman’s father, Lou, yelled into the phone.

Roman felt bad because he was the only person that his father depended on, but he needed to lay low. Lou had no knowledge of what he had done to Diar. Roman had heard from one of his neighbors that the police had shown up at his door. Hearing that only confirmed that Diar had been found, but he didn’t know if she was found dead or alive.

“I need more time.”

“More time for what?” Lou screeched. “You don’t just leave without notice and expect me to understand. Your big ass better be here to cover your shift tonight or it’s going to be trouble.”

Roman scoffed. “Damn, Dad I said I need some time off. I barely even take off, and you got the nerves to be acting like I did something wrong. You got other workers, so rely on them for now.”

“Mothafucka, this is your job, and just because I am your father doesn’t mean you can take advantage of me. I wouldn’t allow my other employees to take off without notice, so no, you won’t get any special treatment from me.”

Roman pinched the bridge of his nose. He was already over this conversation with his father. “Dad, I’ll call you tomorrow and let you know if I’m coming in or not.”

“No, you will be here tonight. Where the hell are you anyway?”

“I’m at Carey’s house.”

“If I have to come out there, I swear, it’s going to be your ass, boy.”

Roman hung up his phone and put it on Do Not Disturb. He was already stressed and didn’t need his father adding more to the burden on his shoulders.

“You should just turn yourself in, fam. All of this hiding out shit will get old fast,” Carey spoke as he put a blunt to his lips and inhaled the smoke.

“Man, I’m not trying to go to jail,” Roman hissed.

“So what the fuck you gon’ do? What about your money? Just turn yourself in and get it over with. Shit, you

probably won't even get that much time if you get a good lawyer."

Roman waved his hand. "Man, you sound crazy as fuck."

"So what you gon' do then? Your silly ass ain't about to be laid up in my shit all day."

Roman jumped to his feet and looked down at Carey disgustingly. "I'll leave mothafucka. I don't need you."

Carey stood with his fist balled up. "Well get your hoe ass out then."

Roman had to think of something quickly because he actually did need Carey's place to hide out. Going back to his place or his father's home was out of the question.

He laughed nervously and said, "I'm just playing," hoping that that would smooth things over.

Carey grunted and returned to his seat, "Yeah, that's what I thought."

Carey was right; Roman had to think of a plan before the police finally caught up to him. He was adamant about not turning himself in. As far as he was concerned, Diar deserved every ounce of the assault. She was the one who had left him

and moved on. Therefore, he wasn't going to apologize for anything regarding her assault. Roman hoped that she had suffered, whether she was dead or alive.

Suddenly, Diar jumped from her sleep in a cold sweat. She'd had another nightmare about her attack. She didn't even remember falling asleep.

Case sat up from the bed. "Diar, you good?" Case asked.

Still visibly shaken up, she looked at him. Before she went to sleep, he was sitting in the chair, now he was next to her in the bed. Diar thought that he would've gone home by now.

"You all right?" he asked once more.

She shook her head and then wiped her forehead. "I had another nightmare. I feel like I'm going crazy. I can't get this shit out of my head."

Case pulled her closer to him and hugged her tightly. Underneath all of her resentment and bitterness, she still loved him.

"I hate to see you like this, baby. Stop worrying about his dumb ass coming after you. You won't be harmed ever again," Case assured her.

Diar heard him, but she didn't believe it. Roman was still out there roaming the city. The police had no leads, and it left her so paranoid. Not to mention, the flashbacks that continued to torture her throughout the day.

Tears freely skated down her cheeks. She wanted to feel better, but she didn't know how. She was ruined, completely troubled by the recent events that had taken place.

"I'm so scared," she whispered. "I'm scared that I'm going to die again."

"What do you mean 'again'? You're still alive."

Diar shook her head. "I felt like I was dying inside of that closet. Do you know what it's like to be surrounded by darkness for hours? I just felt like a part of me died there, and that's why my mind is not right."

"You just had a traumatic experience happen to you. It's going to take time for you to get over it, Diar. Please stop saying that you died because you're alive."

"I can't do this. I can't stay here. I need to go far away, so Roman won't come back for me," she panted.

Diar could feel another panic attack arriving. Her heart rate accelerated quickly as her body trembled. All of a sudden,

she felt like she was fighting for air.

Case placed his hands on her shoulders in an attempt to calm her down. “Chill out and breathe,” he coached.

Diar looked into his eyes while trying to regulate her breathing. After minutes of doing breathing exercises, she was finally able to take regular breaths without feeling like she was suffocating.

“You okay now?” Case asked.

Diar shrugged, not knowing how to answer him. She was nowhere near being okay. She needed help and sitting in her parents’ home wasn’t going to help.

Case laid back with her and positioned her head on his chest. As she lay there, Diar could remember vividly once upon a time that his touch would be able to calm her nerves. But now she didn’t feel the same feeling.

“I’m going to help you get better, Diar. I won’t let you down again.”

Diar couldn’t accept his words. She didn’t want to believe that this time would be different. She was too broken to even receive what he was trying to offer. Instead of

responding, she remained quiet and listened to the soothing sound of his heartbeat.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Kesla sat in the living room next to Cheyenne and Myron. She had been in such a funk ever since the detectives informed her that she needed more evidence to get Case arrested. Lashing out on everyone had become the norm. She was furious and downright disgusted. She'd heard all about how the justice system was designed to help women, but it didn't seem like it was benefitting her. Kesla didn't realize that she would have to prove that Case raped her. She thought that by wearing a couple of scratches and having Case's DNA would be enough to get an arrest.

"You want something to eat, Kesla? You haven't eaten since this morning," Cheyenne spoke, pulling her from her thoughts.

"No, I don't want anything," she quipped, not in the mood to talk.

"Aye, calm your ass down talking to my mama like you're crazy," Myron spat. "I don't give a fuck about your damn attitude."

"Fuck you. I can talk how I wanna talk," Kesla replied.

Cheyenne put her hand up. “You guys, I am not in the mood to hear your bickering. Please cut it out before y’all give me a headache.”

“Nah, fuck her.” Myron scoffed. “She’s all mad because her bullshit ass plan didn’t work. If you would’ve told me about this rinky-dink ass scheme, I would’ve told you that the shit wouldn’t work.”

“This wasn’t a fucking plan!” Kesla pressed. “Case really raped me!”

“Well, how come you haven’t been able to prove it then, huh?” Myron challenged.

Cheyenne narrowed her eyes at Kesla. “What the hell is Myron talking about?”

“He’s not talking about shit,” Kesla insisted. “Ever since Case had his hands shot, all of a sudden he’s a bitch now. What happened to getting revenge for your sister? Where’s all of that tough talk? Why don’t you shut the fuck up and go learn how to snap your fingers again, bitch!”

Myron hopped from the couch and positioned himself in a fighting stance. “Come on, bitch, and let me show you that

my hands are good for something! I'll knock your pimple-face ass out right now!"

Roy came in the living room with an angry expression. "What the fuck is going on in here? Myron, sit your ass down tryin' to fight someone with your hands bandaged up."

"Nah, she's talking like I still can't knock her lil' ass out. Go take your ass back home and deal with the mess that you've created. Once the police find out that you were never raped, your ass is going to jail."

"Why do you keep saying that she was never raped?" Cheyenne questioned.

"Because she wasn't, Mama. I don't know how she pulled off getting his DNA, but he definitely didn't rape her. Kesla has been planning this shit ever since Mariah died. Now her ass is in deep shit because he hasn't been arrested yet."

Kesla jumped from her seat and stormed down the hallway.

"Kesla, wait!" Cheyenne yelled out, but her request fell on deaf ears.

Kesla stormed into the bedroom and slammed the door. Instantly, tears began to form in her eyes as she sat on the

floor. She couldn't lie and say that Myron's words didn't hurt her because they did. She was scared of the possibility of the tables actually turning on her.

When her phone buzzed in her pocket, her body jumped. Kesla looked at the screen and saw that it was a number that she didn't recognize.

“Who the fuck is this?” she whispered.

She let it ring for several seconds and then decided at the last minute to answer. “Hello?”

“This is a collect call from correctional facility inmate, *Tisa*. Do you accept the charges?”

Kesla gasped and then covered her mouth with her hand. What the hell was Tisa doing calling her from jail? There was no way she was going to accept that call, so Kesla frantically hung up. After hanging up, she went on Google so she could go to the Milwaukee Inmate Search. She typed in Tisa's name to see what her charges were.

Kesla's heart almost burst with shock when she read that Tisa had been charged with intentional distribution without consent.

“Oh my God. What did she do? Why would this bitch go to the police?” Kesla whined.

Suddenly, she got up and grabbed her suitcase. If Tisa was in jail, then there was a possibility that she had snitched on her. Kesla refused to go to jail, so she packed her bag and walked out of her aunt’s house. She made sure to discreetly exit out of the backdoor so no one would question her.

Once at her car, Kesla threw her suitcase in her trunk, then hopped inside. She had no idea where she was going to go, but staying in Milwaukee wasn’t a smart move. Once the engine cranked, she drove away with no specific destination in mind.

Kesla was furious, and she was going to make Tisa pay for snitching. So, she grabbed her phone and dialed her Aunt Karen’s phone number.

“Hello?” she answered.

“Hi, Mrs. Karen, it’s Tisa’s friend, Kesla. How are you?”

“Oh, hey, Kesla. I’m good. What about yourself?”

“I’m fine, but I was just having a conversation with Tisa and there are some things she wants to tell you, but she’s

scared. So, I took the initiative to come to you and let you know what was going on.”

“What’s wrong? Is she okay?” Karen questioned with concern.

“Well, she’s okay physically but not mentally. She told me that your husband molested her repeatedly during her teenage years.”

Karen gasped. “What?! That’s impossible! Why are you making up these lies? My husband is not like that.”

“It’s true. In fact, he paid for her to go to Spellman. He paid her off so she wouldn’t tell the family that he had been molesting her.”

“I just... I don’t know what to say.”

“I do. Go and check your pedophile-ass husband. If you don’t believe Tisa, then you should look into the payments he sent her for school. That’s all I wanted. Have a nice night.”

Kesla laughed hysterically as she hung up the phone. Tisa was going to have a heart attack once she figured out that Kesla had revealed her big secret.

Roman laid in the bed at Carey's home in deep thought. The thought of going to turn himself in plagued his mind quite often. He'd searched the Journal Sentinel to check the obituary section for Diar. When he saw that she didn't have one, he knew right away that she was alive. That would be bad news for him because she would be able to identify him as her perpetrator. Roman cursed himself for going that far with Diar. He should've denied his involvement in the robbery and kept it moving. But jealousy mixed with pain and anger got the best of him and caused him to lash out in the worst way.

Since Carey had gone out to the club, Roman sat in the house watching Netflix. He was bored out of his mind and didn't know how long he would be able to hide. He was a social guy and hated being in the house, as well as being alone. He had to figure out something quickly because each day that he was confined to the house was like a slow death.

Roman adjusted his pillows to get more comfortable when without warning, the electricity shut off. He swiftly sat

up and threw the covers off of him. He used the flashlight on his phone to get out of the bed.

“What the fuck? Carey’s ass ain’t paid his damn bill,” he fussed and walked out of the room.

As soon as Roman passed through the threshold, he was knocked back violently with a punch to the nose. Straightaway, blood seeped from his nostrils as his body was dragged back into the bedroom. Roman couldn’t tell how many people were in the room, but he knew that it was more than one. He tried to sit up and fight back, but with the darkness surrounding him, he didn’t have a fair shot.

A kick to the neck had Roman coughing like something was lodged in his throat. Another kick knocked the wind out of him as his hands found his neck to soothe the painful sensation.

“Lay your fat ass back,” the attacker commanded.

“Get... the fuck... off of me,” Roman gritted, still out of breath.

“Is that what Diar told you before you locked her in the closet, bitch? You punk mothafucka, you had my fuckin’ lady

worried to death over her sister. But I'm about to punish your bitch ass."

Roman's erratic breathing floated through the room while his heart rate accelerated. Just hearing the person say Diar's name had him ready to shit on himself.

"You fucked with the wrong one. Now your bitch ass gotta die."

"We should torture his ass," another male voice spoke.

"Nah, I don't have time. Aye, fat boy, the next time you try to hide, make sure you ditch your phone, with your stupid ass."

Roman was scared shitless of what was bound to happen. He didn't realize that keeping his phone would be a foolish move on his part. While he was afraid, he also wasn't going to go out without a fight. He tried to grab one of their legs but couldn't get a good grip.

"Your fat ass ain't fast enough. Now say your prayers."

Roman tried to get up and run, but when the hot bullet pierced his head, he was abruptly welcomed into permanent darkness.

“I have good news,” Nick informed Case. “You won’t be charged for that bogus rape claim, and they’re actually going to charge her instead.”

Case couldn’t contain his excitement as his lawyer recited the news he had desperately wanted to hear.

“So, I don’t have to worry about this shit anymore?”

“Not anymore. A woman came forward and confessed to helping Kesla drug you so she could have unprotected sex with you. She and the woman that drugged you will be charged. I was informed that they would be making an arrest warrant for Kesla today.”

“Hell yeah!” Case celebrated.

“You may have to give a sample of your DNA so they can confirm that it was Kesla who’d actually sexually assaulted you. I’ll call and give you an update once I know more.”

“A’ight cool.”

When Case hung up, he felt like the biggest weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Day in and day out, the possibility of going to jail loomed over his head. Sleepless nights mixed with worry had Case stressed to the point where he was unable to even eat. When Big had called and notified him that Tisa was the one that had spiked his drink, it left him fuming. He wanted to kill her ass but Big advised him to let him handle everything. Case was so glad that Big had come through when he needed him because there would've been a strong possibility that Case could be sitting behind bars.

Case walked out of his office and into the reception area where Keece and Dinero were seated. He took a seat on one of the stools and sighed with relief.

“Nick just called and told me that they're not going to charge me. That bitch, Tisa, and Kesla about to get charged though. I swear I want to go hang those hoes from a tree,” Case grimaced.

“I can't believe this bitch actually helped Kesla take the dick,” Keece stated.

“Aye, how's it feel to know that you got raped though?” Dinero laughed.

Case hated to hear that term. He didn't like knowing that he had been taken advantage of. "I don't like hearing that shit, so don't say it no more."

Dinero chuckled. "That shit ain't funny, but it kinda is. You don't hear about men getting raped too often."

"Hell nah. If I was you Case, I wouldn't ever tell this story to anybody," Keece advised.

"I'm not."

"Aye, let's go over to Mariah's people house and shoot that bitch up," Dinero suggested. "It's time to see some bloodshed in this bitch."

Case shook his head because he knew his brother meant every word. "If that happens, then I would definitely be the first suspect."

"I wouldn't even bring you with me. It would be, Keece, Kiyan or Big," Dinero replied.

"As tempting as that shit sounds, we gotta chill on that right now. We'll definitely get some payback, but not right now. We gotta let them think shit is cool and then attack when they least expect it," Keece noted.

Dinero smacked his lips. “Man, y’all turning into some bitches. Let’s go set the house on fire then.”

Keece and Case laughed hysterically. Case didn’t see how burning the house would be any better.

“This nigga is trippin’ today,” Keece said. Then he asked Case, “What’s up with your girl though? She still ain’t fuckin’ with you?”

Case shook his head at the mention of Diar. She was still an emotional wreck, and he didn’t know what to do to take away her distress. He’d continued to go and sit with her every day, despite her terrible attitude. She still didn’t want him around, and that hurt him tremendously.

“She’s still fucked up. She thinks ol’ boy is going to come back for her.”

“I sent some of the crew to go to his house and shit. I think his big ass is laying low,” Keece said.

When Diar first went missing, Case had asked his brother to send some of his soldiers to look for Roman while he searched for Diar.

Case smacked his lips. “I figured his ass would get ghost.”

“So, what’s wrong with Miss Daisy? Did she go fifty-one-fifty on your ass?” Dinero questioned.

“You know he locked her in a closet and that shit fucked her up mentally. She can’t sleep, and she barely eats. It’s so bad that when you make a noise around her that shit be having her ass going crazy. Plus, she’s still not fucking with me like that. I swear, she curses me out like every day.”

“Damn, that’s fucked up. You gotta be there for her, bro. Even when she says that she doesn’t want you around, you gotta show her that you’re down for her,” Keece advised.

“Yeah, I know.”

Dinero waved his hand dismissively. “Man, fuck that. Tell her loony ass to calm the fuck down. Shit, she’s acting like you locked her in the closet.”

“You’re insensitive as fuck. What if it was Asia that was locked in the closet?” Keece asked Dinero.

“Shit, I lock Asia in the house sometimes when she makes me mad.”

Case laughed at Dinero’s ignorant statement. He didn’t even want to ask why he felt like that was okay. Instead, he stood and walked toward the door.

“I’m about to go check on Diar. I’ll get up with y’all later.”

Case walked out into the crisp air and hurried to his car. He could tell that winter was approaching because the temperature had dropped drastically. He usually called when he was on his way to see Diar, but his phone was dead. Once he pulled up to her parents’ home, he killed the engine. He got out and rang the doorbell. Seconds later, Tina opened the door.

“Hey, Case. I was hoping that you called before you came today.”

“Oh yeah? Why is that?”

“Well, Diar isn’t here. She went away for a while, and I’m not sure when she will return.”

Case could feel his heart break. Seeing Diar every day took his mind off of the bullshit that had taken over his life. He was puzzled by her abrupt departure. He knew that she had expressed going away, but he didn’t think that she was serious about it. Diar had been terrified to even come out of the house, so her going away truly surprised him.

“Where did she go?”

“I’m sorry,” Tina said with sympathy. “She told me not to tell you. When she calls me, I’ll make sure to have her call you.”

Case’s jaws clenched. How could Diar leave and not want him to know where she was? He knew that she was broken by everything he had done to her, but she was tearing him apart by not wanting him in her life.

“So, she really doesn’t want me to know where she is?” Case asked, feeling the heat rise up inside of him.

“No, she doesn’t. I’m sorry, but I have to protect my baby right now. She needs to get her mind right, so just give her some time. I do appreciate you being here for her, though.”

Case bit his bottom lip in attempt to keep from snapping out. Diar had pissed him off with her disappearing act.

“Yeah a’ight,” he spat, then walked away.

Case angrily got inside of his car. How was he supposed to go each day without seeing her? Even with her anger toward him, he still looked forward to being in her presence. It stung that she didn’t want him to know where she

was. Despite them going through a rough patch in their relationship, he had expectations that Diar would allow him to right his wrongs.

Since his night had turned into shit, he drove home so that he could sulk privately.

CHAPTER NINE

Diar sat inside of the bright office, Indian-style on the couch. She had been at the rehabilitation center for one day. She'd entered the program for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. After her parents, as well as Stefani, saw how badly she was affected mentally, they'd suggested that she go to therapy. Diar knew that she needed some serious counseling and wasn't opposed to it. So, with a recommendation from Dash, she flew to a facility located in Arizona.

Leaving Milwaukee was just what Diar had needed. She knew that Roman was still on the run, and she didn't want to take a chance on him tracking her down to kill her. She didn't feel safe being home with her parents. Each day that passed, she felt like it would be the day that she would die. Lately, she had become so obsessed with death that it was normal for her to think that she would pass away. Diar really felt like a part of her died in that closet. She didn't feel the same, nor did she think the same.

Being in a different scenery created a temporary tranquil feeling for her. Diar just desperately wanted to get

better. She didn't want to live the rest of her life looking over her shoulder.

Suddenly, thoughts of Case flooded her mind. It was essential that she get far away from him as well. He'd made his choice once he let the words "She'll never have my heart" slip from his lips. Diar knew it would be next to impossible for her to get over that.

A knock at the door pulled her from her thoughts. Seconds later, an older Caucasian woman entered. She looked to be in her sixties with beautiful white hair. She walked over to Diar with her hand extended.

"Hello, Diar. I'm Margaret."

"Nice to meet you," Diar responded as she shook her hand.

"I'm going to be your therapist during your stay here. First off, are you comfortable? Would you like to go somewhere else, perhaps outside to start your session?"

"No, I'm fine here."

"Okay great. Well, I was looking over your file, and I thought that Exposure Therapy would be beneficial for you."

"What's that?"

“In Exposure Therapy, the goal is to have less fear about your memories. It is based on the idea that people learn to fear thoughts, feelings, and situations that remind them of a past traumatic event. By talking about your trauma repeatedly with me, you’ll learn to get control of your thoughts and feelings about the trauma. You’ll learn that you do not have to be afraid of your memories. This may be hard at first. It might seem strange to think about stressful things on purpose. But, over time, you’ll feel less overwhelmed.”

Diar didn’t like the thought of talking about her trauma repeatedly. She didn’t even want to think about it, let alone converse about it.

“I’m nervous about this. I don’t want this therapy to enhance my fears.”

“It won’t. You have to trust me and know that I’ve been doing this for over thirty years. I’ve had some of the most difficult patients, but they overcame their trauma, and I think you will too.”

Diar released a deep sigh and then looked out of the window. Talking about her time in the closet would be hard. Reliving those torturous forty-eight hours would be like living in a nightmare all over again. But if she wanted to get better,

then Diar was willing to do whatever it took to get her peace of mind back.

“Okay, I’m willing to try it.”

Kesla had been driving for four hours straight and was dead tired. As soon as she hopped on I-94, she headed south. She had no idea where she was going, but she knew that staying in Milwaukee wasn't going to cut it. During her drive, Cheyenne called numerous times, which prompted Kesla to throw her phone out the window. She didn't want to take the chance of anyone tracking her.

Kesla was still angered by the thought of Tisa snitching on her. She had had a bad feeling when she'd first forced Tisa into her quest to bring Case down. Kesla now knew that she should've never let her get involved because she was extremely weak. Ever since she could remember, Tisa had never had a backbone. That's why it was so easy for her uncle to prey on her for all of those years.

Although Kesla's back was against the wall, she refused to fold. She was going to survive by any means necessary. She had no regrets about drugging Case and having sex with him unprotected. If she had the chance to do it all over again, she would, only without the help of Tisa. Now, her

only dilemma was to think of a way to stay out of the eyes of the law.

Case lay in his bed wide awake. It had been two days since he'd felt Diar's touch or smelled her scent. The craving to hear her canorous voice was increasing with each day that passed. He missed her immensely and wished that he could see her. Her mother was still adamant about not giving up Diar's location, so that led Case to plan B. The following day, he planned to go bribe Kayla for her whereabouts.

It seemed like Case's problems were never ending. As soon as he was cleared from the bogus claims from Kesla, Diar just up and disappeared on him. He was filled with so much regret. The way that he had treated Diar was so wrong. He should've given her a fair shot, but he was so consumed with the loss of Mariah that he couldn't see the bigger picture. Diar had opened herself up for him. She had virtually delivered her heart on a silver platter, while Case guarded his with an iron gate.

