



Tiffany
Parker



My Best Friend's
Sister

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By

Tiffany Parker

Dedication

*To my mother, Dot. I love you,
Mama. Thanks for always
telling me you believe in me. I
only wish you were still here to
share this with me.*

Acknowledgments

The first person I want to acknowledge is my wonderful husband. He is my rock and by far my biggest supporter. There has never been anything I have put my mind to doing, that he has not supported me in. Many times, I believe he has more faith in me than I have in myself. We speak of a man who tells everyone he meets that his wife is a writer and that they should go out and buy her book. Let's keep in mind this was before I even finished it!

My next acknowledgment goes to my children. Besides fulfilling my dreams of becoming a writer, they are my greatest achievement. The unconditional love and support I receive from them keeps me going when it becomes too difficult at times to deal with.

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Last but by no means least. I would like to thank God for the talent to write. Many times, we go our entire lives without finding our one true gift. I am truly grateful that he showed me my gift so young in life, even if I did not have the courage then to pursue it.

Until my next novel, many blessing to all!

Tiffany



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Chapter One

As twenty- three- year old Kimble Brown drove down I-285 on his way over to his best friend Trent Carter's house, he seriously hoped Alexandra, Trent's sister wouldn't be there. That girl was trouble, with a capital T. Unfortunately, she had a crush on him. Also unfortunately, for him, she was not shy about him knowing. Had any other woman as fine as Alexandra Carter put the moves on him, he would have been all over her like white on rice.

The fact was, no matter how fine or desirable she was to him, it all came down to one problem —she was Trent's sister. Unless he was ready to settle down to one woman, which he definitely was not, he would stay away from her. There were just certain boundaries he refused to cross. Messing with his best friend's sister was one of them.

So much for luck being on his side. The first thing he noticed as he parked in front of Trent's house was Alexandra sitting on the porch —no doubt because she knew he was coming. Walking up the driveway, two thoughts came to his mind, *Please be ready to go, Trent* and *Please God, let Alex behave.*

“Hi Kim,” Alex said as she stood up to greet him.

“Hey Squirt. Is Trent ready?”

“He’s not here. Mama sent him to the store. He’ll be back in a minute.”

“Okay thanks. I’ll wait for him in the car,” he said as he turned to go back down the driveway.

“Why, you can sit here with me. I haven’t seen you in what, three months. You can tell me about the modeling gig you had in Miami.”

Looking at her beautiful chocolate skin, the long loose curls framing her face and her petite but well proportioned body, he thought to himself, *Don’t do it.* However, he said, “That’s okay we can catch up later.”

“Please,” Alex responded with a mock pout.

He knew he should just keep walking. Instead, he let her sexy-ass voice persuade him to do as she asked. It was going to be a mistake, but he walked the short distance and sat on the stairs next to her. When he noticed just how close they were, he scooted over.

“So how was Miami? I’ve heard it’s so nice there.”

“I was working on various photo shoots most of the time I was there, but I love the MIA.”

Alexandra’s mother came to the door.

“Hey Kimble, Trenton told me you were back.”

Looking up in her direction, Kimble flashed a brilliant smile.

“Hi Mrs. Carter. Yeah, I’ve been home about two weeks now.”

“Well don’t be a stranger, and tell your mother I said hello.”

“Okay, I will.”

“Alex, can you do me a favor? Go downstairs in the basement and bring up a case of water and put the clothes in the dryer.”

“Mama, that water’s too heavy. Daddy told me not to lift it. Can’t it wait until later?”

“Kimble, would you mind helping her?”

“Sure, no problem. I wouldn’t mind at all.”

After Mrs. Carter went back inside, Alex got up and Kimble followed her around to the side of the house to get into the basement. He could already tell from the play of Alexandra’s facial features that she was up to no good. He groaned inwardly as she opened the door, and then moved aside to allow him to enter. Just as he suspected, when he moved past her, she patted his backside.

Turning a menacing eye on her, he said, “Stop that. Little girls who play with fire get burned.”

Smiling, Alex tossed back, “Do you promise?”

A feeling of helplessness settled over him. This girl was a temptation he didn’t need. Even worse, she was one he was having a hell of a time ignoring. He’d always heard that eighteen for a girl was that magic number and it seemed to be holding true in Alexandra Carter’s case. When he’d left three months ago, she had

already started showing a certain amount of aggressiveness, and she wasn't wasting any time getting back to her old self.

For a girl who had five over-protective brothers, she'd certainly managed to learn a thing or two about trying to seduce a man. It annoyed him to think about her with another man. Had some other man touched her? Kimble didn't like the drift of his thoughts. She wasn't his and whatever she did, it didn't concern him.

"Are you coming?" Alex asked, snapping him out of his private thoughts.

"Lead the way."

Nice view, he thought as he watched the sway of her hips, when she walked over to the small room next to the stairs, and turned on the light.

"The water's right there."

With a sigh, he walked past her to retrieve the water. When he stooped down, he heard her echo his exact sentiment from moments earlier, "Nice view."

With the graceful movements of a powerful jungle cat, he stood up and looked at her. At first, he wanted to spank her, but as he took a step in her direction, his thoughts changed. As he backed her up against the wall, the way a jungle cat would his cornered prey, he looked into her eyes, lifted his hand and stroked her smooth cheek.

“I wonder, little girl, what you’d do if a man fell for your seduction. Can you back up your actions?” he bent down to whisper next to her ear before returning to his full six foot two height.

Hell, he was about to find out. Lowering his head again slowly, he brushed his lips across hers. God, he had enjoyed that way too much. Unable to resist, his lips settled on hers and she opened her mouth to allow his tongue inside to taste the sweetness she had to offer. Unprepared for the emotions that accompanied the kiss, he pulled her closer to him; he was totally wrapped up in the moment. Alex was setting his blood on fire. He wanted to raise her skirt, to touch places he shouldn’t even be thinking about let alone touching.

Damn she tasted so good; he never wanted to stop kissing her. Luckily, he came back to his senses when he heard the basement door open.

“Trent’s back, Alex. Hurry up!” Mrs. Carter yelled down.

As he stepped away from Alexandra, she had the smuggest look on her face. Disgusted with himself for his weakness, Kimble turned, picked up the water, and went upstairs with Alex trailing behind him.

Before Trent could say anything, Alex breezed by him saying, “Have a good time.” Then she went upstairs, leaving them in the kitchen with her mother.

“Bye Mama,” Trent said as he and Kimble prepared to leave.

“Bye Trent. And thanks again for bringing up the water for me, Kimble.”

“You’re welcome.”

As they walked to the car, Kimble looked up at Alexandra’s room window; of course, she was standing there. She was a vision of loveliness, one that he needed to stay the hell away from at all costs. As he and Trent got into the car, he made a mental note to do just that.



The freeway wasn’t as crowded as usual and the ride to the Georgia Dome wouldn’t take long. Kimble was flipping through radio stations when he asked, “Does Alex have a boyfriend?”

Trent threw his head back and laughed.

“Yeah right. You know the Old Man don’t want anybody around his baby girl. Why?”

“Just asking. She’s changed a lot in the last couple years.”

“No shit. Pops is going to catch hell when she does start getting too interested in the opposite sex. Not to worry. As always, we Carter brothers are more than ready to beat that ass if any one of them fools get ideas about her.”

“You can’t beat up everybody. Besides, how’s she ever going to get a husband if her brothers and her daddy won’t let anybody near her?”

“Ain’t my problem. Alex is only eighteen. She doesn’t know who’s right for her. When she’s older and if the right one comes along and we approve, he’ll have a chance.”

“You’re all heart,” Kimble joked.

Not wanting to show too much interest in Alexandra, Kimble didn’t pursue the issue. Instead, he took a CD from over his visor and handed it to Trent to put in as they rode the remaining time in silence to the Georgia Dome.

Every year since the tenth grade the two best friends had attended the Battle of the Bands. They had actually known each other since they were five years old. This year was no different. Parking at the Georgia Dome filled up quickly as usual, so they found a lot a little farther away, and walked a short distance.

I need to concentrate on having a good time, not on my best friend’s sister, Kimble decided — if he had any hopes of enjoying himself.

Seeing Kimble was in his own little world, Trent hit him to gain his attention, then pointed at the two girls in front of them. “Man look at the ass on that girl. I want the one in the red.” He sped up so they could catch up to them. “Hey good looking, mind if my friend and I walk with you?”

“Not at all,” the young woman in red responded.

During the show, the two couples got to know each other. Since none of them had plans for later, Trent said, “We were about to head over to The Varsity for a bite to eat. Care to join us?”

“Sure.” Cereka, the young woman in red, replied.

Kimble couldn’t believe his bad luck. He spotted Alexandra and her friends the minute they pulled into the parking lot of The Varsity. He hoped at the very least, they would be able to get their food and leave, without her noticing them.

“Hey Trent, Kimble,” Alexandra said approaching their table minutes after they sat down.

“What’re you doing here, Alex? Does dad know you’re downtown?” Trent responded.

“If you must know Dad wasn’t home when I left.”

Kimble draped an arm around the girl he’d been sitting with then said, “Hey, Squirt.”

Her back was now to her brother, so he didn’t see the murderous look she gave the girl with Kimble.

“The name’s Alexandra —Alex to those lucky enough to be a family member or a close friend, not Squirt. You didn’t have any trouble saying it earlier today in the basement.”

Kimble was too stunned to say anything as he watched her walk away. He did manage to look at Trent who wasn't paying attention at all. Thank God, he was too busy looking down the blouse of the girl he was with, at her formidable bosom.

When Kimble and Trent got ready to leave, they stopped by where Alex and her friends were standing.

"Bye Alex, I'll see you at home later."

"Bye Trent," she responded, looked at Kimble and then turned away without acknowledging him at all.

Kim knew immediately from the way Alex ignored him that she was upset with him. He just hoped it was enough to make her finally stop trying to seduce him. Lord knew he needed all the help he could get. This girl was slowly breaking him down.

"Would everybody like to come back to my place? We could rent some movies," Cereka suggested.

Trent was game, but Kimble really wasn't interested. The alternative of going home alone just to think about Alex didn't appeal to him either, so reluctantly he agreed.

Usually when a female was down for it and putting the moves on him the way this chick was, Kimble would have been like, *Hell yeah*. Not tonight, though. He really wasn't into the kiss he was sharing with —what was her name again?

Neither her, nor the kiss they were sharing compared to what he'd experienced with Alex. It didn't matter. He had to get sweet, sexy Alex out of his mind. He had a beautiful, ready, willing, and able woman right here. Pushing her back, he opened the buttons on her blouse, unhooked the bra she was wearing and molded his hands to her breast. The sweet sound of her purring like a kitten was a response he normally would have delighted in, but again, not tonight.

"I'm ready, Daddy," she said as she laid back on the bed and opened her legs in blatant invitation after he finished undressing her.

Reaching into his pocket for a condom, Kimble rolled it on and plunged into her welcoming body. He was pounding the hell out of her, but it still didn't erase Alex's beautiful face or the double guilt he felt. For the first time in his life, he was making love to one woman while thinking about another.

Laying in bed afterward, he considered pretending to be asleep. He'd had sex with his date twice, and he still wasn't satisfied. She wasn't the one he really wanted. *Why am I letting Alex affect me like this?* he chided himself. *Why am I torturing myself over a woman I can't have unless I marry her?*

Was he losing his mind? He rolled on another condom, pulled the warm body under him and drove into her again. This time he rode her a long time. Immense guilt continued to plague him when she snuggled contently up to him as he moved off her this last time. He had always prided himself on being a considerate lover, and even though it was obvious he had pleased her, he knew it wasn't intentionally. Sleep didn't come easily to him. When he did finally fall asleep, he heard a knock on the door.

"Kimble, get up. We need to head out!" Trent yelled through the door.

Kimble turned his head slightly to look over at the clock on the nightstand. It was eight thirty in the morning. He had only been asleep for an hour; he would be a mess today and no doubt grouchy as all hell.

"Give me a minute; I'll be right out!" he yelled back.

As he swung his legs over the side of the bed and reached for his pants, he heard what's-her-name ask, "Can we get together later?"

Considering he still couldn't remember her damn name, it was highly unlikely. However, in an effort not to make her feel cheap or used, he said, "I'll call you."

Chapter Two

Despite Trent and Kimble's efforts to sneak quietly into the house, Alex heard them from her room. It hurt to think that Kimble had been with another woman. However, she knew her brothers well. Whenever one didn't come home, it was usually because they were laid up with some hussy. Waiting until she heard her brother's bedroom door close, she snuck down the hall to listen to them.

"I don't know about you man, but I need to get some shut eye before tonight," Trent stated.

"Me too, but I want to take a shower first. I'm going down to Dillon's room if you're gonna shower, too."

"Okay," Trent said.

Alex heard his bathroom door close. Quickly she ducked behind the antique case standing in the hall next to Trent's room just before the door swung open.

She waited several seconds to make sure Trent didn't come out before making her way to her oldest brother, Dillon's, old room to confront Kimble. Standing in the doorway to Dillon's bathroom, Alex watched the now-stripped-down-to-his-underwear Kimble, as he stood into the bathroom and brushed his teeth. His body was perfect.

He was muscular but didn't have a body-builder's physique. His skin was a smooth caramel color devoid of any blemishes. By far his best asset was that gorgeous baby face of his —the dark, piercing eyes; luscious, full lips; and that pointy, perky nose. She also loved his dark, short hair that he always kept so well-groomed. It was just the right length to run her fingers through in those moments of intense passion.

She saw the shock in his face when he looked up and saw her standing there.

“What in the hell are you doing in here?” he asked.

“Were you with her last night?”

“That, little girl, is none of your business. Now get out of here before someone finds out you're in here.”

“Not until you answer my question.”

A determined Alex stood her ground. She meant what she'd just said. Unless Kimble answered her question, she wasn't going anywhere. Yes, his answer would hurt, but she needed to hear him say it. Maybe she'd leave him alone or maybe she'd just have to step her game up.

“Yes, Alex, I was,” he responded looking her dead in the eye.

A tear slipped from her eye that she quickly wiped away.

“How could you when I know I’m the one you wanted? You can’t tell me if we hadn’t been in my parents’ basement or even if my mother hadn’t called down that we wouldn’t have done more than just kiss.”

“I didn’t want to tell you that at all. Why don’t you just leave now?”

“No!”

“What do you mean no? Do you want one of your brothers to find you in here?”

“I should tell them what we did in the basement. I should let them beat your ass.”

“You came on to me, little girl —not the other way around.”

She smiled.

“Do you really think my brothers’ll care who came on to who?”

She was deliberately being vindictive because he’d hurt her. She didn’t care. Let him hurt the way she was hurting. It would serve him right if she did tell her brothers. He grabbed her so quickly she didn’t have time to react. He was holding her shoulders and shaking her, but when she looked into his eyes, she saw the same look there she’d seen yesterday.

Looking into his eyes, she wondered if he felt it too. The urge to kiss him was too strong. His head descended, and she knew in that moment that he *did* feel it. There was an undeniable attraction between them. When his lips finally met

hers, Alex participated whole-heartedly. Involuntarily, her hands went up his bare back. His manhood strained against the soft cotton of his underwear, with his hips moving forward so Alex could feel what she was doing to him. Their cores connected. It was the most erotic feeling she had ever felt in her life. Unable to resist, she reached between them, slipped her hand into the waistband of his underwear and wrapped her fingers around him.

Slowly, she began moving her hand up and down the length of his erection, but the need to breathe now forced them to separate.

“Are you pregnant and need somebody to pin it on?” he asked to her surprise.

“Now that’s a stupid question if I’ve ever heard one,” she murmured as she feathered kisses across his chest.

He pushed her back again.

“You don’t act like you’re still a virgin. Are you?”

“Of course I am, but if I want you —and I do —I can’t wait for you. You’ll never make the first move, even though we both know you want to.”

“That’s all good, and you’re probably right, but that still doesn’t explain your experience.”

Alex actually laughed at that.

“You sound jealous, I’ve had a few boyfriends, but I can assure you it’s mostly pure instinct. In case it has escaped your notice, all five of my brothers are the biggest, shall we say, female-chasers alive. I’m not stupid, Kim. I’m eighteen. I know what you and my brothers do, and I read a lot.”

Jealousy could work to her advantage. It was obvious that he didn’t want to think of anybody touching her but him. In an instant, her experience was forgotten, as she coaxed him into another kiss. It was short-lived because the sound of Trent’s voice penetrated their euphoric state.

“Are you dressed?” Trent yelled through the door.

Alex came back to her senses when she felt Kimble suddenly grab her and shove her behind the bathroom door.

“Not yet. Something I ate didn’t agree with me. I haven’t even taken my shower yet.”

“That was way more information than I needed. I need to run up the street, and your cars behind mine. Toss me your keys.”

Going to the door, Kimble handed Trent the keys.

“Ugh, thanks. Hurry up and close the door,” Trent said fanning his nose.

“Whatever. I thought you were tired.”

“Duty calls. Felecia needs me.”



Closing the door, Kimble turned around to see Alex leaning against the bathroom door in plain view. She looked anything but innocent. Her eyes showed that she was taking in his appearance as well. With nothing on but his underwear, it was evident that he still wanted her. When he saw where her eyes were resting, he chuckled.

“Will you get out of here so I can get dressed?”

“I’ve got a better idea. Why don’t I get undressed?”

Now the thought of a quickie with her was laughable. A more likely scenario was that her brother would come back and find them together. Their friendship at that point would be in jeopardy because of his weakness for her.

Please, Alex; just leave,” he pleaded with her.

She walked over to him, looked into his eyes and said, “Promise me you’ll wait for me, Kim. My family can’t tell me what to do all my life.”

“Alex even if I did want to, Trent’s my best friend and I’m cool with all your brothers.”

“Exactly — who better for me than somebody my family already likes?”

“Ah, no. I don’t think you’re listening to me. Your brothers and I have run together for years. They wouldn’t consider me a proper candidate. Believe me.”

Now she was getting mad again.

“You mean to tell me that because you’re just as big a hoe as they all are, they’d object? What a bunch of hypocrites.”

Kimble laughed at her analogy.

“Well I wouldn’t have put it that way, but yes.”

Alex stalked out of the room. Her brothers had some nerve. They took great pride in screwing every damn thing in a skirt, but they expected her to be an angel. Who were they anyway to think they could dictate to her who she could, and could not, be interested in? It was just too damn bad because she wanted Kimble, and she was determined to have him.

She’d show Mr. Kimble Brown, Alex thought as she angrily strode back to her room, not caring one little bit if her brother saw her. She was sick to death of her brothers and their constant interference in her life. Hell if they had not chased off every guy who’d ever shown interest in her, she might have gotten over her crush on Kimble. She doubted it, but she intended to use that to her advantage if necessary.

Fifteen minutes later she heard her brother come back in, and Kimble leave. She spent the remainder of her day mad at men in general. Hanging out in the local bars wasn’t really her thing. Every now and then, however, the fake ID’s she and

some of her friends had gotten at the beginning of senior year came in handy. So when Trina and Lisa called wanting to go out, she agreed.



As bad a mood as she'd been in most of the day, what she should have done is just stay home. But no — she let her best buds talk her into going out. Now she had to call Kimble for help. Calling her brothers or her dad was out of the question since she was somewhere she wasn't supposed to be in the first place. She hoped Kimble would be more reasonable.

Laying in his bed fully dressed, Kimble had dozed off to sleep. The vibration of his phone woke him, and he glanced at the clock on the stereo. It was eleven forty five. Who'd be calling him now? He opened the phone without looking, and placed it to his ear.

“Hello.”

“Kim, it's me,” Alex said.

“What?”

“Kim, please don't hang up,” she sobbed.

She had his full attention now.

“What's wrong Alex?”

“Can you come and get me Kim?”

“Why? What’s wrong? Why are you crying?”

“Can you please just come and get me?”

“Where are you?” he asked her with growing concern in his voice. Alex was a third degree black belt. He had never known her to be afraid of anything.

She dreaded telling him where she was, but she had no choice.

“I’m at the Pit.”

“What the hell are you doing at The Pit?” he asked.

She could hear the irritation in his voice. It was a popular hang out, but Kimble knew no one in her family would approve of her being there.

“I’ll explain when you get here. Can you just come and get me?”

Grabbing his keys, Kimble headed for the door. As he pulled into the lot, he searched for signs of Alex. Nothing, after circling the lot three times, he did not even see any car that she might be driving. The only place she could be was still inside. He parked, got out and started walking toward the entrance.

“I’m over here Kimble,” he heard Alex say, but he didn’t see her yet.

As she stepped out in to the open a little more, he saw that her shirt was torn.

“Are you okay Alex.”

“Yes. I couldn’t call one of my brothers or my dad. I’m not even supposed to be here. My parents think I’m at Lisa’s house. Please don’t tell on me, Kim. We just wanted to have some fun, that’s all.”

Kimble’s face was a mask of rage when he asked, “How did your shirt get torn?”

“There were some college guys from Florida. One of them kept rubbing my butt, and said it was an accident. I threw my soda in his face. He grabbed me and we got into a fight. I guess his friends felt sorry for him because a girl was whipping his ass, and they decided to help him out.”

“Are they still inside?”

“Yes, but can we just go. I don’t want my family to find out about this.”

“They don’t have to know anything,” he said as he pulled her toward the door. Trina and Lisa got out of the car to follow. The whole reason they hadn’t just left in the first place, was because the car keys were in Lisa’s coat pocket and they didn’t want to go back inside alone and get the coat.

Kimble stood in the entrance glancing around the room.

“Where are they? Which one of them touched you?”

“Kimble, please — let’s just leave,” she pleaded, because she had a bad feeling about this.

“Either you can tell me or I’ll ask someone else.”

Kimble was too much like her brother Elray; he wasn't leaving unless she told him.

"Over there by the pool table."

"And which one touched you?"

"The tall one," she responded, an eerie feeling settling over her.

Kimble strode in the direction Alex indicated, pulling her along. Casually stopping beside the pool table, he plucked one of the pool balls from the table and tossed it into the air, caught it, then leaned back.

"Why in the hell did you do that?" one of the three young men whined.

"Now that I have your attention, do you recognize this young lady?" He motioned toward where Alex was standing.

The tallest of the three stepped forward and said, "Are we supposed to be scared?"

"If you had any sense you would be. Obviously you don't or you'd have been gone long before I got here."

Just as Alex feared, the fight was on. Kimble straight-whipped tall-boy's ass. Seeing him go down like a sack of potatoes, his friends rushed forward to help. Too bad for them. Kimble took down all three of them with little effort.

From the corner of his eye, Kimble saw the police coming in his direction. "Take off, Alex. I got this," he instructed.

Of course, it wouldn't be that easy because one of the officers had spoken to some witnesses already who all indicated she was the one who had started this whole mess. Since Trina and Lisa had not been implicated, it made no sense for all of them to get into trouble, so she repeated to them what Kimble had just told her.

“Go home. I'll call you.”

Kimble and Alex were not as lucky. They both got arrested. So much for her family not finding out, she thought, as she called home. Brandis Carter, her father, looked fit to kill everything in sight when she saw him after he paid her bail. Sherry Carter, her mother, just looked worried. She was definitely in trouble.

“Oh Alex, Baby — are you alright?” her mother asked.

“I'm okay, Mom. Daddy is there anything you can do to help Kimble?”

Ignoring Alex, Brandis Carter asked, “Can I take my daughter home now?”

One of the officers walked over and spoke with Mr. Carter.

“Sweetheart, why didn't you call one of your brothers instead of Kimble?”

“Mama you know how they are. Do you really have to ask?” she responded, though she was focused on trying to overhear the conversation her dad was having.

Several minutes later, she saw her dad shake the officer's hand before returning to where she and her mother stood.

“Let’s go,” he said to no one in particular. He hadn’t said anything directly to her at all, so she knew when they got home it was going to be ugly with a capital U.

Reluctant to leave Kimble, Alex looked at him. She wanted to ask her dad again if he was going to help him, but all things considered, she decided it was best if she kept her mouth shut.

The entire ride home her father had not said anything, and that worried Alex. At home, as usual, her father got out and opened the door for her mother then went into the house. When she and her mother came in, he was sitting in a chair, in the kitchen, with his head in his hands.

“Sit down Alex,” he said when he looked up.

When she sat down, she was about to say that she was sorry, but saw her mother behind her father motion for her not to say anything.

Turning to his wife, Sherry, Brandis asked, “Honey would you mind getting me a cup of coffee?”

“Of course not,” she replied.

“Alexandra, you could have been seriously hurt tonight. We don’t place restrictions on you just because we don’t want you to have fun. We do it because you need them. I realize more than you know that you’re a beautiful young girl and

you want to get out more, but Honey, you've got all the time in the world. You're my baby, and I love you more than life. Do you have any idea how I felt tonight?"

"Daddy I didn't mean to hurt you. I'll never lie to you or Mama again."

"Alex, it's not the lie that hurt me; it's the fact you put yourself in harm's way and then you didn't call me, you called Kimble. I'm your father; it's my job to protect you."

He got up from the table just as her mother was putting his coffee down. "Thank you, Honey," he said to his wife before he picked up the cup and left the room.

Alex had never seen her father like this—so distraught, despondent—almost like he was a defeated man. She was about to follow him, but her mother stopped her.

"Alex, sweetheart, you've hurt him. He needs to be alone right now. You're his only daughter. He knows it's not reasonable, but he feels he should be able to protect you from the world."

"I'm so sorry, Mama."

Pulling her youngest child to her, Sherry Carter hugged her tightly.

"I know, Baby."

Chapter Three

Alex convinced Lisa and Trina to come forward and explain the events that had led up to the actual brawl. As a result, the charges against Kimble were dropped.

Over the next month or so after being released from jail, Kimble went out of his way to avoid Alex. The incident at The Pit confirmed what he already knew. He had a dangerous attraction to his best friend's sister, a situation he never wanted to find himself in —ever. In his favor was the fact that her brothers and her father now watched her around the clock. The one thing he was not happy about was —her brothers were pissed at him.

Surprised would best describe his reaction when Trent called and told him they were planning a graduation party for Alex.

“Are you sure it's cool if I come?” he asked just to be sure.

“Yeah it's cool. You know Alex would want you here. She's class valedictorian. Moms and Pops want her to have this party so I'm sure nobody's going to trip about you coming.”

After hanging up, Kimble finished his work-out before getting into the shower to get ready for the party. He figured he might as well go over early to help out. It would also give him another chance to clear the air.

When he arrived, Trent and Elray were in the yard putting up picnic tables.

“What can I help with?”

Elray looked at him but didn't respond, so Trent said, “Grab some chairs and start putting them up to the tables.

“Okay.”

Over the next thirty minutes Rayvon, Rayden and Dillon Carter joined their brothers and Kimble, and in no time, the yard was ready for the party. Next, they all helped bring food outside to set up under the tent to keep bugs from getting into anything.

When Alex walked in with her mother, everyone shouted “Surprise!”

Kimble, however, sucked in his breath as he took in how beautiful she looked. There she stood in her Baby Phat jeans, matching shirt, sandals and hair freshly done. Immediately, he started to wonder if he'd made a mistake in coming tonight.

He watched as Alex made her way around the crowd hugging and thanking all the well-wishers in attendance. Before he knew it, she was standing in front of him.

“Aren’t you going to give me a hug?”

Reaching out he pulled her to him, hugged her and said, “Congratulations.”

“Thanks, I hope we get to talk more later.”

He nodded, then turned his attention to Trent and Elray who were standing just beside him. Trent looked okay, but Elray was much harder to read. As a friend, you couldn’t ask for a better one, but Elray Carter was definitely not someone you wanted as an enemy.

Lucky for him, Dillon picked that precise moment to start up the music, and the party kicked into full gear in no time. In order to divert attention from the fact that he was watching every dance move Alex made, Kimble tried to dance whenever she danced. Not that it helped. He still noticed everything she did. Not surprisingly, he noticed as she snuck away down the hill.

Her hair blew in the wind as she stood under a tree close to the small lake a short distance from her backyard. He didn’t want to startle her, because she probably thought no one had noticed her leave.

“You’re missing your own party,” he announced before stepping forward into her view.

“No I’m not. What are you doing down here?”

“I saw you leave. I haven’t really talked to you since the night I picked you up from The Pit.”

“I was under the impression you didn’t want to talk to me.”

“I thought it was best considering how I was feeling,” he said as he closed the distance between them and now stood inches from her.

“And how were you feeling Kimble?”

He pulled her to him.

“Jealous. The thought of anyone else touching you was driving me crazy.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

He slid his hands to her backside pulling her closer to him. His head descended and he brushed his lips sensually over hers.

“Remember you said one of those guys at the club kept rubbing your butt? You do realize that’s why I beat his ass. I couldn’t stand the thought of him touching you.”

“Why not? You said you didn’t want me.”

He laughed.

“I never said I didn’t want you, Alex. I said you’re my best friend’s sister and I wouldn’t touch you.”

She kissed him back before she said, “You’re touching me now.”

His eyes held hers for what seemed liked an eternity, before he lowered his head again and kissed her passionately. His tongue ravished her mouth to the point that she was barely able to catch her breath. His arousal pressed against her

stomach, an indication he wanted her badly. He broke the kiss, but continued holding her, watching her as if he was waging a battle against himself.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done that.”

“Why not?”

“Because there’s no future for us. Come on. Let’s get back to the house.”

“Kimble.”

Turning to her, he looked into her beautiful honey-brown eyes and asked,
“What is it?”

“If you really believe that, why did you even come down here?”

He looked at her, then answered truthfully.

“Because I want you like I’ve never wanted any woman in my life, but you’re my best friend’s sister. I won’t risk my friendship with Trent no matter what.”

“Thank you.”

He shook his head.

“For what.”

“Being big enough of a man to admit the truth.”

“You’re welcome. Now let’s get back to the house before someone notices us missing.”



As they ran back up the hill, neither of them noticed Trent. He had come looking for Kimble when he got a text message from the fine little mama he had met yesterday, and she had a cousin he could hook Kimble up with for the night. Seeing his sister in Kimble's arms was the last thing he expected.

He probably should have made his presence known immediately but decided to see what Kimble's intentions were for his sister first. What he heard still had him in shock. His best friend had a thing for his sister. Well he certainly planned to have words with him, but he'd do it in private.

He would have plenty of time to call Kimble on what he'd just heard. Alex was going to Tennessee State at the end of summer for college. Rejoining the party Trent found himself watching Kimble. He was pitiful; he had it bad. As hard as he tried to act as if he wasn't paying any attention to Alex, Trent wasn't fooled.

If it was that easy for him to see, had anyone else noticed? Dillon, the only one of his brothers that he would even consider sharing this information with didn't appear to notice, so he dragged him aside for a talk.

"What the hell is so important that you needed to drag me over here?" Dillon asked, the agitation in his voice could be heard clearly.

"Kimble has a thing for Alex, that's what!"

"Whatever. Have you had too much to drink?"

"Get serious, stupid. Have you ever known me to drink in front of Mama?"

If Trent didn't have his attention before, he did now.

"What makes you think so?"

"I saw him and Alex earlier, Dill. I knew Alex had a crush on Kim, but I never gave it much thought."

"Slow down. What exactly did you see?"

"I heard him tell her that he never said he didn't want her. He also kissed her, and I mean really kissed her. He admitted the only reason he stays away from her is his friendship with us."

"Smart man. He knows better than to mess over our sister."

"What do you think we should do about this?" Trent anxiously asked his older brother.

Shrugging his shoulders, Dillon replied, "Nothing. You said he wouldn't risk his friendship with you, so that means he won't touch her."

"I think you're wrong, Dill. You didn't see them. I'm telling you it took every ounce of will power he had to walk away from her tonight. He wants her bad."

"That may be, but we've known Kimble since you were five years old. I've never known him to be a liar. Besides, he knows we'll beat the shit out of him if he doesn't."

Trent laughed because Dillon was right. As much as they all respected Kim, they wouldn't hesitate to give him a good old-fashioned beat-down if it came right

down to it. Neither man could believe they were discussing their own sister, but they all had to face the fact she was growing up whether they liked it or not.

A month later Alex graduated. It was the first time since the incident at The Pit she'd asked to go anywhere, and her mother still had a terrible time convincing her father to let her go with her friends.

"Honey, its graduation night, and she hasn't given us any trouble," Sherry Carter said, as Alex stood quietly in the doorway.

Reluctantly, Brandis gave in. What Alex and her mom didn't know was he had already anticipated this request and had in fact, already talked to Dillon. He would know exactly where Alex was the whole night because of the GPS navigation system on Dillon's truck. In order not to give himself away, he had to act this way.

"I got my cell, Daddy, and I promise not to get into anything you would not approve of," Alex said, kissing both her parents before leaving.

There were a number of parties going on. The Drury Inn off I-75 was the closest, and from what she'd heard, it was going to be the best after-party tonight.

She had already told Trina and Lisa, her two best friends, to meet her there because she knew her dad was going to resist up until the last possible minute.

Trina, Carla, Lynda, Lisa and Crystal rushed over as soon as she walked into the packed ballroom.

“Okay, time to party hearty,” Lisa said.

“Heck yeah, you got that right,” Alex replied.

“There are too many fine dudes here,” Crystal giggled. “I see why so many girls lose their virginity on prom and graduation nights.”

“You are so stupid,” Carla told her. “I don’t plan on losing anything tonight. I’m saving myself for Mister Right.”

“Suit yourself.” Crystal danced off.

Alex could tell Crystal had been drinking. She didn’t really like Crystal all that much, but she was Kimble’s cousin, so she supposed she’d keep an eye on her.

Crystal walked past Lance, the captain of the football team and unfortunately, it looked to Alex like he was making his way over to her. Although she had never shown any interest, Lance had made it clear that he was interested in her.

“Want to dance, gorgeous?” he leaned over and asked her.

She did want to dance, but not with him. However, she liked this song, so she decided to accept.

“You’re really a good dancer Lance,” she said after they had danced two dances together.

“I got all kinds of skills. You’d know that if you ever gave me the time of day, Ms. Carter.”

“Whatever. You know the deal. That’s why you may have let it be known you were interested, but you kept your distance. Jackie is the one you need to stay with.”

“Jackie ain’t who I want; she’s just the one who puts out. When I get that fat contract you’ll come around.”

“Don’t hold your breath. Money doesn’t easily impress me.”

Alex had never been popular with the football players. Tonight however, seemed to be the exception — three more football players asked her to dance. She knew she was pretty, but the football players tended to stay away from her for two reasons — one she wasn’t one of the easy girls, and two her brothers.

She decided not to question her sudden popularity, just enjoy it. Silently she wondered what Kimble was doing. Although she agreed there were some seriously fine guys there, none of them held a candle to him. Quickly she put thoughts of Kimble out of her head. She intended to enjoy herself, and tomorrow was another day. Just then, her cell phone rang.

“Hello.”

“Hey Alex, it’s me.”

“Kimble, hey what’s up?”

“Nothing. I saw Dillon’s truck when I came in, and I didn’t want you to think I was spying on you if you happened to see me.”

“What are you doing at The Drury?”

“Meeting some friends who are here from out of town.”

“Where are you now?”

“In the lobby waiting for them to come down.”

“Okay well have a good time. I’ll talk to you later.”

Mission accomplished. If he knew Alex — and he did, Kimble knew she’d be making a beeline for the lobby. This was the first time Kimble appreciated those damn sign language and lip reading classes his mother had made him take because of his cousin, Luther, who was deaf. Luther was his mother’s favorite nephew; they had spent a lot of time together when they were younger. Because of that, Kimble was fluent in sign language and lip reading.

“Those little shits,” he grumbled while waiting for Alex to appear. He couldn’t believe what the football players were planning. They paid for the drinks, slipped a little something in them, and planned on giving it to Alex and her friends.

Damn what was wrong with kids today? He'd kill the little horny pricks gladly if even one of them looked at Alex wrong. Never had he and his boys been that devious, but then again they had game. They didn't need to drug anybody.

"Hey Kimble."

Smiling he turned around and replied, "Hello, gorgeous. I'm glad I know you so well. It keeps me from having to kick somebody's ass again."

"What're you talking about?"

"Your little football buddies were planning on slipping you and your friends a Mickey."

"And how exactly do you know that?"

"Look, why don't you and your friends just take off."

Never one to look a gift-horse in the mouth, Alex gathered her friends and they left. Kimble had already called Trent and filled him in on what happened just in case he'd had trouble getting Alex to leave. Now that she was safely gone, he called Trent back.

"What I want to know is how my sister manages to stay in trouble?" Trent whined.

"This isn't her fault. She wasn't going to drug herself," Kimble said in her defense.

The two friends talked until Kimble's friends finally came down, and then Kimble told Trent he'd see him in the morning.

Sitting at the table early the next morning Kimble and Trent were having a bowl of cereal when the rest of the Carter brothers walked in. For some odd reason Trent felt it necessary to tell his brothers everything that had happened the evening before. Just as he was finishing up, Alex came in.

Not expecting to see all her brothers or Kimble, Alex blurted out, "Good morning."

Each man looked at her and said, "Morning."

Kimble, however, must have looked a little longer than necessary because Elray said, "Haven't any of you noticed the way Kimble looks at Alex lately?"

Alex, still irritable from last night snapped, "What's wrong with how Kimble looks at me Elray? I'm not a baby anymore; men are going to look at me, and at least Kimble would never drug me and try to take something that I would willingly give him if he'd ask."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" he responded but directed his question in Kimble's direction.

"El what's wrong with you? Do you really think I'd go after your sister, even if I wanted to? You know damn well Trent's friendship means more to me than that."

“My sister would not have said what she did if you haven’t been leading her on.”

“Elray, you are such a hypocrite! You’ve made it a point of sleeping with every girl you’ve ever met. What do you think their brothers think of you?”

“I truly don’t give a damn. Kim is a dog; you’re too young and naive to understand.”

“Oh I understand perfectly —you can, but I can’t,” Alex shouted at her brother, not the least bit scared.

“I think you both need to calm down and shut up before Mama hears you and comes in here,” Dillon suggested.

Elray glared at Dillon, but wasn’t stupid enough to try his older brother.

“Whatever. Be fools if you want too!” he replied angrily, and then left.

Now that the show was over and in an attempt to lighten the mood, Trent asked, “Does anybody want breakfast?”

Alex stalked off and left them all sitting there.

“I think I should head on over to work. I’ll talk to ya’ll later.”

“Alright. And Kimble —my brother may be a hothead, but he isn’t stupid,” Dillon said as Kimble exited the back door and the Carter brothers left to go talk with their sister.



Used to growing up with a house full of brothers. Alex only showed mild annoyance at finding all her brothers including Elray in her room. “What do you want now?” she asked.

Trent spoke first.

“Alex we’re sorry about what happened, but you know Elray can loose it sometimes. He only wants what’s best for you.”

“I’m not stupid, Trent. I know that. When are all of you going to realize I’m not a baby anymore? I don’t need you to make my decisions for me.”

“Honey, we don’t want to make decisions for you, but we’re guys and we know how guys are and what they’re after,” Rayden said as he sat down on the bed. “Elray may not be very subtle, but his heart’s in the right place. He loves you and he doesn’t want to see you hurt.”

“I love all of you, too, but you can’t protect me from the world.” She replied looking lovingly at each of her brothers.

Elray spoke next because he was tired of being spoken of as if he wasn’t in the room.

“Kimble isn’t ready to settle down to one woman. If you have your sights set on him, you may as well change ’em, before you end up with a broken heart.”

She had to know, so she asked.

“What if Kimble were ready? Would it bother you then if we dated?”

“Alex you’re just enamored with his good looks —most women are,” Elray responded.

“I’m not that shallow. Of course, I find him attractive. Just answer my question.”

“As long as the man you eventually end up with respects you and loves you the way you deserve to be, I honestly don’t care who he is. As spoiled as you are, he’d better have money,” Dillon laughed.

Each of her brothers took turns kissing their only sister on the forehead and left.

Alone now in her room, Alex sat on her bed long after her brothers left. She really felt that she had a special connection to Kimble, and she would bet everything she loved that he felt that connection too. He just tried to fight it. Well, he’d find out it wouldn’t do him any good —because she was used to getting what she wanted.

Chapter Four

Summer was almost over, and Alex couldn't wait to leave for college. Working in her father's automotive repair and customization shop as a receptionist allowed her to save a nice sum to start school without having to ask her parents for too much leisure money. As a going away present, her brothers bought her a computer. It wasn't what she'd originally asked for, but it would certainly come in handy.

For the most part, life was pretty much back to normal. Her brothers and Kimble had made up and were spending much of their free time together again, though he went out of his way not to be left alone with her. True to their word, her brothers hadn't told her parents about graduation night.

Almost everything was ready to leave for school, except she still hadn't gotten the one thing she'd been giving hints she wanted all summer. The day before she was set to leave, however, she came home from work and there was a large, gift-wrapped box on her bed. Inside it, she found a new stereo. Thinking it must have come from her brothers or that her parents had finally given in, she opened the card.

“A little birdie told me you needed something to sing to. Have a great year!
Love, Kimble.”

Excited and pleased by the gift, she couldn't wait to thank Kimble. He answered on the second ring.

“Hey squirt.”

“Thanks for the present, Kimble.”

“You're welcome. When do you leave?”

“I'm surprised Trent hasn't told you already, but I leave tomorrow afternoon.”

“I don't discuss you with any of your brothers. The less they think I'm interested in you the better.”

“Kimble, have you given any thought to what I asked you?”

He didn't even have to ask her what she was talking about; he already knew. She wanted to know if he was going to wait for her.

“No, there's no need. You saw how your brothers reacted.”

“I'll miss you Kimble.”

“I'll miss you too, Squirt. And for what it's worth, I really do wish things could have been different.”

“Thanks. I hear Mama calling me. I'll talk to you soon.”

He really didn't want her to go but said, “Bye.”

Alex had no idea how Kimble had gotten the gift into her room. Since she didn't want her brothers to know, she decided to say it was a gift from Trina and Lisa. As she walked out her room, she stuffed the note into her pocket and ran downstairs to see what her mother wanted.

“Hey, baby, since this is the last time we're going to be able to do anything together for awhile, I thought we'd go to the salon to get our hair and nails done. My treat.”

“Alright. Let me grab my purse.”

She loved going to the hair salon with her mother. It wasn't easy for her growing up with only brothers, so she and her mother were very close. As usual, Alex offered to drive. Her mother's car was so fly. All her friends at school thought her mother was cool. Dillon had given their mother the Mercedes, which she rarely drove, as a gift. It was specially painted and customized by him personally. It had all the toys —TV's in the headrests, a killer sound system, GPS navigation system and the paint job, it was Ivory with gold speckles. The car even had rims. How many other fifty-year-old women were riding as clean as her mom was?

The salon parking lot, as usual, was full and her mom's car attracted a lot of attention, which was the reason her mother rarely drove it. Dillon often said there was no reason to be ashamed of having money. To which their mom would reply, “There's no reason to flaunt it either.”

Waiting for a closer parking space, Alex's mind drifted to her brothers. Dillon had followed in their fathers footsteps with his love of cars. He'd worked side by side with his father in his auto repair and customization shop until he'd branched out on his own. Now he owned one of the most successful auto customization shops in Atlanta. He'd done jobs for many of the local celebrities like, JD, Usher and Michael Vick. Rayvon and Rayden, the twins had taken after their father in a sense. They weren't mechanics, or auto customizes; they raced cars professionally. There weren't many brothers in the racing world, and certainly no twins. Trenton had natural people ability and could sell anything to anybody, but he also had a good head for business and investing. That's were most of his money came from. His job as a sales rep allowed him the freedom he needed to be available to help with Dillon and their dad's business as well as their investment portfolios.

It seemed that she and Elray were the only two Carter's who weren't sure what they wanted to do with their lives. Elray, like Kimble, had actually made quite a bit of money as a male model, but he'd always said there was no way he wanted to do that for the rest of his life. She was starting school on a full scholarship with no idea what to major in. She was a good singer but didn't necessarily want to do it professionally.

“Alex, are you done daydreaming?”

Her mother interrupted her silent thoughts.

“Sorry Mama, I was just thinking about school. I’m going to miss you and Daddy so much, and I’m actually going to miss my pain-in-the-butt brothers, but I’ll deny it if you tell them what I said.”

Sherry laughed.

“Are you kidding? I won’t tell them anything. Their heads are big enough as it is.”

Kelsey, the girl who had done her and her mother’s hair for years, greeted them.

“Alex, Sherry who wants to go first?”

“I’m getting my nails done, Mom. You can go first.”

Mother and daughter took full advantage of their time together and spent the remainder of the day allowing the salon to pamper them one last time before Alex left for school. It was dark outside by the time they got home.



“Leave my car out. Your dad can put it away when he gets in.”

“Okay.”

As they opened the front door, the lights came on, and everybody inside yelled, “Surprise!”

It was hard to pull anything over on Alexandra Carter. She knew her family so well —but they had done it. She was completely surprised. Tears welled up in her eyes as Brandis Carter came forward with a large cake in his hands that read, “We are so proud of you!”

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Kimble standing next to Trent, making her night complete. He cared enough about her to be here for her special moment. True, he was at most of the events held at her house, but there was no way she would believe he was there for any other reason.

To his credit, Kimble did his best to act like her presence didn’t bother him, yet she’d caught him looking at her several times. Just before one in the morning, she overheard Kimble telling her brothers he was calling it a night. Sneaking out the back door, Alex followed him and watched as he walked to his car, which was down the street around the corner. All the cars had been parked where Alex would not have seen them.

Instinct told Kimble somebody was watching him, but he shrugged it off as just a case of nerves from being tired. Suddenly, a hand touched his shoulder. Turning around, fist drawn back ready to strike, he came face to face with the last person he wanted to see.

“Alex, don’t you have any better sense than to sneak up on people in the dark?”

“I’m sorry, Kimble, but I wanted to talk to you before you left.”

“You look very nice tonight,” he said as he reached out and stroked her hair.

“Thank you. I have a favor to ask you,” she said quickly before she lost her nerve.

“Sure, squirt. What is it?”

Irritated by his remark, Alex put her hands on her hips and demanded, “Do not call me squirt! I’m eighteen.”

“Sorry, some habits are hard to break. What can I do for you?”

Alex swallowed hard, then just blurted it out.

“I want you to be my first.”

“Your first what?” he asked, truly having no idea what she was referring too.

“No matter what, I want my first time to be with you. It doesn’t matter if we’re never together again.”

Oh no, Baby. Don’t do this to me, his mind screamed even as he felt his manhood rising just at the thought of making love to her.

“Alex I won’t take advantage of you that way.”

“But I love you! Who care’s if we don’t get married, or date? I just want to be with you, and I’m sure that’s not what you said to all those other girls you’ve been with.”

“That’s not fair, Alex. They didn’t mean anything to me. You do.”

“If that’s true, would you really rather I lost my virginity to someone like that jerk who would have drugged me? I want to give my virginity to you.”

Why did she have to say that? Didn’t she know this was torturing him?

“Get in.”

Without asking why, she walked around and got in the passenger seat. Kimble now had no clue what he should do. Hell yeah he wanted Alexandra Carter, but could his friendship with her brothers survive if their relationship did not? Yet at this given moment, he cared more about what Alex wanted than anything else.

The car hadn’t moved. Actually, Kimble hadn’t done anything other than get into the driver’s seat.

“Alex I can’t do this.”

“Why not? You admitted you have feelings for me. I don’t see what the problem is.”

Lifting her chin so that she could look at him, he tried to explain in a way that wouldn’t leave her feeling hurt or ashamed of her actions.

“I do care about you. That’s why I can’t do this. You’re still so young. Time will tell if we’re meant to be together.”

Alex closed her eyes to hold back the tears that threatened to fall.

“Open your eyes, Baby. I’m not saying I don’t care. I’m saying I care enough to wait.”

Doing as he commanded, she looked directly into his eyes.

“What if you fall in love with one of those others girls?”

He wanted to tell her there was no danger of that happening. He was already in love with her. He just hoped like hell she didn’t meet anyone else, but it was a chance he’d just have to take.

“You have to trust me. If it’s meant to be, it will be.”

“I do trust you.”

“Good. Now come on. I’ll walk you back to the house.”

As she snuck in through the back door, he stood in the dark yard for several minutes. Then his phone vibrated, and he looked at the caller ID. It was Alex.

“I’m in my bed. Thanks again for the gift.”

“You’re welcome. Good bye, Alex.”

All thoughts as he drove home were focused on what he was going to do about his feeling for Alexandra. One thing was certain — he would have to prove to Alex’s family that he was worthy of her love. Not only that, he had to prove that he wanted her above anything in this world — that he could be a one-woman man.



When he woke up the next morning, it was ten o'clock. Luckily, he set his own hours at K-Town Publishing, which his father owned, when he wasn't away doing other modeling jobs. He worked in acquisitions for their urban fiction line, as well as a model for different projects within the company. He had, in fact, done several romance novel covers and photo shoots for catalogs, magazines and brochures that his father's company printed for various lingerie and sportswear companies. He wasn't in any particular rush to leave the house today. After he finally got dressed and went into the office, only ten minutes passed before Trenton and Elray Carter walked in.

"What's up? Working hard or hardly working?" Trent asked.

"Just looking over a new project."

"What are you going to get into tonight? Everybody's going down to The Pit to shoot some pool later. Wanna come?"

"Sure, what time?"

"Around six thirty."

"I'll be there, but most likely not until after seven."

All day long while reading over different manuscripts, he wondered whether Alex and her parents had made it safely to the school campus? Going to work would have been a total waste if he hadn't gotten a call just before lunch that his agent had booked him a modeling gig. This gig would have him gone again until

almost Christmas, right around the time Alex would be coming home for winter break.

Since he'd spent the last hour gazing at the same page, Kimble decided to call it a day, and head on over to The Pit.



Trent and Elray were both already at The Pit playing pool when Kimble walked in. As the waitress walked by, he placed an order for a drink, and then asked, "Who's winning?"

Elray cast him a sideways glance, shook his head, and replied, "You really have to ask?"

"Not really. How much have you lost El?"

"More than I wanted to, that's for sure."

That was no great surprise. Trent, after all, could have been a pool shark if he wasn't such a financial wizard. The same waitress kept checking to make sure none of them needed drinks, though Kimble was pretty sure what she really wanted was for Elray to hit on her. In fact, several women had ventured over and asked if they wanted to dance. Elray was the only one to accept. He had lost money to both Kimble and Trent, so he was done for the night.

Dying to know the status on Alex, Kimble missed his shot on purpose before he asked Trent, "Did your parents call yet?"

“Yeah they called. Mama didn’t want to drive back yet, so they got a hotel room. I think she just couldn’t stand to leave Alex yet.”

He didn’t want to show too much interest so he said, “I’m glad they all made it safely. Hey did I mention I got a gig? I leave in three days, and I won’t be back until almost Christmas.”

“I thought you said you weren’t doing anymore of those road shows.”

“What can I say? They offered me a nice bonus to do it.”

Just then, Elray sat down.

“What’re you two talking about?”

“Kim’s leaving for a few months on a gig.” Trent replied.

“Really? I got a call today too. Are you doing the Esquire show?”

“Yeah, but I’m shooting for a spread in Men Today magazine before I start the show.”

“Cool, I’ll talk to you. Honey over there needs a ride,” Elray said as he got up and left.

“Look, as much as I’m enjoying your company, I’m about to call a friend and go spend some time with her before I go home,” Trent teased after his brother left.

“You gonna toss me to the side for some woman?” Kim laughed.

“Of course. Sorry, buddy, but a willing woman’s always gonna be my preference in dates. You’re welcome to come. She has a sister.”

“No thanks. I’m going home. I haven’t told the folks yet that I’m leaving, and Karen’ll be upset. She hates when I leave for long periods of time. Talk to you tomorrow.”

Karen was his little three-year-old sister, and his pride and joy. He still remembered when his parents told the rest of them they were having another baby. Twenty seven year old Keith, twenty four year old Keaton, seventeen-year-old Kimberly and himself at twenty had laughed, thinking they were joking. His parents had been in their fifties so it was no wonder they hadn’t taken them seriously, but little Karen was the joy of their lives.



He smiled to himself as he pulled into the driveway because his little sister adored Alex. The lights were on downstairs, so somebody was still up. His older brothers Keith and Keaton technically didn’t live there, but since Karen’s birth he couldn’t tell. Walking in the front door Karen looked up, saw him, and ran to jump into his outstretched arms.

He should have known Keaton was the culprit.

“Why’s she still up?”

“She didn’t want to go to bed.” Keaton smiled at him. “You’re home early.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m leaving in a few weeks, and I won’t be home till Christmas.”

“Another show?”

“Uh huh, but I’m doing a photo shoot first for Men Today.”

Karen started to cry and Kimble could tell she was getting sleepy because she was rubbing her eyes.

“I’m going to rock her to sleep and put her to bed. See you in the morning,” he said as he headed upstairs giving Karen a horsey-back ride.

Karen went to sleep almost immediately. He placed her in bed, kissed her on the forehead, turned on her nightlight, and left the room. As he made his way down the hall to his room, his parent’s room door opened.

“Is that you Kimble?” his mother asked.

“Hi, Mom. Yeah it’s me.”

She stepped into the hall and closed the door.

“What’s wrong honey?”

“Nothing. I just put Karen to bed. Mom, I’m leaving in a couple weeks for a photo shoot and a road show, and I won’t be back until Christmas.”

“Kimble, you promised!”

“I know, Mom, but they offered me a huge bonus to do it.”

Pulling her handsome son into her embrace, his mother hugged him tightly.

“Go to bed. We can talk about it tomorrow.”

As he entered his room, thoughts of Alex plagued him again. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't stop himself. For what seemed like his nightly ritual since giving in to what he felt for Alexandra Carter, he showered then went to bed with a hard-on — again.

Chapter Five

The last to come down for breakfast the following morning, Kimble entered the kitchen to find Keith and Keaton were already there. His sister Kimberly, affectionately referred to as Kimber, was feeding his little sister Karen, who held her arms out to him. Smiling he plucked her up into his arms, and sat next to Kimber so she could finish feeding her.

“We heard you’re leaving for a few months,” Keith said in between bites of his blueberry pancakes.

“Yeah. I’m doing another show. Thanks, Mama,” Kimble said as she sat a plate of his favorite pancakes before him.

“It’s not like you need the money,” his father said.

“If I want to retire at thirty, I do.”

“Leave him alone,” his mother said. “Kimble is a grown man.”

Small-talk continued around the table during breakfast. Kimberly and Kimble stayed behind to help clean the kitchen, while Keaton took Karen to play in the yard. Keith and their father left for work. Keith also worked for their father as an editor and marketing executive. Kimber who worked as a real estate agent by day, but was actually an aspiring writer, left to show a house.

“I can tell you want to talk, Mama, but I want to spend some time with Karen. We’ll talk later, okay?” Kimble said.

Mrs. Brown nodded.

“Don’t buy her anything,” Kimble heard his mom yell after them.

He shook his head. His mom should already know she was wasting her breath. All Karen had to do was say gimme. Any of her brothers and her big sister would give her whatever she wanted. While waiting for his little sister to finish strapping herself into her toddler seat, he glanced up to see his mother standing in the window. She had a strange expression on her face, and he could just imagine what she was thinking.

She knew him better than anyone did, including his father. Of course, she would know there was more to Kimble accepting this job than he had let on. Her expression told him two things. One she had her suspicions as to why, but for now, she’d keep them to herself. Two she knew there was a woman involved. Truthfully and more specifically, she knew that that woman was Alexandra Carter.



Alex sat across the table from her parents picking at her food. They would be leaving to go back home today, and she’d be on her own for the first time in her life without them or her brothers. She should be on cloud nine, but instead she

was thinking of Kimble. When her parents had spoken to Trent this morning, he mentioned to them that Kimble was leaving again and wouldn't be back until Christmas.

Immediately she'd snuck off to call Trina and Lisa, who in turn called Crystal, Kimble's cousin, to get the scoop.

"How'd you hear already that Kim was leaving?" Crystal asked.

"Trent, told me," Lisa replied, then made a hasty excuse to get off the phone.

Alex thanked her partners-in-crime since grade school before heading off to finish giving her parents a tour around campus. Lucky for her, her dad wanted to get going before dark, because her mother would have gladly stayed another day. She didn't have class for two more days, so she and her new roommates were going to check out some of the local clubs and hang outs over the next couple days.

Her roommates Mona and Shasta seemed cool. Both girls were from the Midwest. Mona and Shasta both were born and raised in Chicago. Mona's father was a well-known preacher. She would have rather had Trina and Lisa but, she was happy they had also gotten into the colleges of their choice. Nevertheless, she was determined to enjoy her college experience. Shasta had a car, which was cool. They wouldn't have to depend on rides from anyone else. She and Shasta were still putting their things up in the room when Mona came in; she hadn't unpacked

more than she needed to. Mona proceeded to look at pictures Alex had hung up over her bed when she got to the pictures with her brothers she paused.

“Who’re all these fine-ass hotties?”

Alex stopped what she was doing and laughed.

“My brothers.”

Mona shook her head and said, “There should be a law against having that many fine brothers in one family. I suppose they’re all married?”

“No, actually none of my brothers’re married. But I think Dillon, my oldest brother, may be in love. My brothers never bring girls home, and Dillon brought one home for Christmas last year.”

“Oh! I think you and I are gonna be very close.” Mona giggled.

Shasta walked over to have a look to see if they were really as fine as all that. To her surprise they were. She then saw a picture of Alex, Kimble and Trent and said, “Now that is one fine brother there. Hey wait a minute! That’s bachelor number two in the GQ issue of Atlanta’s most eligible bachelors from last year!”

“His name is Kimble.” Alex laughed. “He’s my brother Trent’s best friend. We all grew up together.”

“Now this is a damn shame. Most girls never meet this many fine brothers their whole life. You have five gorgeous brothers and their friends are gorgeous too,” Mona declared trying to sound outraged.

As the girls continued unpacking, they laughed and got to know each other better. It was funny because whatever one forgot it seemed the other remembered to bring. Yes, Alex thought. They were going to get along just fine. Not surprisingly, Mona was the only one not tired since all she had really done was watch them and talk, but Alex and Shasta wanted to shower and take a nap before going out. Outnumbered, a defeated Mona turned on the TV to wait it out.

When the alarm sounded at ten thirty, a still-tired Alex and Shasta got up, dressed and hit the night scene. The first club they went to was called the Dragon Fly. It wasn't crowded but there was a fair number of people inside, and there wasn't a cover charge to get in. Mona wasn't the prettiest of the three of them, but it was plain to see she was the biggest partier. She stayed on the dance floor, never with the same partner.

It was two thirty, and the clubs would be closing soon. In order to beat the traffic jam in the crowded parking lot, the girls headed for the door. One of the brothers Alex had danced with a few times named Cal stepped in front of her and handed her a piece of paper, then leaned over and whispered in her ear.

"Here's my number. I hope you'll use it."

Alex smiled.

"We'll see," was all she would commit to. When he didn't move, she added. "I really have to go; my ride is waiting."

“I can give you a ride.”

Cal looked innocent enough, but growing up with five overprotective brothers, she had learned not to take chances.

“Maybe next time, if we see each other,” she replied.

Tired, both Alex and Shasta laid across their beds fully clothed and were sound asleep as soon as their heads hit their pillows. Mona, however, elected to watch TV again, since she still wasn't ready to go to bed.

The following day, after having eaten and spent a quiet day in their room Alex, Mona and Shasta stood at the counter of the skating rink. The school was throwing a skate party for incoming freshman, and even though none of them was a great skater, they had decided to go anyway. Cal was there and he spent a great deal of the evening with Alex. An excellent skater, he gave them all tips on how to get better, as well as showing them numerous tricks. When the session was over, Cal again offered to take Alex back to her place.

“No thanks. I came with my friends. I have a ride.”

“I'm sure they wouldn't mind if a handsome brother like myself gave you a ride.”

Laughing at his obvious lack of modesty, she shook her head no. Reluctantly Cal gave up, but he did insist on walking her to the car, which she agreed to.

Since Freshman Orientation was tomorrow, Alex wanted to get home and call her parents before calling it a night. While picking out the perfect outfit, Alex talked first to her mom, then her dad. She was not the least bit surprised that none of her brothers were home when she asked to speak to whoever was there. Briefly, she debated whether or not to call Kimble, finally deciding against it.

The next morning she woke up feeling ready to take on the world. Orientation went well and she got all the classes she wanted. As she left the hall, she called Cal to make good on her promise.

“Hey Cal it’s me, Alex. Do you feel like grabbing something to eat?”

“Sure, I’m five minutes from the Subway shop.”

“Okay I’ll be there in like fifteen minutes.”

Cal was seated in a booth when she walked in, and he got up to greet her. He tried to kiss her, but she turned her head and he ended up kissing her cheek instead. After eating, he offered again to take her home.

“No thanks. But I’ll call you.”

“If you don’t, I’ll call you.”

Puzzled because she hadn’t given Cal her number, Alex said, “Hey, wait! I didn’t give you my number.”

He smiled and replied, “I asked your friend for the number in your room.”

“Okay, then. I guess I’ll talk to you later.”

Looking up at the clock on the wall, Alex saw that it was almost six thirty and she wondered where Mona and Shasta were. If they were not home by seven, she was going to go down and get a little something to bring back to the room in case she got hungry later. At six fifty two, Mona called.

“Hey girl, come on down. Let’s go get something to eat.”

Ten minutes later Shasta pulled into the parking lot of Ruby Tuesdays. Inside Mona gave her name and the waitress showed them to a table where Cal and two other gentlemen were seated. Turning to Mona, Alex asked, “Whose idea was this?”

“Cal’s, but I told him you’d only come if he got dates for us too.”

Mona was one of a kind. Cal was cute, but Alex wasn’t sure she wanted to encourage him. Maybe she should see if someone besides Kimble could affect her. Cal certainly didn’t seem to, but then again she hadn’t really given him a chance.

Dinner was good. Alex only had dessert since she wasn’t that hungry and they all hit it off well. The guys suggested bowling, but Alex declined.

“I can take you home,” Cal offered.

“Okay,” Alex responded to everyone’s surprise.

When Cal drove Alex home and offered to walk her up, she accepted. At the door, Cal turned to her and said, “I’d like to kiss you good night but I won’t if you don’t want me to.”

“I’d like that.”

Wanting their first kiss to be special, Cal took his time. He pulled her gently into his arms and kissed her thoroughly. He was a good kisser, but it hadn’t moved her at all. Only Kimble could make her knees weak and turn her mind to mush with his kisses. Even though Cal’s kiss wasn’t what she’d hoped for, she participated for several minutes before ending it.

After he left, she took a hot bath while writing a letter to Kimble. Later laying in bed, she heard Mona and Shasta come in just before she dozed off for the night. She awakened the next morning to the phone ringing. It was her mother.

“Good morning sleepy head,” her mother said when she answered.

“Hi, Mom.”

“I won’t keep you long; I just wanted to let you know Dad is taking me to Vegas next weekend, so you won’t be able to reach me at home. I’ll call you and give you the name and room number of the hotel when we check in.”

“You know, Mom, you wouldn’t have this problem if you had a cell phone.”

“I don’t want a cell phone. I love you.”

“I love you too, Mom. Bye.”

The roommates settled into a routine, and Alex continued spending much of her free time with Cal. They were becoming great friends and she found she really enjoyed his company as much as she did Mona’s and Shasta’s. Frequently they all

went clubbing and skating together. It was at the skating rink one Saturday night that Alex took a bad fall and broke her wrist.

It would have to happen just before Christmas when she was going home. The only good thing was that it was her left hand, and she was right-handed. Knowing her mother would be upset, she decided to wait to tell her parents when they picked her up for Christmas break.

Her parents arrived three days later. Surprised to see her cast, her father asked, “What happened to you?”

“I fell at the skating rink.”

“Why didn’t you tell us before now?” her mother asked.

“Because I was coming home anyway. Besides. I’m fine. It wasn’t like it was life-threatening.”

The drive home was quick, and before she knew it, she was standing in her parents’ living room surrounded by her brothers who asked her the same question her parents had.

“What? Haven’t any of you ever seen a cast before?” Noticing her brother Elray wasn’t there yet, she added. “Where’s El? I thought he was coming home, too.”

“His flight gets in at ten thirty, and I pick him and Kimble up at eleven.” Trent said.

Alex tried to hide her excitement about seeing Kimble.

In honor of her homecoming, it was family night. Alex sat on the couch in between her mother and father. Dillon and Trent were sprawled out on the floor, and they were playing a game that their parents had invented years ago. Each member of the family had to tell something that they'd done recently that nobody knew about and then the other members of the family had to decide if they were telling the truth or if they were actually talking about someone else in the family. Unfortunately for the Carter brothers, their mother knew them too well and nobody had ever been able to fool her.

Trent left to pick up Elray and Kimble from the airport after being the only one not to get any of his questions right. When the two of them arrived home later, it was hard for her to hide her disappointment when Elray said, "Kimble decided at the last minute to take another job. He'll be home on Christmas Day and he's leaving again the day after."

Chapter Six

Tomorrow was Christmas, and Alex was looking forward to seeing Kimble. The last week had flown by; she had gone out several times with Lisa and Trina as well as done some last minute shopping. She was certainly having fun on her Christmas break, and when she spoke to Mona and Shasta, they were enjoying their visits home, too.

Dillon, Rayvon and Rayden elected to stay the night so the whole family would be together on Christmas morning. When they were kids if everybody stayed up until midnight, their parents allowed them to open gifts then but if any one of them fell asleep, everybody had to wait until morning. The two who fell asleep most often surprisingly were Rayvon and Rayden, but nobody even tried to stay up this Christmas.

Lying in her bed, she decided to call Kimble.

“Hello, Kim. I didn’t want to miss saying Merry Christmas to you and your family, just in case I don’t see you tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Alex. Merry Christmas to you and your family too. I’m sure we’ll see each other tomorrow even if it’s only for a little while. How’s school been? Meet any interesting people?”

“School’s been great. I think I’m going to really enjoy college life. One of my roommates, Mona, is so crazy. Shasta, my other roommate, is a lot like me. We have so much fun together.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” He really didn’t want to hang up, but he knew he should. “I’ve gotta go; I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Bye, Baby.”

“Good night, Kimble.” He’d called her “baby”, not “squirt” or “little girl.” She wondered if he realized it.

In the quietness of her room, she closed her eyes. Minutes later, she heard the faint sounds of her mother’s laughter. Turning over Alex wondered if she would be as happy as her parents were when she got married. With thoughts of Kimble on her mind, Alex drifted off into a peaceful sleep.



The next morning when she woke up, all five of her brothers were already up sitting on the couch waiting for her to come down.

“Where’re Mom and Dad?” she asked as she took a seat in the big chair in the corner.

“I think the Old Man kept Mom up late last night. They’re still asleep,” Trent said.

Leave it to Trent to say what everybody knew but at least had enough sense not to say. He looked at the five sets of eyes now looking at him and said, "Like you guys didn't hear them last night."

Brandis Carter, their father, walked in and said, "Just hope you find a woman who can keep you happy for thirty years." It was obvious that pops Carter wasn't embarrassed by his sex life and felt no need to explain any further to his children.

Once Mrs. Carter joined them, they spent the rest of their morning opening presents and snacking on leftovers.

It was three thirty in the afternoon, and Kimble still hadn't come by yet. Alex was beginning to think he had changed his mind when the doorbell rang. Thinking it was Kimble, Trent went to get the door.

"Hi, is Alexandra Carter here?"

"Who're you?" Trent asked.

"I'm Calvin Stewart. I go to school with Alexandra. I'm here visiting my brother, and I just stopped by to surprise her."

"Who's at the door Trent?" Sherry Carter asked.

"It's for Alex."

Alex looked up. She wasn't expecting anybody. Surprised didn't begin to describe what she thought when Cal walked in behind her brother.

“Cal, what are you doing here? Or should I ask how you know where I live?”

“I asked Mona. I told her I wanted to surprise you on Christmas.”

Before Alex could say anything, the doorbell rang again. Cal walked over to stand beside Alex noticing the not-too friendly eyes that followed him. Kimble came in carrying Karen, who hopped down and ran to Alex as soon as she saw her. Alex introduced Cal to everyone and they all took a seat. The tension in the room obvious.

One by one Alex’s brothers grilled Cal about every detail of his life, while Alex engrossed herself with Karen. If she had invited Cal, she might have tried to help him, but he had shown up uninvited so in her mind he was on his own.



Kimble sat across from Alex dividing his attention between Alex and her brothers. Even though he didn’t know anything about this Cal, Kimble didn’t like him.

It hadn’t escaped Kimble’s notice that Cal appeared fed up with being grilled, just before he said. “Alex can you walk me out?”

“Sure. Kim, can you play with Karen until I get back?”

While Kimble didn’t respond, he did get up and go over to take her place next to Karen. At the door Cal pulled Alex in his arms and kissed her. From where Kimble sat, he had a clear view of the door and his already dark eyes grew even

darker. Across the room, Kimble noticed Trent nudge Dillon before they both looked in his direction. He strained to make out what Trent was saying to Dillon. At first, it wasn't working so he strategically moved just a little closer by allowing a toy his sister was playing with to roll in their direction.

“I'll bet you every dollar I've every made that Alex is kissing Cal good night.”

“From the look on Kimble's face, I'd say you're probably right. Oh, heck — get over there before he gets up and kills him right here in Mama's house.” Dillon said.

Trent got up, came over to Kimble, and said, “Can you help me bring up some sodas from the basement?”

Again, Kimble didn't answer. He just got up to follow Trent. In the kitchen he turned to Trent, saying, “I need to get something out of the car.”

Outside he waited for Cal, then approached him as he came down the driveway and said, “Stay away from Alex.”

Not intimidated, Cal replied, “What goes on between me and Alex is none of your business.”

“Alex is like a sister to me. If you hurt her, trust me when I say you better hope her brothers get to you before me.” He didn't wait for Cal to reply.

Walking back to the house Kimble just barely missed Trent, who had to run in the back door before he was caught spying. When Kimble entered the kitchen Trent asked, “What did you have to get from the car?”

Kimble glared at him.

“Let’s just go down and get the sodas.”

After returning with the sodas, Kimble saw that Karen had started getting whiney.

“She’s had a long day. I guess I’d better get her home,” he said as he stooped down to pick her up. “Mr. and Mrs. Carter, Merry Christmas. Rayvon, Rayden, El— Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas to you, too, Kimble,” Mr. and Mrs. Carter said, as they got up and left the room.

All the Carter brothers said, “Merry Christmas,” while Alex offered to walk him to the door.

“Call when you get home. Okay?”

“I will,” Kimble responded.

Driving home, he glanced in the back, and Karen was already out like a light. As usual lately, his thoughts drifted to Alexandra Carter. Seeing her with Cal had infuriated him beyond belief. He wasn’t the jealous type but this was the third

time now he'd felt like murdering somebody because of Alex. He didn't even have a right to be jealous.

He had to stay away from Alex. He couldn't have her, but yet he couldn't stand the thought of her with someone else. He was being totally unreasonable, and he knew it. He'd bedded a few of the other models while out on the road, but outside the physical release it provided him, it meant nothing. He was twenty-three years old. Maybe it was time he thought seriously about settling down. He loved kids, and maybe it was time to start his own family.



Alex was still awake waiting for Kimble to call an hour after he'd left. Had he forgotten to call or was he with another woman? Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. She got up to answer it.

“What are you doing here Trent? It's late. I was about to go to sleep.”

“I know, sorry. I couldn't sleep. Can we talk?”

She stepped aside to allow her brother to enter, then sat on the edge of the bed next to him.

“What's wrong Trent?”

“Nothing really I was just wondering about this Cal who showed up here. Are you interested in him?”

“I'm not sure. He's nice, and I do enjoy spending time with him...”

“I feel there’s a but coming.”

“I guess if I was interested in him. I should feel more toward him and I don’t.”

“Isn’t he kinda the first guy you’ve ever really dated? Give it some time. The man for you is out there —there’s no need to rush it.”

“I know, but I guess it’s different for a girl, Trent. We don’t spread ourselves around while we’re looking for the right one the way guys do.”

He smiled at her.

“To an extent that’s true, but trust me —there are some girls who are just as bad if not worse than any guy.”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to be that kind of girl.”

“With us for brothers I don’t think that’s gonna be a problem.”

She laughed. Her brothers loved her a great deal and she loved them, too, but they eventually had to allow her to make her own mistakes. “Go to bed, Trent. We’ll talk again I’m sure but you guys have got to let me grow up. And you’ve also got to learn to accept that I’m going to make mistakes but always know I’m so happy I have you all to catch me when I fall. But you gotta let me fall sometimes. Okay?”

“I’ll try but you know it won’t be easy. Nite bighead.”

When she woke up the next day, it was two o'clock in the afternoon. Why hadn't somebody come in to wake her up? The Carter family always spent the day after Christmas taking down holiday decorations. Getting up, she quickly dressed and went downstairs.

"Hey, Daddy, where is everybody?" she asked when she walked into the kitchen.

"In the basement putting away the tree."

"Daddy, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, Baby. Are you hungry? Your mother left you and Trent a plate in the oven."

"Thanks. Where's Trent?"

"He's still asleep. You guys must have had a lot to talk about."

It didn't surprise her that her father knew she and Trent had been up late talking. He and Mama always seemed to know what was going on, even when you didn't think they would. She took a plate out of the oven and sat down.

"Daddy what would you think of me staying in Tennessee for the summer and working there?"

"I think I would rather you came home this year, but maybe next year after your mother is used to the idea of you being gone more, we'll consider it."

"Are you sure it's mama who needs to get used to the idea?"

“Oh I admit I wouldn’t like it, either, but if your mother knew you asked me and I didn’t try and talk you out of it, she’d give me Holy Hell.”

Alex laughed; the whole family knew Daddy didn’t like to be on Mama’s bad side. She still remembered the only time her mother had ever kicked her father out of their bedroom. It was when the twins had told Mama about racing. She’d had a fit. Even though it was still a sore subject, her mother eventually accepted it and allowed Daddy back in their room, but her father had vowed then and there never to encourage any of their kids to do anything that his wife wouldn’t approve of.

Dillon, Rayvon, Rayden, Elray and their mother came up from the basement.

“Oh Alex you’re up. Can you go get your brother?”

“Okay, Mama.”

“Tell him we’re all going outside to take down the outside decorations.”

“Yes, Ma’am. I’ll be right back.”

With the last of the Christmas decorations put away, Rayvon and Rayden offered to treat everyone to dinner. Of course, not everyone wanted the same thing. Wanting to get out the house, Alex took the different orders and offered to go pick up the food. On her way to Popeye’s, her first stop, she called Kimble.

“Hey Kim, I just called to tell you to have a nice trip.”

“Thank you. I’m already on the plane.”

“You’re gone already?”

“Yeah I caught an earlier flight. Stay safe I’ll see you this summer.”

After dinner, Dillon left because he had a date, but Alex had stopped by Blockbuster on the way home and picked up some movies, and the rest of the Carters stayed up late watching them.



The week flew by. Everybody was going out for New Years Eve but Alex. She just wasn’t in the mood to do more than bring in the New Year with Dick Clark. Trina and Lisa were both going downtown to the Underground for the Peach Drop. Cal even asked her to go out with him, but she declined.

Twice she tried calling Kimble, but he didn’t pick up, so she left him a message.

“Kim, I’ll be home all night. Please call me.”

It was ten thirty and Kimble still hadn’t called. She supposed he was busy and hadn’t gotten her message. She was just about to turn off the TV and go upstairs to bed, when the doorbell rang. She wondered who it could be. She wasn’t expecting anybody, and no one else was home.

“Hello can I help you?” she asked through the screen door.

Kimble turned around and flashed her a brilliant smile.

“Hey, Baby. Open up.”

Alex unhooked the door and swung it open. She was so happy to see him.

“Kimble! What are you doing here?”

“I couldn’t let you bring in New Year alone.”

“I didn’t tell you I was alone. How did you know?”

“I talked to Trent earlier today, and he mentioned that everybody had plans tonight but you. So I caught the next flight out.”

She was so touched that he would do that for her.

“Kim, thank you. But why would you go to so much trouble?”

Alex wished he’d say, “Because I love you,” but instead he pulled her into his arms and kissed her senseless.



Without breaking contact Kimble kicked the door closed with his foot, lifted Alex into his arms, walked to the couch and sat down. He hadn’t meant to kiss her but she looked so damn sexy standing there in her shorts and tank top, he couldn’t help himself. She wasn’t wearing a bra either, which suited his purpose just fine. Pulling down one side to expose her breast he gently sucked the nipple into his mouth.

He had never tasted fruit this sweet in his life. He’d known even before he got on the plane that he shouldn’t come, but Alex sounded so sad when he picked up her message. Then he talked to Trent and learned she would be spending New Year’s alone, and all sensible reasoning left him. He felt her hands in his hair

messaging his temples as he feasted on her exposed breasts. He had to get hold of his senses before he made love to her right there in her parents' living room.

Pulling his mouth from her, he said, "I'm sorry I got carried away."

Kimble knew from the glassy look in her eyes that she was still in a daze and only heard half if any of what he just said. Another kiss is what he wanted so when she leaned up to him, he happily gave her just that. Unwilling to place himself or her in the position of being caught by one of her brothers coming in early, he picked her up and took her up to her room, placing her on the bed. It was almost midnight, and he wanted her to remember this New Year's with him.

"I want to see all of you," he whispered in her ear after placing a series of short kisses along her face and neck.

Waiting for her to respond was murder, so when she nodded her approval, he breathed a sigh of relief before he began removing her top, shorts and sexy lace thong. She was absolutely beautiful, and his body reacted instantly. His arousal was so hard it was painful. He prayed for the strength to leave there without taking her innocence.

As she lay on the bed looking at him, Kimble waged a silent battle to keep himself under control. Alex, however, appeared to him to be totally out of control as she said, "Kimble make love to me. Please."

Nothing would have made him happier than to do just that, but he couldn't. Her exposed naval looked so inviting that he leaned over her to lick a path from her breast downward. Stopping at her naval, he gently swirled his tongue there, sending shivers of pleasure coursing through her body. Conscious thought threatened to leave him as he caressed her intimately. He couldn't however because the possibility of one or more of her brothers coming home still loomed in the back of his mind.