Diar had every right to be done with Case, but he wasn't going to accept it. She had brightened his life so much that when she wasn't around, his mood was dull. His mind was telling him to let her go and move on, but his heart wouldn't

allow it. With her is where he needed to be, but he was afraid that he may have gone too far. No one wanted to hear that they weren't good enough, and that was the impression that Case had given Diar.

When his phone rang, he started to ignore it but changed his mind, hoping that it was Diar. He was disappointed when he saw that his receptionist, Leilah, was calling him.

“What’s up, Leilah?” he answered.

“Hey, can you come get me?” she sniffled.

He swiftly sat up. “Where are you?”

“I’m at the Target parking lot on Miller Parkway. I just got into it with my boyfriend and he left me here.”

“All right, give me a minute. I’m on my way.”

Case slowly got out of his bed and began to get dressed. It wasn't often that Leilah would call him requesting help. He didn't want to leave her hanging, so, despite not being in the mood, he went to pick her up. After a thirty-minute drive, he finally arrived in the empty Target parking lot. He spotted Leilah by the door. She hopped inside and began to rub her hands together.

“Shit, it’s cold,” she hissed as she then held her hands in front of the vents.

“Why did you let your man kick you out of the car in thirty-degree weather?”

“He didn’t kick me out. I got out of the car.”

“Well, you stupid as hell for doing that.”

She shot Case a nasty look. “Thanks for being an asshole.”

He chuckled and drove off. “My bad. Where do you want me to drop you off at?”

“Can you take me to my sister’s house? She lives on Vine.”

Case nodded and drove out of the lot. “Your man ain’t shit if he left you by yourself at eleven o’clock at night.”

“Don’t remind me,” she sighed. “I think I’m done with him this time. I’m tired of the arguing and break-up to make-up shit.”

“I feel you.”

“So, what happened with that girl that tried to frame you for rape?”

“How do you know about that?” he quizzed.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t tryin’ to be nosey. I overheard you and Keece talking about it.”

“Yeah, I bet.” He smirked. “Ain’t nothing up with it. They couldn’t prove shit, so there is no case.”

“Oh my goodness. I’m so happy to hear that. That little bitch is messy as hell. So, what’s going to happen to her? She should get in trouble for lying on you.”

“She’s getting arrested because she had ol’ girl that worked at Big’s bar drug me.”

Leilah gasped. “Wow. That’s fucked up. Man, these hoes nowadays ain’t shit. You can’t trust nobody.”

“Hell nah you can’t. Which house is it?” he asked as he turned down the street.

“Oh, it’s the blue one right there.”

Case pulled up in front of the house and unlocked the door. “A’ight, Leilah. I’ll holla at you tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Case. I really appreciate you picking me up. You can be such a sweetheart when you wanna be.” She smiled.

Case licked his lips and nodded. He didn't know if she was flirting or just being nice. "No problem."

Leilah got out of the car and walked up to the door. Case waited for her to get inside before he drove off and headed home.

Stefani walked into Dash's house and went straight to Ms. Rubie's room. She had been babysitting Amuri while she went to work. Dash's grandmother was a spunky, tell-it-like-it-is woman with a hilarious personality. Stefani couldn't get enough of her and her funny insults. Once she knocked on the door, she let herself in. Amuri was jumping on the bed while Ms. Rubie cheered him on.

“Oh my God. Did you give him some candy?” Stefani asked.

“You know I gave my baby whatever he asked for.”

“Ms. Rubie, you're going to have his teeth rotten by the time he turns two.”

“Oh girl, shit, he'll be fine. Stop worrying so damn much. I've been a mother longer than your green ass.”

Stefani rolled her eyes. “Anyways, despite him being hyper, how was he today?”

“Chile, he stole all my edges today. I mean his ass was into every damn thing. I can only babysit for a maximum of two hours next time.”

Stefani laughed. “Ms. Rubie, your edges been gone.”

“You ribbing?” She asked with a raised brow.

“No, I’m just saying.”

Ms. Rubie pursed her lips together. “Don’t say shit because I’ll roast the fuck outta you.”

Stefani waved her off, grabbed Amuri and walked out of the room. She went to Dash’s bedroom and found him on the phone. He was usually at work around this time, so she was surprised to see him home. Stefani laid Amuri down for his nap and waited patiently for Dash to get off the phone. Once he hung up, he turned around and gave her that sexy stare that made her melt.

“What are you doing home? I thought you would be at the office all day.”

“I took the rest of the day off. I wanted to spend some time with my little man today.”

“Is that right? What about me?” she flirted.

He grinned. “You know you’re always included.”

Stefani tried her best not to fall for Dash again, but it was hard not to when she was around him every day. She still

had yet to go back to her house, and to be truthful, she really didn't want to.

“Have you talked to your sister today?”

She sighed. Stefani hated to see Diar so broken. She only prayed that this therapy would help her get back to her old self.

“Not today. I just hope that she's going to be okay. I've been so worried about her.”

Dash walked over to her and caressed her cheek. “She'll be fine. Therapy works if you stick with it. You see I haven't snapped out in months.”

Stefani agreed with him. Dash used to have serious anger issues that would result in him being destructive. It was nothing for him to trash his house or leave a huge hole in the wall. He had been doing really well with attending his therapy appointments regularly. She hadn't seen him have an episode since before she gave birth to Amuri.

“I have noticed that you have better control of your temper. Do you think it's because you've been attending your therapy regularly?”

He shrugged. “Yeah, but I also wanted to change for my son. Plus, I saw how scared you were around me, and I hated that. So, the change was really for my family.”

Stefani was so proud of him. His temper was one of the reasons why she had decided to end their relationship.

“Well, I’m so happy that you stepped up and took control of your anger. I really admire that.”

“What else do you admire?” he smirked.

Stefani smiled shyly. “I admire a lot of things, but we won’t get into that right now.”

“Yeah a’ight.”

“But do you think Diar will be okay? I know she’s still terrified since Roman is still hiding out.”

“You didn’t see the news?” he quizzed.

“You know I don’t watch no depressing ass news.”

“Well, you should. They found him dead at a house in Whitefish Bay.”

Stefani gasped. She wondered who had gotten to Roman that fast. She couldn’t wait to tell her parents the news.

“Oh my God. Are you serious, Dash?”

He shot her a knowing look. “Do I ever play about shit like this?”

Stefani had never been so happy to see a person dead. Roman deserved whatever fate he was dealt because he had ruined her sister.

“I gotta go call my parents and tell them the news. I’ll be right back.”

Stefani grabbed her phone and went downstairs so she could tell her parents. She also couldn’t wait for Diar to call her. She wanted to be the one to inform her that the man that caused her so much pain was dead.

Diar sat at the patio table while reading and eating her lunch. She was enjoying the beautiful Arizona weather that was a perfect seventy-two degrees. Her therapy sessions had started off rough. She'd even walked out of one because she felt a panic attack approaching. After days of struggling to talk about her trauma, Diar was starting to feel like she was making progress. She was missing her family something awful and couldn't wait for them to come visit. Although she was happy to be away from the Mil, she was beginning to feel homesick.

“Can I join you?”

Diar looked up at the man who seemed to have a staring problem. She'd caught him on several occasions watching her. His creepy glares made her uneasy, and she honestly didn't want him next to her.

“No, you can't. I would like to eat alone.”

The guy sat anyway with his tray. Diar shot him an annoyed look, not liking that he had disregarded her desire to be by herself.

“Did you not just hear what I said?” Diar asked.

“Yeah, I heard you, but I don’t want to eat inside. I won’t bother you, just keep on eating,” he assured.

Diar wasn’t in the mood to put up a fight, so she scooted down to the other side of the table. She began to eat her food and resumed reading Dominique Thomas’ *Arquez and Palmer: A Detroit Love Saga*. She could feel his eyes on her, but she refused to acknowledge him. *I wish his weird ass would leave me alone*, she fussed silently.

“What are you reading?” the man asked.

Diar scoffed and put her book down. “I thought you said you wouldn’t bother me?”

He grinned. “I lied.”

For a split second, Diar could feel her mouth forming into a smile, but she quickly stopped it. She took a moment to take in his features. He was handsome with a low fade, milk chocolate skin and a goatee. He had big, doe-shaped eyes that were almost child-like. She could spot a couple of tattoos peeking from under the collar of his shirt. Diar had to force her eyes away from him as he smirked at her.

“So, you’re not going to answer my question?” he pressed.

“What was your question?”

“What are you reading?”

“A book.”

“What kind of book?”

“An urban love story.”

“You like those ghetto books, huh?”

She cut her eyes at him. “Ain’t shit ghetto about an urban love story. Don’t say stupid shit like that,” Diar hissed.

“My bad,” he said with his hands in the air. “I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“You didn’t offend me. I just hate that the word urban is always associated with ghetto.”

“I get it.” He nodded and then extended his hand. “I’m Jediah.”

She hesitantly shook his hand. “I’m Diar.”

“Diar, huh?”

“What? You think my name is ghetto too?” she shot.

Jediah laughed hysterically. “Nah, I actually think it’s nice. It’s very different.”

Diar shot him a side eye, then said, “Thank you.”

“So what are you here for?”

“None of your business.”

“Damn, Diar. You’re kinda mean. I was only trying to start a conversation.”

“Well, I don’t want to talk about that. Since you’re all in my business, what are you here for?” He rubbed his face as he answered, “Opiates. I’m addicted to pills.”

Diar remained quiet, not sure of what to say after his confession. Judging by his appearance, she would’ve never guessed that he had an addiction to prescription pills.

“What? Did I scare you?” he teased.

“No, not at all.”

“Good, because I could use a friend while I’m here.”

Then he winked at her.

Diar was intrigued by him, but at the same time, she wasn’t trying to get close to anyone. This was a rehabilitation

center, not a social club. All she wanted to do was get herself together mentally and emotionally without any distractions.

Without warning, Diar got up from the table and walked inside of the center. She looked back and saw that he held a smirk on his handsome mug. She didn't want Jediah to get comfortable and think that they were starting a friendship.

CHAPTER TEN

Case walked into the hair salon in search of Kayla. He'd found out that she was a hairstylist at a shop on the south side. He was hoping that she would give him the information that he wanted because he desperately needed to see Diar.

Once Case approached the front desk, he was greeted by the receptionist.

"How can I help you?" she asked with lust dripping from her voice.

"I wanted to know if Kayla was here."

"Hold on."

She walked away, and before he knew it, Kayla appeared. She sported a long turquoise-green wig that complimented her brown skin well.

"Well, if it isn't the heartbreaker. What's up, Case?" she greeted him with a friendly hug.

"What's up, girl?"

"Just working. I know you're not here for me, so what is it that you want?"

“I need to know where Diar went.”

She shook her head. “I can’t tell you. She didn’t want you to know.”

“I’m not trying to hear that, Kayla. You’ve gotta give me something.”

“Just let her breathe for a bit. I’m sure she’ll contact you when she gets back.”

“I’m not waiting that long to talk to her. Shit, it’s a possibility that her ass won’t call me anyway.”

“So, why do you want to know where she is if she doesn’t want to see you? I really think you should back off and allow her to get healthy,” Kayla advised.

“Kayla, I know that’s your best friend, but you gotta help me out. I need to know that she’s okay, and I’m not taking nobody else’s word for it. Help me and I’ll give you a free tattoo.”

“A free tattoo? You gon’ have to do better than that Case.”

He chuckled and then tugged on his goatee. “I’ll treat you to a shopping spree.”

Kayla twisted her lips. “A shopping spree?”

“Yeah man, but you gotta give me what I want first.”

Kayla crossed her arms under her breast and then looked out the window. Case was praying that she would give up Diar’s location without him having to be too demanding.

“Okay, Case, damn. You’re lucky I still believe in y’all love. If you hurt my friend again, I swear, we’re going to jump your ass.”

Case smiled widely, not caring about her threats. “I promise, I won’t hurt her again.”

Reluctantly, Kayla replied, “She’s at a facility in Arizona. I’ll text you all of the information since it’s in my phone. Oh, and I’m coming to get my tattoo done this weekend too. Oh and I like expensive shit, so you better be ready to break bread.”

“A’ight, I got you. Don’t forget to text me that information either.”

“I won’t,” she assured him.

Case was ecstatic when he left out of the salon. He was one step closer to seeing his baby.

Kesla paced back and forth while holding her burn-out phone. She was contemplating if she should call her family and let them know that she was okay. She knew that they were probably worried, but at the same time, she didn't want to take the chance on being tracked down. Kesla had checked into a motel in Dayton, Ohio. She made sure to pay cash so none of her credit cards would be tracked.

She had no idea of what her next move would be. Kesla had some money in her savings, but she knew that the money wouldn't last long. She would have to think of a clever way to get money while staying under the radar. For some odd reason, Kesla got a thrill from being on the run. She felt like she was winning the game. Even if she didn't get Case arrested like she had originally planned too, she still had sex with him. She'd still drugged him, and now she had fled and left him with the reality that she had taken advantage of him.

Thoughts of Case sparked an idea to pop up in her head. Kesla dialed his number and made sure to call private. Her heart pounded inside her chest as she waited for him to answer. Just when she was about to hang up, he did.

“Who is this?”

“It’s me, Kesla.”

“Why the fuck is your ugly, malnourished, bumpy-face ass calling my phone?”

His words stung a bit, but Kesla didn’t let that deter her from the purpose of the call. “I just wanted to let you know that the dick I took that night was so amazing. Now, I see why Mariah was so in love with you,” she snickered.

“You think this shit is a game? Bitch, you better run far away because when I catch you, I’m gon’ murk your ass.”

“Whatever. You won’t find me. I’m too smart for this shit. You or the police will never see me again.”

“Yeah a’ight, bitch. You can be found, and when you are, you’re going to die a slow painful death.” Then, Case hung up.

Kesla looked at the phone and smiled. The reason for her call was to taunt Case. She wanted him to know that she was in the lead. She was winning, and there was nothing that he could do but accept it.

Kesla then made the last minute decision to call her aunt. She felt bad about the way that she had left and at least

wanted her to know that she was alive and well.

“Hello?” Cheyenne answered.

“Hey, Auntie. It’s me, Kesla.”

“Girl, where the hell have you been? The police have been over here looking for you. You better tell me what’s going on, and I mean right now.”

“Ain’t nothing going on,” she lied.

“That’s bullshit. The police are saying that you drugged that boy and had sex with him while he was under the influence. Do you know how much trouble you are in?”

“They’re lying. The girl that snitched on me is just trying to get me in trouble.”

“You know what? I thought Myron was just acting crazy when he accused you of lying about the rape, but now I see that you’re a damn liar. I told you to leave Case alone and allow his karma to come, but no, you had to do shit your way,” Cheyenne snapped.

“Listen, I didn’t call for a speech. I just called to tell you that I’m okay. Now, goodbye.”

Kesla hung up on her and threw the phone on the bed. Her aunt had truly pissed her off with her rant. She didn’t give

a fuck about the police searching for her, nor did she care about Myron. Her negative words had put Kesla in a bad mood. She swore that it would be the last time that she contacted her aunt or anyone else in her family.

One week later...

Case sat nervously in the visitation room at the rehab center where Diar had been staying. To say that he was anxious would be an understatement. He hadn't seen Diar in a while, and he couldn't contain his excitement knowing that she would be in his presence in a matter of minutes. Case wondered how she would react once she knew that he had come. As soon as Kayla had sent him the information about Diar's location, he knew right away that he had to go see her. After begging Stefani for days to be placed on Diar's visiting list, she reluctantly gave in and he booked a flight to Arizona.

Case's heart had been thumping as if he'd performed an hour of cardio. His hands were so moist that he had to keep wiping them on his pants. He had never been so nervous about seeing Diar. Each day without her had been agonizing. With her absence, his days seemed longer and more draining. She was constantly on his mind. At times, he could smell her scent around his house. His strong desire to have Diar was growing with each minute that passed.

Suddenly, she appeared, causing Case to hold his breath. She looked beautiful and healthier. Her skin possessed its natural glow while her hair was styled in a high bun. When her eyes fell on him, Case finally released the breath that he had been holding hostage. For a moment, the couple stared at one another, becoming lost in their gaze. He was scared that she may actually turn back around and not want to see him. When she advanced toward the table, Case breathed a sigh of relief.

Diar timidly sat down and linked her hands together. Case watched her intensely as she avoided eye contact with him. He could feel the detached connection between him and Diar, and it shattered his heart. They truly weren't on the same page of their complex book.

“How have you been?” Case asked, breaking the ice.

She finally looked him in the eyes. “Better.”

“I know you didn't want me to know where you were, but I needed to see you. I had to make sure you were good.”

“I need to be alone right now.”

“I get it, but I still wanna be here to help you.”

She smirked. “You’re going hard for someone who you don’t love and will never have your heart.”

Case couldn’t lie and say that her words didn’t burn. It was becoming clearer to him that he had officially ripped her heart to shreds.

“So, you’re not going to get over that?”

“No.”

“Diar, I do love you, and I’m sorry if my actions showed you otherwise.”

She sat up straight and told him, “That’s the thing though. Your actions do show me that you love me. It was your words that hurt. You always tell me things that contradict your actions. You played with my heart for months. You knew how hard I fell for you, and I feel like you took advantage of that. Even when I tried to walk away, you found a way to pull me back in. I’m honestly tired of wasting my time with you. It’s obvious that you will never get over Mariah, so allow me to walk away and move on.”

Case swiped his hands down his face, visibly frustrated. He heard Diar’s words loud and clear, but, still, he didn’t want to let her go. He glanced at her and noticed that

her eyes were locked on something else. Case followed her gaze and saw that she was looking at another man who was giving her a flirty stare. Steam shot from his ears with the thought of Diar getting closer to another guy.

“You see something you like?” Case snapped.

Diar finally brought her attention back to Case and then smacked her lips. “What? I was just looking.”

“Don’t be flirting with another dude when I brought my ass all the way here to see you. That was disrespectful as fuck. Who the fuck is that?”

“He’s another resident, Case. Did I ask you to bring your ass here? Shit, as far as I’m concerned, you can leave.” Diar tried to get up from her seat, but Case discreetly yanked her back down.

“Aye, don’t make me turn up in this bitch. I came for a visit, so you gon’ sit your ass here and visit me.”

Diar rolled her eyes and crossed her arms across her chest. Case didn’t mean to snap off, but he wasn’t going to allow her to cut their visit short. Plus, her flirtatious glares to the mystery guy had him on the edge. He quickly got himself together before he jumped out of character again.

“I hope you don’t think I’m about to sit here and talk with your ass,” Diar spit.

“You don’t have to talk. Just as long as you sit here, then I’m cool. Besides, you’re cute when you’re mad,” Case flirted.

Diar scoffed and rolled her eyes. Case held in his laugh because she was literally pouting like a little kid.

“Well, since you won’t talk, I guess I’ll tell you what happened to me. Remember I told you that I had beef with my ex’s family. Well, her cousin tried to frame me for rape.”

Diar’s face immediately contorted into a frown. “Rape?”

“Yeah, rape. She had my brother’s bartender drug me, then her bum-ass had sex with me while I was out of it.”

“Are you being serious with me?”

“Does it look like I’m lying?”

Diar slowly shook her head. “So what happened?”

“I went to the hospital, and that’s how I found out I had the drug in my system. Big looked at his footage and somehow figured that his bartender did it. The bitch that set it up is on

the run though, but when I catch up with her, I'ma kill that bitch," he declared.

"So did you get arrested?"

"Nah, they didn't have enough evidence."

"Damn, that's crazy. When did this happen?"

"The night we got in to it."

Diar sat back in her seat and looked down at the floor. He hoped that his mention of their breakup didn't prompt her to revert back to being guarded with him.

Case reached over and grabbed her hand. "I'm sorry, man. I swear I am. I shouldn't have said none of that shit. I've always loved you, baby. At the time, I just wouldn't accept it, and I didn't realize that I was hurting you along the way."

Case could see tears gather on the brim of her eyes. He wished that he could carry her burden of pain. He regretted not loving her the correct way. He missed what they used to share and detested the position they were currently in.

Diar wiped her misty eyes. "Case, I just... You hurt me so bad that night. I just really need time right now."

He took a deep sigh before saying, "How long do you need?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. Let me get myself together, then I'll be able to deal with us."

Case wanted to object so badly, but he couldn't keep being selfish with her. If she needed time away from him, then he had no choice but to give in to her request. More than anything, he did want her to be healthy.

"A'ight, I'll stay away from you."

Case stood and kissed her cheek before exiting the visitation room. He walked out with the heaviest set of shoulders. It killed him to walk away from Diar, but he couldn't continue to force himself on her. He had to let her go for a while, but he was determined to get back to their special place one day in the future.

Diar walked back to her room with tears in her eyes. She sat on the bed and cried softly. Seeing Case walk away broke her down. She could see that he was trying to make things right with her, but their relationship wasn't high on her list of priorities. Case was a distraction for her, and that was one of the reasons why she wanted him to leave her alone. There was no way that she could think about them rekindling their liaison when she was mentally scarred.

Diar felt guilty for forcing Case out of her life. He seemed like he genuinely wanted to be there for her. She still loved him a great deal, but beneath all of her love for him was still pain. Being a part from Case would be beneficial for her because Diar didn't want to become bitter and start hating him.

A knock at the door snapped her out of her daze. She looked up and saw Jediah coming inside.

“I just wanted to see if you were okay. I saw you crying on the way to your room.”

Diar wiped any evidence of her crying spell. “I'm fine.”

Jediah walked over to sit next to her. Usually, Diar would've kicked him out of her room, but she needed some company.

“Was that your boyfriend?”

“I wouldn't call him that. He's someone I used to deal with though.”

“I hope I didn't get you in trouble. I saw how he snapped when he noticed that I was looking at you.”

Diar chuckled. Case had never displayed behavior like that before. He was always so cool and reserved that it shocked her when he snatched her back in her seat.

“No, he didn't like that. You almost got me beat up,” she joked.

“My bad,” he laughed. “I can't help it. When you're around, I just have to look at you.”

Diar blushed. “Stop flirting with me.”

“I'm not flirting. I'm being real with you. You know you're beautiful.”

Diar decided not to respond to his comment. Instead, she changed the subject.

“So, is this your first time coming to rehab?”

“Yeah. It was rough at first because of the withdrawal symptoms, but I believe I’m getting better. My cravings aren’t as strong as they once were.”

“How did you get hooked on pills?”

“Damn, you’re nosey,” he shot.

“I’m sorry. You don’t have to answer that.”

“Nah, I’m just fuckin’ with you. Well, I’m a DJ, so I’m always in party scenes. The people I used to hang with would have Xanax, Oxycontin and Percocet. My guy offered me some one night, and I took it. I first started off just being a social user, but then that escalated to me taking them multiple times a day. On top of that, I was sipping lean too. I felt myself losing control of my life, so I checked in here.”

Diar was intrigued by his story. She’d heard of people becoming addicted to prescription pills, but she never heard a story from a real life addict.

“I’m glad you took the initiative to come get help before it spiraled out of control.”

“Yeah, me too. It was bad, but no one knew because I was good at hiding the shit.”

“Are you scared that you may relapse when you go back home?”

Jediah sat in silence for a moment. “I’m not scared. I just know that I have to work harder at not being around the people that I used to kick it with.”

“Where are you from?”

“St. Louis.”

“Humph, I heard the Lou is rough as hell,” she teased.

He sucked his teeth. “Milwaukee ain’t no better.”

“How did you know that I’m from Milwaukee?”

“I didn’t know. I just assumed it since you were wearing a Brewers t-shirt the other day.”

“Oh,” she said and then became lost into his face. Jediah was so handsome to her. His skin was flawless, with not a blemish in sight. His teeth were so straight and perfect that he could’ve been casted for a toothpaste commercial.

“Do you like what you see?” he smirked.

Diar quickly jumped out of her trance and twisted her lips. “Boy, don’t flatter yourself.”

He grinned. “Yeah a’ight. “I’ll act like you weren’t looking at me like you wanted me to take you down.”

“Anyways...” She rolled her eyes. “I have to go to my therapy session. So I’ll see you around.”

Diar got up from the bed with Jediah following her out of the room. They went their separate ways with her looking back to watch him walk away.

Lord, please keep him away from me. I don't need any more problems.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Be still,” Case spat.

“Dude, this shit hurts,” Leilah hissed.

She was getting a tattoo on her thigh. Since it was after hours, Case had agreed to correct an old tattoo for her.

“This is why I hate tattooing females. Y’all be acting too soft for me.”

Leilah sucked her teeth. “Just because I ain’t all macho like you doesn’t mean that I’m soft. This is a sensitive area.”

“This ain’t shit. Just admit that you’re a punk,” Case kidded.

“Next time, I’m going to ask Keece to do my tat. He’s more patient than you.”

Case smacked his lips. “Yeah right. Keece’s ass ain’t patient at all. You should see the way he talks to me when he’s doing my tattoos.”

“I guess you’re right,” she giggled. “So how have you and Diar been? I don’t see her come to the shop anymore.”

The mention of Diar's name caused his heart to ache. It had been a week since he visited her. He stuck to his word and stayed away from her, but it had been one of the hardest tasks he'd ever done. He missed her so much that he tried his best not to think of her.

"I don't wanna talk about it," he simply said because he didn't want Leilah in his business.

"Well, whatever it is, I'm sure y'all will be okay. Me and my guy are still at odds. I thought we would've gotten back together by now, but he told me that he doesn't want to be in a relationship anymore."

"What did you do to him?"

Leilah scrunched her face up. "Why do I have to be the person that did something to him?"

"Because it has to be a reason why he doesn't want to be in a relationship with you right now, especially when y'all have been together for a long time."

She sighed. "Okay... he told me that he doesn't know if he wants to be with me anymore because I don't respect his mother."

"What's wrong with his mom?"

“She’s a bitch, and she doesn’t respect our relationship. Every time we get into it, he goes and tells her everything. I hate dealing with a mama’s boy.”

Case laughed as he continued to shade her tattoo. “So you’re mad because he loves his mama?”

“No, I’m mad because he puts her first in everything. I feel like I have to compete with her, and I don’t want that. There should be a line drawn when it comes to her. Sometimes I feel like I’m the side chick.”

“Well, what are you going to do?”

“I guess I’m going to fall back. I’m not going to force a relationship with him. Who knows; maybe this is a sign that I should move on to someone else.”

Case nodded, agreeing with her. After five minutes of silence, he finally finished her tattoo.

“A’ight, crybaby, you’re done,” he announced and then wrapped up her new ink.

“Thank you, Case. You’re so talented,” she said as she playfully winked at him.

Case smirked as he eyed her smooth thigh that was still exposed from her tattoo session. He hadn’t had sex in a while

and could feel his dick harden. Leilah was easy on the eyes with peanut butter skin, silky, black hair and full heart-shaped lips.

However, as attractive as she was, he couldn't go there with her since she was his employee.

"You're welcome," he simply told her.

"So what are you about to do? Let's go hang out," she suggested.

"Hang out where?"

"I don't know." she shrugged. "Let's go get something to eat. Your treat."

Case shot her a side eye. "My treat? Why you can't pay?"

"Because I don't want to. Plus, you got all the money," she laughed.

"A'ight, I'll pay but you gotta drive."

"Okay, that's a deal. Let's go because I'm hungry as hell."

Case cleaned up his station while Leilah straightened up the waiting area. After the shop was in tip-top shape, the

two left to go get a bite to eat.

Kesla was uneasy as she rode in the back of the cab. She was on her way to a strip club called Diamonds Cabaret to see about getting a job. Never in her life had she considered stripping, but she was in need of some money. Her stash hadn't gotten completely low, but she knew at the rate of the motel room and other expenses that it would be gone in no time. She needed a low-key job that wouldn't require a background check, so stripping was the first thing that came to mind.

When she pulled up, she paid the driver and got out. The building looked nice on the outside with the sign shining brightly. Kesla walked inside and silently approved. The place was lit up in bright, vibrant colors. The furniture gave off a futuristic vibe. She spotted a security guard by the bar, so she walked over to him.

“Hey, I was interested in working here. Can you direct me to the owner?” she asked.

He gave her a once over and then took out his walkie-talkie. He spoke into the device for a few seconds, then said,

“He’ll be right out.”

Kesla nodded and then sat at the bar. The nervous jitters ransacked her body while waiting. A few minutes later, a man walked up, dressed casually in a gray sweater, black jeans and black dress shoes.

“What can I do for you?” he asked, getting straight to the point.

“Hi... I was wondering if you had any openings for me. I need a job.”

“What are you looking to do?”

“Dance, maybe.”

He gave her a curious look. “Stand up for a minute.”

Kesla stood timidly. He gestured for her to turn around, in which she did. She felt super uncomfortable as his eyes roamed up and down her body.

Then he replied dryly, “Baby, you ain’t got enough to dance.”

“What?” she asked incredulously.

“You need more ass. Can you even work the pole?”

Kesla rolled her eyes and crossed her arms over her chest. She didn't appreciate his blunt words. No, she wasn't thick, but she'd seen a lot of dancers who were slim and trim. She already wasn't feeling his attitude.

“No, but I can learn. I'm sure it's not that hard.”

He shook his head intently, “Nah, that won't work for me. I need someone with experience. Maybe you can be a Diamond Doll,” he offered.

“What's that?”

“Basically, it's a waitress. You can carry drinks to the tables, right?”

She sighed deeply, not feeling the waitress idea. She needed the extra cash, so she hesitantly agreed. “Yeah, I can.”

“All right, give me your number, and I'll contact you tomorrow.”

Kesla gave the owner her cell number and decided to sit and get a drink while she was there. She wanted to check out the scene to see what kind of people frequented the club.

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

“Let me get a shot of Jameson.”

“You got it.”

Kesla bobbed her head to the music as she watched the nude dancers slide up and down the pole. A part of her did want to dance just to see if she could do it. She'd had the courage to do a lot of crazy things, so she knew that stripping would be no different.

The bartender passed her the drink, and she sipped slowly. Kesla's eyes scanned the club, taking in the atmosphere.

Suddenly, she almost choked on her drink as she noticed an officer standing near the door next to the guard. Kesla placed the glass on the bar and shot up from her seat. Since the cop was standing by the exit, she hurried to the bathroom. Once inside, she paced back and forth, trying to get her heart to beat at a normal rate. Her nerves were so bad that her stomach began to form into knots.

“Think, think, think,” she whispered.

Kesla didn't know if the cop was there for her or not, but she didn't even want to be in the same vicinity as an officer. Staying under the radar was her reason for trying to get a job at the club. She didn't want any attention on her,

especially from a cop. Kesla walked back to the door and peeped out. She tried to spot a back door but couldn't see one.

“I gotta get the fuck outta here.”

Kesla walked back into the club. She discreetly looked at the door and noticed that the officer was no longer standing there. She briskly made a bee-line to the exit and walked out. The anxious feeling that had attacked her body had somewhat ceased. She didn't want to stick around and wait for a cab, so she began to walk down the street and call an Uber once she was far enough from the club.

Diar held Margaret's hand and took a deep breath. She was about to face one of her biggest fears. This was something that she never thought she would do, but because she was in Exposure Therapy, it was important that she conquer her phobia.

“Are you ready?” Margaret asked.

Diar's chest heaved up and down while she nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“Remember, I am here with you. If you feel like you need a break, just let me know.”

“Okay.”

Margaret opened the door and stepped in first. Diar slowly followed after and stood like a mannequin. Margaret closed the door and welcomed the darkness into the closet. Being in a place where she'd almost lost her life was terrifying. When Margaret had first suggested standing inside of a closet, Diar objected. It wasn't until Margaret explained the importance of overcoming her fear of closets that she decided to give it a try.

“How do you feel, Diar?”

She swallowed hard. “I feel scared.”

“Is it to the point where you want to step out?”

“No.”

“That’s good,” Margaret coached. “Now tell me what you are thinking about?”

“I’m thinking about the last time I was inside of a closet,” Diar replied with tears in her eyes.

“What’s the moment that sticks out the most?”

“When my body was crammed into the closet. I remember being so uncomfortable and hungry. I just knew that I was going to die. I was certain that I would never see my family again. I had actually accepted my death.”

“The good thing is that you didn’t die. You’re still here, and you’re a survivor. This was probably the lowest moment in your life, but yet you still persevered. Embrace your recovering. Be glad to say that you’re strong enough to go through anything, because you did.”

Diar was so emotional. Margaret’s words meant everything to her in that juncture. She didn’t look at her assault that way. Instead, she cradled the emotion of being

broken. She drowned in her depression and emerged herself in despair.

“Can we get out now?” Diar asked.

“Sure.”

Margaret opened the door where Diar was greeted by the sunlight that shined through the bay window. She grabbed a tissue to wipe her eyes and then took a minute to gather herself.

“Tell me how you feel now that you’re no longer inside the closet.”

“I feel...” Diar paused. “I feel lighter. The way that you explained everything was what I needed to hear. I wasn’t looking at myself like a survivor. I guess I thought of myself as more of a victim. I’m actually glad that I did it.”

Margaret smiled. “I’m so happy to hear that. You’re making great progress, Diar.”

“Thank you.”

The two talked for a while longer before her session was over.

Afterwards, Diar walked to the phone room so she could call Kayla. They hadn’t spoken in some days, and she

missed her.

“What’s up, boo?” Kayla answered. “When are you coming home? I miss your no-driving ass.”

Diar giggled. “Shut up. I’ll be home soon. What are you doing?”

“I’m making a wig.”

“Oooh, can you make me one? I miss my weave.”

“You know I got you. So, how has therapy been going for you?”

“It’s been tough, but I feel better. I’m so glad I decided to come here.”

“You sound better, because, girl, I thought we were going to have to put your ass on suicide watch.”

“I can never take myself out, but I can admit that it was bad.”

“So did Case come to see you? I gave him the information.”

“Yeah, he came, and I thought I told you not to tell him where I was?” Diar quipped.

“I know, but I couldn’t help it. Call me a soft bitch, but I felt bad for him. He really wanted to see you. Girl, that boy can be relentless.”

“You’re a soft bitch, because not too long ago, you were cursing him out about how he did me wrong.”

“I was, but I like Case. If you can give Smokey the Bear several chances, then Case deserves a second chance. Speaking of Fat Albert, did you talk to Stefani?”

“No, I haven’t had much time to call her. Why?”

“Roman was found dead.”

Diar gasped, not believing that Roman was gone. She wanted to be sad about his death, but she wouldn’t allow herself to. He had caused her so much heartache that she couldn’t feel any sympathy.

“Wow! That’s crazy. Who did it, and how did he die?”

“Girl, who gives a fuck? I’m just glad he’s not around to cause you anymore grief. I hope his fat ass is burning rotisserie slow too.”

Diar shook her head at Kayla’s words. She was always known to say the first thing on her mind.

“I’m shocked, but I can’t feel anything for him,” Diar replied. “Look, I gotta go. I’ll try to call you tomorrow.”

“Okay. Bye, suga.”

Diar hung up and walked back to her room. With her therapy session and the news of Roman’s death, she was feeling mentally drained. She was relieved to know that she didn’t have to look over her shoulder when she returned home. Whoever took Roman out did her a big favor, and if she could kiss them a million times, she would.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Case sat on Facetime with his mother updating her about the charges that would be brought against Kesla. Apparently, they had enough evidence to charge her with sexual assault, along with a few more charges. It angered him that Kesla had escaped the law and ran away. He wanted to murder her when she called gloating about all the havoc she had caused in his life.

“So, now, she’s on the run? Have you called her family to see if they know anything?”

“No,” he answered as he twisted his face. “Why would I call those ignorant ass people?”

“That’s okay. You don’t have to, because I bet you I’m going to call. I’m going to give Mariah’s mama a piece of my mind too,” Celine declared.

“Ma, don’t call her. I don’t need you getting into it with those people. Just leave the shit alone.”

Celine angrily shook her head. “No, I’m not. They got a lot of nerve blaming you for Mariah’s death, when their

conniving ass niece drugged you. That bitch needs to feel my wrath.”

Case smacked his lips, becoming annoyed with his mother. He couldn't understand why she just wouldn't mind her business. He needed to find her a hobby during her stay in Milwaukee because she was getting on his nerves.

“I'ma call Pops on you, Ma. You're doing too much.”

“Oh, please,” she scoffed. “Nobody is scared of your father.”

“Yeah, a'ight, we'll see. I gotta go.”

Case then went up to his room to get dressed. He was going over to Keece's house so they could watch the football game. When he was in college, he used to be a wide receiver for the football team, but he struggled academically and dropped out. Celine was upset about that, but Case's heart wasn't in the game anymore.

He turned on Dave East's “Type of Time” while he hopped in the shower. After cleansing his body, Case got out and began to get dressed. His phone rang while on his nightstand, so he grabbed it. The number was private, so he ignored it, thinking that it may be Kesla again. Seconds later, it

rang again. Case ignored it again and then slipped his Nike boots on.

When his phone rang once more, he snatched it and yelled, “Bitch, stop fuckin’ calling me!”

“I’m sorry, but I really need to talk with you, Case,” the caller spoke.

He didn’t recognize the voice, so he asked, “Who is this?”

“It’s Cheyenne. I know I’m probably the last person that you want to talk to, but I needed to speak to you.”

Case smacked his lips. She was right; he didn’t want to talk to her. “You got a lot of fuckin’ nerves calling my phone like your hoe-ass niece didn’t drug me and take the dick while I was unconscious.”

“Listen, Case, I am so sorry for what Kesla did to you. We had nothing to do with that. That was all on her.”

“Where the fuck is that bitch?”

“She ran away. I don’t know where she went to.”

“I don’t believe shit that you say. You could be covering for that hoe. I’m telling you right now that I’m going

to find that bitch, and she's gon' pay for the shit she did," Case warned.

"Case, just let the police handle her. I just wanted to apologize for blaming you for everything."

"You and your entire family was bogus as shit. I mean y'all wouldn't even let me attend the funeral, which was fucked up. Y'all treated me like I wasn't shit, when I was around you and your family for years."

"I know, and I am very sorry for my actions. I shouldn't have ever blamed you for anything. You were always good to Mariah, and I should have never let my pain cloud my judgment. I was hurting, Case. You know how close me and my baby were. I couldn't understand how everything happened, so I decided to accuse you of killing her. I was completely out of line. Please forgive me for that. But I really want to speak with you in person, if that's possible."

"Hell nah!" Case belted. "I don't trust you or your shady ass family! Say what you have to say now!"

"I can't say it all now. We can meet in a public place. Just me and you."

Case sat in thought for a moment. He didn't want to see her, but she had piqued his interest.

"A'ight, I'll meet you at the McDonalds on Appleton. Give me like twenty minutes."

"Okay, I'll see you there."

Getting a call from Cheyenne was the last thing Case had expected. For months, he and Mariah's folks had been at odds. He didn't trust any of her family, especially after Kesla's sneaky act, so he grabbed his gun. He wasn't going to take any chances with her because this meeting could very well be a setup.

Case grabbed his keys and walked to his garage. He jumped in the car and made his way to McDonald's. Within thirty minutes, he was pulling up in the parking lot. He looked around before he got out of the car. His gun was tucked securely in the back of his waistband. When Case walked in, he spotted Cheyenne at the table near the back. He slowly approached her, and noticed that she had tears in her eyes. He shook his head and took a seat.

"Tell me what's good, Cheyenne? I didn't come up here to see you crying."

She sniffled. “I am so sorry. I can’t believe the way that we treated you.”

Case rolled his eyes, not interested in her lame apology. “Is this why you brought me here? If it is, then I’m about to leave.”

“No, wait.” She dug inside her purse and pulled out a notebook. “I was cleaning out Mariah’s room and found this tucked under her mattress. I didn’t even know she kept a diary. I began to go through it and couldn’t believe my eyes... Her death was no accident. She *meant* to kill herself,” she cried.

Case’s breath became trapped in his throat. He stared at her intensely, hoping that she was playing some kind of joke on him. The tears that cascaded down her cinnamon brown skin revealed how honest she was being.

“Wait... what are you saying?” he questioned.

She slid the notebook across the table. “Take a look. She wanted to die.”

Case snatched the notebook and opened it up. He scanned the first page and didn’t see any indication that Mariah was suicidal.

“Go to the last three pages,” Cheyenne instructed him.

Case did as he was told and started with the first of the three.

June, 6th

I hate life. I wanna die. I don't wanna be here anymore. No one understands my pain. I'm empty, I'm broken, and I'm not good enough. I can't keep up with school. I'm so overwhelmed. I don't wanna live. Something has to give or I'm gonna have to take matters into my own hands.

Mariah

“What the fuck,” Case whispered, not believing what he was reading. He turned to the second page.

June, 9th

I've made my decision. I'm going to die, and I'm going to be the one to do it. Life is becoming too hard for me. I've been depressed for years, and no one has helped me. I tried talking to my mom, and she always tells me to pray. My dad wouldn't understand, and my brother isn't easy to talk to. I would go to Case, but I don't want him to know that I suffer from depression. Plus, he has been through enough. He doesn't need the burden of worrying about me. I have to die so that I can have some sort of peace.

Mariah

Case hurried and turned to the last page of her diary. His heart was breaking with each word that he read.

June 11th

I've come to terms with what has to be done. Dying is the only way to escape this prison that I live in. I battle my mind every day, and I'm officially defeated. I know I'm going to hurt a lot of people with my death, but I don't care. Dying is the only way I'm going to be happy. I've tried to reach out for help, but my cries fell on deaf ears. This thing called life is tough, and I'm not equipped to deal with it. This will be my last entry.

Mariah

The notebook fell out of Case's hands. He was devastated and completely thrown off. He was wishing this was a dream that he hadn't been awakened from. He covered his eyes with his hands and shook his head. This had to be a prank or some cruel joke. There was no way that Mariah was depressed, and he wasn't aware of it.

“It's so hard to believe,” Cheyenne wept. “I would've never suspected that she would resort to killing herself. I was around her every day, and sometimes she complained, but for the most part, she seemed happy.”

“How could you not know? This was your daughter, and you didn’t know that she was depressed. Why weren’t you there to help her?” Case growled.

“I thought she was just being spoiled when she would complain about certain things. I didn’t know that she was depressed. I would’ve gotten her some help, if I knew.”

“She said she went to you, and you told her to pray. What the fuck is that, Cheyenne? Your daughter pleads for help, and you say pray? You ain’t shit!”

“Case, let me explain,” she pleaded.

He shot up from his seat and stormed out of the restaurant. He couldn’t believe what had just happened. When he got inside of his car, he rested his forehead on the steering wheel. The news that was just revealed to him almost knocked the wind out of him. He never had an inkling that Mariah was depressed. Whenever she was around him, she was always her usual jolly self. But now that the truth had been exposed, Case came to the realization that Mariah was a good actress.

His heart was cracked and his feelings were annihilated. He was finally starting to accept that Mariah was dead and never coming back, but now that he’d learned the

truth about her untimely demise, he was confused all over again.

“Why would she do that?” he asked himself.

Why couldn't Mariah just come to him so that he could help her? Why would she keep her illness bottled in? She was supposed to be his best friend, and for some reason, Case felt like she had betrayed him. Mariah had robbed him of the chance to get her some help. She would've still been alive if she would've opened her mouth. He was beyond hurt at that point and didn't feel like going over to Keece's house. Case started his engine and drove home so that he could drown in his sorrows.

Diar lay in the bed with her eyes closed while listening to Etta James' "Fool That I Am". This song was speaking to her soul as she reminisced about her situation with Case. She missed him with every part of her heart. Sometimes, when she lay alone wide awake, she wondered if they would ever reconnect. Diar had forced him away, but it was only for the benefit of her wellbeing.

She couldn't lie and say that, on several different occasions she didn't think about reaching out to Case. Diar had tried everything in her power to get him out of her system, but nothing seemed to work. He had come into her life and left an eternal impact.

When Diar slowly opened her eyes, she was startled to find Jediah standing over her. Her body jumped violently while her heart felt like it was going to burst. She snatched her earphones out of her ear and swiftly sat up.

"What the fuck are you doing standing over me like that?" she snapped.

Jediah put his finger up to his lips, indicating for her to lower her voice.

“Shh,” he insisted. “I was calling your name, but you didn’t respond. I didn’t see your headphones in your ear.”

“Uh, yeah, I was. Don’t fucking scare me like that.”

Diar wasn’t fully healed from her trauma. When she saw Jediah standing over here, she briefly thought back to her attack.

“My bad. I didn’t mean to scare you. I couldn’t sleep, so I came in here, hoping that you would be up. Forgive me.”

Diar was irritated, but when she looked into his big, brown eyes, she softened up. “Just don’t do that anymore.”

“I won’t,” he assured and then took a seat on the bed. “What were you listening to?”

“Etta James. Why?”

“I was just asking. Before I leave, I’m going to make you a bomb ass playlist.”

“How do you know that I’m going to like your music selection?” she sassed.

“Girl, I’m the hottest DJ in St. Louis. Trust me, my music selection always gets the club jumpin’.”

“Cocky, huh?”

He winked. “Confident. Don’t mistake the two.”

Diar smiled and crossed her legs Indian style. Her eyes roamed his toned arms that were on display. His basketball shorts hung slightly off his waist, exposing the waistband of his boxers.

“You know that I leave this week, right?” Jediah asked, breaking her from her daze.

“No, I didn’t. Are you ready to go?”

“Hell yeah.” He smirked. “I’m ready to get back to the hustle. I miss working.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“But I will miss your pretty ass.”

“Miss me?” Diar twisted her lips. “You don’t even know me. How are you going to miss someone that you barely know?”

“I know enough. I know that every day I look forward to seeing you walking around the facility. Now, I’m not going

to see you anymore, and that hurts my heart.” He then feigned being in pain.