Kimble was aware of the time even if she was not. Lifting his head, he looked up at the clock, then back down at Alex, "Time to count down the New Year." Shifting his body lower, he held her hips steady for what he was going to do. "Start at twenty," he said then lowered his mouth to her.

"Twenty, nineteen, eighteen, seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, twelve, eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, oh..." that was as far as he heard her count before her body exploded. Her scream filled the otherwise-quiet room as he lifted her hips to him more in order to continue pleasuring her.

Kimble didn't leave her until the tremors in her sweet body were completely gone. Moving back up her body, he kissed her passionately before whispering, "Happy New Year, Baby."

"Happy New Year," she responded then slid her hand across his erection but he grabbed her hand and kissed her again.

“Baby I’d never leave here if I let you do that.”

Moving off her, he got up, walked over to her dresser, picked out a nightgown, and came back to her. Sitting on the side of the bed he sat her up and slipped the gown over her head picked her up, pulled the covers back and tucked her in.

“Go to sleep, I’ll let myself out and lock up.”

“Good night Kimble,” she said sleepily. “Call me tomorrow, okay?”

“I’ll be gone tomorrow, Alex. I have a six AM flight.”

He watched as she snuggled down in her bed, pulled her cover up, and drifted off to sleep before leaving.

As Kimble sat in the airport the following morning, he thought about how much he loved Alex. Something had to give.

Chapter Seven

Two days after her night with Kimble, Alex returned to school. When she got back, she and her roommates swapped stories about their Christmas breaks. Of course, in this version she left Kimble out. The rest of the semester went by uneventfully with the exception of her missing Kimble terribly. *Finally! Summer vacation!* she thought to herself sitting in the back seat of her father's car.

At first, when she arrived home only to learn Kimble would be gone most of the summer, she was hurt.

“Oh well I've got plenty to do and it's not like I won't see him before I go back to school.”

As it turned out, she might have been wrong. The summer was nearly over and she had not seen Kimble even once. She had the feeling he was staying away to avoid her, but didn't say anything.

Her parents were throwing her nineteenth birthday party before she left for school; they even invited Mona and Shasta to come. Mona had arrived yesterday and declared she was in love with all of Alex's brothers.

“They look even better in person.” She kept saying.

Shasta would be there today. Her parents had wanted to throw her party in a hall, but she wanted it at home so they could party as long as they wanted to. With everything already set up, Mona decided to go along for the ride to the airport. As usual, Hartsfield Airport was busy and they had to keep circling between the parking and loading areas until they saw Shasta come out.

“Hey girl, I am so glad you decided to come,” Alex said as Shasta got into the car after putting her bags in the trunk.

The three friends chatted endlessly on the ride back to the Carters’ house. Trina and Lisa would be arriving soon as well. Finally, all her friends were going to get to meet each other. When they got back to her parents’ house, Alex showed Shasta the room she and Mona were sharing, then introduced her to her brothers. Like Mona, Shasta said, “Dang they look even better in person.”

“I gotta get my cell from my room. Then lets go down and help my mother.”

“We’ll meet you in the kitchen. Go ahead and grab your phone. I don’t know why you need it. It’s not like you’re gonna get any calls.”

Mona giggled as she raced down the stairs.

When Alex walked into her room, she saw the box sitting on the bed that hadn’t been there when she left. There was a card.

“Hey, Baby. I know you didn’t think I’d forget your birthday.”

It wasn't signed but she knew who it was from —Kimble. She laid down the note and opened the box. On the top, there was a copy of the newest edition of GQ with Kimble on the cover. When she opened the magazine, a note fell out.

“Read the interview.”

Reading the interview, she gasped because one of the questions was if he were dating anybody special, his answer was, “My heart has belonged to the same woman for years.”

The reporter went on to ask who this special lady was and he answered, “She knows who she is. Nobody else needs to know.”

Could he be talking about her? Of course he was. Why else would he have given her the magazine and told her to read the interview? Putting the magazine in her bag, she rushed downstairs with new-found hope.

Shasta, Mona, Trina and Lisa hit it off well, and Alex had so much fun at her party that she and her friends didn't go to bed until seven o'clock the next morning, long after everybody else had gone home. Her parents let them sleep the whole day and had a huge meal waiting for them when they did finally get up. Her brothers came by and they spent their last night in Atlanta watching movies instead of going out as they had originally planned. Her oldest brother Dillon brought a date. Her name was Venice. It was the same girl he'd brought home at Christmas; things must have really gotten serious between them.



When the girls woke up the next morning, they smelled breakfast. There were four bathrooms in the house, so Alex let them go first while she went to check on her mother in the kitchen.

“Morning, Mama,” she said as she walked in to see all the food her mother had made.

“Hi, Baby. I made your favorite.”

“Thanks, Mama. Mama what do you think of Venice?”

“I think your brother is in love, and I like her.”

“Me, too, but I have to admit I was surprised to see her. Dillon hadn’t mentioned her much since last Christmas so I assumed they weren’t seeing each other any longer.”

“Not because he didn’t want to see her. From what your daddy says, Dillon did something really stupid and Venice wouldn’t talk to him. I have it on good authority he had to kiss some major butt to get back in her good graces. I don’t think he’ll be stupid enough to let her get away again.”

“You really think it’s that serious?”

“Let’s just say I think there’ll be a wedding in the family soon.”

A stunned Alex sat down and spooned some fresh fruit onto a plate before saying, “Good. Dillon deserves to be happy.”

Soon her friends began to trickle in one by one. She left them all to eat while she went to take a shower and get dressed. When she came back down, her father was there and her mother was placing a large plate in front of him. Trina and Lisa got up to leave because they had to get ready to go back to school.

Mona, Shasta and Alex went upstairs to bring their bags down, and when they did Trent and Elray offered to load up the car. Once the car was loaded, Alex turned to her brothers.

“Now I am going to see you this semester right?”

“Yes.” They responded together like scolded children.

Her father made the drive in record time, and before she knew it, they were in front of the dorm unloading the car. Her parents had decided they were not staying overnight this time because her father and Dillon were getting the twins ready for some big race and he needed to get back.



The girls hadn't been back in their room more than an hour when Cal called.

“Hello, Alex. I was wondering if you'd like to get together and go bowling.”

Alex was still more than a little ticked at him for showing up at her house on Christmas. Her brothers always did say she held a grudge too damn long, but she decided to go anyway. Cal brought a couple of his friends along and they actually had a great time.

When they got home, Alex told Mona and Shasta, "I'll be up in a minute." Before she could say anything, Cal surprised her by leaning over and kissing her. Her mind went to Kimble. How his kisses left her weak and breathless, where as Cal's didn't do anything for her.

As Cal ended the kiss, he said, "You've got a pretty protective family don't you?"

"You have no idea. My brothers have chased away almost every guy I've ever known. I think they think I'm going to stay a little girl my whole life."

"They don't scare me. At least they didn't outright threaten me like your friend Kimble. What a dumb ass."

"When did Kimble threaten you?"

"When I got to my car he was standing there waiting for me. He told me if I hurt you I'd better hope your brothers got to me first. He said you were like a sister to him, but I think it's more than that. You're so beautiful, any man would be nuts not to be interested in you."

"My family can be a bit over-bearing at times, and Kimble's been my Brother Trent's best friend since they were five, so he's just like family. Well, I better go on up. I've got some reading to do."

As she walked up to her room, she realized again that she was totally baffled by Kimble. Why, if he cared so much about her, was he so unwilling to give them a chance? Sure, her brothers would be mad at first, but they'd eventually get over it.



Before going home for Christmas vacation, each girl agreed to tell her family they were spending spring break with the others family. They decided since this was their second year of college it was time for them to do something fun together, like a trip to Vegas. Once they all returned from Christmas, the semester seemed to crawl by but it was finally Spring break —time to party. Alex was so excited! She'd been to Vegas once with her family, but her brothers hadn't really let her have any fun.

She felt a little guilty about lying to her parents. She didn't tell them she was going to Vegas because they would have mentioned it to her brothers. She didn't put it past her brothers to show up, and she intended to have a good time. They were staying at The Mirage and had tickets to several shows. None of them cared much about gambling, but they definitely were going to try it before leaving.

The plane ride was terrible. There was turbulence for a good portion of the flight, but they were determined not to let it spoil their fun. At the airport, they picked up their rental car, got directions to the hotel, and went to check in. Deciding to make the most of their visit, they wanted to do everything first class.

Shasta pulled the car into the valet gave the valet their room number and a tip to bring up the bags while they checked in.



Kimble had checked into his room and was sitting in the hotel lobby when the last person he expected to see walked in —Alex. He lifted the magazine he hadn't really been reading higher so she couldn't see him, but he had a perfect view of her. She looked absolutely gorgeous dressed in a lavender and white chic pants suit and matching shoes. For a woman of only nineteen, she exuded confidence and grace. He had known many women in his twenty-four years, but none had impressed him like this girl did.

His next lucid thought was, what was she doing there? He'd talked to Trent two days ago, and not once had he mentioned anything about Alex being in Vegas for spring break. He was there on business for his father's company, K Town Publishing. Her soft laughter drew his attention back to her. She and her friends were approached by a group of young men.

"Hello there beautiful ladies," two of the three young men said.

"Hello," Shasta and Alex replied in unison.

"I'm Mark, this is my friend Eric and that's Reggie. If you ladies aren't busy tonight we'd love to take you to dinner. Why don't you give us your room number and we'll call to set it up?"

“Look since we don’t know you, we’re not going to give you our room number, but I will tell you we will be going to a show tonight. If you figure out which one, then I guess that means we were meant to see you again.” Alex said, as the three girls walked away.

“Smooth, Baby, very smooth.” Kimble laughed to himself. Again, he could kiss his mother for forcing him to take those lip reading classes.

Now that Alex and her friends had left the lobby, Kimble made his way to the exit; sure he would now be late for his meeting. Making it with three minutes to spare Kimble quickly took his seat. Only half-listening, Kimble wished the meeting were over ten minutes after it started. The only thing he wanted to do right now, was get back to the hotel. He had to see Alex.



Now showered and changed, the girls made their way down to the lounge for a few drinks. It was hot, so Alex had slipped into a teal strapless dress that flowed around her ankles. The material was thin and light and it felt so cool.

The lounge was cool, but the company thus far was boring as hell. Was there a man there who didn’t think he could get in a woman’s pants just because he had money? Alex personally thought most of them were lying through their teeth. She’d been around money her whole life, and she seriously doubted these wanna-be’s had any. Why did men assume women would be more interested in

them if they had money? She had had enough. “I’m going to go up to the room to take an aspirin and lie down awhile.”

“Okay, we’ll call you when it’s time for the show,” Shasta said.



Kimble barely had time to sit in his seat, when he saw Alex and her friends enter the lounge. He watched her stride across the room now, obviously annoyed. Alex didn’t hide her emotions well. There was no need to follow her immediately, because he already knew what room she was in. He’d gotten the information from the front desk clerk with nothing more than a wink of his eye. He sat there a minute wondering what those idiots had said to get on her nerves since their backs were to him, but decided their loss was his gain.

Leaving the lounge, he headed to the elevators. Why did the ride to the sixth floor seem to take forever? Stepping off, he had second thoughts about whether or not this was a good idea, but continued down the hall. This was an opportunity he wasn’t going to pass up. Standing outside her door, he paused then raised his hand and knocked.

“Did you forget your key?” Alex asked as she opened the door.

“No. You didn’t give me one.”

“Kimble, what are you doing here?”

In answer, he came forward and swept her into his arms before lowering his lips to hers. He now stood there kissing her with all the suppressed emotions he had kept bottled up for far too long. By the time he turned her loose she had probably forgotten the question. His body, however, now had some questions of its own like, *can I please get some more of that?*

Before closing the door, he reached back, placed the do not disturb sign on the knob, then closed it. There were several years of passion built up, and he was likely to keep her busy for hours. As he picked her up and carried her over to the bed, he saw the depth of the love she'd spoken so often of, in her eyes.

“I tried to stay away from you but somebody up there must really want us together.”

Placing her on the bed his fingers slipped down the front of her dress, and were now circling her erect nipples. A minute later his tongue replaced those fingers. Gently he sucked the puckered bud into his mouth, and she cried out his name. The sound of his name on her lips in the midst of her passion was as sweet to him as a glass of rare wine.

Alex's skin felt hot as a firecracker beneath his lips. That wasn't enough, he wanted to feel his own skin next to hers all over. He noticed how her fingers trembled as she unbuttoned his shirt and pushed it from his broad shoulders, her eyes feasting on his wide chest before she leaned over and ran her tongue around

his nipple and he groaned in pleasure in response to what she'd done. He stood up and back slightly to allow her better access to the belt on his pants. When she had the belt open and the pants unzipped, she sank down in front of him to pull his pants down his long legs. He then stepped out of his pants and pulled her back up to his lips. He wanted to savor this time; it could very well be his only one. He definitely wanted to burn every detail of her luscious body into his brain.

Pushing her back down on the bed to remove her dress, he admired the beautiful woman before him. Every inch of her body deserved his appreciation. Turning her over on her stomach, he explored every curve and valley, licking his way down her spine.

“Open your legs wider for me, Baby,” Kimble whispered and she opened them without any further encouragement from him.

Once she complied, he continued his journey. He kissed and nibbled at both cheeks, placed kisses on the backs of her knees and finished his exploration at her feet. Knowing how sensitive his own feet were, he simply rubbed them between his hands before gripping them and helping her to turn over onto her back.

As he positioned himself, above her Alex placed her hands on his chest. “Wait there's something I need to tell you first.”

Thinking she was going to tell him, she was no longer a virgin he pulled one of her hands from his chest and licked her fingers before sucking on each one of

them. He then said, “It doesn’t matter Alex. All that matters is right now — this, us.”

He eased the tip of his manhood slowly into her, to allow her body to adjust to him. He continued to penetrate her depths until he reached the undeniable barrier of her virginity. Straightening on his arms, he looked down into her beautiful face, and he knew that no matter what —Alexandra Carter would always have a special place in his heart.

Though sorry for the pain he would cause her, he couldn’t help but admit to himself that he was happy it was him who would initiate her into womanhood. Before taking the thrust that would break through her virginity, he gathered her close.

A small scream escaped her lips, which stopped Kimble immediately. He spread warm kisses all over her face before capturing her lips and kissing her passionately. He ravished her mouth with his tongue, hoping it would make her forget the pain between her legs. When he was sure he had rekindled the fire in her delicious body, he began moving his hips in and out of her. It didn’t take long for Alex to catch his rhythm and join in the dance. Riding her a lot faster than he had intended to, he tried to gain control but her matching strokes were driving him over the edge. Her body began to tremble beneath him and she clutched her raised legs to his hips when her body began to explode in climax.

Seconds later Kimble withdrew from her and emptied himself on her stomach. Damn, he had totally forgotten about protection. Luckily, he'd remembered just in time. While he considered the thought of Alex having his baby appealing, she should have a say in that decision before she got pregnant. They needed to talk. He got up and went into the bathroom, then came back with a warm towel and proceeded to clean her. She was probably a little sore — he hadn't been as gentle as he should have been considering her virginal state.

A nice hot soak in the tub would prevent any unnecessary soreness, so he scooped her up from the bed and carried her back into the bathroom.

“Really Kim, I can walk. You don't need to carry me.”

“I know.” He said as he sat her down on the side of the large tub just long enough to run a hot bubble bath.

First, he eased himself down into the water, then he pulled her down onto his lap in the water.

“This feels so good.”

Alex sighed as she rested against his chest.

The tub, oversized in both length and depth, accepted both their bodies with plenty of room to soak. He wanted her again but he wasn't so insensitive that he'd take her again before some of her soreness went away. He'd settle for caressing her.

Why did she have to moan out in pleasure? There was no way she wouldn't feel the changes that were taking place. "Is that what I think it is?" She asked turning around in the tub and straddling him.

"What do you think it is?"

She let her hand stray below the bubbles of the tub to find that part of him that had just given her so much pleasure. Kimble relaxed his head back against the tub and enjoyed the soothing feel of her hand. Her ministrations had him hard as a rock, and when he opened his eyes to look at her, she was smiling sweetly at him. Doomed, he groaned, lifted her and brought her within inches of his straining erection.

The feel of her as she brought herself down onto his erection was indescribable. He helped set a rhythm for her then allowed her to take over while he concentrated on feasting on the tempting breasts that were before him. If he didn't know any better he'd swear that Alex was as experienced as himself the way she was riding him, pulling out and settling herself back down on him precisely at the right moment. Unable to take any more Kimble gripped her hips and began thrusting upward meeting her frantic need with his own. Just as she threw her head back and screamed, he gripped her tighter and surged upwards, emptying himself inside her this time.

As both of their breathing finally began to return to normal, with him still inside her Kimble leaned her back, “I’m sorry Alex I didn’t mean for that to happen. I wanted to protect you.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry for Kimble. I wanted you just as badly,” she tried to reassure him.

“That’s not what I mean. I came inside you without any protection. You could get pregnant.”

“Oh. I hadn’t thought of that.”

Kimble looked into her wide eyes.

“One slip is all it takes, Baby.”

Seeing the worried look on her face, he quickly added. “Don’t worry. You know I’d be there for you. I wouldn’t let you face it alone. I’d take all the blame.”

Alex laughed.

“Oh, so now you’d want my baby to be an orphan. My brothers would kill you. Well maybe they wouldn’t kill you but they’d be mad. Did I ever tell you that my grand-daddy and my uncles used to hate my daddy?”

“No but Trent told me the story. Hey, we all have skeletons in the family closet. My oldest brother, Keith, was born two months after my parents got married.”

Laughing and talking they drained the water from the tub, ran more and finished the bath they'd started earlier. After getting dressed Kimble asked, "Would you like to go dancing with me tonight?"

"I'd love too. What time should I be ready?"

"I'll be back as soon as I change clothes."

"I'll be ready."



Alex walked Kimble to the door, where she saw Mona and Shasta step off the elevator and begin walking toward the room.

"Bachelor number two from GQ's issue of Atlanta's finest bachelors. Right?" Mona said as she approached them.

Kimble flashed a brilliant smile, looked at Alex, and said, "That's me."

"What're you doing here with Alex?"

"Technically, I'm not with Alex. I'm here on business, and I happened to see Alex in the lobby."

"Really! Then why are you coming out of our room?"

"Wow Alex, did you get another mother?"

Alex laughed.

"No Mona just thinks it's her God-given right to be nosey."

"Whatever. My question is still on the table."

“If you must know he wanted to ask me to go dancing, and I said yes.”

Alex noticed Mona looking her up and down and remembered she had changed clothes. She then watched Mona raise a finely-arched brow before asking.

“Why didn’t he ask you in the lobby?”

Knowing Mona the way she did Alex knew she’d just keep grilling her about Kimble so she decided to just leave. Of course when she did get back to the room, which was well past three in the morning, Mona was wide-awake and waiting for her.

“Okay I know it’s not lady-like to kiss and tell, but that is one fine-ass man, so you’d better tell me something.”

Alex laughed but she had no intention of telling Mona anything.

“He’s my brother’s friend, and he just wanted to show me a good time.”

“Uh huh.”

Chapter Eight

After their initial lovemaking session, Kimble decided he had better be prepared, so he took a trip to the drug store. There was no way, now that he'd tasted the fruits of his love, he'd give her up. Making love to Alex was by far the best experience of his life. To hell with fighting his attraction to her. He and Alex were going to be together now. Her brothers would just have to accept it or else.

Kimble spent the remainder of his time in Vegas with Alex. He felt a twinge of guilt that she had to divide her time between him and her friends — though not enough to give up this special time with her.

The time they spent together was private, and they didn't want to share with Mona or Shasta or anyone else for that matter. Telling Alex's brothers was going to be a challenge as it was so this time he intended to savior.



Mona, Shasta and Alex sat in the airport, waiting for their delayed flight. Alex was still amazed at all she and Kimble had shared. It astounded her that she could drive a man like him crazy. Kimble literally had his choice of any woman he wanted, and he wanted her! It would have been nice if he was on the same flight with them, but he'd left on an earlier flight.

Once Kimble arrived back home, he immediately reported to his father on the business meeting in Vegas, but then withdrew into himself. Thoughts of the time he'd spent in Vegas with Alex continued to plague him. What if his carelessness resulted in a baby? Of course he'd stand by her. For better or worse, he now accepted just how much he loved Alexandra Carter. Over the rest of the semester he and Alex spoke by phone two or three times a week and the relationship continued to blossom.



Alex was in her room preparing for her finals. She'd just gotten off the phone with Kimble when her phone rang again. This time it was her brother, Trent. Dillon, her oldest brother, was getting married. She nearly fainted. If she thought that news had surprised her, his next words made her sit down.

“The bride is pregnant.”

“Who is he marrying?” she managed to ask.

“Venice. The wedding is in July. Mama wants to have the wedding before it becomes obvious that the bride is expecting. Oh yeah, Venice wants you to be one of her bridesmaids.”

“Tell her I'd like that. I'll be home before the end of the month, and I'll help any way I can.”

“I’ll tell her.”

It was the best news Alex had gotten since her return from Vegas, except for getting her period. It had embarrassed her to call Kimble and tell him that, but she didn’t want him worrying about whether she was pregnant. The funny thing was—he had actually sounded disappointed when she told him.

Finals ached, Alex prepared to go home. In more ways than one, this would be an exciting summer. To her delight, Dillon and Venice were picking her up from school. Although she had met Venice a few times already, Dillon felt they could really get to know each other on the drive.

Alex sat in back with Venice and they talked nearly the whole way home. It was amazing how much they had in common.

“I couldn’t stand Dillon when I first met him. He knew he was cute and I knew he’d be trouble,” Venice said.

“Really?” Alex found herself responding through her gut wrenching laughter.

“Yes and I was right too.”

“Oh do tell.”

“Uh, hum. Would you two mind not talking about me like I’m not even in the car?”

“Hush and pay attention to the road,” Venice scolded her soon-to-be-husband.

Resuming their conversation, Venice told Alex, “I fought like heck to keep myself from falling for your brother, because any man that fine surly did not have a faithful bone in his body.” She laughed. “In fact, that was the reason we originally broke up. I stopped by his shop unannounced and caught some girl wiggling her nasty tail all over him.”

“And you didn’t kick her butt?”

“For what? She wasn’t doing anything Dillon didn’t allow her to do.”

Before responding, Alex looked at her brother and shook her head.

“You’re better than me. If it had been my man, I would have kicked her butt.”

“You don’t have a man, and even if you did, I better not hear about you fighting over one,” Dillon chimed in.

“Whatever! Didn’t Venice tell you to watch the road?” Alex snapped back.

“As I was saying before the rude interruption, luckily for me my Dillon was already in love with me, and he wasn’t about to let me go that easily. True, I put him through hell trying to get me back, but I had to be sure he loved me as much as I love him.”

Listening to Venice, Alex felt her brother had chosen well. She already liked her but after their talk, she felt certain that she would come to love her soon-to-be-sister-in-law very much. The ride home seemed much shorter, but then again she hadn't really paid much attention.

"Tell somebody to bring their lazy butt out and help with all your stuff," Dillon yelled after them when they got out and did not grab anything.

Rayvon and Rayden were in the living room, and Alex told them what Dillon said. Not missing a beat, they said in unison, "If we're so lazy I don't see any reason to go and help him."

"I'll do it," Venice said.

Rayvon and Rayden jumped up so fast Alex had to laugh.

"God, he hasn't even married her yet and she's already blackmailing us," they whined as they walked out to help Dillon.

Alex knew her brothers. They liked Venice. If they didn't, they wouldn't have moved. After all her things were brought into the house, Alex went up to her room. Lying across her bed, she reached over to flip on the stereo for background noise before calling Kimble.

"Hello," Kimble answered.

"Hey, Baby, where are you?"

"At the gym with Trent."

“What kind of trouble is my brother getting you into?”

“Not the kind you think.”

“Really, and what kind of trouble would I be thinking of?”

“The female kind. Don’t worry you’re more than enough woman for me.”

There it went again; the temperature went up thirty degrees and she was hot all over.

“Thanks Kimble. Now I’m gonna have trouble getting to sleep tonight.”

He grinned, knowing exactly what she was talking about.

“Well that only seems fair since I’ll have the same problem knowing you’re this close to me, and I can’t hold you in my arms.”

“I could sneak out and meet you somewhere.”

“No. I don’t want you out by yourself. Besides we need to talk. Here comes Trent. I’ll talk to you later. Dream about me. Okay?”

“Only if you dream about me.”

“You know I will. Good night.”



The look on Trent’s face showed he was wondering who he was talking to but he must have decided not to ask if it was Alex. Kimble was glad he didn’t, not that he would’ve told him it was Alex anyway. Rigorous workouts three or four

times a week were the norm for him. Trent, however, had never been into physical fitness the way he was, and he voiced his objection.

“Man my body is screaming at me from all this physical torture.”

“You okay? You don’t look too good, Dog.”

“Shut up. Whatever’s on your mind I hope like hell you work it out before you kill me,” Trent said as he walked into the locker room to shower.

Part of him wanted to follow his best friend and tell him, “*What’s bothering me is I’m in love with your sister.*”

If Trent was truly his friend, and he believed that he was, he would accept that he loved his sister desperately and wanted to be with her. One thing was for sure—he didn’t care if he had to fight all her brothers; he wouldn’t walk away from Alex again and risk losing her forever.

So far, he and Alex had played it cool. Fate had a way of intervening because just when he didn’t think he could go another day without seeing her, he ran into her at the Kroger grocery store.

“Hey Baby, miss me?” Kimble asked, coming up beside her standing by the bakery counter.

“Yes.”

“We need to talk, Alex.”

“Okay, let me finish getting what Mama sent me for, then follow me to Wal-Mart and I’ll get in the car with you.”

“Okay. I’ll meet you in the parking lot.”

As promised, Kimble was in his car, in the parking lot when she came out. He followed her to Wal-Mart then she jumped in the car with him.

“We need to just tell your parents and your brothers about us.”

“Why, has something happened? What changed your mind?” she asked as he drove.

He parked in the parking lot of Long John Silver’s because all her brothers hated seafood, and this was one place they weren’t likely to run into any of them. After cutting off the engine, he leaned over and kissed her before answering.

“You. I can’t live without you, Alex. I think about you all the time, I haven’t made love to anyone since Vegas.”

“Really Kim, I admit I was hoping you wouldn’t be with another woman after all we shared, but deep down I wasn’t sure.”

“Believe it. You’re the only woman I want.”

She hugged him fiercely.

“I love you so much Kimble, but my brother’s wedding is coming up. Can we wait until after that?”

“I love you too. If you want to wait, then we’ll wait.”



Alex was on cloud nine when Kimble took her back to the car. She had been in love with Kimble for so long. What did it matter if she waited now that she knew he loved her too?

When she got back home, her mother and Venice were in the kitchen. Before she set the groceries down, her mother said, “Alex go outside and tell your father I said it’s time for him to come in, and if he tells you to tell me in a minute, you tell him I said he doesn’t have a minute.”

Alex laughed, set the bags on the counter, then went out the back door to tell her daddy what her mother said. Ten minutes later, she and her daddy walked in the back door together.

“That was longer than a minute Bran,” her mother scolded.

“Who said anything about a minute? Alex and I were just walking slow.”

Her daddy walked over to his wife circled his arms around her waist then winked at her and Venice.

“Ugh, lets go. Mama and Daddy are about to act like teenagers,” Alex said as she and Venice walked out of the kitchen.

“I think it’s sweet that your parents are still so affectionate with each other. I hope Dillon and I are always that way. I love him so much.”

“Yeah, I can tell. Venice, can I ask you something?”

“Sure, what is it?”

“Well there’s this guy and I love him like crazy, but I’m sure you know by now how my brothers are, and let’s just say he’s a lot like them. But he loves me, and I know he’d give up his past lifestyle for me. How do I tell my brothers? The first thing they’re going to want to do is kill him?”

“Would it surprise you if I told you my family didn’t like Dillon at first and most of them still don’t?”

“No. Considering my brother’s reputation, it would surprise me more if they did like him. I mean all my brothers are sweet as can be, but they definitely have their faults, women being at the top of the list.”

“Even though Dillon’s well-off, my dad said he was no good and I was better off without him. But I stood my ground after we got back together, and I told my parents, my sisters and my brothers if they wanted to be a part of me and the baby’s life they had to accept Dillon, too.”

“And they accepted it just like that?”

“No. My mother was so mad that she said when Dillon breaks my heart for me not to come running back to them. I love my family, but I can’t live for them. I have faith that once they see how happy we are, they’ll be okay.”

“Is your family even planning on coming to the wedding?”

“Yes, but I already told them not to come if they don’t plan on acting right. It’s my day and I won’t let anybody spoil it for me.”

Alex saw the sadness in Venice’s pretty face, and her heart went out to her. Listening to her, she had such a feeling of dread because her brothers were so pig headed; now she wasn’t sure they would ever forgive Kimble.

“We’ll be your family, but I know your own family will see how happy you are and be just as happy for you.”

Venice wiped the tears from her face.

“I’m sorry Alex.”

“It’s okay. Why don’t you go lie down in my room until Dillon gets back?”

She watched as Venice walked up the stairs, then went into the living room and turned on the TV. She felt so bad for Venice having to choose between her love for her family and that of the man she loved. The sad part was, she was going to be in the same situation when she told her family about her and Kimble. Well — Alex knew her mother, at least, would be on her side. For that, she was grateful; she couldn’t image how it would feel not to be able to go to her mother.



When Dillon got there Venice was still asleep, but he could see the tear stains on her face when he checked on her. Walking back downstairs he asked Alex, “What happened, why was Venice crying?”

Alex told him everything that she and Venice had discussed. She saw the muscles in her brother's face tighten. He was mad; there was no doubt about it.

"What the hell do these people want from me? Even if they don't like me, can't they see what this is doing to Venice?"

"Calm down, Dill. She has us now. The hell with her family."

"That's what I keep trying to tell her, but she loves her mother."

Unfortunately Venice's mother's first husband was a dog, and she measured every man she met by her experience with him and she just ran over her current husband, Venice's father. Dillon hated what this was doing to Venice, especially in her condition.

As Alex listened to her brother, she felt, maybe, she might have another ally now that he was in love. She briefly considered telling him about her and Kimble, but with everything else he was dealing with, she decided she would do as she and Kimble originally planned, and wait.

After dinner, Alex volunteered to clean the kitchen, then asked her father if she could borrow the car to go and visit some friends. When she pulled out of her subdivision, she reached for her cell phone and called Kimble.

"Hey Baby, where are you?" Kimble asked when he answered the phone.

"Daddy gave me the car I told him I was going to visit a friend. Where do you wanna meet?"

“Call Trina and tell her you’re going to drop the car at her place. I’ll pick you up there.”

“Okay, I’ll see you in thirty minutes.”

After a few weeks of sneaking around, it was starting to take a toll on both Alex and Kimble, and they couldn’t wait until the wedding this Saturday so they could finally tell her family. There had been several close calls, but neither of them would trade the time they had had together. As fate would have it, she and Kimble had even been paired up in the wedding, giving them the opportunity to spend more time together.



No one was looking forward to the rehearsal dinner. Venice’s family was still down-right hostile when it came to Dillon, and Alex knew her parent’s were not going to stand for it. As Alex walked into the restaurant with her family, a bad feeling came over her.

Venice and Dillon approached the table and Venice began making formal introductions.

“Mama, I’d like you to meet Mr. and Mrs. Carter, Dillon’s parents.”

Willing to give Venice’s mother the benefit of the doubt Mrs. Carter extended her hand in welcome, as did her husband.

“It’s nice to finally meet you.”

“Look, I’m sure my daughter has already told you I’m against this marriage.”

“Then why are you here?” Mrs. Carter fired back.

“I was hoping since my daughter will not listen to reason, that talking with you might solve this problem.”

“Then you’re wasting your time. I adore your daughter and I couldn’t be happier for my son. I had hoped this would be a pleasant evening for our families, but I have no intention of sitting here listening to you go on about nothing.” With that being said, Mrs. Carter turned to her husband and children and said, “Let’s go.”

Chapter Nine

The day of the wedding was finally here. Alex and some of the other bridesmaids were putting the finishing touches on Venice's makeup and helping her with her veil. She made a beautiful bride. It was obvious to Alex that Venice was upset her mother still had not come around, but her brother Dillon and everyone else was determined to make Venice's day as special as possible. Since the entire Carter and Brown family were already in the wedding, Alex had heard Dillon arranging for their grandfather to walk Venice down the aisle, if her dad didn't show.

After Alex told her mother and Dillon just how stressed out Venice had admitted to her she was, both her mom and her brother insisted that Venice speak as little to her family as possible. Dillon had confided to Alex that after the wedding and the baby was born, there would be plenty of time to deal with that situation. Alex agreed because she knew how concerned her mom was about Venice because she wasn't sleeping well, and her appetite had dropped off.

Moments later a knock on the door interrupted Alex and all the bridesmaids as they continued to fuss over all the last minute details to make the bride her most beautiful.

“Yes,” Alex called out.

The wedding coordinator stuck her head inside and said, “It’s time for the girls to get lined up.”

“Are my parents here yet?” Venice asked.

“No. We can wait ten more minutes, and then we need to start.”

“That’s okay. Let’s go ahead now.”

The pain Alex saw on Venice’s face made her mad as heck. How could her family do this to her? Standing in the door about to leave Venice to get in line, her eyes meet with Kimble’s and she silently wondered how her family was going to react to her relationship with him.

The one thing in her favor, or so she thought, was she was secure in her family’s love, but her brothers would definitely be mad at Kimble. With the decision made to proceed with the wedding, Alex closed the door and walked over to get in line next to Kimble. Just as the coordinator was about to open the door to start the procession, the church doors opened.

Everyone in line turned to see Venice’s parents standing there. They hesitated a minute then entered the vestibule. Elray Carter stepped in front of them.

“If you’re here to cause trouble, you can leave.”

Kimble and Trent went to stand beside Elray —not to stop him, but to reinforce what he'd said. They all liked Venice, and she made Dillon happy. That was all that mattered to them. Even though she didn't care for Venice's mother, Alex still felt it would make Venice happy to know her parents were there to support her on this special day.

Walking in front of her brothers and Kimble she asked, "Would you like to speak to Venice?"

"Yes. I've been a complete fool. I can see that her young man loves her, and I want to be a part of her day if she'll have me," Mrs. Wilson replied.

Alex knew that no matter what she would want her mother with her, so she turned to Kimble and her brothers.

"It's okay; just let them speak to her for a minute."

"Fine, but if Venice gets upset, I'll toss you out myself. Alex stays in the room," Elray snapped.

"Thank you," Mrs. Wilson said as Alex led them into the room where their daughter was waiting.



Several minutes later Mrs. Carter came out to see what the hold-up was. Elray told his mother what had happened, and that they were still in talking to Venice. Before Mother Carter could make it into the room, Alex followed by Mr.

and Mrs. Wilson came out. Vandella Wilson walked up to Mother Carter, hugged her and whispered in her ear, “Thank you.”

Both of Venice’s parents escorted her down the aisle to the man of her dreams. The wedding itself was beautiful. The bride’s and groom’s mothers, the bride, and even the groom had tears in their eyes before the ceremony was over. After the wedding, it took hours to photograph everyone, before they finally left for the reception. The reception hall was decorated beautifully in champagne and white like the church. Once there, more pictures were taken before the bridal party was seated at the head table.

Rayden Carter, Dillon’s best man stood and tapped on his glass to get everyone’s attention so that he could propose a toast to the happy couple. After his toast, to everyone’s surprise, Vandella Wilson, the bride’s mother stood requesting to address the happy couple.

“Venice, honey, I want you to know how happy I am for you and how much I truly love you. Dillon, I want to tell you how sorry I am for treating you the way I have, and I want to tell you in front of everyone here how happy I am that my daughter has you.”

Venice was crying so hard that her makeup had begun to run, as she went into her mother’s outstretched arms and they embraced for several minutes before her mother looked up and motioned for Dillon to join them. Dillon approached his

new mother-in-law and hugged her tightly, then pulled his new wife to him and kissed her passionately.



Alex, sitting next to Kimble at the table, was silently crying. Kimble noticed and reached below the table to rest his hand on her thigh, then squeezed it gently. When Alex looked up at him, he smiled at her and she smiled back, but continued to cry. It tore at his heart to see her crying, even tears of happiness. Pulling his handkerchief from his pocket, gently he wiped the tears from her face. Neither of them saw the four sets of eyes watching them intensely. Trent and his mother smiled at the tender gesture, but Elray and Kimble's brother, Keith, were both frowning.

Under normal circumstances, Kimble would never be so stupid as to let his guard down and show such tenderness toward Alex in front of her whole family. Any idiot could see that there was more to the gesture than just friendliness, and when he looked down at Elray, he knew he'd have to prevent a fight. If not tonight, it would be soon.

Kimble knew just from Elray's expression that it took all the strength he had not to get up and try to knock the hell out of him. Fortunately, for him, he also knew that Elray knew if he caused a scene at his brother's wedding, his mother would kill him.



Elray caught a glimpse of Kimble watching him. His idiot brothers might be fooled, but he wasn't, Kimble was interested in Alex. He liked Kimble, but he loved his sister and he couldn't let Kimble break her heart. Kimble wouldn't be faithful, and for that reason, he couldn't have his sister because she deserved better.

The reception lasted well into the night, even after the bride and groom left at midnight. He tried several times to corner Kimble. If he didn't know better, he'd swear that both his own brother Trent and Kimble's brother Keith were running interference for him, because he never got the chance. Deciding to give up for now, he focused his attention on one of Venice's friends who had made it clear earlier that she was interested in him.

Elray finally left, and, Trent and Keith relaxed. The reception didn't die down until around three in the morning. Everyone had left except Alex, Kimberly, Trent and her parents, who were putting wedding gifts in the car. Alex was Kimberly's ride.

"Mom it's late, and I have to take Kimber home. I'm going to just stay at her house," Alex said.

"Okay honey. Drive safely and you girls keep the doors locked until you get home."

Trent who over-heard the exchange started to object, but his mother trusted the Browns completely. Besides, Kimble wouldn't try and seduce Alex in his parents' house.

After they split up, Kimberly said she had a stop to make before they went home and gave Alex directions.

"Who lives here?" Alex asked when they pulled up in front of the Stone Glen townhouse complex.

Kimberly merely smiled, placed her key in the lock and they walked right in. There wasn't much furniture, so whoever lived here must have just recently moved in. Kimberly turned on the lights that led upstairs and Alex followed her up, not wanting to stay downstairs alone. Kimberly then went into the last door on the left, which appeared to be the master bedroom.

"You can watch TV in here. I'll be back in a minute."



Alex switched on the TV, but looked up when the door on the other side of the room opened. Kimble stepped into the room holding a single long-stemmed red rose.

"What're you doing here?" Alex asked, surprised to see him.

"I live here. Or should I say I just bought this townhouse and I'm going to live here when I'm in town."

“Really. And does my brother know you bought a townhouse?”

“No.”

“I love you.”

Alex remembered another time that Kimble had the same look he now had on his face as he moved toward where she stood. The kiss he lightly placed on her cheek before handing her the rose reminded her why she loved this man so much. He had such a sweet and giving nature that complemented her perfectly.