Diar laughed. “Yeah, but you’ve completed your program. You should look forward to staying sober.”

“Yeah, you’re right, but still,” he replied as he lustfully licked his lips. “I’m still going to miss you.”

Jediah smoothly leaned in and planted a sensual kiss on Diar’s lips. She wanted to pull back, but her lips couldn’t seem to part ways. His tongue slowly slid inside of her mouth, causing moisture to creep between her legs. Diar hadn’t been touched intimately in a while, so she found no harm in kissing him.

Jediah’s hands traveled down to her pajama shorts. Once his hand was inside, he found her clitoris and began to rub it in a circular motion. Diar moaned with her lips still locked on his. Her body was yearning for this pleasure. When Jediah’s finger dipped into her wet pussy, Diar began to grind her lower body. He pulled back and trailed kisses to her ear. She was still grinding on his finger, trying her best not to yell out.

“This pussy is so wet, baby,” he whispered and then slid his tongue in her ear.

Diar could feel her orgasm approaching. He rubbed her bud faster as she grabbed his shoulders. She squeezed her eyes shut as she prepared for the intense pleasure. Soon after, a gush of liquid saturated his finger while her body convulsed with delight. After coming down from her sexually-induced bliss, Diar finally opened her eyes.

“I can’t believe how wet that pussy is,” Jediah said and pecked her lips.

Diar smiled shyly, feeling like a little school girl.

“I don’t think you’re ready for the dick yet and I don’t want to get caught in here, so I’m about to go back to my room. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Jediah hopped up and walked out of her room. Diar bit her bottom lip and fell back on the bed. A smile crept on her face while relishing the way her body was relaxed. She shouldn’t have taken it there with Jediah, but she couldn’t take back the act. It was just what she needed and her body was thanking her for it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Case walked into his shop and went straight to Keece's station. The night before, he had been thinking about the revelation of Mariah's death. He was beyond hurt by her suicide. Her death had taken him on an emotional rollercoaster, and it pained him to know that it was all on purpose. Case tried not to make it about him, but it was true that he had been depressed for many months. He'd even sabotaged his relationship with Diar because he was unable to get Mariah out of his system. Her suicide was a hard pill to swallow because he had no indication that she was even unhappy.

Case would've done his best to save Mariah. He would've gotten her the proper help to cope with her illness. They had shared a bond so tight that he couldn't understand why she didn't open up to him. Although Case was dispirited by her suicide, he felt like this was a stepping stone he needed to officially get over her. He couldn't keep giving his time and energy to someone who was no longer living. He had to get her out of his psyche in order for him to live a normal life.

Case was tired of carrying the burden of her death on his shoulders.

Keece was seated in his station with Paris on his lap. Sometimes, she would come and sit with him while he worked.

“What’s up, y’all?” Case greeted. “Aye, Keece, I need you to cover this tattoo up.”

“Which one?”

“The one of Mariah.”

A surprised expression graced Keece’s face. “Are you sure? You just got it.”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

Case didn’t want to go into details of what he had learned last night. It pained him to even tell people that Mariah had taken herself out. He didn’t want people to look at him as less of a man for not knowing that his lady was suicidal.

“Damn, man, I was just about to leave.” Keece fussed. “Watch out, baby,” he told Paris.

Paris got up and then sat in the chair next to Keece. Case sat on the table and put his head down. He couldn’t wait

to get this ink covered up. He shouldn't have gotten it in the first place being that he was with Diar at the time.

“Case, how is Diar doing?” Paris asked.

“I don't know. We don't talk anymore,” he replied.

“Aww, that's too bad because I really liked her. She was cool as hell.”

Thoughts of Diar invaded his mind. He was ashamed that he had positioned her in second place. Trying to mourn Mariah had inadvertently caused a rift between him and Diar. Case had continued to hold back to the point where he had pushed her away. Even though Diar had told him to stay away from her, Case had to figure out a way to get her back.

“So what do you want?” Keece asked him.

“I don't even care.”

“So you want me to freestyle?”

“Yeah, that's cool.”

Keece prepared a stencil while Case sat in silence. He was in a terrible mood, but he didn't want to show it. So, he chose to remain quiet while Keece completed his tattoo.

After a forty-five minute session, he was finally done. Case grabbed a mirror to look at his new ink, which was his last name in graffiti.

Case thanked his brother and walked back to his office. He eyed the picture of him and Mariah that sat on his desk. Her smile was deceiving as she hugged him around his waist. Case shook his head, grabbed the picture and threw it in the garbage. He didn't want to see anything that reminded him of her.

He sat in his office for a while just thinking about everything that had occurred in his life. He had been through so much and wondered when he was going to be happy again. Case had taken a lot of losses in his twenty-three years. The last four months of his life had been tumultuous, and he was dying for some relief.

Someone knocked on his door. He looked up and saw Leilah coming in. She looked cute in some black, distressed jeans, denim top and blue Adidas.

“Hey, Keece is gone and there are no more clients. Is it all right if I go?”

“Yeah, that's cool.”

“What’s wrong, Case? You seem sad,” she acknowledged and walked closer to him.

“Nothing. I’m straight.”

“Are you sure? You know if you ever need to talk, I’m here for you.”

Case could tell that she truly meant her statement. They had developed a genuine friendship and he was grateful for that.

“I appreciate that.” He smirked. “Why is your ass tryin’ to leave work early? Did you work it out with your guy yet?”

“No, not yet.” She smiled. “I’m cool on him at the moment. What’s wrong though?”

“Nothing, nose ass girl.”

She twisted her lips. “I don’t believe you. Is it Diar?”

“Nope.”

“Your mama?”

“No.”

“I give up. I know you’re down, so what can I do to make you feel better?”

Case looked at her, wondering what she meant by that. The sincere look in her eyes made his dick twitch. He came up with different scenarios of how she could make him feel better as he glanced at her full lips that were coated in a clear gloss. Case's mind was wandering to places it shouldn't have been. He didn't know why he was having nasty thoughts about her.

Leilah must've been having the same thoughts because she then leaned in and kissed his lips lightly. When Case didn't object her affection, her kiss became more aggressive. He knew that he shouldn't have been kissing Leilah, but he was in need of some pussy. He felt like his nuts were going to explode because he was so backed up.

Case pulled her onto his lap where she straddled him. He found his tongue roaming her neck as she threw her head back in pleasure.

Case's manhood was about to burst through his jeans. He desperately needed to feel her walls, so he cut the foreplay short.

"Take your pants off and turn around," he demanded.

Leilah hopped up and did as she was instructed. Case reached into his pocket, pulled out a condom and secured it on his dick. When he saw Leilah's small but plump ass propped

on his desk, his penis oozed of pre-cum. He licked his lips and proceeded to slide into her warm honey pot.

Case bit his bottom lip as he rocked in and out of her wetness. Her pussy was gripping his dick like a glove.

“Oh, Case! Fuck me harder!” Leilah yelled out.

Case was trying to go at a slower pace so he could relish her walls. But her cries had sparked the animal in him, so he happily obliged her request. Case gripped her waist and smacked into her pussy. Visions of her ass smacking into his pelvis caused his dick to pulsate.

“Throw that ass back, Leilah,” he growled and yanked her ponytail.

She gripped the edge of the desk and threw her pussy back on his dick. With each stroke, Case felt himself becoming weaker.

“This dick is so good,” she cooed.

He slapped her ass as he pounded into her. Suddenly, she put her hand on his stomach to slow down his backstrokes. Case smacked her hand away as he continued to assault her pussy.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Leilah chanted.

Soon after, Case looked down and saw her cream coating his dick. He had been trying to hold his nut, but once he saw the contents of her orgasm, he couldn't hold it any longer.

“Shit,” he groaned as his fluids filled the condom.

After his nut, Case leaned over on Leilah for a few minutes so he could gather himself. After a while, he slowly leaned back and pulled out. His heart dropped to his feet when he noticed that the condom had broken.

“Oh, shit. Aye, the fuckin' condom broke,” he panicked.

Leilah looked back and quickly stood. “What?”

“Damn, man,” he stressed. “You gotta go get that morning-after pill.”

Leilah nodded. “Okay. I'll go to the pharmacy on the way home. You don't have anything right?”

Case glared at her. “Hell nah, and you better not either.”

He walked into his bathroom and washed himself up. He wasn't one to have raw sex because he always wanted to

protect himself. He made a mental note to go to the clinic so he could get an STD check.

After he cleaned himself up, he walked out and saw that Leilah was putting on her jeans. Case felt guilty as he looked at her. She was his employee, and he shouldn't have crossed that line with her. He usually exhibited great self-control, and he cursed himself for thinking with his dick instead of his head.

“I feel real fucked up about going there with you, Case. Please forgive me. I really need my job,” Leilah pleaded.

“It's cool, Leilah. I should've never gone there with you. Let's act like this shit never happened.”

She breathed a sigh of relief. “I agree, and I'm going to go get that pill right away.”

Case stood with his hands in his pockets, hoping that she would forget their act. She fiddled her fingers and looked up at him. She seemed like she had more to say. Her phone rang in her purse, so she hurried to get it. He watched her as she answered.

“Hello... I'm just about to leave work... What... Oh my God. Which hospital?... Okay, I'm on my way.” Leilah

hung up her phone and grabbed her purse.

“What’s wrong?” Case questioned.

“My mom was in an accident. I have to go.” Then she rushed out of the office.

Case wanted to see if she needed anything, but she was out the door before he could ask. He sat in his chair and rubbed his temples. While he enjoyed the pleasure Leilah had provided, he had done a bad deed by sleeping with her. He prayed that their sexual tryst hadn’t effected their work environment.

“Here you are. One shot of Patron,” Kesla said as she passed the customer his drink.

She had been working at the club for one week, and was surprisingly enjoying it. After her last visit, Kesla wasn't sure if she would return since she had seen the cop there. But after talking to the owner without alerting him that she was on the run, he'd informed her that police officers didn't frequent the club that much. She made up a story to him that she was trying to hide from an ex-boyfriend that had been abusive to her. Kesla was ecstatic when the owner bought her story.

Everything had been going well, and she was pulling in a decent amount of money. She tried to stay to herself and not engage in any conversation with the other workers. She was adamant about staying low-key until she figured out her next move.

Kesla stood by the bar while waiting on the bartender to fill her drink order. She looked and saw that a guy was staring at her. He was handsome with a brown sugar complexion, slanted eyes and plump lips. He wore his hair in a

nappy fro with a crisp lining. The man said something to the guy next to him and then resumed his staring match with Kesla. She hurried and looked away.

Kesla walked over to another customer to give them their drinks. On her way back to the bar, someone grabbed her arm. She turned around prepared to snap, but softened up when she noticed that it was the mystery man that had been eye-fucking her.

“Can I get a drink?” he asked in his deep baritone.

Kesla tried to hide her smile but found it difficult.
“What would you like?”

“A shot of D’usse.”

“Okay.”

She walked away, making sure to switch her ass a little harder. She didn’t mind flirting with him, so that she could get a bigger tip.

Kesla went back to give him his drink. “Here you are.”

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“It’s Keesha.”

“Keesha, huh? Well, if you keep the drinks coming, I’ll make sure you have a nice tip.”

Kesla smiled and then walked off. He was so fine, and she couldn’t help the moisture that seeped between her legs.

Don’t get excited. Just do your job and keep his drinks coming, she coached herself. She didn’t need to be getting caught up with some man now that she was on the run.

Hours later, when the bar was closing, Kesla prepared to leave. She grabbed her coat and walked out of the front entrance. She waited on the curb for her Uber to pull up and take her back to her motel room.

“You need a ride, beautiful?”

She looked and saw that it was the cute guy who she had been serving drinks to.

“No, I’m good, but thank you.”

“You sure? It’s not a problem.”

“I’m positive.”

“Well, let me get your number so we can keep in contact.”

Kesla instantly put up her defensive wall. She wasn't comfortable giving her number out to a random man. She didn't want to make a mistake and have the cops on her ass.

"I'm sorry. I can't."

"You got a man or something?"

"No," she paused. "I'm just not ready to start dating right now."

"Who said anything about dating? I'm just trying to be your friend. I'm not trying to move you in or nothing."

Kesla felt stupid for jumping the gun. She thought that the man was interested in her, but now she could see that she was clearly wrong.

"Look, I didn't mean to fuck your head up. Here take my number, and if you wanna talk, then call me," he suggested.

"Sure," she replied and pulled out her cell phone. She handed him the phone so that he could punch his number in. He did and then gave it back to her.

"A'ight, I hope that you be a big girl and use my number," he said as he smirked.

Kesla playfully rolled her eyes. “We’ll see, but wait, what’s your name?”

“Oh, I’m Julian.”

“Oh. Well, it was nice to meet you.”

He licked his lips and said, “You too.”

Kesla bit her lip as she watched him walk away. She didn’t need any distractions, but he looked too good to resist. She had to remember that she was a fugitive and needed to focus on staying out of sight.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“Can I ask you a question that doesn’t relate to my trauma?” Diar asked Margaret.

“Sure?”

“Why do I seem to pick the wrong men?”

“Well, what kind of men do you usually go for?”

“Hmm, I don’t know, because my ex’s are like night and day. So, I really don’t have a type. I just like what I see and I go from there.”

“Maybe you’re looking for something that they don’t possess.”

Diar nodded. “That could be true because with my ex, Case, I was looking for a commitment, but he wasn’t ready for it. It’s crazy because I had fallen in love with him knowing that I shouldn’t have.”

“What kind of man is he?”

Diar thought for a moment. Case was truly one of a kind. “He has a lot of great qualities. He’s driven. He has his

own business, a nice house and cars. He also has a great sense of style.”

“Yes, but that’s material possessions. What about his characteristics?”

“Well, he has a good heart. He’s giving and caring. Whenever I was in need of anything, he made sure that I had it. Oh, and his bedroom skills are amazing.” Diar dramatically fanned herself with the thought of her and Case’s sex sessions. “But the only thing was that he wouldn’t open his heart to me.”

“And why is that?”

“His girlfriend accidentally killed herself, so he was still stuck on her.”

“That explains a lot,” Margaret acknowledged.

“Yeah, I know, and before you ask, I did try to walk away from the relationship. I actually walked away twice, but each time, he came and found me. I feel like he made me fall in love with him.”

“Are you still in love with him?”

“Yes.” She sighed. “I wish I wasn’t, but I am. He said some things that I have a hard time getting over. Case is really

a good dude. You can tell that he was raised by a man because he carries himself like one. I know you're probably like how else would he carry himself, but there are a lot of men with feminine ways, and I don't mean gay. Case isn't like that, and he's not emotional. He's honest and sometimes, his honesty can be a bit much for me."

"Well, from what I can gather, it sounds like you can't handle him."

Diar twisted her face. "I can definitely handle him. What I can't handle is being in competition with someone who is deceased."

"Well, then walk away," Margaret suggested.

"I did, but, I swear, he has a death grip on my heart. We have this connection that I can't even explain. It's almost like our spirits are connected."

"You may have soul ties with him. I believe in soul mates, but you have to be careful with that. Just because you're emotionally connected with someone doesn't mean that you're supposed to be together."

Diar nodded. "Yeah, I understand that. My best friend suggested that I give him a second chance, but I don't know if

I want to.”

“Here’s my take on things. If you feel that he’s worth it, then give him a second chance, but if you feel like he’s going to take you back to that dark place you were in before, then don’t do it. We’ve been working so hard to get you mentally healthy, and I don’t want you to forfeit that trying to be in a relationship that won’t work. If you feel like he’ll drain you and not add to your progress, my suggestion would be to let him go and love him from afar.”

Diar nodded, trying to process everything that Margaret was saying. She agreed wholeheartedly with her advice. She was finally starting to feel like her old self, and she didn’t want to sacrifice her growth for Case.

“Are you afraid to be alone, Diar?”

She wanted to lie and say no, but she couldn’t. Honesty had been beneficial during her therapy, so she wasn’t going to switch it up now.

“Yes, I am. I like being in a relationship.”

“You have to get to know yourself and be okay with being alone. It’s not a bad thing, Diar.”

“Yeah, I know, and I promise I’m going to work on that.”

Diar and Margaret talked for another thirty minutes before she went back to her room. Once inside, she noticed a note on her pillow. She picked it up and read it.

I was trying to say goodbye to you, but you were in your session. I’m going to miss your beautiful ass. I wanna keep in contact with you, so call me at 314-555-9366.

Jediah

Diar smiled, folded the note and stuck it inside of her notebook. She wished that she would’ve had a chance to say goodbye to him. She didn’t see any harm with calling him from time to time to check on him. For now, she had to prepare for her departure from the rehabilitation center. She had one more week to go, and she couldn’t wait to see her family again.

Tisa sat on her cot feeling like her world was over. She wanted to die, and if she had the resources to do it, she would've killed herself. Fucking around with Kesla was going to cost her her livelihood as well as her freedom. She had worked so hard for her degree, and it was all for nothing. After Big forced her down to the police station, Tisa had no choice but to confess. She made sure she pointed out that Kesla was the main culprit behind the setup. Tisa provided text messages and even recorded conversations between her and Kesla. Tisa didn't trust Kesla, so on more than one occasion, she made sure to record their phone calls.

It sickened her that Kesla was able to get away while she was left to rot in jail. Her charges were serious, and she was facing a lot of time. Her mother had come up with the money for a good lawyer, but Tisa was contemplating agreeing to a plea deal. She didn't want to take anything to trial because she was guilty of everything.

She slowly got up and walked to the phones. She desperately needed to hear her mother's voice. She dialed her number and waited for the operator to put her call through.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Mama,” Tisa greeted somberly.

“Tisa, why didn’t you tell me?” her mother asked in a shaky voice.

“Tell you what?”

“Why didn’t you tell me that Aaron was molesting you? You could’ve come to me, baby.”

Tears instantly clouded her vision. How did her mother know about her sexual abuse that she tried so desperately to hide?

“What are you talking about? Who told you that?”

“Karen called me and told me that your friend told her that he had molested you. This bitch has known for a while, and is just now informing me on everything. I noticed that Karen had been acting distant, and when I questioned her about it, she finally broke down and told me everything. She told me that he was the one that paid your tuition. You told me that you received a scholarship, Tisa. I hope you didn’t lie to me so you could cover for that bastard.”

Tisa took the phone away from her ear and cried silently. She knew right away that the *friend* was Kesla. This

bitch had ruined her life, and now she was going to ruin the dynamics of her family.

“Kesla?” her mother called out.

“Yeah,” she whimpered.

“You should’ve come to me. Do you know how I feel right now? I feel like I wasn’t there to protect you. I would’ve believed you, honey. I’m sorry that you had to go through that alone. I’m so sorry.”

Tisa couldn’t even compose any words to respond to her mother. She never wanted her secret to come out because she knew how bad it would hurt her mom. Tears leaked like a water fountain and her heart ached tremendously. The pain in her mother’s voice almost caused her to drop dead.

“Mama, I’m so sorry,” Tisa cried. “I was scared to tell you.”

“Why, Tisa? We talk about everything. I thought I had established an open relationship with you. I just wish you would’ve told me so we could’ve put that pedophile behind bars. I just feel so guilty because I had you around him, and I never knew that he was hurting you.”

Tisa felt betrayed, devastated and downright crushed. Listening to her mother's cries broke her heart into pieces. She couldn't stand to hear the disappointment in her mother's voice, so she hung up. She hurried back to her cell and buried her face into the flat pillow. Nothing could describe the saddened emotion that ransacked her body. She wanted to go to sleep and never wake up. Kesla had abolished Tisa's entire existence. Life as she once knew it was over, and she had nobody but herself to blame.

Diar stepped out of the airport and inhaled the cold Milwaukee air. It felt so good to be home, and she couldn't wait to see her family. Therapy was just what she had needed, and she was confident that she would be back to herself in no time.

The blowing of a horn startled her and caused Diar to look in the direction of the noise. A smile crept on her face when she noticed Stefani and Kayla in the car. Diar ran over to them where they both jumped out of the car and formed into a group hug.

“We've missed you, Diar! I'm so glad you're back!” Stefani screeched.

“I missed you all too. I'm so glad I'm back home,” Diar beamed.

“Girl, me too. You had me hanging out with Kelli's ol' water bottle built ass,” Kayla fussed.

Diar cackled. “Kay, stop being mean because Kelli is always nice to you.”

Kayla rolled her eyes. “Whatever.”

“I thought Mama and Daddy were coming to get me. What happened?”

“Girl, Mama threw her back out, so Daddy has to take care of her. She did cook for you though. What’s the problem? You don’t wanna see us,” Stefani quipped.

“Nah, I was just looking forward to seeing them too. Let’s go. It’s cold as shit,” Diar huffed.

The women gathered in the car, and Stefani drove off. Diar couldn’t wait to go home and eat some of her mother’s cooking.

“So, how are you feeling, boo? Do you feel like your old self again?” Kayla asked.

Diar nodded. “I’m not there yet, but I feel like I’ll be good. I’m just glad that I went because I know if I would’ve stayed here that I probably would’ve been locked up at my parents’ house.”

“Well, you look better, sis. Oh, and I’ve missed you so much at the store. Trying to do my job and yours has stressed me out. Side bar; when are you coming back to work?” Stefani questioned with a side eye.

Diar giggled at her sister. “I think I’m going to come back on Monday. Let me have the weekend to prepare.”

“Okay. Cool.”

“So, I know that you just got back, but I want to go to the All Black Affair. You know it’s this weekend, right?”

Kayla reminded her.

“Oh yeah, I forgot. I would have to find something to wear, but I’m down.”

“Yeah, me and Dash are supposed to go,” Stefani added.

“Dash, huh?” Diar smirked. “So y’all going on dates now?”

“Well...” Stefani cleared her throat. “Dash and I are trying to start all over and be a family.”

“Yes!” Diar cheered. “I knew you guys would always find your way back to each other. Besides, Dash was not about to let you go be with someone else.”

“I know, but I really do love him, so I’m going to let go of the past and allow him to make things right.”

“Aww, Stef, that’s so sweet. I’m saying though, you better had locked him down because he’s fine as fuck.” Kayla

laughed.

“Don’t be looking at my man, Kay.”

“Girl, please.” Kayla waved her hand. “Every time I saw him, I was sneaking a peek.”

“Anyways,” Diar interjected. “Back to this All Black Affair. I definitely want to go and celebrate me being alive and healthy. Also, I want to celebrate Roman’s ass being dead.”

“Cheers to that,” Kayla chimed in.

Stefani chuckled. “Thank God. Oh, and Diar, we could not find your car. You might have to use mine for a while until you get another one. Please don’t crash my shit.”

“I’m really going to try not to,” Diar promised. “Damn, I really loved that car though.”

“Girl, you’ll get over it when you get another one,” Kayla assured.

“Yeah, I guess.”

Diar couldn’t describe the feeling she was experiencing. Being with her sister and best friend made her feel more at peace. She knew once she saw her parents’ that she would be even more thrilled. Diar was looking forward to her progress and was so glad that she didn’t have to deal with

Roman anymore. She no longer had to worry about him popping back up in her life, and it honestly felt good.

Case sat at the bar with his brothers. He had so much on his mind, from Mariah's suicide to his rendezvous with Leilah. He hadn't told anyone about his encounter with Leilah because he was hoping to just forget about it and move on. Case hadn't heard from her, and he preferred it that way.

"Case, you want a drink?" Kiyan smirked.

"Hell nah," he scoffed.

Dinero and Keece burst into a fit of laughter. Big shook his head and said, "Man, do you want me to make you a drink?"

"Nah, I'm good," Case insisted.

"He ain't fuckin' with your bar like that. Shady ass workers. I damn near stood behind the bar while that Frankenstein lookin' bitch made my drink, 'cause if a bitch drug me, I'm gon' murder that hoe," Dinero declared.

Big smacked his lips. "Fuck you, and she ain't on that shit."

“Aye, but where have y’all been? I haven’t seen you and Dinero since last week,” Case said to Kiyan.

“We had to handle some business out of town. Shit, we actually gotta go back to handle more business this week,” Kiyan replied.

“Yeah, Keece got us making moves while his weak ass stays here like he’s fuckin’ John Gotti or some damn body. We’ve been setting up all kinds of deals,” Dinero fussed.

Case laughed at his brother because he always had something slick to say.

“I thought you wanted more responsibility, lame-ass boy,” Keece shot.

“Nah, I do.” Dinero turned his attention back to Case. “You still haven’t found that stick figure lookin’ bitch?” he asked, referring to Kesla.

“Hell nah, but her ass did call me talking shit. I can’t wait until I catch up with that hoe.”

“We gon’ find her. I promise,” Keece assured.

“Aye, are y’all going to the All Black Affair?” Big asked.

“Yeah, me and Paris will probably step through,”
Keece replied.

“Yeah, I’ll be there,” Kiyan added.

Dinero nodded. “I’m going, but I’m not going with Asia. She got booked with Fabian and Kylie, so she’ll be out of town.”

“Case, you going?” Big asked.

Case hadn’t really thought about attending the event because he hadn’t been in the mood to party. “I don’t know yet.”

“You should come hang out with your bros,” Kiyan urged.

“I’ll think about.”

Case did have a lot on his plate and thought that a night out with his brothers might improve his mood. He needed to take his mind off the bullshit that seemed to be never-ending.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Diar stood in front of the floor-length mirror and surveyed her look. It was the night of the All Black Affair and she was ready to party. She wore a long black dress with a high split, which showcased her robust thigh. Her hair was done in a Naomi Campbell style sew-in with a part down the middle. Her makeup was flawlessly applied, making her feel like a celebrity.

Tina walked in and smiled. Diar had been staying at her parents' house since she wasn't completely comfortable with staying at her place just yet.

“You look good, sweetie. I'm so happy you're back.”

“Thanks, Ma. I'm excited to go out and have some fun.”

“You should be. You've been through enough, so you go and celebrate.”

Diar nodded as her phone alerted her of a text. She looked and saw that it was Kayla saying that she was outside.

“Okay, Mama, that's Kayla. I gotta go.”

“Okay. Be safe,” Tina replied.

Diar walked out of the house and got into Kayla’s car.

“Come on thigh!” Kayla joked.

“Yaasss, girl, I’ve been saving this dress for an entire year, and I couldn’t wait to wear it.”

“It’s really pretty. A’ight, let’s go fuck some shit up.”

“Cool.”

The women made small talk on the way to the venue. Once they arrived, they found a parking space and walked in. The All Black Affair was the place to be. It was an event where Milwaukeeans would dress up in their Sunday’s best and come together and party. Diar attended the event every year.

The girls walked over to the bar and ordered some drinks.

“It’s packed in here,” Kayla stated while looking around.

“I know, right? Oh, there goes Stefani and Dash.” Diar waved her hand so they could come over.

The couple walked over looking like they had just left a red-carpet event. Dash was clad in a custom tux while Stefani sported a short black dress. Her red hair was styled perfectly in a pixie cut.

“Y’all look so cute,” Diar gushed. “How long have you been here?”

“We just got here,” Dash responded.

Stefani gave her a hug. “You’re looking cute yourself, and Kayla you always slay.”

“Don’t I though?” she gloated as she flipped her purple tresses.

Diar shook her head and then sipped on her drink. When the DJ played Trouble’s “Whatchu Doin” Diar and Kayla rushed to the dance floor. She loved her a good trap song, so Diar danced until her feet hurt. She and Kayla rapped and danced as if they were the ones performing.

“Ooh, look who it is,” Kayla sang and pointed.

Diar followed her finger and spotted Case posted up with his brothers. She unconsciously bit her lip at the sight of him. He looked delectable in an all-black suit. His hair cut was so precise and crisp that she wanted to thank his barber

personally. All of the feelings that she'd tried to entomb suddenly flooded her body. It had been killing her to keep her emotions at bay. Seeing him had caused her to feel so weak. She wasn't sure if she could keep fighting him away anymore. Her love for him was way too strong and overbearing. She needed him, and she was tired of acting as if she didn't. Diar hurried and looked away before he could see her.

“Damn, now why he had to bring his sexy ass here? He just killed my vibe.”

Kayla laughed. “Stop acting like you're not geeked to see him. Case is looking mighty fine over there. Do you think he brought a date?”

Diar hoped that he hadn't because she didn't think she would be able to stand seeing him with another woman.

“If he did, then we're leaving.”

“Um, no, we're not. Shit, I didn't buy this ticket for nothing,” Kayla hissed.

Diar rolled her eyes and walked back to the bar. She needed another drink so that she could calm her nerves. Seeing Case again made her anxious, and she wasn't mentally prepared to deal with him.

Case stood alongside Kiyan, Camara, Keece and Paris. Dinero and Big had gone over to the bar to get a drink. Case still refused to drink after his incident with Kesla and Tisa. He didn't trust anyone to fix his drink, so he chose not to indulge.

“Cam, are you mad that you can't drink?” Case asked her.

She smacked her lips. “Hell yes. This breastfeeding shit is for the birds.”

Case laughed at her face because he could see that she was yearning for some alcohol.

“I swear, your brother better not get me pregnant again. All he wants do is see me barefoot and pregnant,” she fussed.

“Oh, girl, shut up. You know you like having Kiyan's babies,” Paris teased.

Camara rolled her eyes. “Whatever.”

Dinero and Big came back over to where they were standing.

“Aye, guess who I saw?” Dinero asked to Case.

“Who?”

“Miss Daisy.”

“Dinero, who is Miss Daisy?” Paris asked.

“Ol’ girl that Case was fuckin’ with. She’s lookin’ good too, fam.”

Case’s eyes wandered to the bar in search of Diar. When his gaze finally fell on her, he couldn’t help but lick his lips. She looked stunning and completely irresistible.

“You’re always giving somebody a nickname,” Paris laughed. “And don’t be saying that nobody look good either. I’ll call Asia to come set it off.”

Dinero waved his hand. “I’ll slap the shit outta Asia.”

Case walked away, leaving them to go back and forth. He approached Diar from behind and bent down to her ear. “Damn, I can see that ass even when you’re sitting down. Where’s your man at?”

Diar turned around with a smirk on her face. “You play too much.”

He chuckled and rubbed his hands down his waves. “Why didn’t you call and tell me you were home?”

She shrugged. "I don't know."

"When did you get back?"

"Two days ago."

"You're still not fucking with me?"

She smiled reluctantly, but said, "No."

"Well, that's too bad 'cause I'm still fuckin' with you."

He took a seat next to her. "Seriously though, are you doing better?"

"Yes, I am. I'm going back to work on Monday."

"I'm glad. I've been worried about your cute ass."

She smiled again. "Stop flirting with me."

"I can't help it. I know you're still mad at me, but I wanna make it up to you. I found out some crazy shit while you were gone, and I'm trying to get my mind right."

"What did you find out?" she quizzed.

"I don't want to get into it right now."

Diar sucked her teeth. "You can't say that and not tell me, Case. You know I'm nosey."

He chuckled. "Yeah, you are nosey as fuck. Let's go out into the hallway."

Case grabbed her hand and led Diar to a secluded area in the hallway of the venue. They sat on a bench and stared at each other.

“I missed you, baby. Give me a kiss, and I’ll tell you what I found out.”

Diar nudged him. “Why you can’t just tell me? Why do I have to give you a kiss?”

“Because that’s what I want. Now give it to me.”

Diar leaned over and tried to quickly peck his lips, but Case grabbed the back of her neck and stuck his tongue inside of her mouth. Their kiss had become intense, and Case loved every minute of it.

He forced himself to pull away.

“Stop trying to act like you didn’t want to kiss me either. You know you missed me as much as I missed you.”

Diar sighed and look down at her fingers. “I did, Case, but I needed some time away from you. You understand, right?”

He knew that he had hurt her badly, so he understood her stance. “Yeah, I get it.”

“So, tell me what’s up,” she reminded him.

“Oh, well, I found out some shit about Mariah. I haven’t even told anyone about this. You’re the first person I’m telling this to, so keep it to yourself, a’ight?”

She nodded.

“Well, I found out that Mariah killed herself on purpose.”

Diar gasped and covered her mouth with her hand. That was the first time that Case had uttered those words to anyone, other than Cheyenne, and it still pained him to think about it.

“Are you serious? How did you find that out?” Diar asked.

“Her mama found a diary that she kept, and she’d wrote about it. She was depressed, and nobody knew it. I was fucked up about it, but then I was mad. I was upset because she didn’t come to me and allow me to help her. I keep replaying shit in my mind trying to figure out if there were any signs that I missed. There were a couple, but I didn’t think much of it. I just thought that she may have been stressed because of school. I hate that she took herself out, but I have to officially let her go. So, I threw out anything that reminded me

of her. I also got the tattoo of her name covered up. I honestly shouldn't have gotten it in the first place.”

“The thing that pissed me off was that I was holding back from our relationship because I was still grieving over the loss of Mariah,” Case continued. “I’m sorry that I didn’t put you first, and I played with your feelings. I love you, Diar, and I’m sorry if I wasn’t honest about it. I feel fucked up, and I want you to forgive me. I’m not talking about some take-me-back kind of shit. I want you to forgive me for hurting your feelings.”

He could see tears gather in Diar’s eyes. He had been waiting to say that to her, so she could see that he was truly remorseful.

“I forgive you, Case, and I want to apologize too.”

He raised his brow. “Why are you apologizing?”

“Because I didn’t allow you enough time to heal. I may have been a little pushy, and I’m sorry.”

“You don’t need to apologize to me. We’re good. I’m just glad that you’re doing better emotionally. I wish I would’ve killed that fat ass ex of yours before someone else did.”

“How did you find out? Are you sure it wasn’t you?” she quizzed.

“Word of mouth and no it wasn’t me.”

She nodded, hoping that he was telling her the truth. “I’m just glad that he’s gone.”

Case nodded and caressed her cheek. He was happy that he didn’t have to fight Diar anymore. She seemed to be in better spirits, and he was relieved. He hated seeing her so broken and afraid.

“Well, I won’t keep you. I’m going to go back and kick it with my people. Call me when you need me.”

“Okay.”

They stood, walked back inside and went their separate ways. Case wasn’t letting Diar go, but she didn’t know that. He still wanted to give her a little time before he went to claim what was his. He had messed up once with her and made a vow that it wouldn’t happen again. For now, he was going to let her adjust to being home and then get his baby back.

Kesla slammed the clippers down on the sink and scoffed. She was trying to change her hair up, and she had done a terrible job on the cut. She attempted to shave the sides, but it looked choppy. She couldn't risk going to the barbershop because she was so paranoid. Kesla was already stretching it by going to work at night. Although her haircut didn't come out right, she was pleased with her dye job. She had dyed her hair honey blonde, which complimented her skin tone perfectly.

Kesla walked out of the bathroom and sat on the bed. She was still staying at the motel, which she hated. She was tired of killing roaches every other hour. She also was tired of eating McDonalds or Burger King. She would've killed to have a home-cooked meal. Leaving the motel was something Kesla didn't want to do because it was affordable and wasn't too far from the club. Besides, the motel was in a low-key location that made her feel somewhat safe.

Kesla grabbed her phone and scrolled through it. She found Julian's number and considered giving him call. She

privately dialed his number and anxiously waited for him to answer.

“Yeah.”

“Um... Can I speak to Julian?”

“Who is this?”

“This is Kes, I mean Keesha.” She almost forgot that she had given him a fake name.

“Oh, the cutie from Diamond’s. What’s up with you? Why did it take you so long to call me?”

Kesla smiled as she relished his sexy voice. “I’ve been a little busy.”

“Busy, huh? Well, we gon’ have to change that when it comes to me.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, really. How long have you been working at the club? I’m a regular there, and I have never seen you before the night I got your number.”

“I just started working there. I actually just moved here.”

“Where are you from?”

There was no way that she was going to tell him that her hometown was Milwaukee. So, she said the first city that came to her mind.

“I’m from Flint, Michigan.”

“Oh word? What made you come to Dayton?”

“I heard it was a great city.”

“Dayton is cool. You may like it. I wanna see you. I come back in town this weekend, and I want to take you out.”

Kesla was cool with just talking on the phone. She didn’t want to go out on a date with him.

“I have to work.”

“Yeah, but you don’t work during the day though.”

“I have a second job,” she lied. “I work at a local clinic.”

“Damn, girl, I see you trying to get that money. I ain’t mad about that. Well, let me know when you’re off, and then we can go somewhere and chill.”

Kesla breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay, sounds like a plan. I have to go, so I’ll call you soon.”

“A’ight, Keesha. Talk to you later.”

Kesla hung up and fell back on the bed. A part of her wished that she wasn't in hiding and could go out with Julian. He was handsome and sexy, and the fact that he was interested in her had her on cloud nine. Kesla didn't attract a lot of male attention. It had been that way all of her life. She didn't feel pretty, and others could see her low self-esteem. The only way she was able to obtain the attention of a male was if she approached him.

Kesla grew up without any kind of affection. Her mother had gotten married when she was around three years old and moved to another state to be with her husband. She left Kesla with Cheyenne who had basically raised her. Her aunt tried her best to take on the role of her mother, but it wasn't the same. She'd always craved that maternal affection, but it was never present.

Growing up, Kesla never felt good enough. She had always felt incomplete and unworthy. She desired attention, and she didn't care what kind she acquired. Many of her family members would always try to talk to her about her behavior, but she never paid them any mind.

Being the first guy that paid her attention, Kesla wanted to see Julian, but she didn't know how she would

make that possible without blowing her cover. She had to think long and hard because she really did want to get to know him.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Diar stood in her bedroom while unpacking her suitcase. She had been home for almost a week now and was finally going through her bags. She pulled out her notebook that Margaret had given her so she could look through it. When she opened it, the note that Jediah had given her, slipped out. Diar picked it up and read it once again. Something in her wanted to see how he was doing, so she grabbed her phone and dialed his number.

“Hello?” he answered.

“Can I speak to Jediah?”

“Who is this?”

“It’s Diar.”

“Damn, I didn’t even think you would call me. What has your fine ass been up to?”

Dial giggled. “Nothing much. I’m just getting situated. How have you been?”

“Shit, I’ve been coolin’. I have to go to work tonight.”

“Are you still a DJ?”

“Hell yeah. You know I’ll never stop the grind. Are you happy to be back home?”

“Oh my goodness,” Diar said with a sigh. “Yes, I am. I missed everything about home, especially my mama’s cooking.”

“That’s what’s up. I miss seeing you though. You should come see me.”

“See you where?” Diar asked with a twisted expression.

“In the Lou.”

“Boy, I don’t know you like that for me to come visit you. If you want to see me, then we can Facetime.”

He chuckled. “It’s like that? You wasn’t saying that when I was making that pussy leak.”

“I sure wasn’t, and you saying that isn’t going to change my mind.”

Diar walked over to the bed and laid back. Jediah was a very interesting person and she did enjoy their talks during their stay at the rehab center. She wasn’t going to fly to another state, so they could spend time with each other, however. She wasn’t that comfortable with him.

“Well, since you don’t want to visit me, I guess I’ll have to settle for Facetime. I was only trying to show you a good time around my city.”

“Yeah, well, give me some time to know you better and that may happen.”

“I guess I can deal with that.”

Diar and Jediah continued to chat for well over three hours. She learned that he was the middle child with two brothers. He was raised by a single mother and his grandma. The more that she conversed with him, the more she could sense that he was very smart. Jediah had graduated from high school at the age of sixteen and was awarded a full scholarship. He ended up dropping out of college to become a DJ.

“You have an interesting story, Jediah. You should have Lifetime do a biopic on you.” She laughed

“Shiiiiitt, not with the way they fucked up that Aaliyah movie. Hell nah.”

When her phone alerted her that someone was calling on the other line, she looked to see who it was. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw Case’s name.

“Jediah, I have to go. I’ll call you some other time.”

“A’ight. Be cool, Diar.”

Diar hung up from her call with Jediah and then hurried to click over. “Hello?”

“What are you doing?”

She closed her eyes and relished the voice that had such a huge effect on her. “Just laying here. What are you doing?”

“I just got home from work.”

“It’s one o’clock in the morning. Why did you get off so late?”

“I had a long session. This dude wanted his entire back done.”

“Oh, I bet you’re tired.”

“A little bit, but I want to see you. Come over,” he requested.

“I don’t have a car, and I don’t want to wake up my mama and ask if I could use her car. Plus, I don’t think she would even let me drive it.”

“What happened to your car?”

“Roman did something with it. The police haven’t found it yet.”

“Damn, well, can I come see you?”

Diar promised herself that she would fall back from Case, but seeing him at the event sparked old feelings. She missed him and wanted to see him.

“Yeah, you can come over. Make sure you text me when you’re outside.”

“A’ight, give me like thirty- minutes.”

“Okay.”

Diar hung up and went into the bathroom to get in the shower. She couldn’t contain her elation for seeing Case. For days, images of his face had haunted her mind. Diar couldn’t comprehend the enduring hold he had on her. She had tried on several different occasions to flee from his entrenched grasp, but nothing seemed to separate the love that they shared for one another.

After getting fresh, Diar sat on the bed and waited for Case to arrive.

Case drove in silence while on his way to see Diar. He had promised himself that he would give her more time to adjust to being at home, but he needed to see her. He strongly desired her scent, and he ached for her touch. Case couldn't shake her, and he didn't want to. Diar was someone who had come and arrested his heart. She owned it without a doubt, and he wanted to return the deed and entrust his heart with her.

Case pulled up and killed the engine. He sent her a text alerting her that he was outside. He got out of the car and walked up to the door. Diar stood with the screen open, wearing a wife beater and pajama shorts. Her nipples poked through the thin material, causing Case's dick to harden.

Diar put her finger up to her lip, so he would keep quiet. They quietly tip-toed back to her room and closed the door.

He chuckled. "You're too grown to be sneaking me in."

"Shut up. My parents don't play."

Case pulled her into him and gave her an affectionate hug. The couple stood in their position for a while just reveling each other's presence. He kissed her on her forehead before letting her go. He took his shoes off and then laid in the bed. Diar crawled next to him and snuggled under him. Case felt so complete with her in his arms. For weeks, he had longed for this feeling, and to finally have it in his possession had him overjoyed.

“Why haven't you gone home yet?” he asked.

Diar didn't answer him right away. After a long pause, she said, “I'm not comfortable being by myself. I know that Roman is dead, but I'm still scared to be alone.”

Case hated to hear that she was still fearful. “You don't need to be scared. I'm here for you.”

“You're here for me, huh?” She looked into his eyes and smirked. “How are you going to protect me when I might need protection from you?”

“Oh, it's like that?”

She smiled. “Yep. Now am I lying?”

“I know I hurt you, but I told you that I let some shit go, and I want to be all yours now. I'll wait if I have to. We

can do things on your terms.”

“Yeah, now I’m about to make your ass wait on me,” she teased.

“I’m cool with that.”

Diar leaned over and kissed his lips. He couldn’t get enough of her luscious kisses. Case rose up from his position and climbed between her legs. He pulled off her shorts and eyed her fat pussy. Her kitty was already glistening with her juices, causing him to lick his lips. Without warning, Case found his tongue swirling around her clitoris. He held her thick thighs in place as Diar placed her hand on the back of his head. She tasted even better than he remembered.

“Shit,” she hissed. “Fuck.”

Case slid two of his fingers into her dewy opening while still attacking her sensitive bud. He knew her body like he knew how to tattoo, and he could tell that she was on the verge of cumming. Her pussy muscles were clenching his fingers while her legs wrapped tighter around his neck.

“Oh, baby. I can’t hold it,” Diar whined.

Once she let those words escape her lips, Case sucked harder on her clit and fingered her faster. Within minutes, her

fluids were saturating his fingers while her legs shivered. He slowly pulled away from her hot box and looked up at her. Diar looked like she had run a marathon. Her hair was all over the place, and she was breathing as if she needed an oxygen tank.

Case smirked and pulled out a condom from his pocket. He pulled out his manhood and secured the rubber. He plunged his dick into her now soaking pussy and held it in place for a minute. Case needed to take a moment and enjoy his familiar place. He needed to savor the feel of her tight walls that made his body quiver. Diar was his home, and he was going to show her just how much he loved to be there.

Her juices were still smeared all over his mouth, so he bent down so she could taste herself. Diar hungrily kissed him while he rocked in and out of her pussy. Every stroke had weakened him to the point where he had to go at a slow pace.

“Damn, I missed this pussy,” he whispered and then gently bit her neck.

“I love this dick, Case. Don’t nobody know how to fuck me like you,” she whimpered.

“I love you, Diar.”

“Oooh, I love you too.”

Her words had moved him, and he began to thrust deeply into her.

“Is this my pussy?” Case leaned down and sucked on her aroused nipples as he awaited her answer.

“Mmmm,” she moaned and attempted to match his strokes.

“I asked you was this my pussy?” he demanded while pounding into her center.

“Yes, Case, it’s all yours!” she yelled out.

“You’re too loud.”

“I can’t help it. This dick feels so good. Make me cum again.”

Case sat on his knees and placed her legs in the crook of his arm. He worked her pussy like it was his special duty. The sounds of their love making filled the room, along with grunts and moans. Case was trying his best to hold his nut, but when he felt Diar’s walls contract around his dick, he couldn’t hold it captive anymore.

“Fuck,” he groaned as he released his seeds.

He looked down and saw her mess that their sex session had made. The contents of their fucking were all over the bed. Case was spent, but he needed another round. He was addicted to her pussy and couldn't wait to get another hit.

“Babe, I need some more,” he requested and then kissed her lips.

Diar smiled, turned over and tooted her ass in the air. Case bit his lip and proceeded into her moist tunnel where they made love for the rest of the night.