“I know,” she heard him say just before he reached up and started pulling out the pins that were holding her hair up.

He must really love her hair, Alex thought as he arranged the curls that had now fallen partially across her face and shoulders. Her hair cascaded down her back, where he could run his fingers through its silky texture. She loved everything about him. Had he been dying all day to make love to her, as she had been to make love to him?

She felt the straps of her dress slide off her shoulders. Next, his warm lips feasted on her breast until she melted in his arms. He then quickly removed the dress completely. She had on nothing beneath her dress but a pair of sexy lace thong panties. Alex could see the look of appreciation on his face for a woman who didn't wear unnecessary clothing.

She watched breathlessly as he removed his clothing just as quickly, rolled on a condom, and then backed her up against the wall. As he lifted her up, he said, “Wrap your legs around me.”

Once wasn't nearly enough after having been apart for weeks. When they finally had their fill of each other, they fell asleep the minute their heads hit the pillow.

Alex woke up the next morning to Kimble gently shaking her.

“Alex baby, we need to get you over to my parents' house before everybody starts getting up.”

“Okay, I'm up,” she replied. She certainly had not gotten much sleep last night, so she was understandably very tired and was surprised that Kimble was able to get up so easily.

He wasn't going to go with them to his parents' house.

“I'll call you later.”

She heard him say from the bathroom. A minute later Kimber walked into the room just as she finished putting all her clothes from last night back on. She couldn't believe that she had totally forgotten Kimber was in the house. Immediately Alex blushed, when she thought about all the noise she had made.

“Don't look so embarrassed; I know how my brother feels about you, and I couldn't be happier.”



They made it to the Brown's house and Kimberly snuck them in and up to her room without anybody seeing them.

"Why do I get the feeling you've done this before?" Alex teased her.

"Hey I have overbearing brothers, too. Granted they aren't as bad as yours, but I've had to sneak around before."

They laughed, stripped down and got into bed where they slept nearly all day. After an early dinner Alex went home, showered, spent some time with her mother, and then went upstairs to her room and went back to sleep. She was so tired from the lack of sleep she'd had over the past couple days that she didn't wake up until nine thirty. Everybody but Elray was gone when she came down.

"Where is everybody?" she asked.

"Daddy took Mama out, and I have no idea where everybody else is."

"What are you doing home?"

"Since I didn't get a chance to confront Kimble last night, I decided I'd ask you."

"Ask me what?"

"What's going on between you two? I'm not stupid, Alex, so don't look at me like you have no idea what I'm talking about."

“El there is nothing going on between me and Kimble because even though I’d like it to be, he feels differently.”

“What do you mean you’d like it to be? You are not ready for a man like Kimble; he’ll only break your heart.”

“So what are you saying, I’m not good enough for him?”

“Of course not. What I’m saying is you would be looking for a commitment that he isn’t capable of giving you,” he replied with an exasperated sigh.

Angry now, Alex asked in a high-pitched tone, “How do you know what he’s capable of giving?”

“Sis, we’re too much alike. He doesn’t have to commit to get what he wants from a woman. So why would he?”

“So what you’re trying to tell me is if you found somebody who you really cared about and wanted to be with, there is no way you would commit to her, even if it meant she’d walk away from you?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying, but Kimble’s still young. He’s only twenty four years old. Do you really think he’s ready to settle down to one woman?”

“Mama and Daddy were young, and I know Daddy’s never cheated on Mama or regretted settling down at a young age.”

“There’s always an exception to every rule. You know that as well as I do.”

“Well it really doesn’t matter because like I said, Kimble’s made it clear that we’re only friends. He thinks of me as a sister.”

Now, in light of her conversation with Elray, Alex began to rethink her decision to tell her brothers about her relationship with Kimble. Maybe it would be better to wait. If things didn’t work out her family would never have to know about them, and his friendship with her brothers would not be affected.

“I’m not Dillon or Trent. I’m watching you.”

“Ooh, I’m scared,” she said getting up to go into the kitchen. Unfortunately, when she came back into the living room to watch TV, Elray was still there. Though he glared at her for several minutes, he didn’t talk anymore about Kimble.

It was late, almost two in the morning, and her parents still were not home. It was obvious that Elray was hanging around for her benefit; he wasn’t convinced that nothing was going on between her and Kimble. Since she had no desire to see who could last longer, Alex got up and went to her room. She had a book that she’d purchased and started several weeks ago. Maybe she’d finish it tonight.



The next day Alex called Kimble at work to tell him what had happened between her and Elray.

“I wanna wait. After talking to El, I know my brothers’ aren’t ready for this.”

“Waiting won’t make telling them any easier,” Kimble said out of frustration. He was tired of sneaking around. In his mind, there was no question where the relationship was going, but he would respect what she wanted — at least for now.

They continued seeing each other over the rest of the summer with Kimble making plans to visit her at school as much as he could. Dillon and a very pregnant Venice took her back to school when her summer vacation was over.

When she arrived, her roommates, Mona and Shasta were already there. Cal even came by to help them get settled in. He also made it clear that he was still interested in more than a friendship.

“I hope we’ll get to know each other better this year.”

“I’m already seeing someone else, Cal, but I do hope we can stay friends.”

He didn’t try to hide his disappointment.

“It can’t be serious.”

Alex elected not to respond. It would serve no purpose to try to convince him that her relationship was, indeed, serious. She did, however, protest when he tried to pull her into his arms and kiss her good night.

“Friends Cal, that’s it. If that’s not enough then I guess this is good bye.”

“For now it’s enough, but I’m willing to fight for what I want,” he said as he left, visibly still upset.

Venice and Dillon originally planned on staying a couple days just to allow Venice to relax, but when Alex showed up to take her brother and his wife out to breakfast Dillon said, “I’m cutting our trip short, Venice is not feeling well and I’m worried. I already called her doctor and mama.”

“Dill make sure you call me when you get home.”

“I will.”

Two days later, she learned from her mother that Venice had been placed on bed rest, so she and Dillon were staying with them in order for the family to look after Venice during the day while Dillon was working. Her mother assured her that both Venice and the baby were fine. It turned out that Venice had been overdoing it trying to get her new business, a bakery off the ground, and the doctor wanted her to rest.



It was almost Christmas break again, and Alex hadn’t done much all semester except attend classes, *which she aced*, and sneak off to be with Kimble when he could get away to come and see her. Both Shasta and Mona questioned her about where she would sneak off to on those weekends, but she just told them she needed time alone.

Mona, never one to mince words, said, “Fine keep your secrets.”

She looked up from the book she had been reading and smiled.

“That won’t work, Mona. I’m not telling you anything.”

“You don’t have to. I know you’re sneaking around with some guy. He must either be ugly as sin or someone your family wouldn’t approve of.”

“He is neither; we’re just making sure that the relationship is going to work out before we decide to go public.”

“I can tell you like him a lot. I hope everything works out. Just make sure I’m in the wedding.”

She hugged Mona, besides Trina and Lisa, Mona and Shasta were her closest friends.

“You know I will.”



Two weeks later, her father picked her up for Christmas vacation. Venice was due any day now, and Alex was glad she would get to be home for the birth of her first niece. All her brothers were at her parents’ house when she got home and to her surprise, Venice’s mother had completely changed and was just as excited as her family about the arrival of her first grand child.

The whole family waited on Venice hand and foot, but poor Dillon was a wreck. If Venice didn’t have that baby soon, he was going to drive everybody crazy. Her mother was a wreck too; this was after all her first grand-baby.

Alex missed Kimble, but he'd told her to stay with her family, as he had plenty to keep him busy. Christmas Eve rolled around, and the Carters were having a get-together at the house. As luck would have it, Venice's water broke during the party. Everyone in attendance who was immediate family went to the hospital to await the birth of the newest Carter. As they all sat in the waiting area, Alex looked around at her family. She wondered if the hospital staff thought her family was crazy considering the number of people there.

Venice had been in labor now for over six hours. No one had left and Dillon had finally contacted her parents. They had been attending a Christmas party as well. Mrs. Wilson had both her and her husband's cell phones in her purse and wasn't aware that Dillon had been trying to reach them until she checked her messages. Venice wasn't due for another few days and considering she had been overdue with all her children, Mrs. Wilson didn't expect her daughter to have the baby before her due date.

Since their arrival a few hours ago, both mothers took turns going in to check on her and bring back reports of her progress. Dillon refused to leave her side at all. Venice had elected natural childbirth and Mrs. Carter was having a hard time seeing her in pain.

“I really wish Venice would let them give her a little something to take the edge of the pain. This is her first baby, she’s going to be in labor for quite a while,” Alex overheard her mother tell her father.

“Sweetheart if my memory serves me well, you were just as adamant about not having any drugs when you delivered our children.”

“I know. And now I know what you must have gone through as I see Dillon like this.”

Four hours later, nine pound six ounce, twenty-one inch long Sherice Nicole Carter was born. She was a beautiful baby and after the family assured themselves that both mother and baby were doing fine, and they each had a chance to see the baby, everyone started to leave. Dillon, of course was spending the night with Venice and the baby. Venice’s mother actually had the hardest time leaving her new granddaughter.



Once the rest of the Carter brothers broke camp, Alex was just about to go home when she called Kimble.

“Hey Baby,” he said as he picked up the phone.

“Venice had the baby. She weighs nine pounds and she is so beautiful. I’m coming over; I miss you.”

“Do you think that’s a good idea?”

“Trust me, no one will notice I’m gone; everybody’s too tired.”

“I’ll see you when you get here.”

Twenty-five minutes later Alex pulled into the driveway of Kimble’s townhouse. He had given her keys, so she let herself in.

When she appeared in the kitchen doorway, Kimble looked up from the juice he was drinking. The look of pure desire in her eyes turned him on instantly. Rising from the chair. He went straight to her, lowering his head for a kiss. It wasn’t a gentle kiss.

They hadn’t been together since she had been home from school and their need for each other consumed them. Reaching under her skirt to pull her panties off, he was glad she never seemed to have on pants when they were together. He wanted her, and he wanted her now. Lifting her onto the table, he laid her back, lowered his shorts, and plunged into her.

As his body slid back and forth into hers, he placed his hands on either side of her legs to encourage her to widen them so he could penetrate her deeply. Just when he didn’t think he could feel any more pleasure than he already did, he felt her inner muscles tighten around him. Her scream reverberated throughout the kitchen, as her body spiraled over the edge with him following her minutes later. After it was over, he couldn’t believe that they had just made love on the kitchen

table. With her still joined to his body Kimble pulled her forward and sat down in the chair cradling Alex close to him.

As they continued to hold each other, he could feel himself growing hard inside her again. Trailing kisses along her shoulders, he lifted her to help her establish her rhythm as she rode him.

Kimble's breathing became labored, as he allowed Alex to make love to him. More than ready to explode, he wanted to hold out as long as possible to make sure Alex reached her pleasure with him. Just when he didn't think he could hold on any longer Alex cried out and collapsed onto his chest. Grabbing her hips to hold her firmly in place, Kimble surged forward exploding his release into her.

As their breathing returned to normal and his senses came back, Kimble realized that in his haste to be with her they hadn't used protection again. Beating the odds once was good, but they couldn't keep taking chances if they planned to keep their relationship a secret.

"Alex."

Unable to move, she purred a contented, "Yes?"

"Baby we have got to be more careful."

It took her a minute to register what he was talking about.

"You worry too much Kimble. Everything's fine. I started taking the pill."

"You did, when?"

“I went to the clinic when I got home.”

“You know you’re in trouble now,” he grinned at her.

“Trust me —so are you.”

Kimble didn’t want her parents to worry or her nosey brothers to be suspicious of her whereabouts, so he told her to call home.

“Hey, Daddy, I stopped off at Trina’s.”

“Okay, I’ll let your mom know. Drive safely and we will see you later.”

“Thanks, Daddy. I love you.”

Now that he had time, Kimble made them breakfast and they opened the gifts they had bought for each other. When all the gifts were opened except one, Alex said, “Close your eyes and don’t open them until I tell you too.”

As he complied, Kimble asked, “What have you got up your sleeve, young lady?”

For several seconds he didn’t hear anything, was Alex even still in the room. Just as he was about to sneak a peek he heard her say. “You can open your eyes.”

Damn! his mind screamed when he opened his eyes to find Alex standing there in a purple and black sheer negligee. At that moment, the only thing he wanted to do was pull her down to him and brand her as his woman.



Two hours later Alex finally made it home. The house was quiet when she arrived, so she assumed everybody was still sleep. Deciding to take advantage of the quiet house, she rushed upstairs to take a long leisurely bubble bath before going to bed to take a nap.

Trent woke her up at three in the afternoon.

“Everybody’s going to the hospital to see the baby. Did you wanna come?”

“Yeah, let me slip on some clothes; I’ll be right down.”

By the time she made it downstairs, everyone had left except Trent. He was stuck with the task of driving her.

“Elray told me about the conversation he had with you concerning Kimble,” Trent said as they walked out to the car.

“And.”

“And I want you to know I think he’s wrong about Kimble. I know him better than anybody, if he wants you—and I know he does—he knows he has to straighten up and fly right.”

“Why do you think he wants me?”

“I saw the two of you the night of your party in the yard, and I also heard him threaten to beat your friend Cal’s ass if he hurt you. He said he did it because he thinks of you as family, but I know for a fact he was jealous. And I’ve known him long enough to know he’s never been jealous of a woman before. Besides, Alex,

I'm not stupid. I see how the two of you are around each other when you think nobody's paying attention."

"Let's say you were right and we did want to see each other. Would you tell the rest of the brat pack and Mom and Dad?"

"No. But Alex, take things slow. You're both young. Don't confuse being attracted to someone with being in love with them. Don't do something now because of your raging hormones that you may regret later."

She had never loved her brother more.

"Thank you Trent. I promise I won't."

This was the best Christmas! Her brother was married with a baby, and she was in love. Even better, she was in love with someone who loved her just as much as she loved him. Now she just had to find a way to tell her family.

Chapter Ten

Over the next week her family spent a lot of time with little Sherice. It was only too funny because whenever anybody held her, Dillon instructed them how to do it correctly. Venice, on the other hand, scolded everyone.

“If all of you don’t stop holding her so much, she’s going to be spoiled.” Venice warned them all.

Of course, all her complaints were ignored. Little Sherice was the first grand child and the first niece of the Carter family; she was destined to be spoiled.

On New Year’s, Dillon wanted to treat his wife to a night out on the town, and asked Alex to baby sit. When her mother found out that Alex was keeping the baby she wanted to stay home but her father said, “no way.” He had booked them a room at the Hilton, since they were attending a New Years Eve party downtown.

All her brothers were going out as well, so it was going to be just her and the baby. Kimble was going to his father’s company party, but he promised he would come by before midnight to bring the New Year in with her. As promised just before midnight Kimble arrived. Little Sherice was asleep so they brought the New Year in dancing to Luther Van Dross playing softly in the background.

“I hate to leave you, but I really have to get back. My father has some very important clients at the party.”

“It’s okay; I understand Kim.”

Since it would be awhile before they saw each other Kimble took the time to kiss her properly. A quick peck wouldn’t do. He also gave the baby a kiss lightly on her little cheek.

“I’ll see you in a few weeks.” He said to her when she walked him to the door.



After Kimble left, Alex made the baby an extra bottle of baby formula and went on up to bed. Since Dillon had told her that she was keeping the baby all night, when her bedroom door slowly opened at three in the morning she wondered who it was. Finally, her eyes adjusted, and she saw it was her brother.

He smiled at her and said, “Her mother couldn’t stay away a whole night.”

Venice, standing directly behind him rolled her eyes and added, “Neither could her daddy. He kept wondering if she was sleeping okay.”

“She’s such a good baby. I didn’t have any trouble with her.”

“We’re staying here the rest of the night. We just stopped in to check on her.”

Dillon leaned over his sister and kissed her lovingly.

“See you in the morning.”

“Okay, night Venice.”

Alex and the baby were still up when her parents stopped in forty-five minutes later to check on their little grand daughter.

“Dillon and Venice are here, too,” Alex informed her parents. Her mother wasn’t surprised. She remembered how hard it had been for her to leave Dillon when he was little. Over the next hour, all her brothers stopped in to check on the baby. They all pretended to be so hard—whatever.

Alex began to feel sorry for her niece. Surly her brothers were going to be even more over protective with her. Truth be told, so was she.

Her mother made a big breakfast the following morning, and the family gathered in the kitchen to eat.

“Hey Alex we’ve got something to show you.” Rayvon and Rayden said. Assuming it was a new racing car, she got up to follow them outside.

In the driveway was a gorgeous metallic blue Cadillac Escalade. When she turned around Rayvon was dangling keys at her.

“Oh my God, is this really mine!” Alex shouted.

They all smiled.

“Yes it is, from all of us. To show you how proud we are of you,” her mother answered.

Alex walked around the truck with her mouth hanging open. She couldn't believe her eyes, Dillon had obviously customized it for her. Opening the door on the driver's side, she got in. The two-toned blue and white seats had her name stitched in both headrests. Dillon opened the passenger door to get in and show her all the toys he had installed. It had everything her mother's car had. He pressed a button on the remote and a small TV screen slid out and up.

"This little feature stays between us," he said.

Excited, she wanted to go and show all her friends and she wanted to see Kimble.

"Can I take it out for a ride?"

"Shouldn't you get dressed first?" Dillon laughed.

Alex looked down at herself. She had forgotten she wasn't dressed yet. Hopping down she hugged her family, then ran to go take a shower and get dressed. She had called Lisa and told her to meet her at Trina's house before she even left her own house. When she got there, she honked the horn and waited for them to come out.

"Oh hell no, girl. You are so lucky," Trina said as she inspected the truck.

"I know. I still can't believe they bought this for me. It's completely paid for. Even the insurance has been paid for a whole year."

"Can we go for a ride?" Lisa wanted to know.

“Yeah, get in.”

They flossed up and down Mt. Zion for a while, then went to South Lake Mall. Alex dropped them at their homes a few hours later, and called Kimble to tell him she was coming over. He was outside when she pulled up, and he didn't look surprised by her gift.

“You knew about this didn't you?” she asked after kissing him.

“Of course I knew. Your father and brothers caught hell from your mother because she was afraid you'd get jacked. She wanted to get you a car. They convinced her you could get jacked no matter what you drove, but they'd rather you were in something that was big and safe.”

She laughed.

“That sounds like Mama. Will you go for a ride with me later?”

“Yeah, sure. I have something for you too.”

When she got back home everybody was still there. She took Elray, Trent, Rayvon and Rayden for a ride.

“I'm impressed. You handle this baby well,” Elray said.

“She should as much as she's been using Dill's truck,” Trent replied.

Rayvon and Rayden who were in the back playing video games said, “shut up and let her concentrate.”

She shook her head wondering if her brothers would ever change. She hoped not.



Later that night she picked up Kimble. They went to Joe's Crab Shack in Gwinnett to get something to eat, then back to his place. Kimble drove while Alex sat back and relaxed. Once they made it to his house, he pulled the truck into the garage. Though her brothers still didn't know about his town house, he decided not to take any chances.

"Wait a minute," Alex said, when he tried to get out of the truck.

Looking at her passion-filled face, he felt like such a lucky man. He still wanted to tell her family about them. He was tired of sneaking around. He wanted her with him always.

His thoughts were distracted when Alex climbed into the back seat and began sliding her dress off. He loved her so much. He had never had a woman who satisfied him the way she did. It was more than sex with her. He climbed into the back seat with her, undressed, and made love to her in the truck before going inside, where they made love again in the shower. It was getting late and though he didn't want her to go, she needed to get home.

"Keep the doors locked and call me the minute you get home," Kimble said as he watched her back out of his garage.

As he waited patiently for Alex to call when she arrived home, Kimble thought aloud. *If we weren't doing all this damn sneaking around, my baby could have just spent the night.* Oh yeah, he was definitely tired of this mess.



Three days later her parents and brothers saw her off as she left to go back to school. Mona and Shasta were blown away by her new ride. They rarely used Shasta's car over the next few weeks when they went out unless Alex stayed home. Cal had stopped by a few times since she had gotten back. She could tell he was hoping she had broken up with her secret boyfriend. They still hung out together, but he watched her in a different way now, and it bothered her enough that she made sure she was never alone with him.

Kimble was supposed to have come for a visit this weekend, but he had called to cancel because he had to fly to New York to do a video his agent had booked him with the rapper Trina. She was disappointed, but she understood he had to work. It would be another month before he would be able to come down and see her. Most of the classes she had weren't hard, so she signed up to be a tutor. As luck would have it, it turned out to be another two weeks added onto the month before she would see Kimble, because he had to do another photo shoot for his father's company before he could get away.

Kimble would be arriving any time now. He had called to tell Alex he was on his way. He had also called ahead and booked their hotel room, and she was already there pacing the floor waiting for him. She looked up when she heard the key turning in the lock. Her eyes were all swollen and red from crying and Kimble froze when he saw her.

He dropped the bag he was carrying closed the door and rushed over to her.

“What’s wrong Alex.”

“I’m so sorry Kim,” Alex said in between sobs. “I swear I didn’t plan this.”

He had no idea what she was talking about, “Sorry for what, Baby? Just calm down and tell me what’s wrong.”

She cried louder before answering, “I’m pregnant Kimble.”

“When did you find out?”

“Last week. I wasn’t going to tell you at all, but I’m scared.”

“I would have found out sooner or later anyway,” he reasoned.

She looked at him and shook her head.

“No you wouldn’t. I was going to get an abortion, but when I went to the clinic I couldn’t do it.”

By the way he grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her she knew he was mad as hell.

“What the hell do you mean you were going to get an abortion? Would you really have killed my baby Alex?”

“You don’t understand! I wanted the baby but I didn’t want you to feel trapped. I didn’t want everybody to say I trapped you by getting pregnant on purpose.”

“Do you really think I give a damn what people think? How far along are you anyway? Have you even seen a doctor yet?”

“No —when I missed my last period I took a pregnancy test. Kimble, I can’t go to the doctor. My parents will find out. I’m still on their insurance.”

He picked her up and took her over to the bed, pulled the covers back and put her in. She was so upset. She needed to just lay down, and calm down. He needed to think. He listened, as she cried herself to sleep, while he sat in the chair next to the bed watching her. Part of him wanted to comfort her, while another part wanted to punish her. He couldn’t believe she had ever considered killing his child.

When Alex finally woke up, she saw Kimble still sitting in the chair watching her.

“How long have I been asleep?”

“A couple hours. I thought you loved me Alex!”

The pain he felt in his heart must have shown clearly on his face because Alex got up, came to him, knelt in front of him and wrapped her arms around his waist.

“I do love you, Kimble. I was scared and I wasn’t thinking straight. I knew the minute I walked into that clinic I could never destroy something our love created.”

He pulled her up into his arms where they just sat and held each other. Neither of them said anything for a long time. They both got up and walked over to the bed where they laid down and fell into an exhausted sleep. The next morning when they got up, he said, “Go take a shower and get dressed.”

When she came out of the bathroom, he was on the phone. He finished his call and went into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, washed his face, combed his hair, then slipped on some clean clothes. Once done they went to the I Hop and had breakfast. When he pulled up in front of a small church she asked, “What are we doing here?”

“Getting married. You need to start seeing a doctor, and I have excellent insurance.”

“Kimble I can’t get married without telling my family first.”

He pulled out his cell phone.

“Fine, then lets call them now.”

“I don’t want to tell them this way.”

“Then what do you propose we do, Alex? We can’t just ignore the fact that you’re pregnant. You said you haven’t seen a doctor because you didn’t want your parents to find out. They don’t have to know until you’re ready to tell them.”

Getting married would buy some time. They got out of the car and started toward the church. The pastor was very nice. Kimble had already explained a little of their situation on the phone before leaving the hotel. He left out the parts concerning her family. Since the pastor thought him an honorable young man wanting to do right by his girl, he agreed to perform the wedding. He even offered to obtain a special licenses for them since his father-in-law also happened to be a judge.



As she stood next to Kimble and took the vows that would make her his wife, she wondered if anybody in her family was going to get married and a baby wasn’t involved first. Her mother had Dillon a whole year before she married her father; Dillon married Venice after he had already gotten her pregnant and now she was marrying Kimble because she was pregnant.

They didn’t have rings to exchange, but Kimble promised he would get her one as soon as they got back home. It didn’t matter to her; it wasn’t like she could wear it yet anyway.

The original plan was for Kimble to go home tomorrow night, but her unexpected announcement made it necessary to delay his departure until Tuesday—longer if necessary.

“Baby I need to get you added to my insurance and hopefully we can get in to see a doctor before I go home.”

“Yeah, I hope so. I really want you there with me.”

“Well let’s stop at the bank so I can have you added to my account so you can have access if you need money.”

“Kimble you don’t have to do that. My family gives me money, I tutor and I make extra money typing papers.”

“You’re my wife now, Alex. I’ll support you.”

“I won’t use more than I need to keep my family from getting too suspicious.”

“Use what you need.”

After completing errands, including getting a doctors appointment for Alex the next morning they had dinner before going back to the hotel. It was their wedding night. Despite the circumstances, Alex wanted it to be special. In her heart she was married to the man of her dreams not because she was pregnant, but because he loved her. Silently they undressed each other and got into bed. Kimble

just held her. As they lay together caressing each other, he scooted down on the bed where he gently laid his hand on her stomach.

“I don’t know if you know it yet, but I’m your daddy. I’m going to take very good care of you and your mommy, and earlier what mommy said—she didn’t really mean it.”

Alex was deeply touched by what he had done. Kimble remained next to her with his hand resting on her stomach, and they both fell asleep. They didn’t make love until early the next morning. When they did, he was so tender, caring, giving and gentle that it brought tears to her eyes. Baby or no baby, she loved this man.



On Tuesday morning as planned, Alex saw the doctor and had her pregnancy confirmed. They were given a due date in late September. Kimble hated the thought of leaving her alone.

“Baby are you sure you don’t want to just come home?”

“I’m sure. Please don’t say anything; I want us to tell our families together.”

“I won’t,” he replied, even though the first stop he planned to make when he got home was to see his older brother, Keith. He needed to talk with someone or he would explode.

He located Keith at the office, but Kimble really wasn’t in the mood to see his father, so they met in the parking lot and went for a walk.

“What did you want to talk about?” Keith asked.

“I got married this weekend.”

“You did what! Why the hell would you do that?”

Rubbing his face, Kimble looked his brother directly in his eyes and responded, “Because Alex is pregnant.”

“God damn Kimble, please tell me you didn’t. I knew you were interested in her, but I didn’t think you were stupid enough to actually get involved, at least not sexually.”

“It ain’t even like that. I love her, Keith. We’ve been seeing each other for awhile now.”

“Do you want the baby or did you marry her just to make things right?”

“I want Alex and that baby so bad it scares me. When she told me she considered getting an abortion I was mad as hell. I mean with any other girl I would have been relieved; hell I probably would have suggested it and offered to pay for it.”

“You must really love her. I’ve never known you to take chances before where birth control was concerned. Or did she tell you she was on the pill.”

“That’s because I never have. Alex is the first woman I ever made love to without protection. The very first time she wasn’t on the pill but we didn’t get

caught up then. She just starting taking the pill. Either it wasn't strong enough, or she hadn't been on it long enough."

"I'll do everything I can. Just let me know what you need."

"Thanks. Listening really helps, and I'll need you and Kimber to help get things ready at my place for when Alex comes home. I've got some errands to run I'll see you at Mamas later."

Talking to Keith helped clear his mind. Besides Kimber, he hadn't told anybody about his relationship with Alex. He wanted to tell his parents, but they'd feel honor-bound to talk to her parents, and Alex wasn't ready to face them yet so he had to respect her wishes. In the mean time, he would get started setting up his house to welcome home his new family. He hadn't put much more than a kitchen set, his bedroom set and a bedroom set in one of the guess rooms, so there was a lot he needed to buy.

He called Alex everyday to check on her to make sure she was doing okay and to ask her input on furnishing. At first, she seemed hesitant, but then she actually started to get into helping him.



For spring break, Alex drove home. She wanted to spend time with her family before she started to show. As badly as she wanted to tell her family about the baby and Kimble, she just couldn't do it. It wasn't that she was worried for her

self. It was how it would affect Kimble's relationship with her brothers that had her concerned.

The semester was almost over. She would be going home soon, and she still hadn't told her family. During one of Kimble's visits, they had gone to several jewelry stores and finally chosen rings. During that visit, Kimble confided to her.

"I've already told Keith and Kimberly."

"Why'd you do that, Kim? They won't say anything, will they?"

"No, Alex, they won't. I needed somebody to talk to."

She didn't want to spend his visit fighting, so Alex dropped the subject. Surprisingly, as stressed out as she was, the semester had gone extremely well. Her pregnancy hadn't affected her much other than the fact that she got tired quicker. She hadn't had any sickness, and her appetite hadn't changed much. Mona and Shasta babied her all the time.

She also continued to talk to her parents on a regular basis. In order to keep her brothers from becoming suspicious, she called them frequently as well. She wanted to keep her routine as normal as possible.



Just over four months now and hardly showing, she wanted to go home one last time. She was planning to take a couple summer classes to give her more time before she had to face the music, so she made a quick weekend visit. Kimble didn't

want her driving alone, so he and Kimberly drove there. Kimber rode back with Alex, and he followed them.

Her mother noticed immediately that she had put on some weight.

“It’s nothing but eating too much junk food and not going to the gym like I should. I’ll lose it all this summer.”

She hated lying to her family again.

Her little niece was getting so big! She spent a lot of her time with her while there. The weekend went by entirely too fast, though it was exactly what she needed to relieve some of her stress.

On Sunday afternoon she left to go back to school, again, Kimberly rode with her and Kimble followed. They only stayed until Tuesday, because Kimber had several appointments she had to be back for, including meeting with her agent about her recently-finished book.

Finally, just before it was time to go home for the summer, Alex called her parents and told them she was staying a few extra weeks to take a couple of summer courses.

Her mother understandably wasn’t happy, especially since this was the first anyone in the family had heard anything about her not coming home for the summer.

“It was a last minute decision, Mama, so I can graduate a little early.”

Kimble's father booked him and Elray on a photo shoot in New York in late June, which he tried to get out of. Alex was six months, and he really did not want to be gone for two weeks. Both Shasta and Mona had also stayed and taken some summer courses, and Cal was also there. Even though he made her uncomfortable, she knew she could count on him. Though she was pregnant, he made it known that he was still interested in her.



Alex missed class, which was unusual for her, so Mona went home to check on her. When she got there, she found Alex still in bed. She looked horrible — she was pale and sweating profusely.

“Alex, are you all right?” Mona asked leaning over touching her hand to her forehead.

“I don't feel so good. At first I thought it was just something I ate, but my stomach's hurting real bad.”

“Have you called your doctor?”

“Yes. He said if I wasn't feeling better to go to the ER. I don't think I need to do that though.”

Mona didn't care what she thought, she was taking Alex to the hospital.

“Where are your keys?”

“In my purse on the dresser.”

Mona still didn't know who the father of Alex's baby was, and even though she knew that Alex hadn't told her family about her pregnancy she didn't think Alex needed to be alone now. Alex would just have to forgive her, because if something went wrong with her baby, she needed her family to be there for emotional support.

Mona called her parents' house and Trent picked up the phone.

"Hi this is Mona, one of Alex's room mates. I'm sorry to call and worry you, but Alex has been taken to the hospital and I think her parents should be here."

"Is she alright?" Trent asked with obvious concern in his voice.

"You can talk to her when you get here. Please just let her mother know she needs her. I have to go now. I'll see you when you all get here."



Trent called all his brothers except Elray, who was in New York with Kimble before he called his father at the shop. After all of them were together they went over to Dillon's where their mother was spending time with Venice and the baby. When Trent entered the house with his father and brother's he knew that they all tried to look as normal as possible. His mother would only need to take one look at them and she'd know that something was wrong.

Brandis Carter spoke first.

“Alex is in the hospital. We don’t know anything more than that right now, but we need to get up there.”

Dillon drove himself, Venice and the baby; Rayvon drove his parents, and Trent and Rayden followed. They were all speeding, but with their concern for Alex, it didn’t matter. Trent called Elray and told him what was going on, and he said he would be on the next flight out.

As soon as they arrived at the hospital Trent was about to look for Alex’s room mate Mona. He didn’t have to she met them in the hospital lobby to take them up to see Alex. They didn’t even stop to talk with the doctor before going in to see her. When they entered the room, none of them was prepared for the sight before them. Alex was asleep, propped up in bed, but the roundness of her stomach was unmistakable. She was obviously pregnant.

Chapter Eleven

No one in the room said anything for several minutes. Sherry Carter the first to break from her trance, walked over to the bed. Smoothing the hair from her baby's forehead, Mrs. Carter kissed her lightly. All her sons were still standing there dumbfounded. Her husband left the room, no doubt in search of a doctor to try to get some information.

When he came back into the room, there was a short balding man in his fifties following behind him. He introduced himself as Dr. Downing.

"Is Alexandra all right Dr. Downing?" Sherry Carter wanted to know.

"Yes, she is going to be fine. I am keeping her a couple of days for observation. She is dehydrated and physically she has exhausted herself. She was having some pre-term labor pains, which we have successfully stopped, and I'd like her to have total bed rest for a few days. She may sleep a few hours more before she wakes up."

"Thank you so much," Sherry said, as he left the room.

Not wanting to disturb Alex, Mrs. Carter suggested they go get checked into a hotel. Within an hour, they had checked into a hotel and were now back at the hospital determined to find out what the hell was going on. Luckily, Mona and

Shasta were still there, because Mrs. Carter certainly had more questions for them.

“Do either of you girls know where Alexandra’s boyfriend is or how to reach him?” Sherry asked.

Sherry could tell that the outspoken Mona had a pretty good idea who the mystery man was but she replied, “I’m sorry Mrs. Carter but we don’t know who he is.”

“Haven’t you ever seen him when he picked her up or talked to him when he called?”

“No Ma’am. Alex was very secretive. He always called on her cell, and he’s never been to the dorm,” Shasta spoke up.

Seeing that she wasn’t going to get the answers she wanted from her daughter’s roommates everyone went into Alex’s room to wait. When Alex woke up, there was a look of surprise on her face. Sherry was at her side the minute she saw that she was awake.

“Baby are you alright? Why didn’t you tell us?”

“I’m sorry, Mama,” Alex responded as a tear slipped down her face.

“We don’t need to talk about it now. The doctor doesn’t want her getting excited, so lets let her rest,” Brandis Carter said.

“You’re right, Honey. Baby, we’re all going to the hotel. We’ll be back to see you tomorrow, but if you need us just call.”

When they got back to the hotel her son Dillon asked, “Dad, why didn’t you ask Alex anything?”

“Didn’t you see how stressed out she looked? The last thing she needs right now is for us to pressure her. Obviously she isn’t ready for us to know, or we wouldn’t have found out this way.”

“That’s true,” Trent chimed in.

“Shut up, Stupid,” Rayvon and Rayden said in unison.

“Why don’t you all go on to your rooms and get some rest? We can talk about this after we get Alex home. Right now she’s the only one I care about,” Mrs. Carter said. “By the way, who’s picking Elray up from the airport tonight?”

“I am, Mama.” Dillon responded as he followed his sibling out the door.



Elray got there just after midnight. Trent filled him in on what had happened since they had gotten there. He desperately wanted to ask Elray if he had told Kimble about Alex being in the hospital. What he didn’t want was to believe that his best friend had anything to do with his sister’s unexpected pregnancy.

Before going to the hospital the next morning, Trent was the last to come down and join his family for a light breakfast. They chatted but agreed as a family not to pressure Alex for any details she wasn't ready to give. He and Elray, the only one who hadn't seen Alex, were the first to enter her room.

"Kimble what in the hell are you doing here?" Trent asked, surprised to see him.

"I came to see about my wife and baby."

"Your what!" came from everyone, now in the room.

As Kimble stood up, Trent noted that there wasn't a hint of fear in his face. It was obvious that both he and Alex had been crying.

"You heard me. Alex is my wife and she's in here because she worried herself sick about how to tell you about us."

Trent made a move toward Kimble, followed by his hot headed brother Elray but stopped when they heard Alex say.

"Mama, Daddy please! This is why I didn't know how to tell any of you. Mama, say something! Kimble's my husband. Don't let them hurt him."

"We aren't going to hurt the horny prick; we're gonna kill him," Elray snapped.

"That's it! Out, now!" Kimble exploded.

"You can't kick us out," Trent said.

“Wanna bet? I’m her husband what I say goes.” To prove his point Trent watched as he reached for the buzzer on the side of his sister’s bed and pushed the button. When a nurse appeared, he said.

“Could you please have security escort my wife’s brothers out? They’re upsetting her.”

As mad as he was Trent was glad somebody had enough sense to try and keep the peace, his father said, “I think it’s best if we talked with Kimble and Alex alone. Go on down to the waiting area; we’ll be there in a minute.”

“But Dad,” Trent responded.

“Now, Trent. Elray, you too.”

Trent left the room but he stayed by the door so he could listen. After all Kimble was his best friend, he needed to hear what he said now, not later. Once his dad thought he and his brothers were gone, he said.

“I think you owe us an explanation Kimble.”

“Mr. Carter, Mrs. Carter—Alex wanted to wait. Originally, she wanted to see if our relationship worked out. When she got pregnant, I wanted to tell you right away, but she still didn’t, so we got married. I do want you to know I love your daughter with all my heart. I would never do anything to hurt her.”

“Kimble I believe you love my daughter, but I have to tell you I’m extremely hurt and disappointed that neither of you felt you could come to us,” Sherry Carter said.

“Mama, don’t blame Kimble. It was my decision. He was only respecting my wishes.”

“How long have you been married?” her father wanted to know.

“Since she told me she was pregnant,” Kimble answered.

“Alex needs her rest so we will discuss this after she gets out of here and she’s doing better,” her mother said.

Her parents kissed her, then turned to leave the room.

The chart sitting just outside his sister’s room provided just enough cover that his parent’s didn’t see him when they came out. Lucky for him the elevators to go to the cafeteria were in the other direction. He saw his father stop and look back in the room. That was a follow me so I can talk to you alone look.

Kimble must have recognized it to, he held his ground saying.

“The doctor will be in shortly. I’m going to stay awhile longer.”

Right after his parent’s walked away Trent heard Alex say.

“Kimble, promise me you won’t fight with my brothers.”

“Baby don’t worry about that right now. The doctor wants you to rest.”

“How do you expect me to rest worrying about what’s going on between you and my family?”

“Alex we all love you. I do understand how your brothers feel. But I promise not to fight with anyone in your family.”



When Trent joined, his family, similar conversations were taking place in the hospital cafeteria. Elray, Rayvon and Rayden all wanted to drag Kimble out of the hospital and beat the crap out of him, but he and Dillon both felt he deserved a chance.

“What will beating Kimble up solve now?” Trent asked his hotheaded brothers. “Besides I really believe that Kimble loves Alex and would never intentionally hurt her.”

“I agree. After what I went through with Venice’s family, I’m not jumping to conclusions. Kimble’s a good man.”

A short while later Trent saw Kimble approaching the table where the Carter family was sitting. His brother Elray started to get up, but his father’s terse command to sit down, stopped him dead in his tracks.

“Kimble, what can we do for you?” Brandis Carter asked him.

“I want to talk about Alex. I promised her that I wouldn’t fight with any of you, and I’m here to ask you to respect her wishes—at least until she has the baby. I had no idea she was stressing herself out this much.”

“Give me one reason why you think you have a right to ask anything, after what you’ve done?” Rayden asked.

“Look I know better than anybody why all of you are upset. Trent, El, we’ve been friends for years. Do you really think I’d hurt your sister? I swear to you here and now that Alex is it for me. I don’t need or want any other woman. I love her and I love my son.”

“It’s a boy?” Mrs. Carter asked.

Kimble smiled.

“Yes, we just found out before I came down to talk to you.”

“Look — for now the only important thing is taking care of Alex and the baby. We need to keep as much stress off her as possible. We can deal with the whole Kimble situation later,” Mr. Carter said.

Trent, Mrs. Carter and Dillon and all nodded their heads in agreement.



Two days later, Alex was released, from the hospital but she refused to leave school, at least until she completed her summer courses. Unable to get his wife to listen to reason, Kimble stayed with her.

No one in her family wanted to leave her alone with Kimble, but they had to face the fact that for now, he was her husband, and whether they liked it or not she was having his baby. Mona and Shasta watched over her like two mother hens while her parents called her each day until it was time for her to come home for the remainder of the summer.

Kimble had told his family everything, and they couldn't wait to see Alex — especially his mother who couldn't have been happier. She made her displeasure known only to him about how he had handled the situation.

When Alex and Kimble arrived back in Atlanta, Kimble wanted to stop at his parent's house first. Alex was apprehensive about seeing his family considering why they were married. When they arrived, his mother quickly put her fears to rest when she met them in the driveway.

"I'm so happy to have you as part of my family," Mrs. Brown said.

They went into the house where Kimble sat down next to Alex on the couch. Little Karen wanted Alex to hold her so Kimble explained, "Alex can't hold you right now." He pointed to her stomach. "She has a baby in her tummy."

Karen rubbed Alex's stomach before hugging her and asking, "Do you still love me too?"

Kimble watched as Alex leaned over, kissed her chubby little cheek and said, "Always."



They stayed for dinner before leaving to go to the Carter's house. On the way to her parent's, Kimble pulled over for a minute, pulled a small box from his pocket, and handed it to Alex. It was the ring she had chosen. Pulling it from the box, he placed it on her finger. It was then she noticed for the first time that he was also wearing his ring and for the first time since they had gotten married, she actually felt like a married woman.

Kimble wasn't surprised, but he was annoyed slightly that all her brothers were at her parents' house when they arrived. Trent and Dillon both tried to show their support for them, but Elray, Rayvon and Rayden were very open about still being very angry with Kimble. To his credit, Kimble kept his promise and was very cordial with her family.



After they left, Elray and the twins started in on their parents.

"I don't understand why we're allowing Kimble to call the shots," Elray grumbled.

"Elray, as much as you may hate to admit this, your sister is a grown woman. She's married and having a baby. You can't treat her like a baby anymore, because she isn't one. And if you continue to push, you just may push her right out of your life."

“But Mama, Kimble isn’t right for her; he doesn’t have a faithful bone in his body. He only married Alex because he knew once we found out what he’d done we’d kill him.” Elray responded.

“El, I think you’re wrong. I know him much better than you do. Family means a lot to Kim. He wouldn’t take marriage lightly. He would never have married Alex if he didn’t plan to do right by her and be faithful to her,” Trent said.

“You’re a fool if you believe that, Trent. You’re letting your friendship cloud your judgment on this situation.”

“I agree with Trent,” Dillon cut in. “Kimble’s not a punk. I’ve seen him take on three guys at once. I really don’t think the threat of us is what made him do right by Alex.”

Rayvon and Rayden, who hadn’t said anything, got up to leave.

“We’ll see,” they said before kissing their mother goodbye.



After all their children had left or gone to their rooms Brandis and Sherry Carter made their way upstairs to their own room to discuss their daughter. Neither was happy about her marriage to Kimble; they felt she was too young.

“I think Alex and Kim will be fine.” Mrs. Carter said.

“I hope you’re right, but I think we are going to have our hands full keeping your sons out of their sister’s decision.”

Why did the boys always become her sons whenever they did anything stupid? Reaching over Sherry turned off the light then snuggled up to her husband to get some sleep. Lord knows she was going to need it.



Across town, Alex was sitting on the bed in Kimble's townhouse watching him work out. He looked up at her and smiled but sensed that something was bothering her. After he was done, he grabbed the towel he had laying on the floor next to him, wiped his face then went to sit next to her.

“What are you thinking about?”

“My brothers—I knew it'd be hard for them to accept us as a couple.”

“I know, but they don't have a choice.”

“You promised, Kimble.”

“I'll keep my end but I won't let them keep you stressed out.”

Not wanting to talk any more about her brothers, Alex hugged her husband, got up, grabbed the remote off the TV, then got into bed. Kimble left her to her thoughts and went into the bathroom to take a shower.

As soon as Kimble closed the bathroom door Alex heard her cell phone ring and wondered who it could be. First glancing at the caller ID, she answered.

“Alex, hi it's Venice.”

“Hi.”

“I called to invite you out to lunch tomorrow.”

“I’d like that. What time and where do you want to meet?”

“How’s twelve thirty at The Atlanta Bread Company?”

“Sounds good. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Later, when Kimble joined her she told him about the call.

“I’m meeting Venice for lunch tomorrow.”

“That’s good; you need to get out and do something fun. Now go to sleep.

You look tired.”



The next morning after Alex left to meet Venice for lunch, Kimble called Trent.

“Trent it’s me. Can we meet somewhere to talk?”

“Yeah, where?” Trent asked.

“I can be at the Waffle House on 138 in about half an hour.”

“Fine. I’ll see you then.”

Kimble was already there when Trent pulled into the parking lot, but he was still in his car. They walked inside together, taking a seat in the far corner. Kimble felt he owed it to his best friend to talk to him in more depth about the situation with Alex.

“What is it you wanted to talk about?” Trent asked once the waitress had taken their orders.

“I want to know if we’re still cool.”

“Kim, I’m not going to lie and say that I’m not ticked at you, but yeah we’re still cool. You know I can’t even say I didn’t know about you and Alex. I just wish you had handled things differently.”

“Alex told me about the conversation she had with you, and for what it’s worth you’re right. I know I can’t have her and still be the way I used to be. I don’t need to be with a different woman every other night anymore. I love her.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that, but El and the twins don’t believe it.”

“That’s because none of them has ever been in love before.”

“Kim, just don’t hurt her. If you do you’ll have to deal with all of us.”

“I’m shaking in my boots, but all jokes aside—I love her too much to ever hurt her. I’m worried about her being hurt by your family’s unwillingness to accept our relationship,” Kimble felt compelled to add.

“Not all of us are against it. Dillon also thinks you love Alex. Mom and Dad aren’t happy, mostly because they think Alex is too young. But I know them—if they see she’s happy, they’ll accept it.”

“Thanks, man. We’re both counting on you.”

“I’ll do what I can, but you know how Elray is. As far as Rayvon and Rayden are concerned, I think there’s no way you’re going to avoid them getting you somehow, but they’re too sneaky to let Alex catch them, so watch your back.”

Kimble laughed because he had been thinking the same thing. Those two would definitely get back at him. The only question was, how?



Alex and Venice finished lunch and went to South Lake Mall to get in some shopping. Leaving the mall Venice walked Alex to her truck and helped her put everything she had bought inside her car.

“Give my brother a hug and kiss for me, and tell him I’ll call him later,” Alex said before getting in her truck. Pulling out of the parking lot, she noticed that her cell had a message from Kimble. He was so sweet; he had called just to check on her and make sure she was okay.

She called him back.

“Hi honey. I’m going to stop at my parents for a little while before coming home. Do you want to meet me there?”

“No, I’ve got to meet with my agent about a new job. I’m bringing dinner home, so don’t eat too much.”

Surprisingly both her parents were home when she stopped by. Her dad was usually at the shop this time of day, but he had taken the afternoon off to order

some supplies he needed and to work on the itinerary for Rayvon and Rayden's last few races of the summer.

It was nearly six in the evening when she got up to go home. Kimble wasn't home yet when she got there, so she decided to take advantage of having the house to her self and take a hot bubble bath. The water felt very soothing as she leaned back and immersed her body. Playing with the bubbles resting on her rounded belly, she hummed softly.



When Kimble entered his bedroom looking for his wife, he smelled the vanilla coming from the bathroom. Making his way to the bathroom door, he stopped when he saw her in the tub her hands resting on the swelling stomach that housed his son.

He stood there several minutes observing, sure, that Alex was unaware that she had an audience, as she moved her hands up and down her stomach. The baby must have suddenly kicked because her hand stopped and she giggled.

“He’s very active isn’t he?” Kimble asked from the doorway.

Looking over at him, she answered, “Yes.”

Kimble walked further into the room, dropped down on his knees and replaced her hands with his own. The baby kicked.

“See. He knows I’m his daddy.”

“I know he does. I’ll be out in a minute.”

“Take your time. I’ll get you a towel and a gown for you to put on.”

“Don’t bother. All mine are too small.”

“Then I’ll get you one of my tee shirts.” He replied while walking out of the room.

A few minutes later, he returned with a towel and a shirt for her to put on. Helping Alex from the tub, Kimble towed her dry, then slipped the shirt over her head.

“Let’s go downstairs. I’ve got dinner waiting for you.”

After dinner they went into the living room to watch TV.

“How’d the visit with your parents go?”

“Good. We didn’t argue and they didn’t mention our marriage even once. Oh yeah I forgot; I’ve got stuff out in my truck. Would you mind going out and bringing it in?”

“Of course not.”

Coming back in from the garage, he placed the bags on the couch next to her and they looked at everything she had bought.

“I didn’t really spend as much as you think,” she said.

“I don’t care how much you spent.”

“I know, but I don’t want you to have to pay for everything.”

“I already told you—you’re my wife now. I’m perfectly capable of taking care of my family. Speaking of which, my agent wants us to do a photo shoot together. I told him I’d have to ask you first.”

“Me—why would he want to do a photo shoot with me? I’ve never done any modeling before.”

“Do you remember the interview I did some time ago for GQ magazine where they asked if I had a special someone? Well they’re doing a story on featured bachelors who have married recently, and they chose us for the cover.”

“But Kimble do they know I’m big as a house right now?”

“Actually, yes. It’s one of the reasons they picked us to do the cover. But if you don’t want to do it, we don’t have to.”

“I didn’t say that. Do you really want to do it? You realize every woman in the ATL and around the world is going to know you’re officially off the market after they see it.”

She smiled at him.

“Good. I can’t wait to show off my beautiful wife and let the world know she’s having my baby.”

Chapter Twelve

The next day, Kimble didn't waste any time calling his agent to arrange for the photo shoot. Hell, the way he saw it, this could work to his advantage in more ways than one. It would make a statement on so many levels, actually killing two birds with one stone so to speak. It would let all his former female acquaintances know he was off limits and obviously committed to his wife. It would also show his wife's family the depth of love he had for her.

After he finished his call, he went downstairs to check on Alex. They had a doctor's appointment at three. Walking into the kitchen, he took in her beauty. Even now with the protrusion of her stomach, she turned him on like crazy. He had to resist the urge to raise her skirt right then and there and claim what rightfully belonged to him now.

"You just about ready to go sweetheart?"

"Yeah, I'm just trying to be a good girl and drink my recommended amount of water per day."

He laughed. Anybody who knew Alex, knew she hated drinking water. She much preferred an ice cold Mountain Dew or Dr. Pepper.

A short time later, they were sitting in the waiting room of her doctor's office waiting to be called. When the nurse came out and called, "Mrs. Brown," Kimble had to nudge Alex because she still wasn't used to it yet.

"Everything looks great, Alexandra. Do you or your husband have any questions?" her doctor asked as he wrote in her chart after the exam was concluded.

Kimble felt awkward about asking, but it was ask either her doctor or his mother.

"Is it still okay for Alex and I to make love?"

"Yes Mr. Brown, as long as it doesn't cause any discomfort for your wife, there is no harm in it. I'll see you both next month unless you need me sooner."

After leaving the doctors office, Kimble decided to take Alex with him while he ran errands. His parents' house was the first stop on his list. Karen was so excited to see her big brother and jumped into his out stretched arms.

"Can I go home with you?" she asked, as he and Alex prepared to leave after their brief visit.

Unable to deny her request, Kimble went up to her room and packed her an overnight bag.

"I'll bring her home tomorrow, Mama."

His mother merely nodded and hugged them each good bye.

Next, he needed to go to the office to pick up some papers he needed to work on, so he took Karen and Alex with him there also. They stopped in Keith's office to say hi and he looked up from his desk as they walked in.

"Hey guys."

"Hi Keith," Alex said.

"Hey I stopped by to pick up the papers for the promo Dad wants done for the new author you just signed, Miracle Dayton." Kimble said looking on his desk.

"I have them here; she's an interesting young lady."

"I haven't met her yet. Oh Karen sweetie don't touch that," Kimble said, picking her up.

"It's okay. There's nothing in here she can break I can't replace. How have you been feeling Alex? You look great," Keith said.

"I feel good, but right now I could use a nap. Your nephew sleeps better in the day so I have to try and sleep when he sleeps."

"That's my cue; I'll call you later to discuss the promo."

"Alright, bye Alex."

Keith reached for Karen gave her a hug and a kiss then handed her back to Kimble. They also made a brief stop by his father's office before leaving. Since Alex was tired, he dropped them off at home, tucked them both in bed, then left to finish his errands.



Alex wasn't sure how long she had been asleep when she heard Karen calling her name from the other room. As she walked the short distance into the room where Karen had been sleeping, she imagined how in a few months she and Kimble would be making this trip for their own baby.

"Do you want to go downstairs and get some juice?"

"Yes." Karen replied taking Alex's hand.

The doorbell rang just as they sat down to watch some cartoons. It wasn't one of her brothers, because she was still mad at them and refused to tell them where Kimble lived. Her parents now knew, but they wouldn't tell them until she said it was okay. Turns out it was Trina and Lisa.

"Hey mommy," Trina and Lisa said rubbing her belly as they walked by.

"Hi. Why aren't you two at work?"

"We were both off today, so we decided to stop and see if you were home before we went downtown," Lisa answered.

Alex was enjoying Trina and Lisa's company so much they never made it downtown and were still there when Kimble came back a few hours later. They had helped Alex make tacos for dinner.

"Hey Kim, are you hungry?" Lisa asked.

“Yeah I’ll take a plate,” Kimble responded. Then he and Karen went upstairs so Alex could have some alone time with her friends.

Around ten thirty Alex opened the door to her bedroom. Trina and Lisa had gone home. Kimble and Karen were lying on the bed. He had given her a bath and she was asleep. She thought to herself he was going to make a great dad.



Upon seeing his wife entering the room, Kimble smiled at her, got up, picked up Karen and took her into the other room to put her back into bed. When he came back, Alex had taken off her clothes and slipped on one of his tee shirts. He wasn’t wearing anything but a pair of shorts, so his response to her was very evident.

“Kimble we can’t make love with Karen in the next room.”

“Why not? She’s asleep,” he said as he came toward her.

Reaching down he placed a hand on each side of her face and pulled her to him for a mind blowing, bone chilling, kiss. She swayed against him wanting more. His hand strayed under the shirt she was wearing, and then he raised an eyebrow at her when he discovered she didn’t have on any underwear.

As he lowered her to the bed, he pushed up her shirt to reach what he wanted desperately to touch, to make throb for him. As Kimble massaged her moist heat, she spread her legs to give him better access then screamed when her

body shattered in a thousand pieces. Covering her mouth with his to silence her screams of pleasure, Kimble eased himself home. It was hard for him because of how aroused he was, but he took it slow, not wanting to lose control and risk hurting her or the baby.

Kimble maneuvered his body toward the center of the bed as Alex curled up next to him. His heart belonged to her. Her brothers were so wrong. There was no way he could or would still lust after other women. His hand was resting on her stomach when the baby kicked in that very spot.

“Kimble you know we have never discussed any names.”

“Do you have any in mind that you like?” he asked.

“I like several, but I thought since it’s a boy I’d let you name him.”

Leaning up, placing his hand under his chin he looked down at her.

“I would have thought you’d want to name the baby.”

“If it had been a girl I would.”

“Do you like my name?”

She smiled because she did want to name the baby after him but didn’t want to sound corny.

“Yes Kimble I do.”

“Kimble La’Ron Brown, Jr. I like it; it has a nice ring to it.”

“It does, doesn’t it.”

He kissed her again.

“Thank you baby.”

She yawned then said, “You’re welcome.”



Closing her eyes, Alexandra Carter Brown went to sleep in her husband’s arms. When she woke up the next morning, she was alone, the smell of bacon in the air. Getting up she took a quick shower, dressed, and went downstairs where she found Kimble and Karen in the kitchen. Karen was helping her big brother make breakfast.

“Hi Alex. Come sit next to me,” she said, and then reached for the milk Kimble had placed on the table and poured it on the bowl of Fruit Loops that was in front of Alex.

“Thank you. Did you make this for me?” Alex asked as she picked up her spoon.

“Yes.”

Karen giggled.

She was already dressed, and after breakfast they left. It was a beautiful day, not too hot—perfect for taking a walk. As they strolled through Piedmont Park, it annoyed Alex the way women openly admired Kimble. Though Alex had to admit, he wasn’t paying any of them any attention.

Stopping under a tree, Alex and Karen waited as Kimble spread the blanket he'd brought along for them to sit on. While they were sitting there, enjoying the warmth of the day, a group of women approached them.

"Excuse me, but weren't you featured in GQ as one of Atlanta's most eligible bachelors? Can we get an autograph and a picture with you?" one of them asked.

Alex noticed that Kimble appeared uneasy before he said.

"I'm sorry ladies, maybe some other time. I'm not a bachelor anymore and I'm with my wife right now."

"It's okay, baby; go ahead," she said.

"You sure it's okay?"

"Yes Kimble, now go ahead."

Kissing her lightly Kimble got up and posed for several pictures with the young women, who were very appreciative. One even took it upon herself to also thank Alex. After posing for the picture, he sat back down. Karen was happily playing with a toy he'd thought to bring along. The ground wasn't comfortable so they didn't stay too long.

Karen saw an ice cream vendor and exclaimed, "Ice cream, ice cream!"

After purchasing ice cream, they continued walking in the park. Per her doctor, walking was great exercise and her mother had said it would help when it

came time for her to deliver. She wasn't sure how walking would help, but it certainly wouldn't hurt.

Karen wore herself out, and was asleep in the backseat, when they drove to the Brown's to drop her off. Just after they left Kimble's agent called and wanted him to stop by to finalize next month's photo shoot, but Alex didn't want to go.

"You can just drop me off at my Daddy's. I'll either get a ride home or you can come and get me later from my Mama's."

She hadn't been to her father's shop in awhile, and her father was delighted to see her. Rayvon and Rayden were there and asked, "Where's the worm?"

Glaring at them, she responded, "If you're going to start in on my husband, I'll leave."

"Ray's," her father intervened, and they quickly apologized.

"What brings you down to see your old man baby girl?"

"Kim had some things to do, and I didn't want to go. It was stupid for him to go all the way home to get my car, so I had him drop me off here."

"Well I'm glad. I miss having you around here."

"I miss it too, Daddy."

"Then why don't you come back and work a couple days a week?"

"I'd love to. Let me talk it over with Kim."

The twins rolled their eyes, but kept quiet, and the rest of the afternoon was pleasant. Her father insisted on taking her home and Kimble was already home when she arrived.



“Hi honey, there’s a chicken dinner in the microwave for you,” Kimble remarked when she walked into the den.

“I’m not hungry yet, but thanks. Kim, can I talk to you a minute?”

Placing the papers he was looking over down on the table, Kimble gave her his full attention.

“What’s up?”

“My dad asked me to come back to work a couple days a week. I’d like to; it would give me something to do with my time.”

“I don’t know, baby. I think that may cause a problem with me and your family.”

“That’s stupid. Why would my family have a problem with it when it’s my dad who brought it up, not me? What’s the real reason Kim?”

“You’re right, baby. If you want to do it, then it’s cool with me.”



The following week Alex started back working with her family. It was mid August and she continued to flourish. Working at her dad’s shop turned out to be

very good for her. Her mother came down whenever she worked, and she got to spend a lot of time with her brothers as well. Venice also came by with the baby when she could get away from her bakery.

It was a Friday night at closing time. Her back was hurting so bad, Rayvon offered to drive her home.

“No thanks, I’m going by Mama’s to help her and Venice with a special order for Kimble’s mother, for her church bake sale.” When she got to her mother’s house, she was about to put her key in the door when it opened.

“It’s about time you got here,” Mona said.

“Hey girl what are you doing here?”

When Mona stepped aside, Alex saw all the people in her mother’s living room and the banner that read “Congratulations.” It was her baby shower, and she hadn’t suspected anything. She just assumed they wouldn’t try to give her a surprise party.

Her father and all her brothers were there, as well as Kimble’s brothers and the rest of his family. They got so many gifts. It was going to take a small truck to take them all back to their house. It was so good having Mona and Shasta there. She really missed them. Her brothers and Kimble all behaved themselves, but she had caught Elray and the twins giving him the evil eye a few times.

By the time she got home, her back was really killing her. Kimble gave her a back rub then ran a bath. The photo shoot was scheduled for next week, but if her back continued to bother her as much as it had for the past week, she was going to cancel. Her back problems worried Kimble, so he insisted she rest for the rest of the weekend.

On Sunday after church, her parents brought all their gifts over. While there, her father asked, “Don’t you think you’ve made your brothers suffer enough? When are you going to tell them where you live?”

“Daddy, they haven’t learned a thing. Don’t tell me you didn’t see all the dirty looks Elray, Rayvon and Rayden were giving Kimble at the shower.”

“Yes, I did; but they know better than to come here and act a fool. They don’t want to deal with me. I know they’d feel better knowing in case something ever happened.”

“Trent actually does know, so okay Daddy, you can tell them.”

Kimble had already told her parents about her back bothering her, so they didn’t stay long. Her mother had also brought dinner for them.

“Baby your moms can really throw down; her pot roast is so tender,” he said after he ate two big plates before getting ready to do his evening work-out.



Alex sat on the couch watching her after her parents left. His body was magnificent; his muscles flexed with his every movement. It was obvious to anyone looking at him that he took pride in his body. A body she knew too well could give her the ultimate pleasure. Damn, he wasn't even trying to turn her on but he was making her hot and tingly all over.

“Kimble.” She whispered his name.

As he glanced up from his workout, the raw desire he saw in his wife's beautiful eyes was overwhelming.

“Are you sure Alex?”

“Please Kimble. Don't you want to?”

Now that was a stupid question if he'd ever heard one. Crawling over to where she was sitting, he pushed her legs open so he could fit between them. Kissing her, he caressed her sensitive breast through the material of the shirt she had on as she whimpered against his mouth. Breaking the kiss just long enough to take off her shirt and the shorts she was wearing, he then eased her panties off. Well, into her eighth month, Kimble was acutely aware of her stomach, so he pulled her down on the floor with him turned her around to kneel in front of the couch and entered her from behind.



A short while later he took an exhausted Alex upstairs and tucked her into bed before going back downstairs to his office. He was still worried about her. Knowing how much her back had been bothering her, he should have never made love to her. If his brothers-in-law only knew — his wife was by far his greatest temptation.

Their photo shoot was scheduled for Wednesday morning, so Kimble didn't let her go to work Monday or Tuesday. She needed her rest because her back was still hurting. Both her family and his had stopped over to check on her and keep her company when Kimble had to go out. On Wednesday, she and Kimble were at the studio by six in the morning. The shoot was scheduled to take a few hours, but at noon they were still there.

The photographer had breakfast brought in. She loved the chemistry between them so much, that since the shoot took longer than expected, she also had lunch brought in for them. After lunch, the photographer was showing the digital proofs of the photos taken. Alex couldn't believe how nice the pictures had turned out. They looked so natural together. The shot of Kimble resting his head on her stomach was chosen for the cover, which would hit newsstands for the October issue, and there were also three other shots that would run with the article.

On the way home, Alex had an ice cream craving, so they stopped for ice cream. Tired, she went up to lie down as soon as they got home, while Kimble called Keith at the office. He had a meeting scheduled with Ms. Dayton later that day, but he didn't want to leave Alex alone.

"No problem; we can do a teleconference. I'll call you as soon as Ms. Dayton arrives," Keith assured him.

When he checked on Alex, she was still asleep. Going back downstairs, he called his agent to tell him how the shoot had gone, but the photographer had already called him and raved about the chemistry between him and Alex. He didn't really feel like cooking and he couldn't leave the house until his conference call with Keith, so he called his mother-in-law.

"Hi Mrs. Carter. I was just calling to see if you could come over and stay with Alex. I need to go out and get something for dinner."

Mrs. Carter, as usual, was happy to hear from him.

"I wouldn't mind at all, but I actually have a better idea. I'm cooking now. I'll just make enough and bring some over."

It would make Alex happy to have her mother there, and he didn't mind giving her a reason to come over. Besides — he loved her cooking. Whatever she brought would be better than anything he could have ordered.

He was checking some e-mails, many of which he deleted without opening because they were from various women he did not intend to contact, when his conference call came in. An hour into the call, the doorbell rang and he got up to answer it.

“Alex is upstairs asleep,” he told her mother and Trent when he let them in. He excused himself to finish his call in the other room, which only lasted another twenty minutes. Then he rejoined his mother-in-law and Trent in the living room. Alex still hadn’t come down, so he offered to go up and get her.

“No don’t bother her. She needs all the rest she can get these last few weeks in her pregnancy.”

Dinner consisted of fried salmon patties, macaroni and cheese, and fried potatoes. If he continued to eat his mother-in-law’s cooking, he would have to increase his workout time or he’d gain weight for sure. After Kimble finished off his second helping, he walked his mother-in-law and Trent out. Once they were gone, Kimble fixed a plate to take up to Alex. When he went into the room, she wasn’t asleep.

“Hey, you missed your mom and Trent.”

“Really what was my mother doing here?”

“Bringing us dinner. They tried waiting for you.”

“I’m sorry. It doesn’t take much to make me tired these days.”

He put the tray on the bed next to her then sat down.

“Are you hungry?”

“A little. What did Mama bring?”

He removed the top to her plate, then placed the tray in front of her. After finishing off three salmon patties and some fried potatoes, she smiled.

“I guess I was hungrier than I thought.”

“I guess so,” he teased as he left the room to take the tray back downstairs.



Over the next week, Kimble stayed close to home because Alex had started swelling up. Her feet barely fit into any shoes and she had to stop wearing her wedding ring due to the swelling in her hands. Both his mother and hers were concerned with how fast and how much swelling she had. Tuesday morning just before they were leaving for her doctor’s appointment, both their mothers came by, deciding they wanted to go with them to the doctor.

“Mrs. Brown,” the nurse called. “It’s good to see you. How are you feeling today?”

“Not too good.”

“It’s almost over,” the nurse responded as she weighed Alex and took her blood pressure.

The fact that the nurse had taken his wife's blood pressure three times concerned Kimble. He was sure Alex felt so miserable she hadn't noticed because she hadn't said anything. A minute later, the doctor came in, did a quick exam then turned to Kimble, though he was talking to them both, and said, "Your wife's blood pressure is too high. I want to admit her to the hospital immediately. If we can't get it down by tomorrow, I'll induce her labor."

Even though he was no expert, Kimble knew this was bad. Alex was so out of it she barely reacted to the news at all. Luckily, her doctor's office was right across the street from the hospital. Walking out of the exam room Kimble said, "Alex is being admitted."

"What's wrong Kim?" Mrs. Carter wanted to know.

"Her blood pressure is too high," he responded. "Meet us at the maternity floor of the hospital."

First, each woman called her husband, and then rushed across the street to the hospital. Once Alex was settled in her room, Kimble went out to the waiting area to talk with his mother and Mrs. Carter. By that time, his father and Mr. Carter had both arrived.

"Okay, this is what I've been told so far. Alexandra's blood pressure is dangerously high. Right now she is being hooked up to the fetal monitors and they're monitoring her blood pressure."

While he was sitting there talking with his parents and in-laws, Keith, Kimberly, Dillon, Venice, Trent and Rayvon came in. Kimble left it to their parents to tell the rest of the family what was going on so he could go back in with Alex. For the time being, he was the only one allowed in her room.

Within the hour Rayden, Keaton and Elray all showed up. Everybody was extremely worried about Alex's condition. A few hours after they had began monitoring her and the baby's vital signs, the doctors asked to meet with Kimble. Afraid of what they were going to tell him, he didn't want to talk to them alone. He needed the support of their family.

"This is our immediate family. Anything you have to say, they can hear."

The doctor waited until everyone was seated and he had their full attention before he began.

"Mr. Brown, your wife has developed a severe case of pre-eclampsia. Her blood pressures continued to climb even with the medication we've been giving her. After consulting with another specialist, we both agree that it would be safer to go ahead and do a c-section to get the baby out now than try to induce her labor."

"Is the baby in danger?" Kimble asked.

“I’m sorry to say yes, they both are. But at this point we’re more concerned about your wife. We can have the baby out in sixty seconds if we have to, but we can’t risk letting her blood pressure get any more out of control.”

Mrs. Carter stifled a sob and buried her face in her husband’s shoulder. Kimble’s mother went to her son and wrapped her arms around him, seeing he was visibly shaken by what the doctor had just told him. Kimble lifted a tear-stained, determined face to the doctor.

“Do whatever you need to do to for my wife and baby. They’re my life. I can’t live without her. We can make more babies.”

God he would never have thought he would have to deal with something like this and at such a young age. Wiping his face, Kimble knew he had to get himself together so he wouldn’t upset Alex. Standing up he hugged his mother, then went back into the room with Alex while they got her ready for an epidural.

“Kimble, I’m so scared. I’m not due for a couple weeks.”

“I know, honey. Me too.”

“Kimble is there something you aren’t telling me?”

“Baby they can’t get your blood pressure down. They said they wanted to do a c-section.”

“I don’t want a c-section unless there’s no other choice, Kimble. You know that.”

“Alex, there is no other choice,” Kimble responded, just barely able to keep his composure.

“Oh God, I didn’t realize.....”

Rushing to his wife’s side, he held her hand.

“Honey everything’s going to be just fine.”

It had to be. He couldn’t see life without her.

Chapter Thirteen

Even though time was of the essence, the doctors allowed each family member a brief moment with Alex before taking her into surgery. Seeing how upset Kimble was, Venice offered to go into surgery with Alex.

“Thank you, but I have to be there with her.”

“Let’s pray,” Mr. Carter suggested. The entire Brown and Carter family formed a circle and joined hands for prayer. This wasn’t the time for petty resentments, and each of the Carter brothers offered Kimble words of encouragement as did his own family.

Forty minutes and a lot of pacing later, Kimble appeared and announced the birth of Kimble La’Ron Brown Jr., seven pounds two ounces, nineteen inches long. The baby was two and a half weeks early, but healthy.

“He’s perfect, Mama,” Kimble said as he went to his mother and hugged her. He looked over at his in-laws before adding, “Alex is fine. I’ll let you all know when you can see her.”

Both families let out a sigh of relief as Kimble disappeared back into the room with Alex and the baby. The nurse came out to let them know when she could have additional visitors. Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Brown were the first to go in,

followed next by Mr. Carter and Mr. Brown. Each of their siblings was given a visit as well before they all went home.



Alex and the baby went home a week later. Trina, Lisa, Mona and Shasta all came to see the baby. Some of Kimble's friends came by to see his son; you could see the pride in his face as he showed him off. She was still sore, not that Kimble let her do much. He made dinner, tended to the baby and her, and worked from home most days if he could. His agent called for him to do a photo shoot, which he turned down not wanting to leave them alone yet.

When it was time for the baby to go to his first month's check up after they got home, both their mothers came along. Even though he had actually lost a pound his first week home, the doctor assured them that he was doing fine. Before going home, they stopped to have lunch together at The Atlanta Bread Company. One of the waitresses was obviously taken with Kimble and she did everything she could to gain his attention.

Leaning over so no one could hear her Alex said. "I think you've got an admirer."

"So I've noticed."

"Well what are you going to do about her? I'm sure my mama has noticed and yours probably has too."

“It could be worse; it could’ve been one of your brothers,” Kimble tried to joke.

“All jokes aside. If you don’t say something to the little hussy, I will.”

It wasn’t as though she wasn’t used to women throwing themselves at Kimble, but that was before he’d married her. It annoyed her to no end that the hussy was doing it right in front of her.

At first, Alex thought she was seriously going to have to check the little hussy. When she came back to the table and asked more to Kimble than anyone else, “Can I get anything else for you today?”

Kimble answered.

“Yes my wife and I would like a few slices of chocolate cake, to go, please. And I’d also like the check now.”

Bravo baby. Nicely done. Way to put that tramp in her place.

A satisfied grin appeared on Alex’s face as she lifted her hand, the one with the huge rock on it of course, to flip her hair back.

“Lunch is on me,” Mrs. Brown announced.

“Thanks, Mama.”

“You are very welcome. Now let me kiss my grandson,” Mrs. Brown stated, leaning over the baby as they exited the restaurant.

Alex got in back, put the baby in his car seat, and then said good-bye to her mother and Kimble's.



At the house, Kimble was sitting in the living room on the couch when he heard Alex say, "I didn't tell you I wanted cake to take home."

He looked up at her, smiled and said, "Well I thought you'd enjoy a piece later tonight."

"Yeah right, you didn't want me to jump all over that little flirt. I guess you believed me when I said I would, huh?"

Laughing Kimble replied, "I never doubt you, baby. You're a Carter. Tempers run in your family. Besides, I didn't want my mother or yours to think I enjoyed her attention, or that I was too stupid to notice."

He continued watching Alex as she walked over to the table to get the slices of cake and put them away. Truth was, if she got jealous every time a woman batted her eyes at him, she wouldn't be able to go anywhere with him. After all, Kimble knew he was a good-looking man. What sister in her right mind wouldn't be interested in him? That's where his wife needed to trust her husband.

The new parents decided to spend a quiet evening home alone. Little Kimble was sleeping soundly when his father went into the nursery to bring him into their

room where he placed him in his bassinet for the night. Neither he nor Alex was comfortable leaving him in the nursery even though they had baby monitors.



After breakfast the next morning, Kimble needed to go into the office for several meetings that were scheduled. He wanted Alex to go to her mother's, but she insisted she wanted to stay home. After bringing the baby's bassinet downstairs for her, he left. Alex occupied her time cleaning the kitchen, mopping the floor and taking out the trash before sitting down on the couch to read the newspaper.

The doorbell rang about an hour after she had sat down. She wasn't expecting anybody. Walking over she pulled the curtain back and saw her sister-in-law, Venice and her niece.

"Hey, this is a surprise. What are you two doing here?" she asked as she opened the door for them.

"I had to run some errands before going into the bakery today. Sherice and I wanted to stop by and visit."

"Come on in. Little Kim should be waking up soon to be fed and changed."

"Oh good! I get to play with him before he goes back to sleep."

"Probably not. He's usually out like a light as soon as he gets done."

She was right. The baby woke up not ten minutes after they got there. Venice changed him while Alex got his bottle ready. Sherice sat quietly on the floor playing with toys Venice had put on a blanket.

Venice asked, "Can I feed him?"

"Sure," Alex replied and handed the bottle to her. Though Venice had been part of the family for less than a year, Alex felt very close to her. She sat and watched her with the baby seeing the love in Venice's eyes as she glanced down into Little Kim's face.

"Venice I'm so happy you're part of our family."

Looking up from her new nephew Venice smiled and replied, "Thank you, Alex. You know it's funny because in a lot of ways I'm closer to your family than I am to my own. You and your brothers have been so nice to me."

"I wish they were as nice to Kimble."

"Give it some time, Alex. They all love you so much, and they just don't want to see you get hurt."

"I know, but can't they see how happy we are?"

"Yes, but they're afraid it won't last. Kimble has had his pick of any woman he wants all his life. When a man is that fine he faces more temptation than the average brother."

“This is the very reason I told Kimble I wasn’t going to tell him about the baby at first. I even considered getting an abortion. Everybody’s going to think I got pregnant on purpose just to trap him.”

“Nobody who knows you is going to think that, and I personally wouldn’t care what other people think. Besides, Kimble doesn’t strike me as they type who would do anything he didn’t want to do. When he married you I truly believe he married you because he loves you; not because you were pregnant.”

“That’s true, but he also isn’t the kind of brother who’d get a girl pregnant and just walk out on her, either. He’s my brother’s best friend. Maybe he felt more of an obligation toward me than he would some other girl.”

“Listen to me. Don’t let these feeling destroy your marriage. Kimble loves you and you love him. If you remember I was pregnant when Dillon married me and a few of his ex’s have accused me of the same thing. Think I care? I know they’re just jealous that I have him and they don’t.”

“Thanks, Venice.”

“You’re welcome.”

Both kids had fallen asleep while their mothers talked. When Venice got ready to leave, Alex offered to keep Sherice while Venice finished her errands.

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“No, of course not. I’m not doing anything anyway today.”

“Okay, I won’t be gone long.”

After Venice left, Alex turned on the TV and sat back down on the couch. Kimble hadn’t called her, so she decided to give him a call and see what he’d like for dinner.

“I got it covered. You take it easy and I’ll see you in a little bit.”

Kimble worried too much, Alex thought to herself as she hung up the phone. She felt fine. Actually, she felt better than she had in months. Since she didn’t have to worry about dinner, she picked up a book she’d been reading and turned the TV off. When Sherice woke up, she fed her a jar of the baby food that was packed in her bag and gave her half a bottle of juice. Sherice really looked more like Dillon than her mother. She was a Carter for sure, Alex thought as she studied her pretty little face.

The same could not be said for her baby — he was a Brown, looking just like his daddy. At least her baby was a boy. Venice must have been disappointed that her daughter didn’t look like her at all. Sherice picked up a toy and handed it to her and they were sitting on the floor playing when the doorbell rang again. Boy, Venice wasn’t kidding when she said she would only be gone a couple hours.

When she opened the door though it wasn’t Venice. It was her brother, Dillon.

“Venice got caught up at the bakery and asked me to come and get the baby for her,” Dillon said as he came in.

“I told her it was no trouble for me to keep her.”

“She told me. But you haven’t been home long, and she didn’t want you to overdo it.”

“God she sounds like Kimble. He didn’t even want me to cook him dinner today, because he doesn’t want me doing too much.”

“Smart man. Where’s my nephew?”

“He’s asleep in his bassinet right there.”

Dillon stooped down to pick up Sherice as he walked over to look down at his nephew. He gazed at him for several minutes before he leaned over the bassinet and gave him a light kiss on the cheek.

“Thanks for watching Sherice. I’ll call you later.”

Little Kim wouldn’t wake up for awhile, so Alex got a blanket and laid back down on the couch to read.



Kimble was sitting at his desk going over a manuscript when Keith and his dad came in.

“What do you think of the manuscript so far?” Mr. Brown asked.