Kesla took a deep breath and exited the car. She couldn't believe she had agreed to meet Julian for dinner. She pulled her baseball cap lower to shield her eyes. She didn't want to take a chance on being noticed, so she added some sunglasses for extra insurance. Kesla walked into the restaurant. She spotted Julian sitting at a corner table while talking on the phone. She slowly proceeded over to the table and took a seat. Julian was wrapping up his conversation so she looked at the menu. After another two minutes, he finally got off the phone.

“What's up, Keesha? What's going on with the hat and sunglasses?” he questioned.

“My allergies have been acting up and my eyes are little irritated,” she lied so effortlessly.

“Oh, well, thanks for coming out to dinner with me. Your lil' ass has been dodging me ever since you gave me your number.”

Kesla chuckled because she had done her best to avoid going out with him. She was fearful that he may lose interest

so she finally agreed to go out to dinner.

“I wasn’t dodging you. I just have a lot on my plate as far as work.”

“I get it.” He nodded. “So why can’t I get your number?”

Kesla hadn’t given him her number because she didn’t want him having access to her. “I don’t like to give out my number to random men.”

“Well, I’m not random. I’ve been caking with your ass for some weeks now. Don’t you think it’s time that I get your number? I hate having to wait for you to call me.”

Kesla smiled at the cute pout that he had placed on his face. She wanted to say no, but she decided to give in to his request.

“Okay, I’ll give it to you.” She called his number from her phone so that he could have it.

Julian looked down at his vibrating phone and smiled. Kesla’s panties were soaking as she stared into his face. Julian was so sexy and charming. She loved the way that his eyes devoured her. She wanted him in the worst way.

“Now was that so hard?” he teased.

“No, it wasn’t. So tell me a little about yourself.”

“I’m thirty years old. I own two small businesses. I was born and raised in Dayton, but I do have a house in Memphis. I love old karate movies and my favorite food is pizza.”

“You don’t have any kids or a girlfriend?” she asked and then took a sip of water.

“If I had a girl, I wouldn’t be here with you. I don’t have any kids yet. Are you done being in my business?” he joked.

She laughed. “Yes.”

The couple talked about everything under the sun while they enjoyed their meals. Kesla made sure not to give up too much information on herself. Julian kept trying to pry, but she wouldn’t allow him into her personal business. She wished that they had met under better circumstances because she was really digging him. He was funny and down to earth, which she found very attractive.

“I’m going to wrap this up and take it home,” she stated, referring to her burger.

“So, do you have to work tonight?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Maybe I’ll come see you. You know I love those little outfits that you wear.”

“Oh, you do, huh?” she flirted.

“Hell yeah. I love the way your ass sits up in those shorts.”

Kesla grinned at him. He was making her feel so beautiful and sexy. No man had ever complimented her like that.

“Well, I’m glad...” She couldn’t even finish her sentence because she saw a police car pull into the parking lot. Her heart rate immediately accelerated and her hands became clammy.

“What’s wrong?” Julian questioned.

“Uh... nothing. I need to go to the restroom.”

Kesla jumped from her seat with her purse in her hand. She stormed into the bathroom and paced back and forth. She was starting to realize that being a fugitive was a hard task and extremely stressful. She hadn’t gotten any good sleep since she’d been on the run. Looking over her shoulder everyday was starting to take a toll on Kesla mentally and physically.

“I gotta find a way out of here,” she said frantically.

Kesla walked out of the bathroom and saw the backdoor. Without even thinking about it, she rushed out of the door and ran out of the parking lot. She didn't even look to see if the police car was still parked there. The only thing on her mind was getting far away so she wouldn't get caught. Kesla knew that Julian would be pissed about her leaving the restaurant without saying goodbye, but she didn't care. She would make up some kind of explanation later, but for now, she had to get back to the motel where she would feel safe.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Diar stood in the mirror while applying her mascara. She was on her way to work and was dead tired. Case had kept her up all night, and she was barely able to get four hours of sleep. It had been a week since their sexual encounter with each other, and the couple had been at it nonstop. Diar tried to stay away from him, but he was her addiction just like she was his. She was truly enjoying him and didn't have to wonder if he felt the same way.

“Are you ready?” Tina asked.

“Yeah, here I come.”

Diar walked back into her bedroom to put her shoes on. After she was completely dressed, she grabbed her purse and phone and then met her mother in the living room.

“I'm ready, Ma.”

“Is Stefani going to bring you back home?”

“Yes, she said she would. If not, I'll just ask Kayla or Case to come get me.”

“All right. Let's go.”

Diar and Tina walked out of the door and headed toward the driveway. All of a sudden, Diar stopped in her tracks. Her mouth was agape while her hand rested on her chest. She couldn't believe that she was staring at the car that she had been wanting for the past two years.

Screaming, Diar ran over to the shiny, black Jeep that had a red bow sitting on the hood. She grabbed the small card that was placed under the windshield wiper and smiled as she read it.

*I heard this was one of your dream cars, so I wanted to make it your reality.
Enjoy, baby.*

Case

“Ooh, let me see,” Tina asked and then took the card out of her hand.

Diar was in awe as she opened the driver door and hopped in. The interior was red leather with black trim. She could tell that Case had paid a nice penny for this car.

“That was really sweet of him, Diar. Make sure he doesn't get mad and try to take this car back. If it's not in your name, you need to make that happen pronto,” Tina instructed.

“I will, Mama, but watch out so I can go thank him,” she said, trying to close the door.

“All right and drive safely. No talking on the phone or texting while driving.”

“I won’t.”

Diar found the key in the glove box and started the engine. Her mother took the bow off of the car before she walked back into the house. Diar played with the radio so she could connect her phone to the Bluetooth. Once it was connected, Diar blasted Jacques’ latest mix-tape and drove to Case’s tattoo shop. She arrived after a twenty minute drive and walked inside. She was greeted by Leilah right away.

“Hey, Diar,” Leilah greeted. “I haven’t seen you in a while. How are you?”

“I’m good. Is Case here?”

“Yeah, but he has a client.”

“That’s okay I just want to say something quick to him.”

“Okay, cool.”

Diar walked back to Case’s station. He was tattooing a man who was getting some ink done on his back. She walked

over to him and bent down so she could whisper in his ear.

She kissed his cheek. “Thank you, honey. That was so sweet.”

He looked at her and grinned. “You like it?”

“You know I love it. I was so surprised when I walked out of the house. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome and try not to crash it, please.”

“You got jokes?”

“Nah, I just know your driving skills ain’t shit.”

Diar rolled her eyes. “Whatever. I have to go to work. I’ll see you later.”

“Bye.”

Diar walked out of the shop and headed to work. Case had truly made her day by purchasing her a new car. She had no clue how he knew that she loved Jeeps. Each day that passed, Case was showing her that she was his number one priority. During their first go round, she hadn’t been secure about the position in his life, but now, Case was assuring her that she was the only person he desired. She was so happy that she didn’t have to fight for his love anymore. They were both equally yoked, and she loved it.

Case was just finishing up his client's tattoo. He wrapped it up and walked him out to the front desk so that he could pay. Then, he went back to his station to text Diar. He wanted to see how she liked her car so far. Case had heard her on the phone with Kayla stating how she wanted a Jeep. Since she was in need of a new vehicle, he figured he would foot the bill for it. He didn't mind getting her whatever she wanted because she deserved it. He had put her through so much emotional turmoil that he felt like he owed it to her to buy her something nice.

"Hey," Leilah walked in interrupting his thoughts.

"What's up?"

"It was a nice surprise to see Diar come here. Are you guys back together?"

"We're just cool for right now."

Case didn't want Leilah in his relationship business, so he kept the details very vague.

"Well, I hope you guys get back together. You're really cute as a couple. Me and my guy finally got it together," she

said with a smile.

“Word? He finally took your silly ass back. You better not be trying to fight his mama no more.”

Leilah laughed hysterically. “Shut up. I should’ve never told your ass about that, but for real, we came to an understanding, so I think we’ll be fine.”

“That’s good. What happened with your mom? Is she okay?” he asked referring back to the accident.

She sighed. “She’s all right now, but she broke her ankle. My sister and I have been taking care of her.”

“That’s fucked up, but I’m glad she’s all right.”

“Yeah, me too. Some kids hit her,” she explained with a shake of the head. “These damn kids keep stealing these cars, when they know damn well they don’t know how to drive. I’m sick of it.”

“Yeah, one of those fuckers almost hit me the other night.”

“See? It’s getting crazy out here. I’m about to order lunch from Jimmy Johns, do you want something?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

“Okay.”

Leilah walked out of the room, and Case resumed texting Diar. He was glad that Leilah was carrying herself in a professional manner. He was afraid that their sexual encounter may have caused her to get a little crazy. He was happy that she was proving him wrong.

A week later, Diar walked out of work with Stefani. She had no plans since Case was hanging out with his brothers. She figured she would call Kayla, and they would go somewhere and hang out.

“I hope you don’t have fun on your little getaway to Fiji,” Diar teased Stefani.

“Don’t hate because my man likes to spoil me.”

Diar laughed. “Yeah whatever. Don’t get pregnant again.”

“I can, and I will!” Stefani yelled out.

Diar shook her head and got inside of the car. She cranked the engine and drove to her parents’ house. Case was pressuring her to go back home because he didn’t feel comfortable sneaking in to her parents’ house at night. Diar needed him to understand that she was still getting over her attack, and she didn’t feel comfortable being in her house alone. So, to shut him up, she would go and spend the night at his house.

When Diar arrived home, she got a call on her cell phone. She was expecting it to be Kayla, but was pleasantly

surprised to see that it was Jediah. They would talk or text whenever she wasn't around Case. Although her and Case hadn't made their relationship official yet, she still didn't want him to know that she was talking to another man.

Diar quickly answered Jediah's call before he hung up.
"Hello?"

"What's up, Diar? What are you doing?"

"I just got home from work. What's up with you? I haven't heard from you in a couple days."

"Man, I've been chillin', but guess what?"

"What?"

"I got booked at a club in Milwaukee tonight. I think it's at Lux. I wanted to surprise you, so I figured I would tell you when I got here."

"Wow, your lil' sneaky ass," she giggled. "So, I'm guessing you want to invite me, right?"

"Yeah, I haven't seen your pretty ass in a minute. Come through so I can show you a good time."

She laughed. "Boy, how are you going to show me a good time in my city? You sound crazy."

“Man, just come and wear something sexy for me.”

Diar rolled her eyes because he was talking like he was her man. “Bye, Jediah. I’ll stop by with my best friend.”

“A’ight, I’ll see you later.”

Diar hung up and went inside the house. She called Kayla to see if she would go with her, and Kayla agreed. Once she had confirmed the plan with Kayla, she got in the shower and got dressed. She sported a black duster, black bralette and black high-waist jeans. For her shoes, she decided to wear a pair of boots with fur around the ankle.

Diar’s face was beat with a natural make-up look and a dark lip. Her jet black hair was styled in a sleek ponytail to the back. Diar was feeling like her old self. Her confidence was through the roof, and she was no longer scared to live anymore. The only thing she needed to work on was staying in her home by herself, but she was certain that she would be able to tackle that obstacle in no time.

Since Kayla didn’t like to drive with Diar due to her horrible driving skills, she offered to come get her. Diar sat and browsed through her Instagram while she waited for Kayla.

After twenty minutes, Kayla had finally texted Diar to come outside.

“Don’t nobody take as long as you to get dressed. I’ve been waiting on your ass for almost an hour,” Diar fussed as she got in the car.

“I couldn’t find anything cute to wear, especially with me being bloated.”

“Girl, please, your closet looks better than mine.”

“Whatever.” Kayla waved her hand and then pulled off. “So, who the hell is this dude, and what kind of drugs was his ass on?”

“He’s someone I met at the center in Arizona, and he was addicted to pills.”

“Aw shit, a pill popper? I hope the corners of his mouth ain’t white. Those mothafuckas who pop pills don’t ever lick the corners of their mouths.”

Diar laughed so hard that she had tears in her eyes. “How do you know?”

“Girl, my brother pops pills, and his ass is always trying to talk to me with those dry ass lips. Before he can even

start his statement, I tell him to get the fuck outta my face looking like he been eating powder donuts all day.”

“I can’t breathe,” Diar managed to say between laughs.

“It’s the truth.”

The two continued to converse on their way to the club.

When they arrived, Kayla found a parking space and then they got out. The line wasn’t too bad, so they didn’t have to wait too long. The club was packed as the girls walked to the bar. Diar spotted Jediah in the DJ booth vibing out to his set. The patrons seemed to be enjoying what he was playing because they were on the dance floor dancing their asses off.

“Are you going to go say hi?” Kayla asked her.

“Yes, once I get my drink.”

The women got their drinks and walked over to Jediah. His eyes lit up once he saw Diar approach him. He looked good in a white bomber jacket, black Kaepernick jersey and black jeans. To complete his look, he wore some Black Timbs.

He wrapped his arms around Diar and gave her a strong hug. When he discreetly kissed her neck, she instantly felt uncomfortable, so she backed up.

“You look good,” he complimented her.

“Thanks. So do you. This is my best friend, Kayla.”

Kayla and Jediah shook hands. His eyes quickly came back to Diar. He licked his lips while Diar tried her best to avoid eye contact with him. She sipped her drink and bobbed her head to the music.

“You gon’ hang with me when the club closes?” he whispered in her ear.

“Hang where?”

“I don’t know. This is your city.”

“Yeah, but everything is closed after the club, except a couple of restaurants. Unless you want to go to the Casino.”

“Nah, gambling ain’t really my thing. Maybe you can come back to my hotel room.”

Kayla smacked her lips while Diar gave him a knowing look. She knew where he was trying to get, but she wasn’t going to go there with him. It was bad enough that she allowed him to play with her kitty while at the rehab center. She didn’t want to keep giving him the wrong idea, knowing that her heart belonged to someone else.

“Nah, I’m good on that, Jediah.”

“You sure?”

“Yes, I’m positive.”

Kayla leaned over and whispered, “His ass is too thirsty for me. Go get him a bottle of water.”

Diar playfully pushed her away while laughing.

“You want me to play something for you?” Jediah offered.

“Hmmm, I can’t really think of anything. Surprise me.”

He nodded. “A’ight.”

When he changed the song to Migos “T-Shirt”, Diar and Kayla couldn’t help but dance. She felt Jediah’s eyes on her the entire time. She decided to ignore him and have a good time with her bestie.

The night had flown by and Diar had enjoyed her time out. Jediah had even stopped being a creep and making her feel uncomfortable.

When the club closed, Jediah walked Diar and Kayla to the car. He wrapped his arm around Diar’s shoulders as they walked down the street.

“I’m glad you came to kick it with me. Next time, you and your friend have to come to the Lou, so I can show you a good time.”

“We’ll have to talk about that,” Diar said after they rounded the corner.

“Oooh shit,” Kayla suddenly said under her breath.

Diar looked to see what had her attention and almost shitted on herself when she saw Case walking over to her. She could tell by the expression on his face that he wasn’t happy. Despite his mean demeanor, Case looked good. His hair was freshly cut, along with his goatee. He donned a grey jacket, white T-shirt and black jeans. He wore a pair of black Yeezy’s to complete his ensemble.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” Case asked in a calm manner.

Diar slithered away from Jediah and replied, “I just came from the club.”

“You know that’s not what I’m asking. Why the fuck dude got his hands all over you? Did you lose your mind?”

Diar swallowed hard because Case had this look in his eye like he was ready to snap at any moment.

“Aye, bro, it’s not even like that. She’s just a friend,”
Jediah spoke up.

“I ain’t your fuckin’ bro, and I’m not talking to you.
Now, Diar answer my question,” Case demanded.

“He’s just a friend, Case, damn. Why are you coming
over here trippin’?” Diar fussed.

“I’m trippin’?” Case chuckled. “You got me fucked up.
Let’s go.”

Diar looked at Kayla, who had somehow found their
spat humorous.

“Girl, you better go before Case set it off up in this
bitch,” Kayla urged.

Diar shook her head and followed Case to his car. He
was walking like a mad man while she tried her best to keep
up with him. She walked past his brothers, who had smirks on
their faces.

“Miss Daisy, you gon’ get your ass beat for thinkin’
shit is sweet with Case,” Dinero blurted out.

They all burst out laughing while Diar rolled her eyes.
Dinero was an ass to her, and she didn’t like him very much.

“Shut up,” she spat as she got in the car.

Case started his car in silence and drove away. She knew they were about to argue once they made it to his home. She wasn't in the mood for his shit, but she did look guilty. Even if they hadn't confirmed their relationship, they still belonged to each other. Diar would've been upset if she saw him with his arm wrapped around a woman, so she understood his anger. She just hoped that this incident didn't cause him to revert to his old ways, because her heart wouldn't be able to take it.

Once they were in the house, Case let her have it.

“Why were you so cool with letting him walk with his arm wrapped around you?” Case questioned as he stood over her.

Diar sat on his bed trying to think of some kind of explanation that he would accept. He was looking at her like he wanted to knock the shit out of her. She was starting see a side of Case that he had kept hidden from her in the past. Most of time, he was caring and sweet, but Diar was learning that he could be very intimidating and demanding as well.

“I was wrong for that Case. I should've said something to him.”

“Ain't that ol' boy from the rehab center?”

Diar wanted to lie, but she couldn't. She had to keep it real with him, especially since he was the one that had remembered Jediah.

“Yes, that was him,” she mumbled.

“What the fuck?” he yelled, causing her to jump. “How long have you been fuckin’ with him?”

“I don’t fuck with him like how you’re thinking. We were cool at the center and exchanged numbers before we left Arizona.”

“Is that why you wanted me to stay away from you, huh? So you can start fuckin’ with his lame ass?”

“No, Case!” she hollered and stood face to face with him. “I needed you to stay away from me because I was so hurt.”

“Listen to me,” he demanded, pointing in her face. “I didn’t give you space so that you could start fuckin’ with somebody else. I thought I was doing you a favor so you could get yourself together. But you got shit twisted if you think I’m about to let you play me for a fool.”

“I can’t believe that you think my persistence to keep you away was so that I could get with Jediah.”

Case waved his hand dismissively. “I ain’t tryin’ to hear that shit. Stop tryin’ to play me, Diar.”

“Case, I’m not trying to play you. I’ve never played games with you. Why don’t you believe me?”

“Did you fuck him?” he quizzed, ignoring her question.

“No.”

“Let me find out you lying; I swear I’mma hurt your ass.”

Case walked into the bathroom and slammed the door. Diar plopped down on the bed in a frustrated manner. She wasn’t going to waste her energy with Case. She had already apologized, but he wasn’t willing to accept it. She didn’t want to stay at his house when he had an attitude, so she pulled out her cell and dialed Kayla’s number.

“So did Case put the paws on you for letting Jediah have his dehydrated hands all on his baby?” Kayla answered.

“Your ass isn’t funny. Can you come pick me up from Case’s house?”

“Why? What happened?”

Suddenly, the bathroom door opened, and Case stormed over to her. He snatched the phone out of her hand and put it up to his ear.

“Kayla, she don’t need no ride.” Then he hung up and put her phone in his pocket.

“Your ass ain’t going anywhere. I’ll take you home in the morning.”

“I don’t want to stay here with your mean ass. Just let me go back home, shit.”

“I’m not taking you home, and ain’t nobody coming to get you. You caused my fuckin’ attitude, so deal with it,” he spat as he walked back into the bathroom and slammed the door.

Diar rolled her eyes and took her shoes off. She was irritated that Case was making her stay with him when she didn’t want to deal with him at all. She took off her clothes and snuggled under the covers.

Just as she was dozing off, Case came out of the bathroom. He got in the bed, but he didn’t touch her.

“How long are you going to be mad?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he spat.

“You act like I cheated on your or something.”

“You would’ve been crying if it was me, so I don’t want to hear that.”

“I know, and that’s why I apologized. I didn’t mean to disrespect you, but I wasn’t aware that we were together yet.”

“I don’t see how,” he scoffed. “I spend all of my time with you. If I’m not at the shop, I’m with you. I bought you that Jeep, and I got that ADT system installed in your house so you could feel safe. I thought my actions were telling you that you belong to me.”

“You got a security system installed in my house?” she asked excitedly.

“Yeah. It was a surprise, but I’m going to have the people come and deactivate that bitch.”

Diar smacked her lips. “You’re so childish. Don’t do that, Case.”

He smirked. “I’m just fuckin’ with you. I don’t take shit back that I do for you.”

“Thank you, honey,” she cooed and then leaned in for a kiss, but Case turned his head.

“I still ain’t fuckin’ with you like that. Now go to sleep.”

Case turned his back on her and got comfortable under the covers. Diar shook her head and turned over as well. She was done trying to cater to him. He had worked her nerves enough, so she figured some sleep would do both of them some justice.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The next day, Diar found herself walking inside of the hotel where Jediah was staying. She had reached out to him so they could meet up. She wanted to apologize for the way that she had left last night. She didn't want him feeling some type of way about everything and wanted to make sure that they were good. Jediah had texted her his room number as she got on the elevator. Once Diar got to her desired floor, she walked to the door and knocked.

Seconds later, he answered the door fully dressed.

“What's up, Diar,” he greeted and then gave her a hug.

“Hey, Jediah. How are you?” she asked as she stepped inside of the room.

“I'm good. I'm glad you called me. I was about to call and see if you were all right. Your man wasn't too happy with you last night.”

Diar sighed. “No, he wasn't. He didn't like that you had your arm wrapped around me.”

“Is he always that aggressive with you?”

“What do you mean?”

“When he was at the center, I remember him yanking you back in your seat. Then last night, he was talking to you real crazy. Is that something you like?”

Jediah had struck a nerve with Diar. She didn't appreciate him questioning her relationship with Case. He knew nothing about Case, so he had no right to judge him.

“Case is a good man. He treats me very well. I don't really have to explain my situation to you, but just know that he's good to me. We were going through some things when I was at the rehab center. Wouldn't you be mad if you saw a man hanging all over your woman?”

“Yeah,” Jediah nodded. “I probably would.”

“See? Now stay out of my business, and we'll be good. I just wanted to come and apologize for last night. I know I probably put you in an awkward situation.”

“It's all good. My heart is a little broken, knowing that I don't have a chance with you,” he joked with a pout on his face.

She playfully rolled her eyes. “Boy, you know...”

Diar's words trailed off when she noticed a pill bottle on his bed. She reached over and grabbed it. Jediah tried his best to take the bottle from her hands, but he was too slow.

“Jediah, I know you're not taking pills again!”

“Man... those are just some Advil,” he explained and then waved his hand.

She gave him a knowing look and then opened the bottle. The pills looked nothing like Advil.

“Jediah, this ain't no damn Advil,” she scolded. “What kind of pills are they?”

He snatched the bottle from her hand and looked at her angrily. “Stay outta my fuckin' business.”

“Did you start back using pills?”

“No, I didn't,” he denied.