“Well it’s certainly different from anything you’ve ever published before.”

“I know.” Mr. Brown replied. “Let me know when you’re done with the review.”

“I will, Dad,” Kimble said as their father walked out.

Keith sat down on the window ledge of Kimble’s office.

“How’s married life?”

“Married life is good.”

“How are things going with trying to patch things up with her brothers?”

“Trent and Dillon are okay, but Elray still thinks I can’t resist temptation and that I’ll eventually cheat. Truthfully, I’m not sure what Rayvon and Rayden think. Luckily, Elray’s the only one I’m going to have to deal with for now. Trent told me that Rayvon and Rayden are leaving soon for Italy for some big race.”

“Good luck,” Keith replied and left.

Later that night he picked up Alex and the baby. They went out to dinner then stopped off at his parent’s house.

“There’s my handsome grandson,” his mother said taking the baby from him before he made it completely inside the door.

“Can I hold the baby?” Karen asked.

Kimble smiled, amused at how little attention his mother and siblings showed him and Alex now that they had the baby to goo-goo and ga-ga over. His

sister, Kimber, came into the room minutes later and just like his mother headed straight for the baby.

“Mama let somebody else have a turn holding him,” Kimble heard her whine not a second after sitting next to his mother.

His mother completely ignored Kimber and placed the baby in Karen’s arms. She finally looked up at him and Alex and said.

“Where are you two going this evening?”

Kimble burst out laughing.

“Nowhere, Mama; we just wanted to stop by before going home.”

Little Kimble ended up being passed around to each Brown family member as they came in before he and Alex left to go home around ten thirty.



A week later Alex and the baby were at her parent’s house because Rayvon, Rayden, Dillon and her dad were going to Italy for the Italian Grand Prix Trent had told her about. Everybody was out front when the last person she expected to see pulled up — Cal. Her first thought was, why he wasn’t at school? With a look of surprise, everyone watched as he parked, got out, and walked over to Alex.

“Hi Alex.”

“Hi Cal. What brings you here?”

“I came to visit my brother, so I thought I’d stop by and see you while I was here.” He turned and acknowledged everyone else.

Her mother was holding the baby while her father and brothers continued loading the car. Nobody from school except Mona and Shasta knew she was married, but this was the second time Cal had intruded on her private life uninvited. It occurred to her that she had made it clear to Cal that she was involved with someone else. Didn’t the fact that she had had a baby deter him at all? Walking a short distance to the side of the house so she could speak to him privately, she asked how he even knew she would be there.

“I didn’t. I decided to take a chance. I’ve missed you a lot Alex.”

“Cal, we’re just friends. I don’t think it’s appropriate for you to keep coming to my family’s house unannounced.”

“I know you said you only wanted to be friends, but I was hoping once you had the baby you’d change your mind.”

“Why on earth did you think that?”

“Come on Alex; I never believed you had a boyfriend. No one’s ever seen this mystery man. I think you just said that because you were ashamed of getting pregnant, then getting dumped.”

“Why you little ass. I really think it’s time you left.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” a male voice she recognized as Kimble’s sounded from behind them.

Cal turned to see him standing there with his arms folded across his chest. “I told you last time—what goes on between me and Alex is none of your business.”

“Now that’s where you’re wrong. It was my business then and it’s my business even more now, since I’m the mystery man, and you happen to be speaking to my wife.”

Cal laughed and turned his back on Kimble. Before Alex could say the words to stop him, Kimble had grabbed Cal and was about to hit him when her mother’s voice stopped him.

“Kimble!”

Before letting Cal go, Kimble gave him a clear warning.

“My mother-in-law just saved you an ass-kicking, but if you come near my wife again, even she won’t be able to save your sorry ass.”

“Cal I think it’s time you left. Alex take your husband inside the house,” Sherri said as she turned and took the baby inside.

All her brothers and her dad were still standing there as Alex led Kimble into the house behind her mother. She stopped inside the door to peer out the window and observed as Cal walked to his car without saying a word, got in and left.



“Now that’s what I call good entertainment.”

“Rayden, shut up and get in the car,” his father said.

Mr. Carter went inside to check on his wife and daughter while his sons finished putting the luggage in the car for their trip.

“Where’s your mother?”

“She took the baby upstairs.”

Brandis Carter knew his wife. She was mad, but somehow he didn’t think it was at Kimble. Pausing just outside their bedroom door, he squared his shoulders for the confrontation he knew was coming.

When he did open the door, he saw his wife sitting on the bed holding his grandson. She looked up at him and he saw the irritation in her face before she spoke.

“If I find out that you or any of your sons had anything to do with that little display, there is going to be hell to pay.”

“Honey, don’t be ridiculous. You know me better than that.”

“I also know your sons, and they tell you everything, Brandis Carter. I’m leaving it to you to let them know I’m not happy. Leave Alex and Kimble alone. He hasn’t done anything but love her and that baby. Give them a chance.”

Calling him by his whole name was never a good sign.

“I’ll talk to the boys, but I truly don’t believe they had anything to do with what happened.”

“Oh please, Bran! I wasn’t born yesterday. This has Rayvon and Rayden written all over it. God, if I didn’t know any better I’d think you and your son’s would’ve been happier if Kimble were the dog you all think he is.”

“I have to go if we’re going to make our flight; I’ll call you later tonight.”

“Okay, but I mean it. You better have the boys back off. I’ve never interfered with you and your boys, but I won’t have them putting unnecessary stress on Alex and Kimble’s marriage.”

Oh, he was going to talk to his boys all right. He didn’t appreciate their little stunt if it was them. They knew better than to pull something like that in front of their mother, and he had to admit, if he had any doubts about Kimble, he was starting to get over them.



Rayvon, Rayden, Dillon and Brandis Carter sat in silence on the plane-
awaiting take off. Dillon, got the unlucky seat, next to Dad. He had chewed them out thoroughly on the ride to the airport. Everyone pleaded innocent and tried to convince him that it was a coincidence that Cal had shown up at their house. Of course, he wasn’t buying it. Brandis also informed them that their mother certainly didn’t buy it.

Though none of his children would own up to any involvement in the shenanigans with Kimble and Cal just the fact they all played a little too stupid all but convinced him of their guilt. Now who the ringleader was he wasn't certain but his money was on Rayden. He understood what his sons were doing even if he didn't approve. During his tirade, Brandis hadn't let on in any way who he thought was guilty because his sons never ratted on each other — never had, and never would.

Why do I to listen to Rayden? Rayvon wondered, sitting next to his brother. Nothing had gone as planned. Kimble had arrived too soon and his mother wasn't supposed to have witnessed anything. Oh well, it didn't change anything. Kimble had to convince them that he was worthy of their little sister. He'd certainly answered the question of jealousy; he was as territorial as it gets with Cal. Cal was lucky; Kimble would surely have kicked the crap out of him if their mother hadn't been there to stop him. That wasn't to say they wouldn't have tried to stop him, but Rayvon doubted they would have had an easy time of it.

When Rayden initially approached him with this hair-brained scheme, Rayvon had no qualms about using Cal. Quite simply, they didn't like him. The impression he'd made on his first meeting wasn't a good one, and all the Carter brothers agreed he was sneaky. Also, after hearing what he'd said to Alex, Rayvon knew for certain he wasn't the nice guy he pretended to be. It was a good thing he

was out of the picture. Cal definitely would have ended up getting a Carter family-style ass whipping.

Another fact remained. Rayvon and his brothers wanted to be sure that Kimble could be trusted. Kimble needed to prove to them that no matter what the situation, he wouldn't be tempted—even if he thought there was no way his wife would find out. Rayvon understood that Kimble was human, but neither his brother Dillon nor his father would cheat on their wives. They loved them entirely too much to hurt them that way. If Kimble couldn't prove to him and his brothers that he loved Alex the same way, he would have to go because that's what Alexandra Carter deserved, and the Carter brothers intended to make sure that's what she got.

Chapter Fourteen

Kimble was still fuming over what that little toad Cal had said to his wife. Nothing would have made him happier than to kick his ass. Disrespecting his mother-in-law, however, wasn't an option, so he'd let it go for now; but he truly hoped they crossed paths again. Looking over at his wife, he could tell she was mad, but he wasn't certain why.

“Alex what was he doing here?”

“How do I know Kim? I'm sure you must have heard me tell him that we're just friends, and he should stop showing up here uninvited and unannounced.”

“Actually the only thing I heard was the part about you lying about having a man; but I really don't want to have this conversation here.”

“I'll get the baby and meet you at home.”

“I'd rather we left together.”

“Okay.” Alex said then went up to get the baby.

When she knocked on her mother's bedroom door, her mom yelled out.
“Come in.”

Alex closed the door behind her.

“Is he going to sleep?”

“Not really. Is Kimble okay?”

“Yes. He’s kinda mad that Cal was here, but I told him he just showed up uninvited.”

“I think he was more upset about what he said to you than his being here. Alex a man’s pride is a funny thing make sure Cal understands you love your husband.”

“I don’t think I have to worry about him coming back around any time soon, Mama.”

“I’m not so sure. His pride’s also at stake, especially after what Kimble said to him. Just make sure he isn’t getting mixed signals from you.”

She decided her mother didn’t need to know about the kisses or anything else she had shared with Cal.

“I will, Mama. Kimble’s ready to go home so I came up to get the baby.”

“I’ll bring him home later. You and Kimble go on.”

Alex leaned over and gave her mother a hug and kiss then kissed her baby. She left her truck at her mother’s and rode with Kimble. On the ride home they decided they didn’t want to fight about Cal; he was insignificant. She knew Kimble loved her, and she him. There were no reasons for doubt.

“Look baby there’s no reason for you not to have male friends as long as Cal isn’t one of them. As much work as I do that involves being around other women, we have to be able to trust each other or we’ll fight constantly.”

“I do trust you, Kimble, and I’m sorry about today.”

“I’m sorry I over-reacted. I’m not going to lie and say I’m not the jealous type, because with you I am. But I also trust you.”

“Thanks, honey. It means a lot to me that you trust me. I don’t ever want you to believe that I would encourage anyone else. I love you, only you — have since I was thirteen.”

Kimble grinned.

“I guess I can admit it now. I’ve always loved you too. Lord knows I tried to fight it.”

“Don’t I know it.”

Alex laughed.

“How many weeks do I have left?”

Alex didn’t even try and pretend that she didn’t know what he was talking about.

“It depends on what the doctor says when I go back for my check up.”

Rolling his eyes he asked, “How the hell do so many woman end up being pregnant when they go back for their six week check up?”

Alex laughed at him before replying, "Because they're married to men like you who act like they can't wait. And you wonder why we don't trust you men."

"Ah, that's not something you'll ever have to worry about," he said as he pulled into their driveway. They got out and he walked up behind her. He pulled her into his arms. "You're more than enough woman for me, and luckily, if I can't wait to get home to you, I can afford to fly you to me."

Laughing, they went upstairs to change clothes watch TV and wait for her mother to bring the baby home.



Dillon called the next day. Rayvon and Rayden had taken first and third places in the race in Italy. They would all be coming home two days later than expected. He also told them that First National Bank and Trust who had become one of her brothers' sponsors, was throwing a reception for the new sponsorship when they returned.

In preparation, Alex, Venice and Mrs. Carter were going to the mall to buy new outfits.

"Baby I can watch the kids while you're gone," Kimble offered.

"That's a great idea. Why don't we take the kids over to my house and Trent and Elray can help him," Sherry suggested.

Both Alex and Venice gave specific instructions before leaving, but they were still concerned about leaving the kids in the care of their uncles Trent and Elray, if not Kimble. The phone rang not thirty minutes after the women left.

Before answering Trent and Elray took bets on whether it was Mama, Venice or Alex. It turned out to be none of them. It was Keith, Kimble's brother, looking for him.

"Kimble, sorry to bother you, but it's almost an emergency, Miracle Dayton is here in my office, and she isn't happy with her proposal. Can you please come down here?"

"Keith I can't; I'm watching the kids. Alex, her mom and Venice have gone shopping. Trent and El can't keep the kids alone."

"Look if I could put this off, I would." Keith pleaded.

"Fine, bring her here and bring a copy of the original proposal."

"Thanks, we'll be there within the hour."

"What was that about?" Trent asked him when he hung up the phone.

"A new writer, Miracle Dayton. She's a science fiction horror writer. I've never actually met her, but I did the proposal for the release of her initial book with K Town. Apparently she wasn't impressed and wants some things changed."

"Why are they coming here?" Elray wanted to know.

“She apparently isn’t inclined to wait. Keith says she’s a very intense woman. I’m gonna check on the kids. Hold on.”

Both kids were still asleep but they would both more than likely wake up just before Keith got there or soon after they arrived.

“Trent can you help me get the baby’s bottle ready and see what Venice packed for Sherice to eat?” Kimble asked.



Elray was sitting in the family room, where they had set up the cribs for the kids to sleep, surfing the internet when they returned. He looked up when they entered the room. There were still mixed emotions on his behalf when it came to Kimble. When he saw how happy his sister was, and how much Kimble obviously adored Kimble Jr., he really wanted to leave things alone. The problem was, he had known Kimble too long, and he had never known him to date anyone exclusively. He still didn’t trust him to stay content with just one woman.

An hour and a half had passed. Sherice and little Kimble were both awake now, and still no Keith. Neither Trent nor Elray knew the first thing about changing diapers, so Kimble got assigned the task of changing both kids. Once they were changed and dry, Trent and Elray tried to get Sherice to eat while Kimble fed his son. Sherice had her uncles wrapped around her finger; they were

so patient with her. Kimble was truly surprised at how well the brothers did with their little niece.

The doorbell rang, and since they were all busy and expecting Keith, Trent yelled out, “It’s open, come in. We’re in the family room.”

Keith entered first with Ms. Dayton trailing behind him. She wasn’t at all what Kimble had expected. You might actually have missed her, if you were not looking for her. She was very short. At first glance, she looked very plain, but after a more careful inspection, he noticed she was actually quite pretty.

“Everyone this is Miracle Dayton, one of K Town’s newest writers. Miracle, this is my brother Kimble and his brothers-in-law, Elray and Trent Carter.”

After formal introductions were made, they took a seat to wait for Kimble to finish with the baby. Little Kimble seemed to sense that his father had something else to do because he didn’t go back to sleep, and when Kimble tried giving him to one of his uncles other than Keith, he cried.

“Mind if I try?” Miracle asked.

“That isn’t necessary, but you’re welcome to hold him if you’d like,” Kimble replied.

“I love children; I’d love to hold him.”

Kimble handed the baby to her. Everyone in the room watched as her face lit up when she looked at the baby she was now holding. Kimble had a hard time

imagining her writing the graphic horror novel that he'd read. He would have expected someone more gothic or at the very least, nerdy.

The baby had stopped crying and was sitting contently in Ms. Dayton's arms as she rocked him. Miracle held him for several minutes humming and rocking him gently as though they were the only two in the room. Suddenly she stood up and handed the baby back to Kimble.

"Thank you Mr. Brown. He's a beautiful baby. I'm sorry to have imposed. We can do the meeting some other time."

Kimble exchanged glances with his brother. He immediately noticed that she was crying as she turned and walked out of the room. Keith rushed after her.

"That was strange," Elray remarked.

"I'm sure Keith'll fill me in later," Kimble said as he sat down.

An hour after Keith and Miracle left little Kimble finally went back to sleep. Sherice was still awake and having a great time playing with her Uncle Trent.

Kimble saw Elray coming toward him.

"You're very good with him."

He was lying on the couch with the baby on his chest.

"Thanks. He's very easy to take care of. I think he's a little fussier than usual. He's not used to his mother being gone."

"Speaking of my sister, how are things going between you two?"

“Fine. Is there a reason you think it wouldn’t be?”

“No. Just wondering. Are you going to do any modeling jobs this spring?”

“I’m working full time at my dad’s company so I haven’t really given it much thought.”

“I’m sure you probably make more modeling than you do working for your dad.”

“Publishing pays better than you think, but yeah I do make more with the bonuses I usually get. Is there a reason for the questions?”

“Just wondering how Alex is going to like being left at home alone while you’re out with gorgeous half-naked women.”

“My wife knows I love her, El. Don’t cause trouble by putting thoughts in her head she didn’t have. I’d think as her brother you’d want to see her happy.”

He laughed. “I do. I’m just not convinced she’ll stay that way with you. You seem to forget I’ve been on the road with you before. I know what goes on and the type of women and temptation you’re up against.”

“It’s only a temptation if you’re interested. Contrary to what you think, El, I’m content in my marriage. I don’t need or want other woman anymore.”

“Time will tell. You do know that if you hurt her it won’t matter that we’re friends.”

Kimble didn’t get a chance to answer.

“Elray are you giving my husband a hard time?” Alex asked as she walked past him over to where Kimble was laying.

“I wouldn’t dream of it, little sister. Where’s Mama?”

“Outside. She said for you and Trent to come help her.”

Trent picked up Sherice, and he and Elray went outside to help their mother.



“Kimble, I’m sure I’ve told you not to put him asleep like that.”

“Sure you did, but he was fussy and it was the only way he’d go to sleep. Did you ladies find outfits?”

“Yes. Venice and I paid for Mama’s since we picked it out. We can leave once Mama comes in to see the baby.”

Bending down, Alex picked the baby up off Kimble’s chest and he got up to get the baby’s things together as well as Sherice’s. Of course, two hours later they were all still there. Elray had left because he had a date. Trent had gone upstairs to take a nap. According to him, baby-sitting was hard work.

Alex and Kimble finally had to leave to take Venice home to pick up her car. The bakery called something about an order that had been mixed up and she needed to go down there and straighten things out.

“Don’t worry about anything. Sherice can spend the night with us,” Alex said to Venice when they arrived at her house. Poor Venice would most likely have a late night tonight trying to get the order corrected and ready to go out tomorrow as planned.

Keith called later that evening while she and Kimble were home watching TV after putting the kids to bed.

“The meeting’s rescheduled for tomorrow at one.”

“Okay. Did you find out what made Ms. Dayton wig out earlier?” Kimble inquired.

“Nah, she wouldn’t talk about it. I’ll see you at one tomorrow. Tell Alex I said hey. How’s my nephew?”

“He’s fine. Talk to you tomorrow.” Putting the phone on the table next to the couch, he pulled Alex back against him. “Keith told me to tell you hi.”

Alex nodded then settled in to watch the rest of the movie.



The next morning, Alex decided to tag along with Kimble. She and the kids were going to sit out in the park while Kimble had his meeting. It was a beautiful day — not too hot, not too cool. Unfortunately, Kimble’s meeting was taking longer than expected. His meeting was supposed to have been over nearly an hour ago. She was just about to call him when her cell phone rang.

“Hey, I’m sorry baby. I’m gonna be awhile. Take the car. I’ll see you later at home.”

Disappointed, Alex packed up the kids and left. After she got home, Venice picked up Sherice. She started dinner, gave the baby a bath, and was preparing to take a shower herself. A hot bath is really what she wanted, but because of her incision, she would have to settle for a shower for now. She had placed the bassinet in her room just outside the bathroom door so she could hear the baby if he started to cry. The water felt so wonderful she never wanted to get out. After finishing her shower, she finished dinner then laid down.

She didn’t hear Kimble come in until well after nine o’clock that evening. She had left him a plate in the microwave and when she heard it turn on, she got up to go downstairs.



Kimble heard Alex coming down the stairs while he was sitting in the kitchen waiting for his food to warm up. The meeting with Miracle, Keith, his dad and a couple members of the art production team had him mentally drained. Intense didn’t begin to describe Miracle Dayton. Almost the entire proposal had to be re-done. The woman definitely knew what she wanted and how she envisioned it should be done. He could tell from the way his brother watched Ms. Dayton

throughout the meeting that he was extremely impressed by her. It was more than that, though. He was interested in her, romantically.

“Why are you sitting here in the dark?” Alex asked as she entered the kitchen.

“Just thinking. Sorry about today.”

“Nothing to be sorry about. You have to work if you’re going to keep me in the style my brothers and I will demand.”

“Oh so now I’m married to a gold digger with meddling brothers.”

She laughed and sat down in his lap.

“Well the meddling brothers part you got right.”

He thought this a perfect opportunity to see how she felt about him continuing to model and do shows.

“Speaking of work, my agent called and offered me a gig. I turned down a shoot right after the baby was born, but there’s one coming up in six weeks. They’re offering a twenty five thousand dollar bonus.”

“Is it here in Atlanta?”

“No I’ll have to go to New York, but I won’t do it if you don’t want me to.”

“Don’t be silly, Kim. I knew you’d have to go away for work, and I trust you.”

“I love you, baby,” he said just before pulling her closer into his arms and kissing her gently.

“I love you too. Now I’m going back upstairs. I’ll see you when you come up.”

As Alex walked up the stairs, a part of her feared him going back to work on the road—not that she doubted his love, but she’d seen the models he worked with. They were out of her league. She knew she was pretty, but these girls gave a whole new meaning to the word “sexy.” There was no excuse for the insecurities she was feeling. She definitely needed to keep them to herself. Young didn’t have to mean stupid.

Walking into the room Alex paused to look down at the baby before sitting on the bed to wait for Kimble. A short time later he came into the room and also paused beside the baby’s bassinet before he bent over to place a loving kiss on his cheek. Undressing he said, “Honey I’m going to grab a quick shower.”

After showering and slipping into a pair of shorts, he got into bed. Alex immediately went into his arms and laid her head on his chest. Within minutes, he fell into an exhausted sleep. Alex, however, was still awake over an hour after Kimble had gone to sleep, thinking. No sooner than she had finally fallen asleep did little Kimble decide he was hungry.

“It’s okay, I got him. Go back to sleep,” she heard Kimble say as he turned on the lamp on the nightstand, picked up the baby and took him into his room to change.

After changing his son, Kimble went downstairs, made a bottle, then sat down on the couch to feed him. Usually he went right back to sleep but he was still awake so Kimble decided to stay downstairs with him so they wouldn't wake up Alex.

Yes, he had always wanted children, but he was still in awe of this tiny person who held his heart so completely. He had envisioned himself being a father, just not until he was well into his thirties, maybe even early forties. It amazed him that he was this content being settled down with a baby and a wife. Alexandra Carter Brown was everything he wanted in a woman—strong, confident, smart, sexy as hell, independent, sassy, and passionate. He loved her totally and completely. His family knew it. He just wished her family, or should he say her brothers in particular, realized it.

Going back to work on the road was going to put enough strain on his marriage. He didn't need her brothers' meddling interference. At least Trent and Dillon were partially on his side, but when it came down to it, the Carter brothers always stuck together no matter what.

As his son looked into his face, Kimble swore he saw him smile. The love he had for this precious little one was overwhelming. He truly didn't understand brothers who could walk out on their kids. Even if they didn't love the mother, the baby was a part of them. Sharing this time with his son was special. He found

himself looking forward to him getting older and them doing father and son things together. Placing the baby on his chest, he laid down.

Little Kimble yawned and stretched his little body before finding a comfortable position for sleeping. Even after the baby was asleep, Kimble stayed downstairs and enjoyed having his son all to himself. As he felt himself getting sleepy Kimble got up, went upstairs and placed the baby back in his bassinet.



When Alex woke up the next morning, she found herself alone. Both Kimble and the baby were already up. Assuming they were downstairs, she went down looking for them, but found a note from Kimble saying they had gone to his mother's.

Going back upstairs, Alex dressed and was just getting her keys to leave when the phone rang.

“Hello,” she said.

“Alex, its Mom. What are you doing today?”

“I didn't have any specific plans why?”

“I talked to your dad and brothers. Their flight gets in this afternoon. Would you like to go with me to pick them up?”

“Yeah but let me check with Kimble. He and the baby are at his mother's, and I don't know if he has to go into the office today.”

“I talked to his mother earlier, and she and Kimberly were going to call you anyway because they want to keep the baby while Kimble runs into the office.”

“In that case I’ll be right over.”

Twenty minutes later, she pulled into the driveway of her parent’s house. Her mother was already dressed and ready to go. Even though her mother hated the sport her sons were involved in, she was extremely proud of them. They had succeeded in a sport that was still pretty much dominated by white America. Frequently her mom joked that her brothers were like the Venus and Serena of the racing world.

“Maybe we should stop off at Venice’s bakery to pick up some goodies and to see if she wants to go to the airport with us,” Alex suggested.

“Okay, I’m sure she does.” Mrs. Carter responded.

It appeared to Alex that Venice was not the least bit surprised to see her sister and mother-in-law walk in. When she questioned her about it, Venice told her Dillon had called her earlier to let her know what time the flight would get in.

“Great minds must think alike. I already made some desserts,” Alex heard Venice say when she picked up Sherice to give her a kiss.

Alex continued playing with Sherice while her mother and Venice put the goodies in her truck since they wouldn’t let her help. Alex drove. Neither her mother or Venice liked driving on 285 because of all the eighteen-wheelers. Traffic

wasn't as bad as expected, and they made it there well before the flight was due to arrive.

Rather than circle the airport, Alex paid to park and they went into the concourse to look around while waiting. A magazine cover caught Alex's eye and she stopped by the newsstand. The new issue of GQ featuring her and Kimble on the cover had not come out yet. Apparently, the video that he had done with the rapper Trina was getting a lot of attention. There were several pictures of him posing with her. One of the captions read, "Is this the new man in Trina's life?"

It went with the territory, she told herself as she closed the magazine, but it still bothered her to see it. Those types of articles sold magazines. None of it had to be true for them to print it. One thing was for sure — she wouldn't buy that magazine again. Why was she was being silly? She hadn't even been married to Kimble when he did the video with Trina.

Venice came over to her. "Their flight just landed."

Walking over to where her mother was waiting for her dad and brothers, she told Venice about the pictures and the caption.

"Alex you knew when you married Kimble that he was a damn good looking man, and you also knew what he did for a living," Venice said.

"I know, but I don't have to like it."

They both laughed.

Waiting outside the terminal, Alex knew the minute Venice and her mother spotted Dillon and her dad because their faces lit up like the fourth of July. That's the kind of love that she and Kimble shared. She was being stupid.

Chapter Fifteen

Alex dropped Dillon, Venice and their baby off at the bakery where Venice's car was. Dillon wanted to go home, shower, change and rest before coming over to the house later. Alex and her mother hugged him. "Take your time. We'll see at the house later," Mrs. Carter said to her son.

Rayvon and Rayden were pumped and anything but tired. When Alex pulled into the driveway of her parent's house, everyone got out to go into the house. Of course, Rayvon and Rayden whined.

"What, you can't take a bag?"

Both Alex and her mother shrugged, laughed and said, "We're girls. Everything's too heavy."

Pops just looked, shook his head, then turned and walked into the house behind his wife and daughter. Alex sat quietly listening as her dad told her and her mom everything that had happened while they were in Italy. Just as he was finishing up, the twins finished with the luggage and walked into the family room. She could hear the pride in his sons' accomplishments radiate in every word her father spoke.

Around six-thirty that evening, Dillon and his family finally showed up. It felt like old times in the Carter house with all the family together plus the new additions. Alex found herself wishing that Kimble and her son were there also. Not ten minutes later, she got her wish. Kimble walked in with the baby and Chinese take-out for everybody.

“A peace offering?” Rayden asked.

“Do I need one?” Kimble responded.

Alex got up to get the baby from him, then looked at her brother and said, “Be nice or I won’t let you hold your nephew.”

“Good, because I got first dibs anyway,” her father said holding his arms out for his grandson.

Alex handed the baby to her dad. Kimble and her mother had already gone into the kitchen to get plates and silverware for the food. As they came back into the family room, Alex asked, “What can I help with?”

Kimble leaned over, kissed her and said, “I got it, baby; have a seat.”

When Alex turned around to go back and sit on the couch, she noticed the scolds on her brother’s faces at what Kimble had done.

“Objections, need I remind you that he’s my husband?”

No one responded, but Alex noticed that didn’t stop them from shooting dirty looks at Kimble throughout the evening behind their parents’ backs.

Everyone got the hint it was time to go home around midnight when Pops announced, "I'm tired," then grabbed his wife by the hand to go upstairs to bed.



Kimble was glad to be home. It had been a long day. Wrestling little Kimble from his mother and sister after he had come back from the office was fun, and one of the highlights of his day. With him being the only grandchild on his side of the family, he was going to be spoiled rotten between his family and Alex's. He was carrying him as they entered the house, so he took him straight upstairs to get him ready for bed. After such a long day, he decided to forego the baby's nightly bath till morning. Kimble turned when Alex joined them in the bedroom and watched her sit on the bed to remove her shoes.

After he finished getting the baby ready for bed Kimble began removing his own clothes. His task complete, Kimble turned again to Alex who was still sitting on the bed watching him.

"You look tired. Are you going to shower before you go to bed?" he asked.

"Yeah, I have a busy day tomorrow, and if I know Mama she'll be calling pretty early to get me up."

"Why where are you going?"

"I'm going to the press conference with Mama, Daddy, Dillon and the twins."

“Oh yeah I forgot about that. Trent did mention it earlier. Do you want my mother to watch the baby? Unfortunately I’ve got a shoot I have to go to myself tomorrow.”

“No, Daddy told me to bring him.”

The tiredness showing in her face, Kimble pulled her into a standing position, and undressed her while she just stood there and let him. Once he had her completed naked, he led her into the bathroom so they could shower together.



The baby only woke up once the entire night as though he knew his parents needed their rest. After bathing the baby and getting him dressed the next morning, Alex gave him to his father to feed so she could get dressed. Kimble was still home when she left to meet her dad and brothers at her parents’ house.

Dillon, Rayvon, Rayden, Trent and Elray were outside on the porch when she got there. Each of them took off, trying to get to her truck first, to get Little Kim. Trent won. Inside the house, Venice was changing Sherice’s clothes because she had just spilled a whole cup of apple juice on herself. Both her parents were in the kitchen sitting at the table drinking coffee. Alex walked over to give each of them a hug and kiss.

“Where’s my grandson?” her father asked.

“Trent got to him first, but I’m not sure who actually has him now.”

“Will Kimble join us later at the press conference?” her mother asked.

“No, he had a photo shoot at his father’s company today, so he probably won’t get home until late tonight.”

“We better get going if we plan to be on time,” her father said as he stood and left out the back door.

It took three cars to transport the growing Carter family. Only two parking spots had been made available and when they got there, so they left the cars with the valet service while other parking arrangements were made. Rayvon and Rayden changed into their racing suits for the pre press conference photos, as did Dillon and their dad. The press conference started as soon as the photo shoot was over.

Sitting in the front row with her mother, Alex was so proud of her brothers. They had accomplished so much. The pictures taken were going to run in Black Enterprise magazine.

During the press conference, her father announced, “The Carter racing team is both proud and pleased to announce that we are starting the Carter Foundation to benefit minority children. The foundation will sponsor inner city youth who are interested in participating in racing either cars or motorcycles.”

Rayden approached the podium next. Clearing his throat, he began, “I also have an announcement. I’ve been in training for several months, now, and I’ll be entering the national motorcycle circuit this coming season.”

Alex immediately looked to her mother. Everybody knew how she felt about her boys racing period, but motorcycles! She definitely wasn’t going to be happy. The fact that Rayden had been in training, and was going to compete and Daddy had waited to let her find out this way wasn’t good, either. It was worse than Alex thought. Her mother refused to ride in the car with her dad or either of her brothers on the way home. After they pulled into the driveway, her mom was out of the car so fast that her dad didn’t even get a chance to open the car door.

As everyone entered the house, it was obvious that her mother was beyond furious. Alex actually felt sorry for her father because he was going to catch hell. A few years ago, Rayvon and Rayden had mentioned the possibility that they wanted to get into motorcycle racing, but because their mother had thrown such a fit, they hadn’t mentioned it again.

Alex heard Dillon asking, “Do you want us to stay for awhile?”

“No, I knew this would happen. I’ll call you.”

Alex decided to invite everybody to come back to her house. To her surprise, they all accepted. Kimble wasn’t home when she got there. Technically this was the first time all her brothers had been to her home.

“Elray, would you mind going upstairs to bring little Kim’s bassinet down?”

Elray followed Venice upstairs. Once Alex had the kids settled, she and Venice went into the kitchen to fix some snacks. They could hear her brothers discussing Rayden competing in an upcoming race in Charlotte. With her mother being so angry, Alex listened as her brothers suddenly voiced that none of them were looking forward to the reception that the racing sponsors were giving.



Kimble arrived home around eleven thirty, surprised that all of his brothers-in-law were there. Tired, he really was in no mood to argue tonight. The lingerie photo shoot had been a disaster, taking longer than anyone planned. One of the models Keith had hired didn’t show up because of a family emergency, and he’d stepped in at the last minute to complete the shoot. The catalogue for the Naughty but Nice Boutique had to be ready for print in two days, and there was no time to reschedule the shoot. The photographer couldn’t have been happier. He loved the chemistry between him and Alexis.

His problem was that he’d had a brief affair with Alexis — a fact that both Trent and Elray Carter were aware of. While Alexis had been great in bed, she was entirely too jealous and clingy. The affair lasted less than three months, but she made no secret of the fact that she was more than willing for it to resume.

Speaking to his brothers-in-law and Venice as he walked over to Alex, Kimble kissed her.

“I’m tired, honey. I’m going to go on up to bed. Do you want me to take the baby with me?”

“No, he’s fine. Is everything okay?” she asked.

“Everything’s fine. I’ll see you when you come up.”

Having been friends with the Carter brothers as long as he had, Kimble knew they could tell something was bothering him. It was risky not to stay but his mood definitely wasn’t going to allow him to put up with badgering tonight.

Alex wished that Kimble hadn’t gone upstairs. It was nice having her family there, but she wanted to include her husband.

To break the tension of Kimble’s hasty exit she heard Venice say, “How long do you think your mom is going to stay mad?”

“Yeah I’m surprised you guys told her about Rayden racing motorcycles the way you did. You had to know she wasn’t going to be happy,” Alex added.

“We did,” Rayden responded. “But we also felt it would be easier than telling her alone. She’ll accept it. You know how Mama is.”

She did, but this was different. This was something that put one of her children in jeopardy. Talking about it wouldn’t change anything, so the conversation shifted to the reception. Alex, her brothers and Venice spent the next

few hours discussing the reception and the foundation before everyone left to go home. Before going upstairs, Alex put the few dishes they'd used in the dishwasher and turned it on.

Kimble was laying across the bed asleep when she came in after putting little Kim in his bed. Removing her clothes, she slipped into one of Kimble's oversized tee shirts, then into bed.



The next morning when Kimble awoke Alex was still sleeping. He placed the baby next to her and went downstairs.

Since the baby was still asleep but would most likely wake up soon, he made him a bottle. Sitting at the table looking over some reports he'd brought home with him, he still wasn't happy about how things had worked out with the photo shoot the day before. Lost in thought he didn't hear Alex when she first entered the kitchen with his son. Placing the file he was looking at aside, he got up to give his wife a proper good morning.

"I take it you feel better this morning?" Alex asked when he turned her loose after the delicious kiss he'd just given her.

"Sorry I was such a crab when I got home. Nothing went right on the shoot yesterday."

“It’s okay; I understand. How about we do something fun after I get me and the baby dressed?”

“I’d love to, but we have to have this catalogue ready and we’re so behind. I need to go in if we’re going to meet our deadline.”

This was the very reason he had never wanted to work a traditional nine-to-five job. Kimble liked the freedom to set his own hours and work when he wanted. Modeling afforded him those luxuries; working with his father in publishing didn’t. But working for his father’s company did afford him a more steady income — which, now that he had a family to support — he needed. While he didn’t consider himself a male chauvinist, he really didn’t want his wife to work outside the home. But he wouldn’t object if she decided she wanted to.

Even though he knew Alex understood, she was visibly disappointed so he added, “I’ll leave as soon as possible. Then you, the baby, and I can go catch a movie and go out to eat.”

“Okay. I’m going to go by and see my mother until you’re ready. Rayden and my dad dropped the bombshell about him racing motorcycles at the press conference yesterday.”

He must not have looked the least bit surprised by what she had just told him because she asked, “You already knew didn’t you?”

“I knew.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Alex, we already had a lot to deal with. You didn’t need this on top of everything else.”

“Kimble, don’t start treating me like my brothers. I’m not as fragile as they think I am.”

Kimble pulled her back into his arms gazing lovingly into her eyes.

“I promise not to keep anything else from you.” It wasn’t true because he was keeping the fact that he’d worked with Alexis from her, and he also wasn’t telling her that the photographer who shot last night’s shoot was recommending that they work together again on another upcoming catalogue for Naughty but Nice.

Standing there holding his wife, he tried to reason with himself that he wasn’t telling her for her own good. It was bullshit, but it did make him feel a tiny bit better. Why tell her he was going to be working so closely with a woman he’d had an affair with? Especially one who wanted to resume that affair. It was bad enough that his two brothers-in-law knew he’d had an affair with Alexis. Part of him wanted to sit her down and just tell her, because he would most likely work again with someone he’d slept with in the past. However, he had yet to win her brothers over, and until he did, he would just as soon not add any fuel to the fire.

He got the baby ready while Alex finished dressing. Kimble went on in to the office. He hoped it wouldn't take all day to finish putting this stupid catalogue together. When Kimble walked into his brother Keith's office unannounced, he hoped it gave Keith a good indication that he was still in a bad mood from yesterday.

"Morning little brother."

"Keith, are they ready to get started yet in editing?"

"Yes. I've seen the spread—it's hot. I hate to say this, but you and Alexis sizzle together on film."

"Then don't."

"Kimble is there a particular reason you don't like Alexis?"

"Yes, Keith, there is. I had an affair with her. She's the last person I need to sizzle with!"

"Oh Kim. Why didn't you just say something?"

"Because Naughty but Nice is one of Dad's biggest contracts. I don't want him to lose their business. He has a deadline which we would never have met if you had to reschedule the shoot."

"It's not like you've never worked with someone that you've slept with."

"But I wasn't married then."

"I take it someone in Alex's family knows you had an affair with Alexis?"

“Trent and Elray both know. Trent wouldn’t say anything, but Elray already thinks I’m going to cheat. I don’t need him putting insecurities in Alex’s head. Damn, Keith, she already thinks she’s not as beautiful as the girls I work with. I mean it’s crazy! I think she’s more beautiful than any of them, and sexy as hell wouldn’t begin to describe her in my eyes.”

“That’s because you love her. Don’t get me wrong, I think Alex is gorgeous too but it’s easy to understand how she’d feel insecure with you working around beautiful models all the time.”

“What am I going to do Keith? I love Alex so much! You know I want to start my own business so I need to keep working when I can, but I don’t want to put my marriage at stake.”

“Then ask Dad for the money.”

Shaking his head, Kimble responded, “You know I want to make it on my own.”

Keith picked up the phone and buzzed his secretary.

“Tell the editors and the printing departments to go ahead with the spread I approved this morning and cancel the last two appointments I have.” Walking around his desk, he said, “Come on. You need advice I can’t give you. I’ve never been married.”

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.”

Kimble left his car and rode with his brother. When they pulled up to the golf club, he couldn’t figure out why of all places they were there. When they walked out onto the outside patio and saw his father sitting there, he turned to his brother and said, “I don’t want to talk to Dad about this.”

“Relax, Kim; I think Dad’s the perfect person for you to talk too. He and Mom have a very successful marriage, but they’ve had their fair share of problems. Dad’s a hard man. But he’s fair—and Kim, he loves us. He wouldn’t tell you anything wrong.”

Knowing Keith was right wouldn’t make talking to his father any easier. This just wasn’t the type of conversation he wanted to have with his Dad, but if it meant saving problems in his marriage, he’d do it. As he and Keith approached their father’s table, he saw his father look up and smile, obviously happy to see his sons.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of your company?” Mr. Brown asked. “Has the layout for the Naughty but Nice catalogue been approved?”

“Yes its been taken care of. I got in early, met with the team and approved the preliminary layout. Right before we left the office, Kim and I did the final approval.”

“Good. That’s one less thing for me to worry about. Now back to what you two’re doing here.”

“I need to talk to you, Dad,” Kimble responded.

“What about?”

A waitress appeared and asked if she could get anything for them. Both Keith and Kimble ordered a large glass of apple juice. The waitress left returning minutes later with their juice.

“Dad, this is really hard for me. I need some marital advice.”

“Okay, Son. I’ll help any way I can. Are you and Alex having problems already? They say your first year’s the hardest. I personally think it’s your first three years.”

“No, we aren’t really having a problem per say. I’m trying to avoid a problem and her brothers’re not helping.”

“What kind of problem?”

He didn’t know how to tell his father that his past was his problem. His parents had always frowned on the fact that he spread himself around with so many women. Yes, he’d always been very careful as well as discreet, but he was well aware that his mother especially hated what she considered a womanizing man.

It was Keith who finally broke the silence.

“His problem is women. Alex’s brothers think he’s going to have a problem being faithful, and they’re doing everything they can to convince their sister that she made a mistake in marrying my wonderful brother here.”

“I see. All I can say is you should have known this would be a problem. How long have you been her brother’s best friend? What is there about you that Trent doesn’t know?”

“It’s not Trent, Dad. It’s mostly Elray.” Kimble told him honestly.

“Elray, I’m not really a bit surprised. He’s just as bad, if not worse than you. That’s why he doesn’t see you changing. Talk to him. You’ve got to make him see just how much you care for his sister. Unfortunately, and fortunately, for you they have a close-knit family. You should be able to understand that and use it to your advantage. Think about if it were one of your sisters. You’d be just as protective. If you love Alex the way you say you do, do everything you can to convince her brothers of that. If you don’t, they will destroy your marriage.”

Isn’t that what he’d been doing since her family found out about their marriage? He hadn’t given one single member of her family any reason to doubt his love. Both he and Alex knew her brothers would have a hard time accepting them together, but he’d honestly thought when they saw how happy she was that would change. If Alex could accept that her husband had a past and changed for her, her brothers certainly should.

“Thanks, Dad. I hate to ask but would it be okay if I take off the last part of next week? I want to take Alex away for the weekend. The baby will be two months old and she hasn’t had a break.”

“Dad, I can handle anything that might come up while Kim’s gone,” Keith added.

“I wasn’t going to say no, but thanks for letting me know” Their dad smirked at them. “Stay for a round since you’re here?”

Shaking their heads, both men declined. Keith wanted to get back to the office to check on the progress of the Naughty but Nice catalogue, and Kimble wanted to pick up Alex. On the ride back to the office, Kimble decided he was being unfair to Keith. It would not hurt to run into the office to help check on the layout for the catalogue before leaving.

To his surprise, Keith was right. The pictures that he and Alexis took for the spread were, in fact, terrific. Before he realized it, he had spent the next hour poring over the spread with Keith. Very few changes made, the final spread was sent to printing. After finishing up, Kimble stopped in his office to get some work he intended to do at home, called Alex, and then left.

Chapter Sixteen

Alex shook her head as she watched her dad following her mom around the house trying to make amends. Of course, Sheri continued to ignore Brandis. To Alexandra's knowledge, he hadn't been kicked out of the bedroom, so that was a good sign. She was sure her mother wasn't still upset but was making her dad suffer out of principle for letting her find out the way she had. One thing for sure—if Rayden got hurt, her dad was going to catch holy heck.

Finishing the fruit salad she was making, Mrs. Carter placed it on a tray along with the bowls, silverware and lemonade. She and Alex were going to sit out on the deck while discussing some last-minute details for the reception that Saturday. When her mom went over to the fridge to put the lemonade back, her dad picked up the tray and headed for the back door. Opening the door, he stood there waiting as his wife and daughter to walk out. Once they were seated, he placed the tray on the table and left.

“Mama how long are you going to punish Daddy?”

“I'm not punishing your father, I'm just not happy with him right now so rather than say something I don't really mean I'd rather not talk to him at all.”

“But Mama he looks so miserable. Besides you know if Daddy could have, he would’ve talked Rayden out of racing bikes.”

“I know that, but I still don’t like that Bran has been keeping this from me. Alex, a healthy marriage stays that way when there is communication. Your father and I promised each other years ago that we wouldn’t keep secrets from each other—especially secrets that involved our family.”

“If you knew something was going to hurt Daddy, wouldn’t you do the same thing?”

“Not if it was something he would’ve eventually find out anyway.”

Alex knew when talking to her mother was like talking to a brick wall, and now was one of those times. Her mother wasn’t going to budge on how she felt no matter what she said. Leaving well enough alone, Alex changed the subject.

“Are you still planning on going to the reception for Rayvon and Rayden this weekend?”

“Of course I am. Just because I don’t agree with your brother’s choices doesn’t mean I won’t support him,” her mother assured her. “Sweetheart, my love for this family is unconditional. Always has been, always will be.”

Unconditional love. That’s what she had for Kimble. Hearing her mother say that gave her hope that her brothers, Elray in particular, would eventually accept her marriage to Kimble. Little Kim had fallen asleep in his chair.

“I’ll take him inside so he can sleep comfortably.” Her mother spoke as she rose from her chair.

While waiting for her mother to return her dad stuck his head out the door.

“Kimble just pulled into the driveway.”

“Thanks, Daddy.” Alex responded as she covered what was left of their fruit salad, then got up and walked around the side of the house to meet him.

“Hey, you done for the day?” she asked giving him a big hug.

“Yes. Keith had almost everything done before I came in. We reviewed it, made a few changes, and it’s good to go. Where’s the baby?”

“He just fell asleep. Mama took him in the house to put him in the bed.”

“Do you still want to catch a movie or something?”

“I always want to do something with my fine sexy husband. Let me see if Mama will keep little Kim.” They both knew asking was just a formality. Both her mother and his couldn’t wait to have the baby to themselves every chance they got.



The mall was more crowded than they expected, considering it was only about two thirty in the afternoon. It would be another forty minutes before the movie they wanted to see would start so they decided to kill some time looking at some dresses. Though Alex already had the dress she was wearing Saturday night Kimble knew she wouldn’t want to miss out on the opportunity to keep her

options open. Coming out of Rich's, they heard her name called, and turned around. The last people Kimble expected to see were her brothers Trent and Elray.

“Hey, guys. What are you doing at the mall?”

“Hey to you, too, little sister. We could ask you the same thing,” Trent said.

“Kim and I are going to a movie, but it doesn't start for awhile so we're just killing some time.”

Kimble already knew from the mischievous look on Elray's face, he intended to start trouble, so when the next words came out of his mouth, he wasn't the least surprised.

“Kim, I saw Alexis earlier today. She said the two of you did a shoot together the other night.”

“Yeah we did. The person Keith hired was called away on a family emergency and we didn't have time to reschedule.”

Kimble sincerely hoped he would just drop the subject. Of course he didn't. Elray was going to be Elray. That being said, he was like a dog on a bone, he just wasn't going to give up until he was good and ready.

“Lingerie for the Naughty but Nice boutique, wasn't it? I hear things were pretty steamy on the set.”

“Elray is there something you're trying to imply? I was totally professional at all times, and I didn't disrespect my wife in any way.”

“Elray, I knew Kimble was a model when I married him. I’m not so insecure that he can’t do lingerie or swim wear ads or work with female models.”

“How do you feel about him working with former girlfriends? You did tell her that you and Alexis used to date didn’t you Kim?”

“No, Elray. I didn’t. I didn’t see the point in it since I wouldn’t really say I dated her.”

Elray was trying to get a rise out of him. Kimble knew it, yet he still allowed himself to get sucked into this ridiculous conversation with his brother-in-law.

“Oh, that’s right. You just screwed the hell out her for a few months.”

“Hey, El. Dang you’re taking this too far,” Trent said.

“No I’m not. My sister has a right to know what her husband’s doing and it appears he isn’t going to tell her.”

“Elray, I trust my husband. What he did before he married me is none of my business. Do you think I’m stupid? He was just like you. Do you think I don’t know what kind of hoes you all were? You probably still are! Do you plan to tell your wife when you get married about all the sleazy affairs you’ve ever had?”

Although Kimble knew Elray was just trying to protect his sister, he wanted to plant his fist in his face and never remove it. He was so mad. Nevertheless, he had to keep his cool. Alienating her family wouldn’t be the smartest move he could make. Besides El was his boy no matter what. They’d eventually get over all this.

“El, look—can we just talk?”

“We are talking, Kimble. If you had come and talked to me before all this happened, things might be different. But you went behind all of our backs.”

Now Alex was mad.

“So did I, Elray. Does that mean you’re mad at me too?”

“Yes, Alex. I am pissed at you. I asked you if you had a thing for Kimble and you looked me in my face and told me a lie. Didn’t you tell me nothing was going on?”

“I also told you that’s not what I wanted, but what Kimble wanted.”

“Yeah, well it didn’t take much for him to change his mind, now did it?”

“Elray you’re not being fair.”

“You’re my sister. I don’t care if I’m being fair. I don’t wanna see you hurt.”

Hearing the emotion in Elray’s voice when he said that brought tears to her eyes. Leaning forward Alex placed her hand on her brother’s arm and said, “Then stop hurting me. I love Kimble and when you attack him it hurts me.”

For a minute, Kimble thought Alex had gotten through to her pigheaded brother. The expression on his face clearly showed she wasn’t telling him anything that he didn’t already know.

“I’m not trying to hurt you, Alex. If I truly in my heart thought Kimble was ready to give you the same type of love and commitment you’re capable of giving

him, I'd be more than happy for you. I still would've been pissed that you snuck around behind our backs, but you know I love you. I could get over that."

Unfortunately, after that remark Kimble would be better off leaving than trying to get Elray to budge. Knowing how much his wife hated fighting with her brothers the best thing to do was end this conversation.

He didn't get the chance. Alex turned to him and said, "I wanna go home."

As they walked away without acknowledging Elray, Trent hurried to catch up with them.

"I'm sorry about how Elray acted."

"You shouldn't have to apologize, Trent. You didn't do anything wrong," Kimble said without breaking his stride.

"I know, but I think you and I understand El better than most people."

Looking at his brother-in-law Kimble was grateful for his friendship. He hoped that someday soon his relationship with Elray would return to the friendship they'd once shared. Even after everything Elray was putting them through, Kimble still considered him one of his closest friends. If anything went down, he'd still be there for him and he'd bet money that Elray would be there for him as well.

Leaving Trent and Elray at the mall Kimble asked. "Are you sure you don't want to see the movie?"

“No, I just want to go home.”



Not wanting her mom to know about her argument with Elray, Alex sent Kimble in to get the baby. Her mom could always tell when something was bothering her. She should have known her mother would come out to check on her. First arguing with her brother, now lying to her mother, Alex found her mood getting worse by the minute. By the time Kimble pulled into the garage at home, all she wanted to do was get into bed and go to sleep. It was only five o'clock in the afternoon but that didn't matter; sleep was her cure all.

“Lay down awhile baby I'm going to feed the baby and put him down for a nap.”

“Okay. I'll see you when you're done.”

A short time later when he came into the room, went into the bathroom and placed his cell on the counter on speaker she pretended to be asleep and listened as her husband phoned his brother-in-law, Dillon.

“Hey Dill. Have you got a minute?”

“Yeah. What's up?”

“Things are getting out of hand with El. He saw Alex and I at the mall and he came out the box at me. He knew about a shoot I'd done with a woman I've slept with in the past.”

“No need to go any further. I know my brother. I may not approve of what Elray did, but I’m not any happier with you right now than he is.” He also added, “I know you love my sister and she loves you, so I’ll see what I can do.”

After listening to the call, now Alex wished she hadn’t pretended sleep. By the time Kimble returned several other calls, she really had fallen asleep.



Since his wife was still asleep after he finished his calls, Kimble decided to make a light dinner of chicken and rice soup with tuna sandwiches. He made up a tray for them then went upstairs to join Alex. She was still sleeping when he came into the room. Sitting the tray on the dresser, he went back downstairs, grabbed the baby monitor and went back upstairs.

Gently he shook Alex’s shoulder to wake her up. When she turned over, he placed a light kiss on her lips. Sitting up, she scooted over so he could lie down next to her.

“I’m sorry your brother’s being so difficult. I know how much you want your family to accept our marriage.”

“He’ll come around. I just hate fighting with him. Elray and I have always been the closest. I think it’s because we’re the two youngest. You know what, though, I really don’t want to talk about my brother.”

“Okay let’s eat.”

“Can we just lie here for awhile?”

Kimble didn't say anything he just pulled her closer and held her tighter.



Sometime later, the baby started crying. Slipping out of bed, she left a still-sleeping Kimble to go and get him. Glancing at the clock next to the bed, she saw it was nine thirty. Once little Kim was changed she took him downstairs, made a bottle, then sat in the living room to feed him.

The baby was still eating when Kimble came down looking for them a short time later. Alex smiled up at him as he took the tray he'd brought up earlier into the kitchen.

“Are you hungry?” he asked.

“Not really.”

“Baby you need to eat something.”

“I will when I'm hungry, okay?”

He didn't pressure her. Placing the sandwiches in the garbage, he put the soup in the fridge, then went to sit next to her on the couch. Usually once the baby went to sleep, she put him to bed but long after he'd fallen asleep she was still holding him closely to her. Promising herself that she wouldn't let her own stupid insecurities put a wedge in her marriage, Alex refrained from speaking because she

was still thinking about what Elray had said earlier. Thinking about it, it wasn't so much what her brother had said but what her husband didn't say.

Why hadn't he told her about the shoot with Alexis and why hadn't he mentioned that she was a former lover? In her heart, she trusted Kimble and knew with all certainty that he loved her. But in her mind the thought was there that men would try and get away with whatever they could. Still, Kimble hadn't given her any reason to doubt him. Would she really want him to point out every single woman he'd ever been with?

What woman in her right mind would want all the sordid details of past bed partners of the man they married? Of course, she was jealous of all the women who had gone before her but in truth, she was grateful to them as well. Because of their eagerness to be with the man who now shared his love with her, he was as skilled a lover as any woman could hope for. As her biggest hoe of a brother Elray put it, "Practice makes perfect."



Kimble sat quietly next to his wife watching the play of emotions on her beautiful face, and he knew that she was thinking about what Elray had said earlier. Something needed to be done; family loyalty was something his father told him to use because he understood it. Had this been his sister, his brothers Keaton and Keith and himself would make sure that he was going to treat her right.

Though he wasn't so sure he would be as pigheaded as Elray was being about the whole thing. Damn. The one thing that was hurting him most was his friendship with her brother. Elray knew too much about Kimble's past. Unfortunately, they had once been entirely too much alike.

Also unfortunately, Elray had never come close to being in love his whole life. On the bright side, they both came from families that had parents who had enduring, long-lasting relationships.

Deep in thought by now, Kimble didn't notice that Alex had gotten up until she was half way up the stairs. Quietly he got up and followed. Alex went into the baby's room placing him in bed, then slowly backed out so as not to awaken him. Kimble was standing in the doorway watching, and she collided with him when she turned around.

"Kimble I don't want this to come between us," she whispered.

"Neither do I, baby."

Walking back into their bedroom, he didn't turn on the light because the night light was still on from earlier. Sitting down on the bed, he pulled Alex down into his lap. Laying her head on his chest, Kimble cradled her lovingly against him. They both knew going into this relationship that her brothers were going to be against it, but neither was prepared for how it would affect them or the insecurities they would face because of it.

Kimble didn't doubt his love for his wife and Alex didn't doubt her love for her husband, but even the strongest marriage would have problems withstanding all the constant interfering. Needing her husband's love more than she ever had, Alex turned her head to place a kiss lovingly on his neck.

Gently Kimble maneuvered her so that he was able to lower his head and kiss her passionately. Silently they kissed and caressed while removing each other's clothing. Gazing at his wife Kimble thought he would rather go the rest of his life without a woman, than hurt her the way cheating on her would. Nothing in his life compared to the love he felt for Alexandra Carter Brown, his love, his life, his wife.

All thoughts of her family, mistrust, and insecurity were forgotten over the next few hours as Kimble showed his wife just how much he loved and adored her. Even though Alex had gone back to the doctor already, and he said both her and her incision were fine, Kimble was extremely gentle with her introducing her to positions that both thrilled and pleased her beyond belief. Afterward Alex lay sleeping exhausted as Kimble slipped out of the room to call his brother Keith who hadn't answered when he tried calling him earlier.

"Hey Keith. I talked to Dillon a little while ago. I can't stand what this is doing to Alex!"

Keith's advice was simple.

“Then you need to handle your business or steer clear of Elray until you get through the reception this weekend.”

Kimble agreed that once this weekend was over, it was time to have it out once and for all. It didn't sit well with him that Alex was hurting this way. He pretty much had his mind made up that if Elray didn't come around, things might just get physical. The problem was, any physical altercations with Elray on this matter could end a friendship he didn't want to lose. Not to mention it would tear Alex apart. Saturday night couldn't come soon enough for Kimble.



When Kimble entered the reception with his beautiful wife on his arm he immediately noticed most of her family was already there. Elray and Trent were sitting with—of all people—Alexis. Wanting Alex to enjoy herself without a scene, he steered them over to where their parents were seated. If nothing else, he knew, even Elray would never disrespect his own mama by causing trouble.

Watching Elray from the corner of his eye as he sat with Alex, Kimble still couldn't believe his eyes. Seeing Alexis was the last thing he'd expected this evening. Even more disheartening was she appeared to be there with Elray. He could care less if El was dating Alexis. It wasn't like they'd never shared the same woman before. He just hoped that he hadn't brought her there just to cause

trouble. Sadly, the latter was most likely. He doubted that Elray would hook up with Alexis seriously because like him, he hated jealous women.

Sleeping with them was one thing, but dating was another matter entirely. Still, he was surprised even Elray would go to this length. It wasn't like any of the Carter brothers to bring a female around close family. Not unless she was special. That had been the major give-away that Dillon was head over heels for Venice.

“Excuse us, everybody, but could we have our parents and siblings join us?” Rayvon and Rayden announced from the podium, where they were posing for pictures.

As soon as Alex left the table, Alexis stood and started toward him. Damn. He didn't need this. Before Alexis could make her way over to him, he stood. He had no intention of waiting for her to approach him.

Chapter Seventeen

Alexis smiled. So, Kimble had been watching her all along. Elray said he was, but she wasn't sure until now. There was no way he could have known she was headed in his direction unless he'd been watching her. Well he could run, but it wouldn't do him any good. Lucky for her, Kimble was stopped by someone on his way to the door, and he was still talking to them when she walked up behind him.

"Hello, Kim. I hope you weren't planning to leave before saying hi to me," Alexis said as she leaned in closer than necessary.

"Alexis," he acknowledged, then turned back to the gentleman he was talking to. "If you'll excuse me."

Grabbing Alexis by the arm, he took her a short distance hoping his wife was too busy with pictures to notice. He wanted to search the room for Alex, but didn't want to look like he was obviously up to something.

Snatching her arm from him, Alexis said, "What's wrong with you? Why are you man-handling me?"

"Look, you know I'm married, so what's up?"

“You can’t speak to me because you’re married? What, doesn’t your wife trust you?”

“I’m not stupid, Alexis. It’s no coincidence that you’re here tonight with Elray.”

“Elray’s fine as hell. He asked me out, and I said yes. Why you tripping? I offered all this to you and you didn’t want it. Now you wanna hate on me for moving on.”

“Yeah right.” He sneered at her. “And it just happens to be with my wife’s brother. Convenient. I don’t give a rat’s behind if you sleep with every man from here to Kalamazoo. Just don’t interfere in my marriage.”

Placing her hand seductively on his chest Alexis whispered to him, “I haven’t slept with Elray if you must know, but I wouldn’t mind sharing you. Your wife never has to know.”



Kimble didn’t even respond. He walked away. Alexis was bold. He knew with certainty that if he left the room now, she’d follow. Not willing to risk it, he walked over to an empty table, sat down, and motioned for a waitress. Drinking wasn’t something he made a habit of, but right now he needed one, badly. Just as he was finishing his drink, Alex came and sat down next to him. Leaning over she kissed him lightly before asking, “Why’re you over here by yourself, baby?”

“I don’t usually drink in front of my mother, and I didn’t want to drink in front of yours either.”

“Is something wrong Kim?”

“No I just felt like having a drink.” Grabbing her hand, he asked. “Wanna dance sexy Mama?”

Alex giggled as she followed him to the dance floor.

“So, what were you and Alexis talking about?”

Surprised, he asked. “How do you know who Alexis is?”

“Elray told me.”

He just bet Elray couldn’t wait to drop Alexis’s name.

“It was nothing. She was just asking how everything turned out with the catalogue.”

While dancing, Kimble noticed Elray was across the room talking with Alexis. Again, he could just kiss his mom for those lip reading classes. He made sure that he kept his vantage point so he could make out what Elray and Alexis were talking about.

“I offered and he declined,” Alexis whined. Because in truth, she’d love another tumble with Kimble. So his rejection to her was a genuine disappointment.

“You have to get him alone. Of course he’d decline with my sister right there.”

Shaking her head, Alexis disagreed with him.

“You’re wrong. He loves her. He won’t take me up on any offer.”

“Really, and just how do you know that?”

“I’m a woman. I’ve been with him. Kimble’s not a liar. Besides haven’t you taken the time to really look at him? Haven’t you seen the way he looks at your sister? He’s definitely in love. If he’d ever looked at me with the love in his eyes he has when he looks at your sister, please believe I’d be fighting her for him right now.”

“Just do what I paid you for, Alexis. I don’t want your womanly advice or opinion. I’m a man, and I’m telling you Kimble’s not gonna turn down a sure thing if he knows there’s no way it’ll get back to my sister.”

Licking her lips, Alexis smiled.

“Fine, it’s your money. Either way I win. If he turns me down I keep your money, and if he doesn’t—I get more of the best sex I’ve ever had.”

Trent came back to the table and plopped down in a chair. After resting a few songs, he asked Alexis, “Would you like to dance?”

“No thanks, I promised the next dance to your brother. I’ve just been waiting for the right song.”

Taking his cue Elray got up to follow her to the dance floor.

Kimble and Alex had left the dance floor.



Watching Kimble dance sensually with his wife had gotten Alexis all hot and bothered. Leaning closer Alexis swirled her tongue in his ear.

“What’re you doing?” Elray asked.

“It’s safe to say I probably won’t get another chance at Kimble tonight. No reason the night should be a total loss.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning why don’t you take me some place private?”

Oh, this girl was a freak, but that was okay. He could handle it. Moving through the crowd Elray and Alexis walked out the door.



For the first time since they’d arrived that evening, Kimble relaxed somewhat. There was no doubt in his mind where Alexis and Elray were going. He’d seen that same look on her face many times. It was time for some damage control on his part. Just like Elray knowing him so well was a distinct advantage for him, it was going to prove to Kimble’s advantage that he knew Elray just as well.

Waiting until he knew for sure that he'd find Elray and Alexis in a compromising position, Kimble asked Alex to go with him to get some fresh air. He could play dirty, too.



Outside in the gazebo, Elray leaned against the railing while Alexis shimmed her body up, down, and over his. Turning to face him, she pushed open the shirt she had already unbuttoned, feasting her eyes on his chest before licking around each hard little nipple. She liked being in charge, so when Elray reached for her, she pushed his hands back down. Capturing his mouth with her own she kissed him, taking in the taste of cinnamon Altoids.

Reluctantly she broke their kiss while her hands reached for his belt buckle. Loosening his belt to open the front of his slacks Alexis reached in to caress his already-throbbing, hard member. Feeling it wasn't enough; she wanted to see it as well. Freeing him, she knelt down in front of him for a closer look. Pleased would have been an under statement. He was definitely blessed.

Rubbing around the head with her finger first, she then did the same with her tongue. After she'd played long enough, she stood up sliding her dress up along her legs until the entire lower portion of her body was revealed. Alexis laughed as she watched Elray's eyes jump to life at the sight that greeted him. She wasn't

wearing any under wear. Coming off the rail, he quickly switched positions with her, reaching into his pocket for a condom.

She took the condom from him and rolled it into place. Now that Elray was completely covered, she leaned back as he ran his hand along the center of her womanhood to check her readiness. As expected, she was ready to please. Lifting her legs onto his forearms positioning them wider, he plunged into her eagerly.

Kimble and Alex were walking hand in hand along the perimeter of the building. The night air felt wonderful.

“Are you ready to go back inside now?” he asked.

“It’s such a beautiful night; let’s stay a little longer.”

That was just the reply he’d hoped for. Making his way around the back to where he was certain Elray and Alexis were, he said, “Why don’t we sit out in the gazebo for a few minutes before going back inside?”

As they neared the rear of the building to the path leading to the gazebo, he almost felt bad about what he was doing. If he had to choose between a moment of embarrassment and loosing his wife over some bull, he’d choose the embarrassment any day.

As they neared the gazebo, Alex asked, “Kim did you hear that?”

“Hear what, baby?”

“I’m not sure. I just thought I heard something.”

“I didn’t hear anything. Maybe it’s just some bugs, or birds, or something.”

Kimble shook his head at how Alex started looking all around her feet so he swung her up into his arms.

“My hero,” she giggled resting her head on his shoulder.

Closer to the dark gazebo, Alex said, “You can’t tell me you don’t hear that.”

“That I heard. Don’t worry, baby. I’ll protect you.”

Not that there was any need for protection from what was making the noise they heard. Kimble stopped walking and looked straight ahead.

“We have company,” he said, pleased that Alexis’ creditability was about to plummet to zero in his wife’s eyes.

Turning her head so she could see what he was talking about, Alex saw Elray and Alexis. Not that she could clearly see Alexis’s face, but she did recognize the dress that was now hiked up above her waist. Sliding down out of Kimble’s arms Alex’s left shoe heel stuck into the dirt next to the concrete stone her foot missed. She looked down to inspect her heel, and when she lifted her foot, she noticed that Alexis now had a clear view of them.

Having an audience must have been a complete turn-on for Alexis, because the moans she was making before were nothing compared to what she was doing now. After Alex got her shoe off, Kimble picked her up again, and they made their

way back up the path. Stopping briefly at the restroom, Alex cleaned her shoe heel before they continued on into the ballroom.

Half an hour or so later, Alex saw Elray and Alexis return to the party. Apparently, so did Kimble because he sighed heavily. Leaning over to Kimble Alex asked him, "What did you ever see in her? She's such a slut." Then, before he could respond, "Don't answer that. It's pretty obvious."

Alexis sat at the table with Trent while Elray made his way over to where Alex and Kimble were sitting. Alex's skin tingled with disgust at the thought of her brother with that slut.

As Alex watched her brother coming toward them, she hoped he was only coming to say hi. Deciding that she was still too upset over what she'd just witnessed, she wasn't going to wait for Elray to start in on her husband. When he was within hearing range she spoke first.

"Enjoying yourself tonight big brother?"

"As a matter of fact, yes I am."

"I'll bet you are," Alex replied sarcastically.

"What's that suppose to mean?" Elray asked, surprised at her tone.

"Nothing." She moved her head to the side as she saw Alexis enter the dance floor to see who she was dancing with. It was Trent. Looking back at her brother she said, "Your date certainly has energy."

Looking over his shoulder at Alexis, Elray turned his eyes to Kimble before he replied, “She isn’t my date.”

“Then why is she here, Elray? I doubt she knows anybody here but you.”

Kimble looked uneasy.

“Oh but she does, baby sister. Remember, she used to date your husband. Sorry, I mean she used to screw your husband.”

Elray still didn’t know that Alex had seen him earlier in the gazebo. He looked more than a little shocked when Alex stood, walked over to Kimble, and kissed him passionately on the mouth — with obvious tongue action. She looked back at him and said, “From the looks of her she’ll screw anybody who’ll ask. Maybe you’ll get lucky and get some tonight.”

Before Elray could respond, Alex pulled her husband up from his chair walked hand in hand with him toward the dance floor. Once there Alex made sure to make eye contact with Elray as she began dancing with Kimble. She was mad, and she wanted to make sure he knew it. As she rubbed her body sensually along her husband’s, she felt exhilarated seeing the anger in her brother’s eyes.

Elray was soon forgotten for the moment, as Alex enjoyed dancing with Kimble. When the song ended, Alex didn’t intend to talk any further tonight with her brother. Instead of going back to the table where he was still seated, she and Kimble headed toward the buffet table.



Alexis had watched the entertainment provided by Elray and his sister, who was obviously pissed at him. She wasn't sure how the tables had gotten turned on him, but he wasn't one to be deterred once he had his mind made up. She wasn't the least bit surprised when he glanced in her direction, made eye contact with her and motioned with a nod of his head for her to approach Kimble again. Acknowledging his signal, Alexis made her way toward the buffet table. She felt it was a waste of time, but did it anyway.

Coming up behind Kimble and Alex, Alexis picked up a plate and looked over the vast selections. Placing a few strawberries, watermelon wedges and grapes on her plate, she moved down closer to where they were.

"That's a lot of food you have there," she remarked to Kimble.

"I've got a healthy appetite."

"Yeah I know," she replied, then shifted her attention to Alex. "I haven't met your wife. Are you going to introduce us?"

Alexis could tell from Alex's body language that she'd struck a cord with Kimble's wife. Alex would have to be stupid to miss the fact that she wasn't talking about food when she said she knew he had a healthy appetite. Just the way she said, "I know," should have made Alex want to slap the holy hell out her. She had to be thinking. *The audacity of that witch! She actually wants my husband to introduce*

us. What for? We're not friends and never will be. We have nothing in common besides the fact that we both slept with the same man. The difference between us is he loves me.

Turning her attention to Kimble, Alexis saw that he was glaring at her like he wanted to choke her. His balled fist was a good indication that he was having a hard time restraining himself. It was just her luck that Kimble was about to make the introductions when Trent and Dillon came to the rescue.

“Hey Alex, Rayvon and Rayden are about to cut their cake and they want you and Kimble to come over.”

“Alexis—if you’ll excuse us,” Kimble said to her as they all made their way over to the table where the twins were. Once the entire family was gathered, the twins were presented with an endorsement check on behalf of the racing sponsors who were throwing the reception.

Alexis had followed and was standing just close enough that she overheard Trent when he leaned over to Kimble and said, “I think it might not be a bad idea to leave after the cake is cut. Dillon and I will keep Elray busy.”

Damn, it was just her luck that Kimble nodded his agreement. Just before they began posing for pictures, he whispered something to Alex and she nodded as well. When the photographers finally stopped taking pictures, Alexis was inches away from Kimble and his wife when his brothers, Keith and Keaton walked in.

“Leaving so soon?” Keith asked.

“Actually I’d say you’re just getting here very late.”

“Couldn’t be helped. I had to meet with Miracle, and Keaton didn’t want to come alone.”

Alex hugged both her brothers-in-law.

“I’ll talk to you later.” Taking the key out of Kimble’s hand, she said, “I’ll get the car; come on out.”

After Alex walked off, Alexis sat at a table to listen as Kimble gave his brothers a brief overview of what had happened prior to their arrival.

“Kim, you really need to do something about Elray. He’s taking this thing to a whole ’nother level. It’s so unnecessary. I’d think by now he’d see for himself that you and Alex are right for each other,” Keith remarked angrily.

“He’ll come around. Trent and Dillon have.”

“How have Rayvon and Rayden been?” Keaton asked.

“Surprisingly quiet. Neither of them has given me any trouble.” Turning back to Keith, Kimble added, “This is my mess let me handle it.”

Shrugging his shoulders, Keith said, “I have no intentions of butting in.”

It was a lie, and Kimble knew it, but he didn’t say anything. He just left. Both Keith and Keaton would do what they wanted. It didn’t matter what he said to them. They all understood Elray, but they didn’t have to like all the unnecessary trouble he was causing.

Neither got a chance to confront Elray that evening. Shortly after Kimble left so did Elray and Alexis.



A week passed, thankfully uneventful. Alex and Kimble now stood at the boarding gate for Delta flight 629 to Cancun, Mexico. Getting away for the weekend was just what they both needed. Kimble had tried again prior to the trip to talk with Elray, but met with nothing but his continued opposition. He did however meet Dillon and the twins for lunch.

“Hey Dill, Rayvon, Rayden, what’s up?” Kimble said as he took a seat at the table.

“What’s up?” the Carter brothers all responded.

“I won’t take a lot of your time but before we eat I gotta know who arranged for Cal to be at your parent’s house?”

Dillon smiled before asking, “Why do you think any of us was behind that?”

“Because Cal gave up too easily after that incident, and truthfully that’s just the type of thing I’d expect from Rayden and Rayvon.”

“That doesn’t make any sense at all, Kim,” Rayvon said.

“Sure it does. If he truly cared about Alex, my threats wouldn’t have mattered. Had it been the other way around, there’s no way in hell I would’ve

walked away. Besides that, Alex and I were the only ones who looked even remotely surprised that Cal was there.”

Dillon, Kimble thought was the only one of them who understood his logic. If necessary, he'd have walked through hell and back for his wife Venice. Let another man walk away with his girl? Only when hell froze over.

“Whatever. Just don't f-up,” Rayden said as he stood and placed twenty dollars on the table. “I've got a date. Talk with you later. And Kim — for the record, welcome to the family.”

Standing, Kimble embraced his brother-in-law.

“Thanks.”

Hearing their flight number called, Kimble snapped out of his meeting memories.



Alex wasn't afraid to fly, but it wasn't one of her favorite things to do either. She was glad the flight wasn't a long one as she opened her bag to get a book out to read. Kimble watched her settle in for the flight, then leaned his head back closing his eyes.

Taking off and landing were always the worst part of the flight in Kimble's opinion. It made his stomach lurch. While checking in at the hotel, he asked if they had something for an upset stomach. The desk attendant said he would have

something delivered to there room. Taking the key, he and Alex proceeded to take a quick tour of the hotel before going up to the room.

The scenery as they stood on the balcony was breath-taking. Because of his upset stomach, Kimble wanted to stay in the room instead of going out.

“Oh baby, go lay down for awhile.” Alex said. “I’ll hang out on the balcony in the Jacuzzi and check on you in a little bit.”

The romantic weekend Kimble planned for Alex turned out to be anything but. He ended up being sick their entire stay, with Alex spending her time nursing him. It made sense now why he’d gotten an upset stomach on the flight. Kimble didn’t handle being sick very well, and he was wearing on her last nerve. Alex had to admit she was very happy to be going home. She also hoped Kimble wouldn’t get sick often, because the last few days had tried her patience with her husband, dearly.

After arriving home, it took nearly another week before Kimble was back to his old self again. He wanted to do something special for Alex. Contacting Mona, Lisa, Shasta and Trina, he arranged for them to have a girl’s day on him.



Early Saturday morning, a limo with Mona, Shasta, Lisa and Trina arrived to pick up a shocked Alex.

“What’s going on?” Alex asked when she opened the door to her best friends.

“Your hubbie’s giving you the day off,” Mona answered. “Get your stuff and let’s go!”

From there the girls went to the salon for a complete day of beauty. Manicures and pedicures, eyebrows arched, facials and each woman had her hair done. After leaving the salon, the limo took them to Lennox mall for some shopping. While walking down the mall with her girls, Alex had the misfortune of running into the last person in the world she wanted to see, Alexis. Deciding to ignore her she kept walking. It wasn’t like they really knew each other.

It didn’t work. Alexis saw her and walked over.

“Hello, Alexandra.”

As bad as she wanted to act like she didn’t hear her, Alex spoke anyway.

“Alexis.”

“Since we really didn’t get properly introduced at the party, let me formally introduce myself. I’m Alexis Warren.”

“These are my friends—Mona, Lisa, Trina and Shasta.”

Introducing Alexis to her friends, Alex intentionally rolled her eyes at Alexis. It was obvious that she didn’t care for her. A blind man could see that and Alex hoped her friends did, so they wouldn’t waste too much time being nice to her.

Hell, she was no fool, it was written all over Alexis's face that she would gladly have given anything to have Kimble back. Of course, that would never happen.

After a moment of awkward silence, Alexis said, "Good bye, it was nice meeting you all."

"Who was that?" Mona immediately asked.

Watching her walk away, Alex replied, "Someone Kimble used to know."

"I take it you don't like her at all. You weren't very nice to her."

"You take it right, Trina."

"Oh she more than dislikes her. She hates her guts," Mona said.

"You're right Mona I do."

"Remind me to ask you later exactly why you hate her so much but there's no need to waste our day on some tramp from Kimble's past."

Leaving the mall just before closing time, the girls went to Pappadeaux's in Alpharetta for dinner. They were waiting for the orders to be brought out when Alex felt her cell phone vibrate.

"Hello."

"Hi, baby it's me. How're you enjoying your day out?"

"It's been great, honey. Thank you so much. I really needed it."

"You're very welcome. Well I won't keep you. I just wanted to check in. I'm going over to Dillon and Venice's for a while. I'll see you when you get home."

“Okay, where’s the baby?”

“He’s with me, and I have everything covered. Don’t worry about us. Just have a great time.”

It was well after midnight by the time she got home. Little Kim was sleeping soundly in his crib. Big Kim she found in their room looking over some papers spread across the bed.

“You look tired,” Kimble said when he looked up to see her standing in the doorway.

“Not really. I haven’t had that much fun in a long time.”

Alex threw her purse and packages on the chair, kicked her shoes off, and began removing her clothes. Standing in nothing but her underwear, she went into the bathroom to remove her make up, wash her face, brush her teeth, and put her hair into a loose ponytail. Done with preparing for bed, she went back into the bedroom, noticing that Kimble had already cleared all the papers from the bed.

He patted the spot next to him. Promptly she laid down on her stomach next to him and he proceeded to give her a back rub. Kimble removed her bra to massage her unrestricted. The soft sounds coming from her were soon replaced with her smooth, even breathing. Alex had fallen asleep. Chuckling to himself, Kimble reached over, turned off the lamp, pulled his sleeping wife into his arms, and went to sleep.



At first Kimble thought, he was dreaming when he smelled bacon. That was before he woke fully to see Alex coming into the room with a tray in her hand. Sitting up in bed, he watched as she placed the tray on the bed. It contained two plates with bacon, eggs, grits, biscuits smothered in butter, jelly, milk and juice. Running into the other room, Alex came back with little Kim so they could enjoy a leisurely morning breakfast together.

After breakfast, Kimble showered before getting ready to go to a meeting with his agent.

“Thanks for that great breakfast, honey.”

“You’re very welcome. After that great day I had yesterday, you more than deserve it.”

“I’ll be gone awhile. What are you going to get into today?”