Diar stepped closer to him and held his hand. She wanted to look him in the eyes to see if he was lying. “Jediah, you can be honest with me. Did you start back using?”

He tried his best to avoid eye contact with her. After a long pause, he released a deep breath. “Yeah, I did.”

“Why though? You were doing really well.”

“I’m stressed, Diar,” he huffed as he plopped down on the bed. “My mom is sick. Her Lupus is getting really bad. I didn’t know how to deal with it, so I started using the pills again.”

Diar sat next to him. “I really hate to hear about your mother’s health. I really pray that she gets better. But your family relies on you, and you need to have a clear mind right now. You don’t need to be high around your family.”

“Diar, you wouldn’t understand, so don’t come over here preaching to me,” he spat and stood up.

“So you went to rehab for nothing?”

“Don’t worry about what I did. If I want to pop pills, then that’s my business. I’m not questioning you about your shit.”

“You know what? I’m going to mind my business. If you want to pop one hundred pills, then be my guest.”

Diar grabbed her purse and walked out of the room. She couldn’t believe that Jediah had resorted back to taking pills. She thought that he had made great progress at the rehab center. He was telling her that he had been doing well, but now that she had saw him up close and personal, she could see that

it was all a lie. Jediah needed help, but she wasn't equipped to give him what he needed. She would definitely say a prayer for him and hope for the best.

A week later, Case and Diar sat in his bed, sharing a deep conversation. The couple had just come from having dinner and a movie. He had gotten over his attitude about Jediah hanging all over her since Diar was showing him that she was sorry. Since he had been so closed off during their relationship, Case decided to open up about his past family drama.

“So, your mama lied on your brothers’ mother? Oh my goodness, that shit is crazy as hell. Did your dad do something to your mom for lying?” Diar asked as she laid across the foot of the bed.

“Shit, he divorced her. I think that hurt her badly. Ever since they separated, she’s changed. I know she wish that they could’ve stayed together, but my Pops wasn’t having that.”

“But he couldn’t stay with her knowing that she had separated his family. He would’ve lost the respect of your brothers if he’d done that.”

“That’s exactly why he did it. If he would’ve stayed with my mama, my brothers wouldn’t have fucked with him.

My Pops is all about his sons, so he had to do what he had to do.”

“I don’t blame him. Your mother’s spirit is all fucked up. I feel bad energy every time I’m around her ass,” Diar squirmed dramatically.

“She’s a trip, but that’s my mama though. I gotta love her.”

“Wow, Case. You’ve really been through so much; from your parents’ divorce, to being shot. Now to this bitch that drugged you. The police still haven’t found her ass?”

“Nah, they haven’t. Shit, don’t nobody know where her ass is. I know my brothers have been trying to find her too. I’ll probably find her before the weak ass police do,” he scoffed.

Diar hopped up from the bed and stood with her hands on her hips. “I bet her raggedy ass family knows where she is. They can’t pay me to believe that they don’t know her whereabouts. Let’s go over there and find some answers.”

Case laughed at the wicked expression on her face. “You want to go over there now?”

“Hell yeah. We need to let them know that we’re not playin’ with their asses. Plus, I want to beat that hoe’s ass

personally for sampling my good dick.”

Case laughed hysterically and shook his head. Diar was showing her crazy side, and he was loving every minute of it. “A’ight. We can go.”

“Are you serious?” she asked surprised.

“Yeah come on.”

Case and Diar put on their shoes and were out the door within minutes. Although it was ten o’clock at night, Case didn’t mind crashing Mariah’s parents’ home. He had been too nice to them, and it was time to show them that he was serious about finding Kesla.

After a short drive, Case pulled up in front of the house. The couple hopped out, and then Case began to bang on the door. He looked over at Diar, who had her pepper spray in her hand. Before he could say anything, the door opened, and he was greeted by Cheyenne.

“Case? What are you doing here?”

“Where the fuck is that niece of yours?” he asked calmly.

“Yeah, where the hell is Kelsey?” Diar yelled.

“Case, I already told you that I don’t know where she is, and her name is Kesla,” Cheyenne corrected Diar.

“I don’t give a fuck if her name was Ronny, Bobby, Ricky or Mike. You better tell us where this bitch is hiding,” Diar warned.

By this time, Roy had come to the door to see what the commotion was. Case scoffed once he stood next to his wife.

“What the hell is going on?” Roy asked.

“I wanna know where that bitch, Kesla, is! Y’all think this shit is a game, but I’m not playing with y’all! Give up her fucking location!” Case snapped.

“Now wait a minute. Case don’t bring this drama to my door step being disrespectful,” Roy scolded.

“Fuck your door step. You mothafuckas have been treating me like shit ever since Mariah died. I don’t give a fuck about y’all no more or being respectful. I know y’all know where she’s at.”

“We don’t know, Case,” Cheyenne stressed. “If we did, we would’ve called the police.”

“I don’t believe that shit,” Diar hissed.

“I don’t care what you believe, and I don’t even know you like that. You better relax, little girl,” Cheyenne retorted.

“And you better stop talking slick to my lady. I’m a leave, but I’m coming back every day until I get the answers I need.”

“Yeah, and I’m gonna be with him,” Diar added.

Case grabbed Diar’s hand and led her back to the car. Diar was still talking shit as she was being ushered into the passenger seat.

“Don’t get comfortable because we’ll be back!” Diar hollered.

He got inside on the driver’s side and pulled off. Once he turned the corner, he and Diar burst into a fit of laughter.

“Aye, how you gon’ talk shit, and don’t even know her name though?” Case laughed.

“Fuck her name,” she giggled. “I just wanted to know where her ass is at.”

“They know something, and I’m a keep coming back until they give me some answers.”

“Yeah, they know,” Diar agreed. “Don’t worry, Case; she’ll be found sooner or later.”

He nodded and continued to drive. His phone rang displaying Kiyán's number, so he answered.

"What's up, bro?"

"Shit. What the fuck you doing?"

"I'm riding with Diar right now. I'm about to go to the crib."

"Aye, come fuck with me at the house. I need somebody to talk to and I haven't seen your ass all week."

"Everything good?"

"Yeah, it's cool," Kiyán assured him.

"A'ight, I'm on my way."

Case hung up and then looked over at Diar, who had a pout on her face.

"Are you leaving me?" she asked.

"Just for a little while. I'm about to go chill with my brother."

"Okay." she sighed. "I guess I'll go wash my hair then."

"Yeah, and have that ass ready for me. You turned me on when you was going off on Cheyenne."

“I did, huh?” she flirted.

“Yeah, you had my dick hard as fuck.”

“I got you, boo. Just don’t be out too long.”

“I won’t.”

Kesla looked down at her ringing cell phone, wondering if she should answer. It had been a week since she had walked out on Julian at the restaurant. He had been blowing her phone up like she'd owed him money. Kesla felt bad about her behavior, so she decided to answer.

“Hello?”

“Damn, girl, I've been calling you for the past week. What the fuck is up with you?” he snapped.

“I'm sorry, Julian. I've been really busy.”

“I'm not trying to hear that shit. How you gon' walk out on me at the restaurant the other day? That was rude as fuck.”

The guilty feeling that Kesla was experiencing was growing by the second. She could sense it in his voice that he was fed up with her antics.

“I had an emergency and had to leave right away.”

“And you couldn't just tell me that?”

“I’m sorry, Julian. I really am.”

She could hear him sigh deeply. “Look, Keesha, I tried to be patient with you, but you play too many games. I think I’m going to give you some space.”

“Nooo,” Kesla begged. She really liked Julian and didn’t want to see him walk away. She wished that she could explain her situation to him, but she couldn’t trust him. He was the first guy to actually show interest in her, and Kesla didn’t want him to give up on their friendship.

“Listen, I’ll do whatever I have to do to make it up to you. I’m willing to explain my situation if you would let me. Please don’t give up on me just yet.”

“I don’t know, man,” he said with doubt laced in his voice.

“Please, Julian? I’m willing to do anything.”

“A’ight. How about you come over and chill with me?”

“Okay, I can do that. Send me the address, and I’ll be on my way.”

“A’ight, I’ll text it to you.”

Kesla hung up and went to take a shower. She was so relieved when Julian agreed to give her another chance. She

was messing up with him, but it was only for her protection. Kesla couldn't take a chance on him figuring out who she really was.

After slipping on a cute joggers set, she called an Uber and waited for her ride.

After twenty minutes, her driver finally arrived and drove her to Julian's house. When she pulled up, Kesla noticed that he lived in a duplex. She texted him to let him know that she was outside. She didn't want to get out of the car and walk up to the door since it was night time. When Julian stood on the porch, she finally got out and met him by the front door.

He hugged her and led her upstairs. The house was empty, except for a few boxes that sat along the wall. Kesla followed Julian to the bedroom which was fully furnished with a bedroom set and TV.

"Damn, I've never had to chase anyone down like I've been doing for you," he joked.

She smiled and then kissed his cheek. "I apologize. I haven't been on my best behavior. How can I make it up to you?"

He chuckled. "I can think of some ways."

Kesla could feel her body temperature rise. The look Julian was giving her was enough to make her panties drop.

“Have a seat,” he offered as he pointed to the bed.

Kesla kicked her shoes off and climbed on the mattress. Julian followed suit and got comfortable next to her.

“Are you hungry? I can order a pizza.”

“Yeah, that’ll be cool.”

Julian got his phone out and began to text. “They got this new app where you don’t even have to call and order. This shit crack because I can just text them what I want.”

“You’re geeked, huh?” she joked.

“Hell yeah. I order pizza like four to five times a week, so this app was right on time.”

Kesla nodded while watching the movie that was on the TV. She was extremely nervous, but she did her best to try and mask it.

After Julian placed his order, he looked up at her and licked his lips. His hand found her hip and began to caress it.

“So, what’s your deal?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Why are you so hard to get through? Why are you so secretive? Tell me what you’re hiding.”

Kesla avoided eye contact with him and looked down. She couldn’t tell him the truth. They hadn’t known each other that long for her to confide in him.

“You don’t want to tell me?” he asked.

“It’s not that. It’s just... I don’t know.”

“Are you in some kind of trouble? Is there someone after you?” he quizzed.

“I... it’s a complicated...” Her sentence was interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell.

“That’s probably the pizza man. I’ll be back.”

Kesla watched as Julian walked out of the room. *How can I get away from this conversation?* she wondered to herself. She was feeling uncomfortable with his questions. Kesla was already doing too much by coming to see him, so he needed to be satisfied with her efforts. She didn’t need to answer his twenty-one questions.

Kesla adjusted her position in the bed and began to play a game on her phone. When she heard a bunch of footsteps, her antennas went up. She got the shock of her life

when Case appeared dressed in all black. He was followed by four other men, including Julian. She frantically hopped up from the bed and cowered in the corner.

“What’s up, lil’ bitch?” Case greeted her with a smirk on his face.

Kesla was completely speechless. Her hands were shaking as if she was going through withdrawal symptoms. Her heart was beating so fast that she thought it would burst at any minute. She tried to find any words, but they had escaped her.

Case laughed. “I see you’ve met Julian aka my brother, Kiyon.”

“Kiy, why did you come up with that gay ass name?” Dinero questioned.

Kiyon shrugged. “Shit, I don’t know. It was the first name that came to mind.”

“Kesla, what happened to all that shit you were talking? You swore up and down that Case wouldn’t find you. Now look at your busted ass. You quiet as fuck right now?” Big taunted her.

Kesla's chest heaved up and down as she stared at Case. He had definitely caught her slippin', but she wasn't going to go out like a coward. She still won the game in her twisted mind.

"Fuck y'all, and, Case, I'll always have the privilege of drugging you and taking your dick, bitch," she spat with her head held up high.

Dinero shook his head. "Your Hey Arnold lookin' ass still talking shit? Bitch, I thought of a gruesome death for you. You should be begging and pleading."

"For what? What the fuck do I look like beggin' y'all for my life when you're going to kill me anyway? Julian, you ain't shit!" she yelled.

"Bitch, my name ain't no fuckin' Julian," Kiyon spat, causing his brothers to laugh hysterically.

Kesla was hurt because she really liked "Julian," but to find out that he was actually Case's brother set her off. When Case advanced toward her, she jumped across the bed. She knew she had nowhere to go, but she still wanted to put up a fight. Dinero grabbed her and roughly pushed her down on the bed. Kesla began to swing and kick wildly. Dinero restrained her arms as Case ran over and punched her hard in the nose.

With that one punch, Kesla slid to the floor and fell into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Case stood and watched as Dinero taped Kesla's hands together. She was laid in the trunk of a car with cement blocks holding down her limbs. Dinero had thought of a clever way that Kesla could suffer and die at the same time. The car belonged to a local hype that had traded it off for drugs. Now the brothers were posted at Lake Madison watching Kesla wake up.

Case smirked as she began to panic. Her mouth was taped up, so she was unable to make a sound. She had bucked and tried her best to get out of her position to no avail.

"You ain't going anywhere," Kiyon informed Kesla.

She mumbled something inaudible while tears gathered in her eyes. Seeing Kesla with tears in her eyes caused Case to smile. He hoped that she was realizing that she was about to die.

"Dinero, how the fuck did you come up with this shit? You be thinking of some weird ass ways to kill somebody. I'm worried about you," Keece said as he sparked up a blunt.

Dinero shrugged. “This came to me in a dream, so I had to do it.”

“Kiyan, how did you know that this was Kesla?” Big asked.

“Case showed me a picture of her. So, after me and Dinero handled our business shit, we went to a strip club. When I saw her at the club working, I had to make sure that was her. I asked Dinero, and he confirmed it. That’s when the idea to act like I was interested in her popped in my head.” Kiyan turned to Case. “Aye, your ass owes me big time for this. Cam was all over my ass until I finally told her what I was doing. She thought I was fuckin’ around on her.”

“You came through for me, so I got you,” Case assured him.

“Aight, y’all come on and kill this bitch. I’m hungry as fuck,” Big complained.

“Wait, we gotta finish the blunt first.” Dinero grabbed it from Keece and took a pull. He then dumped some ashes on Kesla, who was still trying to break out of the tape.

Dinero tried to hand the blunt to Case. “Here, hit the blunt one time.”

“Nah, I’m good,” Case declined.

“Man, come on, and stop acting like a bitch,” Dinero shot.

“Damn, nigga, he doesn’t want to smoke,” Keece defended Case.

Dinero smacked his lips. “If you don’t hit the blunt, I swear I’ll let this bitch go.”

“We’ll jump your ass out here if you even think about doing that shit,” Big warned.

“Damn, man, give it to me.” Case grabbed the blunt and took a couple pulls.

“That wasn’t that hard, now was it?” Dinero finished off the blunt, and then threw it at Kesla.

Kesla had been quietly sobbing before, but, now, her moans were louder. Case shook his head at the tears that continued to spill from her eyes. He had no sympathy for her and was glad that she would finally be taken care of.

Case shut the trunk while Dinero leaned inside of the driver’s side and switched the gear shift to drive.

The vehicle slowly proceeded into the water. Case got a sense of satisfaction as the car was gradually being

submerged in the water. He knew that Kesla was panicking by that time. She needed to die a painful death because she had caused so much turmoil in Case's life.

“You think they will find the car?” Kiyam asked no one in particular.

“Probably.” Big shrugged. “Let's go. I'm ready to go back home.”

The brothers hopped into the rented SUV and drove off. They stopped to get something to eat before boarding their jet home.

Case slipped in bed right behind Diar and kissed the back of her neck. She shuffled a bit before waking up. She looked back at him and rolled her eyes.

“Where the hell have you been?” she questioned.

“Why?” he smirked because he knew she would get irritated by his question.

“Because I want to know. Now where were you?”

He kissed her neck again and rubbed her nipples. “If you give me some pussy, I’ll tell you.”

“Why do you always do that? I’m not giving you anything, until you tell me where you were.”

Case had hiked her leg up and slid his erect penis into her moist pussy. Diar had talked a good game, but she’d barely put up a fight. He gave her deep thrusts while licking her ear.

“Why you acting like you didn’t want this dick?” he taunted while trying to find her G spot.

Diar couldn’t do anything but moan as Case worked her walls. He buried his face into the crook of her neck and

held her tightly. Diar's wet center was performing some kind of magic on Case and he could barely stroke her.

"Damn, baby, this pussy gon' make me get you pregnant," he groaned feeling like he would bust at any minute.

"Go harder," she requested and then put an arch in her back.

Case gripped her hips and started hammering into her sex. His dick was pulsating, alerting him that his nut would be arriving soon. Diar's pussy muscles clenched around his manhood as her legs began to shake. Soon after, Diar's juices flooded his dick. Case hurried and pulled out, so he wouldn't cum inside of her. He couldn't even come down from his sexual high before Diar questioned him.

She turned over to face him. "Okay, now where were you?"

"Damn, can I nut first?" he quipped.

"You did already. Now, spill it."

"A'ight. We found Kesla."

Diar gasped. "For real? Where was she?"

“In Dayton, Ohio. My brother found her when he went there for business. He played her into thinking that he wanted to fuck with her. She took the bait and got caught.”

“So, what happened to her? What did you do?” she asked eagerly.

“I’m not telling you that.”

She smacked her lips. “Come on, Case. I need to know.”

“Don’t worry about all that. Just know I won’t have to deal with that bitch again.”

“You’re so unfair. If I would’ve known you were going to withhold the details, I would’ve denied your ass when you wanted to fuck.”

He laughed. “You were wet as fuck. You wanted this dick, so shut up.”

“That’s what you think,” she shot and got up to go to the bathroom.

Case laid on his back with his hands locked behind his head. He was so relieved that he had the burden of finding Kesla off of his shoulders. He could now breathe a sigh of

relief, knowing that she was dead and that he didn't have to deal with her or Mariah's family ever again.

The next day, Case walked into the shop and went to his office. He had some tattoo conventions that were requesting his attendance, and he wanted to send them a confirmation email. He felt someone's presence's in the room, so he looked up and saw that Leilah was standing by the door.

“Why the hell are you standing there?” he asked and continued to send his email.

“Um, I wanted to talk to you.”

“A'ight. Come in.”

Leilah walked inside and took a seat. Her arms were wrapped around her body. The distressed expression on her face told him that something was off.

“What's wrong?”

“A lot,” she stressed and then rubbed her hands down her face.

“Like what? Leilah, spit that shit out,” Case spat, not in the mood for her riddles.

“I found out I was pregnant.”

Suddenly, the room was so quiet that he could hear a pin drop. Case sat back in his seat and gave her an intense stare. This couldn't be happening to him. He was for sure that Leilah had gone to get a Plan B pill after they'd had sex.

"I thought you went to get that pill?"

"I was going to, but I forgot to go due to my mom being in that accident," she explained.

"What the fuck? Don't give me that lame ass excuse, Leilah! You could've gone to get it the next day! You're full of shit!" he barked ready to slap her out of the chair.

"Case, I was so worried about my mom that it slipped my mind. Do you think I would do this on purpose?"

"You're on that bullshit!" he stood and began to pace back and forth.

Case rubbed his hands down his hair with thoughts of Diar clouding his mind. What would she think of the news of him getting his receptionist pregnant? They were in such a good space, and he had already taken her through a lot. He couldn't even fathom what she would do if she found this out.

"Case, I'm sorry. I know I fucked up, but it was an honest mistake. It's possible that it could be my boyfriend who

is the father as well.”

Case smacked his lips and then rolled his eyes. He had no idea that Leilah was this careless.

“You’re fucking up my life with your irresponsible ass. What the fuck am I supposed to tell Diar? Shit, what am I gon’ tell Keece? He’s about to be pissed, knowing that we fucked around.”

“I don’t know,” Leilah cried. “I don’t want to be in this situation either. It’s fucking embarrassing that I don’t know who I’m pregnant by. My boyfriend is going to fucking leave me when he finds this out.”

Case waved his hand, not really caring about her situation with her boyfriend. This entire dilemma could’ve been avoided if she would have just taken the Plan B pill.

“How far along are you?” he asked.

“I’m four weeks.”

“Why do you think that it could be your boyfriend’s baby? I thought y’all were broken up?”

“We were still having sex.”

Case shook his head, not believing that he could potentially be having a baby with someone other than Diar.

“Do you want me to have an abortion?” she asked.

“I’m not about to help you make that decision. That’s all on you,” he hissed.

Case didn’t want her blaming him if he had told her to have an abortion. He didn’t want that kind of burden on him, so he insisted on that being her choice.

“I fucked up big time, and I apologize. I really don’t know what to do. Please don’t be mad at me.”

Case smacked his lips. “Get out, Leilah. I don’t feel like talking anymore.”

She hurriedly scurried out of the office without another word. Case was defeated as he sat down in his chair. He was so mad at himself for even taking his relationship with Leilah to a sexual level. They shouldn’t have been intimate, especially with her working for him.

Case suddenly started to feel ill. There was no way that he could work with his nasty predicament on his mind. He grabbed his keys and walked out of the shop. He needed to be alone with his thoughts, so he went home.

It had been two days since Leilah had revealed that she was pregnant, and Case was still in a dreary mood. Each time that he thought about it, he began to feel sick to his stomach. Diar had picked up on his distant behavior and questioned him about it. He would assure her that everything was okay, but it wasn't. He had a revelation that would most definitely break her heart, and he wasn't looking forward to doing so.

Case figured the first person to tell was Keece. He wanted to get him out the way before he told Diar the big news. Case had called him to come over, so he could speak with him face to face.

“Okay, I made sure I hung up everything in your closet. Do you need me to take anything else?” Celine asked.

She had stopped by to drop Case's dry cleaning off. She was only supposed to stop by for a minute, but, of course, she had stayed longer than expected.

“Thanks, Ma, but I'm good. Are you about to leave?”

“Yes, I have a nail appointment, so I'm going to get going.”

The doorbell rang, so Case went to open the door where he was greeted by Keece.

“What’s up, bro?” Case said and then gave him a brotherly hug.

He was hoping that Celine would have been gone by the time that Keece had arrived. He didn’t want the tension between the two to be awkward. He watched as Celine crossed her arms and smiled.

“Well, hello, Keece. Long time no see,” Celine spoke.

“What’s up, Celine?” Keece responded coolly.

“How are Paris and the girls?”

“Good.”

She cleared her throat. “It sucks that we don’t speak anymore. It seems like you and your brothers just forgot about me.”

Case shook his head because he could see that this conversation was going to go left really quick. When Keece shot Celine a glare, he knew that things were about to get out of hand.

“You know why we don’t speak,” Keece quipped.
“Don’t come to me with that fake shit, Celine.”

“Yeah, but you guys act like I didn’t raise you all,” she argued.

“But you didn’t have to. You could’ve let my mama raise her own damn kids. I really don’t see how you don’t see any wrong in what you did.”

“I know I was wrong.”

“Well, act like it then. As a matter of fact, stop talking to me about this shit. You got one son, so tend to him, and stop worrying about me, my brothers and my mama.”

“I don’t care about your mother,” she scoffed.

“Yeah right. You’ve been caring about her ever since she got with my Pops.”

Case was stunned at the words Keece had spewed at Celine. He could tell by the expression on Celine’s face that she was devastated. Case didn’t understand why she had to start that conversation with Keece in the first place.

Celine shook her head. “You’re out of line, Keece.”

“Out of respect for Case, I’m going to stop talking to you now,” he said and then walked into the kitchen.

For some reason, Case felt bad for his mother. He could see that she was hurt, and even though it was her fault,

he hated to see her like that. He walked over to her and gave her a hug.

“Just go. I’ll call you tomorrow,” he told her.

She nodded, grabbed her purse and then walked out of the door. Case walked into the kitchen and saw Keece looking inside of his fridge.

“You ain’t got shit in here,” Keece joked.

“Get out of my shit anyway.”

“Aye, your mama needs a reality check. I didn’t curse her out like I wanted to because I don’t want to disrespect you, but she better leave me alone with her bullshit.”

“Man, I’m not trying to be in that shit. I got enough on my plate right now.”

“What did you want to talk to me about?”

Case was dreading every moment of his impending revelation. The fact that Keece was already irritated almost caused him to renege.

“I may have gotten someone pregnant,” Case announced.

“Who? Diar?”

A pain shot through Case's chest, wishing that it was indeed Diar who was carrying his child.

“Nah, it's actually ... Leilah.”

Keece cut his eyes at him. His stare was fierce and intimidating. After a moment of silence, he shook his head in a disappointing manner.

“That's bad for business, Case. Why the fuck did you go there with her? And you ain't use no condom? Man, you're trippin'.”

“I did use a condom, but it broke.”

“How long have you been fucking her?”

“I only fucked her once.”

“Why she didn't go get that plan B or some shit like that?”

“She was supposed to, but her mama got into a car accident. She claims that she forgot. I'm still mad about that shit because she could've gone the next day and it would have been effective.”

Keece continued to give him discouraging looks. Case hated that he had disappointed his brother because he truly looked up to him.

“I don’t want you to start having kids all over the city. If I could go back, I would’ve only had my kids by one woman. I’m saying this because I know you ain’t trying to be with Leilah like that, right?”

“Nah, you know I wanna be with Diar.”

“Have you told her yet?”

Case released a deep sigh. “Nah, I don’t even know if I should tell her. Leilah said the baby could be her boyfriend’s.”

“Yeah, but you still need to tell her, because if you keep it from her, it could blow up in your face in the end.”

Case nodded because what Keece was saying was true. He didn’t want to keep everything a secret if the baby ended up being his. He definitely didn’t want to hurt Diar like that.

“Now, I gotta fire her ass. She violated the company’s policy.”

Case smacked his lips. “What policy?”

“No fucking the boss.”

“Where is the policy, because I don’t remember seeing it?”

Keece laughed. “I just made it up.”

Case shook his head and chuckled. “This shit is crazy. I can’t believe I got myself in this situation.”

“I don’t believe that you only fucked her once either.”

“I swear I did. As soon as I busted my nut, I knew that shit was a mistake.”

“What do you think your girl is going to do?” Keece asked, referring to Diar.

Case pinched the bridge of his nose and sat in deep thought. The thought of Diar leaving him made his heart palpitate. “I don’t know. I hope she don’t leave me.”

“I hope not either, but keep in mind that it’s a strong possibility that she will.”

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y

Case had finally persuaded Diar to move back home. After he showed her how to use her ADT security system, she felt a little better about staying in her place alone. Yes, she knew that Roman was dead, but she was still a bit fearful. Diar was so happy to be back in her place. She missed her house immensely, especially her bed. Her parents had assured her that she could stay at their place a little longer, but she felt like it was time to get back on her own.

Diar was currently waiting on Case to arrive. He told her that he had some things to talk to her about. She didn't have a clue of what it could be since everything had been going well in their relationship. She had never felt so happy in her entire life. Case was showering her with love and attention, and Diar basked in every minute of it. She had yearned for his affection all along and was glad that he was naturally giving it to her.

When her doorbell rang, she bolted to the door to open it. Case stood looking good with his snapback on backwards. He was growing his hair out a little, and she was loving his

curly cut. Diar wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed his lips.

“I missed you,” she sang inches away from his lips.

He kissed her again. “I missed you too.”

Diar let him go and ushered him into the living room. She turned the TV on and sat next to him with her feet propped up in his lap. Instinctively, he began to rub her feet.

“So, what’s up, Case DeMao?” she kidded.

Case appeared to have something on his mind. When he looked at her, Diar could sense a hint of sadness in his eyes.

“I need to tell you something.”

Right away, her heart rate accelerated. She was on the edge of her seat as she stared at Case. She knew that it would be bad news just by the tone of his voice.

“What it is?”

He gave her another look that she couldn’t quite read before he said, “I might have gotten somebody pregnant.”

It seemed like all of the color drained from her skin. Diar knew she had heard him wrong. He couldn’t have possibly said that he’d gotten someone pregnant. She closed

her eyes briefly, hoping that it was all a dream. When she opened her eyes, Diar was disappointed to see Case with that same depressive look on his face.

“Pregnant? I know you’re playing, right?”

“I wish I was, but I’m not.”

“So... who’s the girl?”

“I don’t even wanna tell you,” he stressed.

“Who the fuck is it, Case?” she spat, not in the mood for games.

“It’s Leilah,” he replied, making sure to avoid any eye contact with her.

Diar shot up from the couch and stood in front of him. The anger that was swimming through her body was enough to provoke her to kill him.

“You’ve been fucking this bitch behind my back this whole time?”

“Hell nah. I didn’t fuck with her until we broke up.”

“You’re full of shit, Case! You had this bitch smiling in my face when you knew you were fucking her!”

Case stood up, so that he could look Diar in her face. “Listen to me, I didn’t fuck her until I came from seeing you at the rehab. I only fucked her once.”

“Yeah, and you fucked her raw at that!” she retorted.

“No, I didn’t. The condom broke, and I didn’t realize it until after we were finished. Diar, baby, you gotta believe me. I would never lie to you about something as serious as this.”

Diar walked away from him and stood on the other side of the room. She couldn’t even stand to be near him. She was hurt, crushed and devastated all wrapped in one. She had never dealt with a man who had a child and couldn’t see herself doing it now.

The room was eerily quiet as Diar tried to regulate her breathing. Once again, Case’s betrayal had knocked her back ten steps emotionally.

“I don’t know how you think we’re still going to be together after this shit.”

Case looked at her with worried eyes as he walked over to her. He tried to reach out for her, but Diar snatched away.

“Don’t do me like that, please,” he begged.

“Do you like what?” she barked. “You got your fucking receptionist pregnant and you expect me not to be upset? This shit hurts, Case.”

The tears that Diar was desperately trying to hold captive finally rushed out of her eyes. It was always something with Case. She wondered why their relationship had to have so many obstacles. She honestly was starting to feel like he wasn't the person she was supposed to be with.

“I know this shit looks bad, but it's a fifty percent chance that I'm not the father. She told me it could be her boyfriend's baby.”

“Oh, so is that supposed to make me feel better? What's crazy is that you had a problem with my friendship with Jediah, when all along you've been fucking your lil' receptionist. Case, you really ain't shit,” she cried.

Case said nothing as he pulled her into his embrace. Diar wanted to push him away, but the pain had immobilized her. Her heart was just restored only for it to be broken once again.

“I'm sorry, a'ight? I don't have an explanation for you. I shouldn't have gone there with her at all, and I'm sorry for hurting you once again. But you need to know that I only

fucked her once. It happened when we weren't speaking to each other. I just need you to ride this out with me. I can't lose you again."

Diar was a ball of confusion as she listened to his words. She didn't know what to say. She loved him with the depths of her soul and saw herself marrying him. On the other hand, she couldn't see herself playing step mother to someone else's kid. Diar had visions of her bearing his first child, and to know that someone had beat her to the punch left her bruised.

Case lifted her face so that she could look at him. "I know it's selfish to ask, but I really just need you to rock with me. I can't go back to not having you in my life. It would kill me, baby."

Diar wanted to say no, but she couldn't. Somehow, her mouth wouldn't even form the word. Instead, she remained silent and continued to wipe her tears.

"I promise I will make it up to you somehow. Just stay by my side in this."

"I need some time to myself. Can you just leave?"

Case looked like he wanted to protest, but Diar gave him a look that screamed get out. She honestly didn't want to

be in his presence at the moment.

“A’ight.” He sighed. “Please answer the phone when I call.”

Diar nodded and watched him walk out of the front door. She then treaded to her couch and plopped down. She didn’t expect her day to go from sugar to shit all within twenty minutes. She needed Case to leave so she could think about things without him all up in her face. Diar’s heart was telling her to stick with him and be his supportive partner, while her mind was telling her to cut her losses and move on.

Case sat in his car feeling like the most terrible man in the world. He was still parked outside of Diar's house and was contemplating on if he should go back inside. He felt like shit for breaking her heart once again. Case didn't know what to do to take her away her pain. He pulled out his cell and texted Keece.

Case: I told Diar about Leilah. I don't think she's fuckin' with me anymore.

Minutes later, Keece responded.

Keece: On what? What did she say?

Case: She was mad af. She thinks that I've been fuckin' with Leilah.

Keece: I do too. LMAO. Nah, but for real, if you really want her, then you have to fight for her. Don't just let her walk away from you.

Case knew that getting Diar to see that him and Leilah had only been intimate once would be hard, but he was determined to do it. Keece was right. Diar belonged to him, and Case wasn't going to allow her to walk out of his life without a fight. For now, he would allow her a night to be alone, and then get back to begging her to stay in his corner.

Case: I love you, Diar, and I'm going to make it right.

Diar sighed as she stared at the message. She was so hurt that she couldn't even receive his words, but she still decided to text him back.

Diar: I love you too.

She was posted at Kayla's house filling her in on her relationship woes. It had been two days since Case had revealed Leilah's pregnancy, and she still felt like shit. Diar grabbed the wine glass and gulped it down. She needed something to take her mind off of the bullshit that she was going through with Case.

"So, do you want me to tell you the real or what?"
Kayla asked.

"I'm sure I don't have a choice, now do I?"

"Nope, you don't."

"Well, go ahead."

Kayla stood in dramatic fashion as if she was getting ready to give a speech. Diar chuckled at her antics because she knew that she was about to say something crazy.

“So, here’s my take on everything. You don’t have to deal with this bullshit. You have no ties to Case. You’re not married to him, so you’re free to walk away from him. Diar, you’re young with no kids and a promising future. You don’t have to settle.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“But I know that you love Case. He really seems like a great guy, and I know that it’s hard to walk away from someone who you love and is so good to you.”

“I’m not gonna lie, Kay; I’m torn. I feel like he cheated on me, but he didn’t. I also don’t believe that he only fucked her once.”

“I know. It’s almost like you don’t know what to believe. But there is a chance that the baby is not his. So, if you were to leave him, and it came out that he wasn’t the father, it would be like you walked away for nothing.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” Diar agreed.

“So you can either walk away with your head help up high, or you can’t stick it out with him. It’s your call.”

“It’s not that simple, Kay. I wanna be with him, but I don’t want to have to deal with another woman and a baby.”

Kayla sat next to her and rubbed her back. “I understand, and I won’t judge you if you stayed.”

Diar turned to her and asked, “If you were in my shoes, what would you do?”

“Hmm,” Kayla thought. “I would stay with him honestly. You don’t know if that baby is his, and I just wouldn’t want to give my man up for something that’s not definite. But that’s me though. You have to make your own decision.”

That was the hardest part for Diar. She didn’t know what to do. Her heart was being torn into two different directions.

“Besides, it’s not like he cheated on you. You guys were broken up when he fucked ol’ girl. Don’t act like you ain’t let Jediah play with your little coochie when you were at the rehab center.” Kayla laughed.

Diar rolled her eyes because her encounter with Jediah wasn’t the same as Case possibly getting another woman pregnant.

“Girl, bye, because I didn’t let Jediah stick his dick in me and get me pregnant,” Diar noted.

“No, but you was still doing your thing, so you can’t be mad at Case doing his thing.”

Diar didn’t have a comeback, so she remained quiet. Talking about the messy situation had caused her to get a headache. She knew that a talk with Case needed to happen, so that they could sort through their dilemma together. Diar just wasn’t looking forward to it.

“Do what you have to do, friend. You know I’ll be here to pick up the pieces with you.”

Diar smiled. “You really are a terrible, friend,” she joked.

“I know. Now let’s go get something to eat because I’m starving. Shit, I’m about to eat like Case cheated on me.”

Diar laughed and shook her head. She was so grateful for her friendship with Kayla. She always gave her the truth and never steered her wrong. She wouldn’t trade their relationship for anything in the world.

Diar pulled up in the back of the tattoo shop and killed the engine. She was finally meeting with Case so they could discuss their relationship. She had prolonged it for as long as she could, and it was finally time to put everything on the table. Diar grabbed her phone and texted Case to let him know that she was outside. After a while, he emerged from the shop and headed toward her car. Her heart still skipped a beat whenever she was in his presence. The amount of love she held for him should've been illegal. He walked up to her and pulled her into his arms. Diar could feel the same tingle she always felt whenever she felt his touch. She pulled back and kissed his lips.

“What’s up?” he asked.

Diar nervously ran her fingers through her hair. “I was hoping that we could talk about our situation.”

He nodded. “Yeah, we need to. I need to know where your head is at.”

“First off, is she in there?” Diar asked, referring to Leilah.

“Yeah, she is.”

Diar instantly caught an attitude. She hated the fact that Leilah was still working there.

“Fix your face. Keece told her that she had to find another job, so he’s giving her time to do that,” Case said.

Diar inhaled deeply in an attempt to calm her nerves. “I’ve been thinking about a lot of shit, Case.”

He grabbed her hand. “Like what? Tell me what’s on your mind.”

“You know how much I love you. You are someone who has come in and taken over my heart and feelings, but I don’t know if I want to stay in this relationship.”

She watched as Case looked away and blew out an exasperated breath. He let her hand go and crossed his arms over his chest. She knew that it wasn’t what he wanted to hear, but she had been thinking long and hard about her decision.

“Why not? I told you that it’s possible that I’m not even the father,” he reiterated.

“I just feel like we’re not meant to be. There’s always something that’s lurking in the shadows waiting to fuck up our

relationship. I love you, Case. I really do, but this is all too much for me.”

“So, you’re willing to give up on us?”

“It’s not giving up. I honestly need to be alone. I’ve been jumping into relationship after relationship, and that’s not healthy. Being alone is something that I need right now.”

“Now you need to be alone?” he scoffed. “Just last week your ass was happy to be with me, now you’re trying to break us up over this shit?”

“This shit? Mothafucka, you may have gotten somebody pregnant! Don’t downplay your bullshit!” Diar yelled.

“Okay, and this shit happened when we weren’t together. You fuckin’ act like I cheated on you. I fucked that girl once, and we weren’t even speaking to each other.”

“Yeah, but as a result of y’all fucking each other, you got her ass pregnant!” she barked.

“Possibly! Damn, can you get that through your fuckin’ head? You know what? You’re right, maybe we shouldn’t be together.”

Diar was stunned that Case had actually agreed with her. Deep down, she thought that he would at least fight for her.

“Really, Case?”

“Yeah really. I’ve apologized to your ass a million times. I’ve assured you that I don’t want Leilah and that it’s you that I want. I don’t know what else to do to make you see that this shit won’t affect how I love or treat you. It’s obvious that you can’t handle the situation, so just walk away.”

“So you can just give up on us so easily?” she asked in a shaky voice.

“Didn’t you just say that you don’t want the relationship? What the fuck? I don’t have time to play with you. Either you gon’ fuck with me or you’re not. This back and forth shit is for the birds.”

Their talk wasn’t going the way that she had planned. The frustrated expression on his face angered her. She at least wanted him to care, but he seemed like he was tired of the entire situation.

“I’ll always love you, and I wish you nothing but the best,” Diar paused for a moment, not sure if she was making

the right decision. “But I think we should go our separate ways.”

Case shot her a look that could kill before he stormed back into the shop. With each step that he took, it felt like he was ripping her heart from her chest. They were supposed to make their relationship work. They were supposed to live happily ever after. Now, here they were, back at square one. Diar’s mom had always told her that people come into your life for a reason or a season. It pained her to think that her fling with Case was just a seasonal love. She wished that they could’ve worked out the kinks, but she was still working on herself and felt like it was imperative for her to be alone.

Diar wanted to break down so bad and cry, but she didn’t. She was tired of crying over Case. It would hurt her to move on, but it was for the better.

She got back in her truck and drove away. She prayed that she had made the right decision to move on because she was currently feeling like shit. Diar was aware that her love for Case probably would never go away. He was truly one of a kind, but they weren’t destined to be together.

EPILOGUE

One year later...

Case sat in his car wondering if he was making the right decision. Something deep within him had pulled him to this destination, and he was unsure if he had made the right move. After his break up with Diar, Case tried his best to move on. He'd even started dating someone new, but it just didn't feel right. Nothing was the same without Diar in his life. Case tried to go on as if he didn't care about his break up with her. He attempted to go on with his life as if he hadn't been affected by her absence.

The truth was that Case missed her so much sometimes that it hurt. Walking away from her had been the toughest battle he'd ever had to fight. He had been shot, he had been drugged, but nothing hurt worse than seeing the love of his life walk away from him. In a way, Case felt like he had given up too easy on her. Sometimes, he felt like he should have fought harder for her, but his pride had overshadowed his common sense.

They hadn't spoken to each other in an entire year which was surprising to Case. Somehow, they used to always

find themselves back in each other's presence, but not this time. It had been three hundred and sixty five days since he had seen Diar's beautiful face. Often, he would dial her number, but would never have the courage to actually call. Even though his love life had been suffering without Diar, Case's career had skyrocketed.

Case had been featured in *Ink Magazine*. He and Keece had opened up a second location for their tattoo shop. Case was doing so well financially that he'd even purchased his first home. Despite the advancement of his career, Leilah had caused some drama for him during her pregnancy. Her boyfriend didn't like the fact that he could be the possible father of her baby. Leilah's boyfriend was under the impression that she and Case had been sleeping together.

Case and her boyfriend had exchanged words a couple times during her pregnancy. When the baby was born, he requested a DNA test right away. Case was relieved when he found out that the baby wasn't his. He could finally move on with his life without the possibility of him becoming a father looming over his head.

Case got out of his car and slowly walked into the store. He spotted Stefani at the register, so he strolled over to

her.

She greeted him excitedly. “Hey, Case! “How have you been?”

“I’m good. How have you been?”

“I’m doing great. Are you here to see Diar?” she ask with a smile.

He nodded with a grin on his face. “Yeah, I am.”

“Okay, let me go get her. I’ll be right back.”

Case walked off and went to stand by the window. He was as nervous as a crack head in a rehab center. His mind was telling him to walk away, but his heart wouldn’t allow him to move.

“Hi, Case.”

The voice that he had yearned to hear had finally graced his ears. He turned around and smiled. Diar looked better than she’d ever looked. Her jet black hair was styled bone straight with a part down the middle. Her body looked lovely in a black body suit and distressed jeans. Those beautiful almond shaped eyes of hers seemed to possess a sparkle that he had never seen before. Without saying a word, he walked over to her and gave her a strong hug. Case

discreetly closed his eyes while inhaling her scent. He pulled back and licked his lips.

“How have you been?” he asked.

She continued to smile widely. “I’ve been really good. I’m surprised to see you here.”

“Well, I was in the neighborhood, so I stopped by.”

“Oh really? Well, what’s up? Is there anything new going on in your world?”

“Keece and I got another tattoo shop. Oh, and I bought a house too.”

She nodded in approval. “Wow! Congratulations. I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks. What have you been up to?”

“Just working pretty much. I’m creating a new plus size line for the store, so I’m excited about that.”

“That’s what’s up. I’ve missed you though,” he revealed.

“You missed little ol’ me, huh?” she teased.

“Hell yeah. I’ve been missing you since we broke up that night.”

Diar looked down at the ground and shuffled her feet. “Yeah, well, I believe it was for the better. I wanted to focus on myself, and I wanted you to focus on being a father.”

“I don’t have any kids, Diar.”

She looked up at him with a surprised expression. “So, it wasn’t your baby?”

“Nah, it was her boyfriend’s, which worked out perfectly for me.”

“I’m sure it did.”

Case noticed that she had a diamond ring on her left hand. “What’s that?” he pointed.

Diar looked down at the ring and smirked. “A ring.”

“What kind of ring?”

“A special ring.”

“So you’re telling me that I’m too late?”

Diar nodded without responding verbally. Case felt his chest ache with the thought of her being engaged. Knowing that he had come a little too late had him upset with himself.

“I’m just playing, Case,” Diar laughed. “This is my mom’s first wedding ring, and she gave it to me.”

Case breathed a sigh of relief and chuckled. “You need to quit fucking with me like that.”

“I know, but it was too funny, and to answer your question, you’re not too late.”

“Word?”

“Word,” she playfully mocked him.

“You know ever since we broke up, shit hasn’t been the same. I know we’ve tried twice already to get this thing right and I wanna try again. I’ll keep trying as long as I can guarantee that I’ll have you in my life.”

Diar gave him a faint smile as her eyes became misty. “I miss you too but I am scared. I’ve been doing really well emotionally and I think that’s because I’ve been alone for the entire year. I just don’t want us to go back to that same dark place.”

“We won’t. You just have to trust me. I promise I won’t hurt you again. I need you in my life, and I don’t need you to be scared. We’ll make it this time. I promise.”

She looked at him for what seemed like hours before she playfully rolled her eyes. “I really thought I got rid of you this time, but I guess you can be my baby again.”

Hearing her say that caused his heart to smile. Case leaned in and kissed her sweet, juicy lips. He could feel the fireworks go off as he slid his tongue inside her mouth. After a moment of getting reacquainted with their lips, he reluctantly pulled back.

“You don’t have no surprises that’s gonna pop up on us, now do you?” Diar asked with a raised brow.

Case laughed and said, “Nah, I don’t have any kind of baggage.”

“Good.”

She wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him. Case had craved Diar for the past year, and he was so glad that he had another chance to get things right. This time, he would do his best to love her the way that she deserved. He prayed that this year apart would be beneficial to their relationship.

Case sensually kissed her forehead. “I’ve been suffering without you, and I promise to get it right this time.”

“I know you will.”

“You still love me?” he questioned.

“You know I do. I told you that I will always love you.”

“Good, and I love you too. I gotta go back to the shop, but I wanna see you later.”

“Well, just call me. I have the same number.”

Case kissed her once again before leaving the store. Nothing could take away the happiness he was experiencing. He was now complete with having Diar back in his life. His business was doing well and now he had the girl of his dreams on his team. Case could finally say that he was content with his life.

The end.

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