“Nothing much. I’m going to give little Kim a bath, then get some housework done. I might run over to my mama’s house.”

“Okay. I’ll call you later. Love you.”

“I love you too.”

A short time later he was walking into his agent’s office for the meeting, Kimble felt great. That changed two minutes after he got there.

“What do you mean they want both of us?” he exploded, not at all pleased with the proposition he had just been presented.

Chapter Eighteen

Now back in his car Kimble was speeding down I-20 probably as mad as he'd ever been in his life. His agent had just presented him with a job that two years ago he would have jumped all over. Every model in the business wanted to work with certain designers, but that was before he'd married Alex. Damn — he wanted this job working with Balla, but how was he going to tell his wife that he would have to go on location with Alexis of all people?

He hadn't actually said no. He just stormed out the office saying, "I'll think about it and get back to you."

Speeding down the highway helped him clear his head some. Instead of going off the deep end in the first place, he didn't know why he hadn't thought of it — he'd just take Alex with him. Fairly certain that Alex wasn't going to be happy even if she went along, he at least wouldn't have to turn down this job.

Instead of going home, he went by his parents. It was Sunday and all his brothers and sisters could usually be found there. Karen was happy to see her big brother jumping into his outstretched arms. Never breaking stride, he continued over to his mother, giving her a kiss before sitting on the couch next to her.

"Hi, baby. What brings you by this afternoon?" his mother asked.

“Nothing much. I haven’t been over in a couple days, and I just wanted to see how everybody was doing. Can’t a man visit his mom’s without there being a reason?” he teased her.

“Sure, but more importantly—where is my grand baby?”

“Home. I had a meeting, then I came straight over here.” Looking around he asked, “I saw Dad’s and Keith’s cars outside. Where are they?”

“Downstairs in your father’s office.”

“Thanks, Ma. I’m going down to see them.”

Dropping Karen in Kimberly’s lap as he walked past her, Kimble went downstairs to have a talk with his dad and brothers. Keaton was also there when he walked into the room.

“Kimble, what’s up?” Keaton asked, moving over on the small couch next to the wall of their father’s office.

“Not much. Just stopped over to see what everybody was up to.”

His father had looked up when he walked in, but went right back to the book he was reading after saying hi. Keith tilted his head forward to acknowledge his presence, but didn’t say anything. It was like old times being here in the office with his father and brothers on a Sunday afternoon, each doing their own thing yet still being together for quality time.

It wasn't fair to break the peaceful mood of this day, so for now he'd enjoy this time. He could always talk to Keith or his dad tomorrow or the next day. He stayed late into the evening before finally going home around nine thirty. His mother sent food home with him for Alex, just in case she hadn't cooked.

Both Alex and Little Kim were still up and sitting in the living room. His family. Joining them, he realized how precious the time he spent with them was. No one could interfere with the peaceful tranquility in their home. Bowing his head, he sent up a silent prayer of thanks for his many blessings. Raising his head, Kimble opened his eyes to glance over at Alex; from head to toe, he admired her beauty and spirit.

"Alex, can we talk?"

"Bout what."

"I've been offered a job working with Balla."

"Really, Kim! That's great!"

"I want you and the baby to come with me."

"Why?" Alex asked as she got up to go in the kitchen to get a towel to wipe up the juice that she knocked over.

"Promise me you won't get mad first."

Alex looked up from cleaning the floor.

"Why would I be mad Kimble?"

“I’ll be shooting with Alexis.”

“Is that why you want me to come?”

“Partly.”

Shaking her head, she said, “No. I trust you. I won’t go and let my brothers think there’s no trust between us.”

“Damn your brothers, Alex. I want you there with me.”

Leaning over to place a gentle kiss on his forehead, Alex shook her head again.

“No. I have to show my brothers I won’t let them manipulate us or our marriage.”

While he understood her logic, he disagreed with her this time. He just had a gut feeling that something wasn’t right. Kimble had learned along time ago to trust his instinct, and his instincts were telling him something was going to happen. Although he knew it was unreasonable to believe that Elray could manipulate this situation, he did believe that it was feasible that he and Alexis would use it to their advantage. The one ace in the hole he still had was that Elray still didn’t know that Alex had seen him and Alexis in the gazebo at the twins’ party.

While Alexis had almost no creditability with his wife, her brother was a different story. They were still family no matter what. The fact that Alex was mad

at El would help, but it wouldn't totally eliminate his creditability. And he'd bet his last dollar that Elray'd be at that shoot even if he wasn't working it.

Having helped Alex finish cleaning up and putting the baby to bed, Kimble walked into the bathroom where Alex was wrapping her hair for the night.

“Alex.”

Without turning around, she acknowledged him.

“Yes?”

“Baby, will you please just think about it?”

“If it'll make you happy, I'll think about it. I'm not saying I'll change my mind, though.”

Pulling her into his arms, Kimble kissed her. He couldn't ask for anything more. She was at least going to consider his request.

As it turned out the next day when he called his agent to tell him he was taking the job, he found out that Elray was going to be there, working. Balla was known for the parties she threw after having a successful show, and as Kimble sat looking over the itinerary three days later, he wasn't surprised to see that she was having a big bash for all her models as well as potential clients and some of Hollywood's elite.

The party would give Balla a chance to show off some of her private collection, which was in high demand at red carpet events, that she didn't offer at

her collection shows. Each model attending would be expected to wear an original piece from that collection. This gig had the potential to propel a model to superstar status if the right designers liked what they did or wore. If everything went well, Kimble would have a chance to network with some of the fashion industry's top models, designers and distributors. It would also give him a chance to present his interest in starting his own representation agency, which was his dream.

All along Kimble had said he wanted to retire by the age of thirty and start his own company. Doing this show with Balla might give him access to the very people who could make that happen even sooner. In two days, he was leaving to do the show with Balla, and he still had not changed his wife's mind about going.



As a treat to her husband, Alex arranged for little Kim to stay at her parent's house over night, and she was taking her gorgeous husband out to dinner and dancing. After the scrumptious meal they had at Ray's on the River, they went to Visions where Alex had arranged for a private table and champagne to celebrate. She, better than anybody, knew what this show meant to him. He'd shared his dream of starting his own agency with her, and she believed in him.

Getting up from the table, she pulled him up when a dance mix started.

"Let's see what you're made of."

Knowing he couldn't compete with his wife on the dance floor, Kimble got up anyway. His eyes followed the sway of her hips as she moved through the crowd in front of him toward the floor. Once there she moved to the music. It wasn't that he was a bad dancer; she just was a really good one. It didn't escape his notice that he wasn't the only male in the room enjoying his wife's dance moves. His chest stuck out with pride because they could look, but he was the only one there with the right to touch as well.

By the time the dance mix ended he was completely out of breath, while Alex was totally charged and ready to dance some more. Before they could sit down, a tall light-skinned brother approached Alex and asked her to dance.

"No thanks," she replied.

"Hey, if you change your mind, I'm at the table over there," he said and walked away. Just as he left, Trent, Elray, Alexis and two other women she didn't recognize came over to their table.

"Baby sis, I saw you out there. Girl you better slow down. Pops would bust a vein in his head if he saw you dance like that."

Trent laughed as he sat down next to Kimble.

"Whatever. What're you two doing here?"

"My friend, Tyrone, got engaged. So, we took him out to celebrate."

"Big Tyrone's getting married?"

“Yep. Him and Melody are finally gonna tie the knot. He’s been in love with that girl since fourth grade.”

“Tell him I said congratulations. I’m really happy for them.”

“I will. What up, Kim?”

“Hey Trent,” Kim replied, then looked up at Elray. “Hello.”

Alex didn’t acknowledged Alexis or the other two girls standing there and she was about to get really pissed at Elray, but then he spoke to her and Kimble, then left. While Kimble and Trent talked, Alex excused herself to go to the ladies’ room. As she crossed the room, Alex felt that the hussy, Alexis, was watching her. Turning her head slightly in her direction, Alex saw that she was right just before she entered the ladies room.

Alex was freshening up her make up when Alexis walked in. Alexis stopped right next to her and checked her reflection in the mirror. Sliding her fingers through her shoulder length hair Alexis then lifted each of her already over-exposed breasts up in the barely there black dress she was wearing.

“You don’t like me much do you?” Alexis asked after spraying a small amount of perfume on her dress.

“I don’t know you well enough to like or dislike you.”

“I don’t take it personally. I wouldn’t like you, either, if the situation was reversed. Kimble’s one hell of a man.”

Putting her lipstick back in her purse, Alex turned to Alexis.

“If you’ve got something to say, say it. We’re not friends, and since we’re being truthful—I have no desire to be friends.”

“I’m not your enemy regardless of what you may think. And I’m not a threat to your relationship with Kimble. What we had is in the past. I still care about him, but I respect the fact he loves you.”

Alex laughed.

“You’re such a lying little conniving bitch. I may not be as worldly as you, but I’m not so stupid that I don’t know you want my man. But what I don’t understand is how you think that after sleeping with my brother, who is a good friend of Kimble’s, that he’d even want you back.”

Shrugging her shoulders Alexis tossed her hair again.

“Little girl, if I wanted your man I’d have him. And as for your question, men share women all the time. That just goes to show how naive you truly are.” Alexis started to walk away, then turned back to say, “Don’t make me prove it.”

She should have kept walking, because in the blink of an eye Alex grabbed her by the back of her hair and flung her to the floor. Standing over a dazed Alexis, Alex asked, “Why is it you don’t seem surprised that I know about you and my brother?”

Still sitting on the floor, she looked up at Alex and replied, “Because I’m not. I saw you and Kimble. More importantly, I saw the look on Kimble’s face when he saw me with your brother.”

“And your point is?”

Alexis stood up before she replied, “You figure it out.”



The look on Alex’s face when she walked out of the ladies room was almost worth being tossed on the floor. Alexis smiled to herself as she walked across the dance floor to sit back down at the table.

“What happened?” Elray asked.

“Your sister and I had a nice little chat.”

“What the hell do you mean you had a nice little chat?”

“She accused me of wanting her husband and I told her she couldn’t be more wrong.”

“Oh yeah that was smart!”

“Lucky for you one of us was thinking. Telling Alex I don’t want her man just makes her more suspicious of me. Therefore, it’ll make her more suspicious of Kimble every time she sees him with me. Find the doubt, Elray. Feed the doubt.”

Elray fell silent after her last statement, so Alexis eyed Alex sitting across the room with her brother and Kimble. She could tell Alex was doing her best to

ignore her just before she leaned over and gave Kimble a kiss. No doubt just to piss her off. Any idiot, or should she say anyone who knew what a passionate man Kimble was, knew he'd be ready for some love after that kind of kiss.

As hard as Alexis tried not to react to what Alex had just done, her body couldn't help but stiffen with jealousy. It wasn't like she hadn't planned on taking Elray back to her place for some late night fun, but she had hoped that her talk with Elray's sister would have left her so mad at Kimble, that she wouldn't let Kimble anywhere near her. So much for that notion. They all stayed until the club closed.

Actually, they all walked out to the parking lot together. Alexis saw the tiredness on Kimble's face. She was just getting into her car when she heard Alex say, "I'll drive."

She sat there for several minutes after they pulled off. Elray would be waiting for her at her place. Even knowing that didn't make it any easier to know that Kimble was going home and most likely going to make love to his wife.



After sliding into the driver's seat of Kimble's car, Alex adjusted the seat and mirrors. Merging into traffic on I-75, Alex looked over at Kimble. He was resting back in the seat with his eyes closed.

Turning on the radio, she hummed to herself while letting him rest. As she pulled into the garage, Kimble sat up to get out of the car. He already had the house door open for her when she got out and walked around the car. Barely inside the kitchen, he pulled her into his arms for a kiss that left her weak and barely able to stand unassisted.

“That’s what you get when you play with fire,” he said, just before leaning down to kiss her again. Though her thoughts were jumbled, Alex was glad her husband hadn’t forgot what she had started earlier at the club with kiss she’d given him. She was no fool. She didn’t doubt for a minute that when she’d kissed him at the club and set his blood on fire the way she had, it was going down when they got home.

If he hadn’t initiated – she would have. Either way, she intended for this to be a night to remember. Alex had no idea how Kimble had accomplished it, but she was standing in the middle of their kitchen wearing nothing, and so was he. Kimble lifted her up into his arms as though she weighed nothing, carried her over to the kitchen counter top and placed her on it.

“Wrap your legs around me, baby, and hold on.”

Eagerly she complied as he gently eased himself inside of her. He felt so right. This was where he belonged. She was the one woman who belonged to him totally and completely.

Before leaving the kitchen, Kimble made love to her on the counter, in the chair, on the table, even on the floor. That still wasn't enough, because once they got upstairs they made love again in the shower before going to bed and falling into an exhausted sleep.

Kimble was leaving that evening, so when he woke her up the next day what better way to start the day than with more of the love they'd shared the night before? Yet he had to be tired with the little sleep they'd gotten.

"Kimble, aren't you tired?" Alex asked, still too sleepy to want to get up yet.

A sly smile appeared on his lips.

"I'm never too tired to make love to my beautiful wife."

"What if she's too tired to make love to her handsome husband?"

Needless to say, less than ten minutes later she was wide-awake beneath her husband moaning in pleasure as she received his measured strokes. His lovemaking made her weak with the intensity of his desire for her. Sometime around mid morning, they got up showered and went over to her parents to get little Kimble so he could spend time with his father before he left for his trip.



Much to Kimble's dismay, he still hadn't talked Alex into coming with him. Standing in line at the airport, he found himself hoping like hell that Elray and Alexis weren't on the same flight as him. So much for wishful thinking. As soon as

he kissed Alex goodbye at the security checkpoint, he saw them both. A lesser-trained eye might not have made them out, but he did. They were ahead of him. Alexis was off to the side to be re-checked. No doubt due to the fact she had piercing in places unseen that had caused the metal detector to go off.

Once they all cleared the security check point, Kimble intended to stay well behind them hoping they wouldn't notice him before it was time to board the plane. Twenty minutes later, he was seated on the plane next to a pretty blonde who was chattering nervously about how much she hated to fly. Luckily neither Alexis nor Elray had noticed him, but for some reason he was sure they both knew he was on the plane. During the whole flight, the young blonde hadn't stopped talking, and Kimble was so happy when the plane landed, he nearly knocked her over trying to get his things from the overhead compartment.

Balla had sent cars to the airport to pick up all the models arriving for the show. Wasn't it just his luck that he was in with Alexis, Elray and Shonna another model that he once had a brief affair with? Since Shonna didn't live in Atlanta he rarely saw her unless they were on the same photo shoot or during the same runway show. Unlike Alexis, Shonna didn't have a mean or hateful bone in her body, so when she leaned over to hug him, Kimble accepted her embrace.

"I hear congratulations are in order. Wow! Married and a baby," Shonna said as she sat back smiling.

“Thank you.”

“What’s your wife like? I saw her in the spread you did for GQ. She’s very beautiful.”

“Yes she is. She’s also the most loving, generous, kind and gentle person you could ever meet.”

“Well I’m happy for you. You deserve it. I hope I get to meet her someday.”

Looking over at Elray and Alexis before he answered, Kimble noted that they both pretended to not be listening. But he knew better.

“I asked her to come, but she said she’d just be in the way. I’m seriously considering not going to the party after the show’s over and flying back home.”

Just what he thought. Elray had been listening all along, because he put his two cents worth in.

“Why would you do that? That’s just plain stupid. Do you know what being at one of Balla’s parties could do for your career?”

“Yes, El, I do. But that’s not as important to me as being with my family.”

“Ah, I would think providing for them would be just as important. Have you discussed this with Alex?”

“No I didn’t.”

“Since you’re using my sister as your excuse for not going, don’t you think you should talk to her about it?”

“You’re married to Elray’s sister?”

“Yeah, not that he hasn’t voiced his objection a million times.”

“Why, you’re one of the sweetest guys I know.”

Elray answered for him.

“He also doesn’t have a faithful bone in his body.”

Nobody said anything else the rest of the ride to the hotel. Alexis had been unusually quiet. Truth be told, Kimble was wondering what was going on in her head. Of course, she’d never succeed in her attempt to seduce him, but it promised to be one hell of a night if she persisted in trying.

In the hotel lobby, Shonna congratulated Kimble again before leaving to go to her room. In an attempt to make peace with his brother-in-law, Kimble asked, “Do you have plans for dinner?”

“Not really.”

“It’s on me then.”

To his surprise, Elray accepted. They agreed to meet in the lobby around seven. Inside his room, Kimble pulled out his cell and called Alex.

“Hey baby,” he said when she answered.

“Hi. Are you all settled in?”

“Yeah. I’m gonna have dinner with El and call it a night after that. I’ve got a five a.m. call tomorrow.”

“Really, baby. That’s great! I hope you and Elray can work this thing out. The baby and I are spending the night over at Mama’s while you’re gone, but I’ll have my cell with me.”

“Okay I’m gonna grab a shower and change. I’ll call you tomorrow after my shoot.”

“Night, Kim.”

Kimble hung up, turned off his cell, then placed it on the charger. Going through his luggage, he pulled out only what he’d need for tonight and tomorrow morning. Next he stripped, went into the bathroom, and got into the shower. He stayed in longer than usual. One, the water felt great. Two, he needed to calm down before going down to have dinner with Elray.

Elray was sitting in the lounge of the hotel having a drink when Kimble came down. After he sat down, Elray motioned for the waitress and ordered Kimble’s usual—a virgin daiquiri.

“Thanks for having dinner with me tonight, El. I hope we can talk.”

“So talk, Kim.”

“I don’t want to fight, El. We’ve been boys since before I can remember. Can’t we get past this? I love Alex. Just tell me how I can prove that to you.”

Taking a sip of his drink, Elray ran his hand down his face before he replied, “I wish you could, Kim. I really wish you could. But Alex is my only sister, and I refuse to sit by and watch her be hurt if there’s something I can do to prevent it.”

“I haven’t done anything to give you a reason to doubt my love for her.”

“No you haven’t, but you haven’t done anything to prove to me that you won’t go back to being the Kimble I’ve hung out with; the Kimble who I know as well as I know myself; or the Kimble who I, myself, have shared women with.”

Kimble knew what Elray said would have been true in the past. But the simple truth was that he was a changed man who was completely in love with his wife.

“Elray, man. I’ll do whatever it takes. Just back off with Alexis and any other schemes you’ve got up your sleeve to try and come between me and Alex.”

“I’m not making any promises, because if what you say is true and you really love my sister, whatever I may or may not be planning won’t make any difference.”

Kimble nodded his acceptance, because he knew Elray well enough to know he wasn’t going to change his mind. At least not tonight, anyway. Finishing their drinks, they went to dinner. Later when Kimble saw Alexis enter the dining room with a couple of the other models, he shook his head. After a pleasant dinner with his brother-in-law he was in no mood to deal with Alexis.

“I’m tired. I think I’ll call it a night.”

“You know if what you say is true, you can’t hide every time you see Alexis.”

I’m not hiding. I just have no desire to end my night with drama. Good night.”

“Night, Kim.”



Waiting until she was sure that Kimble wasn’t coming back down, Alexis got up and walked over to the bar. Elray followed, and they moved down to the end so they could talk and not be over heard.

“Do you want me to go up to Kimble’s room tonight?”

“No,” Elray responded slipping his room key in her hand.

“Okay. I’ll meet you around ten thirty.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

At ten thirty on the dot, Alexis stepped off the elevator wearing nothing but a slip of a dress that she wouldn’t have any trouble getting in and out of. Walking up to Elray’s door, she slipped the key in the slot, then opened it. The lights were out when she entered. As she reached for the light, his voice stopped her.

“Leave it off.”

She did. Closing the door, she pushed away from the wall, then reached for the straps of her dress letting them slip off her shoulders as she crossed the room.

Now that she could see Elray on the bed, she was surprised. He was still fully clothed, resting against the headboard.

“Is there something wrong, Elray?”

For the first time since she'd entered the room, he truly looked at her.

“No, I'm fine. Please sit down a minute, Alexis.”

Alexis didn't feel awkward in the least standing before him with her breast bared. She sat down and waited to hear what he had to say. For several minutes he didn't say anything. Tired of waiting, Alexis kicked off her shoes, scooted up on the bed, and stretched out next to him placing her head in his lap.

Waking up the next morning in Elray's room, she realized the night hadn't gone as planned. Alexis was still amazed that she'd fallen asleep laying in his lap while he slept sitting up against the headboard. Slipping from the bed, Alexis fixed her clothes and left Elray sleeping.

Chapter Nineteen

It was nearly ten o'clock and Kimble had been finished with his morning shoot for nearly an hour. Now he sat outside by the pool reading over some materials he'd brought with him to occupy his time in between shoots. He planned to keep himself busy, especially intending to stay away from Alexis.

Elray he could handle. Alexis, even though he didn't desire her, could prove to be a problem if she decided to cause trouble. Alex trusted him, and he intended to make sure that her trust wasn't misplaced. He had already called her this morning. After talking with Alex, he'd called his mother, speaking with Kimber and Karen before hanging up. When he called the office to speak with Keith, his secretary said he was in a meeting with Miracle Dayton and had asked not to be disturbed.

Keith had never told his secretary to tell any member of their family that he was busy before. Now more than ever, Kimble was convinced that his brother was definitely interested in the mysterious Ms. Dayton. He was happy for him. Keith, being the intense person he was, didn't spend a lot of time pursuing relationships. That wasn't to say he didn't have a beautiful woman on his arm many times, but above everything else, Keith hated a shallow woman. Therefore, like him, Keith

kept his affairs brief. With the attention he was showing toward Miracle, Kimble was pretty sure that was about to change. Packing away the materials after completing his review, Kimble decided to do several laps in the pool before going back to his room to change.

Even though he was still doing laps, Kimble noticed Alexis when she approached the poolside area. The fact that she openly admired him as he got out of the pool pissed him off. A feeling of disgust and regret shuddered through his body. Regret that he'd ever had an affair with Alexis and disgust that she was trying everything she could to destroy his marriage. Damn, he hated that his wife's own brother was the one encouraging her. Didn't the fact that he was happily married matter at all to either of them.

While toweling dry he saw Alexis take a seat in one of the lounge chairs and adjust her hat. Probably so she could watch him unnoticed.



Why couldn't it be me he loved? Alexis thought to herself as she observed Kimble. If she thought that she had any chance at all of repairing her relationship with Kimble, there was no way she'd have ever agreed to help Elray. That wasn't going to happen. One look at Kimble with his wife, and a blind man could see he was completely in love with her.

Her phone vibrated. Looking down, she saw that it was her brother, Darnell. Darnell was a goody two shoes as far as she was concerned, and she really wasn't in the mood to deal with him. Hitting the button on the side of her phone, she sent the call to voice mail. When she was away on jobs, dealing with her family was the last thing she wanted to do. To say she came from humble beginnings would be accurate, but she'd done what was necessary to pull herself up.

Both her mother and her brother disapproved of her lifestyle. Too bad. Being poor wasn't something Alexis enjoyed. Besides, she wasn't stingy with her money—she helped her mother out all the time. She would gladly buy her a house somewhere out of the ghetto, but she knew her mother wouldn't accept it. After her dad died, her mom had worked three jobs to keep from losing the small house that she and Darnell still lived in. In many ways, Alexis felt she had that same strength and determination as her mother. If there was something she wanted, she went after it.

As Kimble dove into the water again, Alexis' thoughts returned to the man before her. She watched as he did a few more laps. His laps complete he got out, grabbed the towel lying on the seat, wiped the water from his face, threw the towel around his shoulders and left without acknowledging her at all. She knew he'd seen her. Kimble was truly a man worth fighting for, even if it was a losing battle. Yet some how she wasn't sure if her 'I can't have him neither can you',

attitude was worth it. There was no doubt in her mind that if she destroyed his marriage, Kimble would never speak to her again.

Is that what she really wanted? His hatred? She wished she could say the only reason he'd married his wife was because he'd gotten her knocked up and two of her brothers were his best friends. A man like Kimble wouldn't impregnate his best friend's sister, then dog her out. Not only that, Kimble wasn't that type of guy. If she'd gotten pregnant, Alexis would like to believe Kimble would have married her to give his child a name. The big difference in her case would have been that he didn't love her and would not have remained faithful.

She sat in her lounge chair long after Kimble left, and cried. Yes, she had everything she wanted materially. But the one thing she wanted above everything else was the love of a good man. True, she wasn't a virgin when she slept with Kimble, but he was the only man she'd ever shared her heart with, not just her body. Even Russell, her first. She hadn't been in love with him. He was the captain of the football team. Status had always been important, and if sleeping with the high school football captain meant she stayed his girlfriend, so be it.

As the tears continued to flow freely down Alexis' face, she adjusted her hat to cover them. God she hated being at odds with her feelings. It just wasn't like her. Once she made up her mind to do something, she just did it. She didn't worry about the consequences of her actions. If only that were true with Kimble. Why

did her heart have to be involved? She was so engrossed in her misery, Alexis didn't see Elray and Shonna coming until they stood directly in front of her.

“Good morning Alexis,” Shonna said, as she took off her cover-up and sat down on the lounge chair next to her.

Certain that they would both be able to tell she was crying, Alexis quickly got up, saying something had just gotten in her eye.

“Here let me take a look,” Elray offered.

“No, that's okay. I'll see you later.”

Walking into the lobby of the hotel, instead of going to her room, Alexis hit the button for the fourth floor where Kimble's room was. Standing outside his room with her hand raised to knock, she couldn't bring herself to do it. Lowering her hand, Alexis prepared to walk away just as the door suddenly opened.



“What the...?” Kimble muttered when he saw Alexis standing there. Then he noticed she was crying. “Is there something wrong, Alexis?”

“Can we talk, Kim?”

Against his better judgment, Kimble invited her in. He glanced around before he went inside behind her, to make sure there wasn't anybody around. Then he closed the door. Uncertain of Alexis's motives, he proceeded with caution.

“What did you want to talk about?”

“Why didn’t things work between us Kim? I did everything I could to make you happy.”

“Alexis, I don’t need this. Elray’s hell bent on proving I won’t be faithful to my wife—which I’m sure you already know. So don’t come in here with this crap.”

“Elray didn’t send me, Kim. I came because..., well, because I still love you. I’ll always love you. Isn’t there anything I can do to prove that to you?”

“Look, I’m sorry if I hurt you. That was never my intention.”

Alexis turned away from him and walked over to the window. Without turning around she continued.

“I did things for you I’ve never done for anyone else. I’m not stupid. I knew going in you didn’t love me. It didn’t even matter. That’s how much I wanted you. Doesn’t that mean anything to you at all?”

Standing there listening to her, Kimble thought about what his mother had told him and his brothers years ago when they were younger.

“Be careful how you treat a woman. When a woman gives you her heart, don’t trample all over it like its nothing.” She often reminded them that they wouldn’t want anyone to do that to her or to one of their sisters.

Walking over to Alexis, Kimble wrapped his arms around her. Even though he knew in his heart he had always made it clear with the women in his life that he wasn’t looking for a serious commitment, it didn’t make him feel better seeing

Alexis like this. She completely broke down, sliding down to her knees, sobbing. Kimble sat there, rocking her, not having the words to comfort her. He wasn't sure how long they had been sitting there when a knock sounded at the door.

At first he thought he'd just ignore it and let whoever it was think he wasn't there, but as loudly as Alexis was wailing, he doubted whoever it was hadn't heard her. Damn! He didn't need this. He hoped like hell it wasn't his brother-in-law. That was the last person he wanted to find Alexis in his room, not that he'd done anything wrong. With Elray it wouldn't matter, though. He'd find a way to twist things.

"Don't say anything," he said when he stood up to go to the door. "Who is it?"

"It's me Kimble, Shonna."

Opening the door slightly, but not enough for her to see inside, he said, "Hey."

"Hey yourself, I'm done for today and I just wanted to see if you'd have dinner with me tonight."

"Yeah, what time?"

"I'll meet you down stairs around six thirty," Shonna turned to leave then turned back to tell him. "Turn down the TV or change the channel."

Kimble was about to say something when he saw Shonna wink and put her finger up to her mouth in a shushing motion. Understanding, he nodded. Elray was somewhere within hearing distance.

“I will. I was working out, and I didn’t realize it was so loud.”

Kimble waited ten minutes then left his room. He needed to create a diversion so Alexis could get out of his room unseen just in case Elray was still lurking around. Before leaving, he instructed Alexis not to leave the room until he called to let her know the coast was clear. He hoped she wouldn’t betray him. Standing outside on the curb, he flagged a taxi. Seated in the taxi once he saw Elray he pulled out his cell and told Alexis to get out of there now. Elray wouldn’t follow him but he was certain his next move would be to locate Alexis to make sure there was no chance she’d been with him. This was getting old. He needed to put a stop to this crap now. After hanging up from Alexis he instructed the driver to pull over wait ten minutes then take him back to the hotel.



Alexis had not been in her room ten minutes when she heard a knock.

“Who is it?”

“Open up Alexis,” Elray said.

Opening her door Alexis stepped back. The only thing she had time to grab was the thin short silk robe she was now wearing. Closing the door Elray looked at her it was obvious that she had been doing some heavy duty crying.

“Are you alright?”

Emotionally she was a wreck; she resorted to the only defense mechanism she could think of. Nodding she released the front of her robe and it fell open. Of course she wasn't wearing anything underneath and she truly needed the release that making love to Elray would provide.

Shrugging out of her robe, she walked over to him and kissed him. He hadn't come here for sex, but what the hell? He had time.



Back in Atlanta, Alex came downstairs at her parents' house and found her mom, Venice, Dillon, her niece Sherice, and Little Kim in the family room watching TV.

“Hey everybody,” she said, as she took a seat on the couch and pulled Sherice into her lap.

“Hi Alex.” Dillon said. He was the only one to acknowledge that she'd come in the room. Both her mom and Venice were watching a taped episode of the soaps, which Dillon hated.

Getting up from the loveseat next to his wife, Dillon motioned for Alex to follow him into the kitchen.

“Want something to drink?” he asked when he got a soda from the fridge.

“No, I’m not thirsty.”

“Kimble told me he asked you to go with him and you said no.”

“Yes I did. He only asked me to go because of Alexis.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“It’s true. He’d just had a fight with Elray right before he got the job.”

Dillon pulled something out of his pocket and laid it on the table, then slid it toward Alex.

Picking up the envelope she asked, “What’s this?”

“Open it.”

Alex pulled the airline ticket out of the envelope.

“It’s a roundtrip ticket. Did Kimble put you up to this?”

“No. I bought the ticket. I love you, little sis, but I swear sometimes you can be just as stubborn and pig headed as your brother. You should be with your husband because he wants you there, not here just to spite El.”

Alex didn’t know what to say. He was right. She was so determined to prove Elray wrong, she hadn’t given any thought to what her husband wanted. Getting up, she moved around the table to give her brother a huge bear hug.

“I need to go home and pack. I need to ask Mama to keep little Kim. Goodness I’ve got a lot I need to do before tomorrow morning.”

“Not to worry. As usual, big brother has taken care of everything. Little Kim’s staying with me and Venice, and I had her go over to your place earlier today and pack you a bag. Rayden will pick you up here in the morning and take you to the airport.”

“Thank you, Dillon. I love you.”

“You’re welcome. Now don’t worry about anything. Enjoy your trip, and I’ll see you when you get home. And Alex, Venice packed you a little surprise. She wouldn’t even tell me what it was, and she gave your bag to Rayden with instructions not to let you touch it.”

Later that evening Alex showered and went to bed happy that she had an older brother with better sense than her. She couldn’t wait to surprise Kimble tomorrow. He would be so happy to see her! It could be like the honeymoon they’d never really taken. Her mother woke her up at six thirty to come down for breakfast before leaving for her flight.

Rayden got there at seven, most likely because he wanted to eat, too. After kissing their mother, Rayden sat down at the table and she placed a plate stacked high in front of him. Shaking her head, Alex could only imagine that her parents were happy they didn’t have to feed five boys on a regular basis anymore. All her

brothers had hearty appetites. It couldn't have been cheap to feed all of them. Her dad came in just before she was ready to leave.

“Have a great flight, sweetheart. And tell that brother of yours to behave — or else.”

Laughing, Alex said, “I will, Daddy.”

Dillon really had taken care of everything. There was a car waiting for her when she arrived to take her to the hotel. Once there, she checked into the room that he had booked in the same hotel where Kimble was staying. After she was done getting settled in her room, she called Elray — not that she was going to tell him she was there.

“Hey big brother,” she said when he answered the phone. “I'm trying to reach Kim. Have you talked to him today?”

“I saw him earlier this morning, and we have a three thirty shoot together.”

“Okay, well if you talk to him before me, tell him I said to call me on my cell.”

“Will do.”



Immediately after hanging up from Alex, Elray dialed Kimble's number. No answer on either his cell or hotel phone. Where could he be? He already knew for certain he wasn't with Alexis, because she was still shooting. And he'd seen

Shonna by the pool alone, reading. Damn! He'd focused so much of his energy on trying to have Alexis seduce Kimble, it never occurred to him that Kimble had been to LA hundreds of times. He didn't need Alexis. He probably had several girls' right here in LA to choose from. This was the very thing Dillon always told him about himself. He got too focused on one thing and let everything else slip by unnoticed.

Since there was no way to find out where Kimble was or what he was doing, Elray decided to go back to his room, shower, and get dressed for later. While in the car on his way to their three thirty shoot, Elray tried one last time to reach Kimble with no luck. Arriving on location, the first thing he noticed was Kimble was already there talking with several other models who were also shooting.

He didn't really have the time to question Kimble about where he'd been all day. He needed to get to wardrobe. There was plenty of time later to talk with him and find out where he'd disappeared to. Even though they were in several frames together, Elray didn't get a chance even once during the entire session to talk with Kimble, and before he could say anything, he saw Kimble get into a car and leave.

Running over to his things, he quickly searched through his pants pocket, pulled out his cell phone, and dialed Kimble's number. He answered on the first ring.

“What's up El?”

“You left in such a hurry we didn’t even get a chance to talk.”

“Yeah, I know. I have a meeting I wanted to get back and get ready for.”

“Oh, who with?”

Elray wasn’t fooling him, but he answered anyway.

“It’s nobody you know. I’m just working a couple business angles while I’m here.”

“Will I see you later?”

“Probably. I’ll call you when I get in.”

Knowing he wasn’t going to get anything else out of him, Elray let it go. He still had two more sessions before he could leave for the day, anyway, so he headed off to talk with the photographer. Once he completed his final layout for the day, Elray grabbed a bite to eat then headed back to the hotel to wait for Kimble.

He knew for certain he wasn’t with either Alexis or Shonna because, he’d talked with both of them.



Dillon had gotten Kimble’s room number for her before she left Atlanta, so Alex knew exactly what room he was in. She had been watching since she arrived for Kimble’s return and so far she still hadn’t seen him. The tramp Alexis had paraded herself through the lobby several times. She also saw a number of the

other models who were there for the show. Giving up her seat at the end of the bar Alex headed for the elevators. She decided she'd wait in Kimble's room for him.

Getting into his room was easy. She told the hotel manager that she'd flown in to surprise her husband, and after showing him her ID, he agreed to give her a key. First she set the mood placing some scented candles around the room, then slipped into the sexy teddy that Venice packed for her. Satisfied with the room's appearance, she laid down across the bed. A short time later, she heard a knock on the door.

It couldn't be Kimble. Why would he knock on his own door? Going to the door, she looked through the peephole to see who it was. Frowning, she wondered who the woman on the other side of the door was, and why was she knocking on her husband's door? Deciding there was only one way to find out, Alex slipped into the robe provided by the hotel, then opened the door.

"Yes," she said to the obviously surprised woman standing there.

"Uh hi. I'm Shonna. You must be Kimble's wife."

"I am. Who are you?"

Extending her hand Shonna replied, "I'm an old friend of your husband's. It's nice to meet you."

Sensing the genuine niceness of Shonna, Alex shook her hand and said, “Nice to meet you too. I’m Alexandra. Kimble isn’t here yet. Did you want to leave a message for him?”

“No, that’s okay. I’ll just talk to him tomorrow. I hope we can get to know each other before we all leave.”

“Sure. Maybe we can all have lunch tomorrow.”

“Sounds nice. I’ll talk to you tomorrow then,” she said as she turned and left.



Looking at his watch, Kimble noticed that it was much later than he thought. Even though he told Elray he’d call him when he got back, he was tired and really didn’t feel like playing twenty questions with his brother-in-law. Deciding that Elray could wait until tomorrow, he stopped at the soda machine to get a soda and some ice before going to his room.

As he approached his room, he saw the faint flicker of light from beneath the door and he could swear he smelled vanilla. Slipping the key in the lock, he stepped into the room. He was surprised to see the candles everywhere. He took a quick survey of the room and didn’t see anyone. Who could’ve done this? If Alexis was behind this he’d strangle her. He’d really had enough of both her and Elray for a lifetime. Taking off his jacket, he went through the room blowing out the candles.

The smell of vanilla he didn't mind so much, because it reminded him of Alex. She loved vanilla. Suddenly lonely, he pulled out his cell phone and dialed her number. After three rings he didn't think she was going to answer so, he prepared to leave her a message. Then he heard her soft voice say, "hello."

Pulling off his shirt, Kimble sat on the edge of the bed then lay back looking at the ceiling to talk to her, "I miss you baby."

"I miss you too. It's late. Where are you?"

"I just got back to the hotel, and I'm in my room. What are you doing? You don't sound sleepy."

"I'm not. I was just standing in the mirror admiring a new night gown I got."

"Oh, baby you really know how to torture a man. I can't wait to get home and see it. I bet you look so sexy."

"I can't wait either so I guess I'll just have to let you see it now."

Laughing Kimble said, "Really! And how do you plan on doing that?"

Kimble sat up as he heard the door to the bathroom open. Alex stepped into the room with the cell phone still to her ear and said, "Do you like?"

Chapter Twenty

He could show her better than he could tell her. Without saying a word, Kimble closed his cell and tossed it on the bed. Walking over to Alex, he took her cell and did the same. His body immediately responded to the woman he loved and hadn't seen or held in the last couple days. Again, he thought how much he appreciated a woman who didn't wear unnecessary clothing.

Leaning down he captured Alex in his arms as his lips settled on hers. The desire between them welled up and bubbled over into a fierce need to be together. He wanted to make love to her until he couldn't move another muscle if his life depended on it. His mouth never left hers as he hooked his fingers in the straps of her teddy and pulled them off her shoulders. Shimmying her body this way and that the flimsy teddy pooled at Alex's feet.

Maneuvering her toward the bed Kimble kicked off his shoes while Alex undid his belt buckle. Lowering her gently to the bed Kimble stood just long enough to rid himself of his remaining clothes. As he joined her on the bed, he knew going slow and savoring the moment wouldn't be until much later in the evening.

As he rolled Alex beneath him and slid into her warm, welcoming body, they each heard the other's sigh of pleasure. Kimble shifted to the side for Alex to maneuver herself and assume control by being on top. Rising and falling, rising and falling until Kimble couldn't hold back any longer. He grabbed her hips to slow her down as he surged upward in the most powerful release of his life.

Later, Kimble and Alex snuggled contently in each others arms after having just made love three times back to back, Alex kissed his chest before saying.

"I hope we didn't just make another baby tonight."

"I, for one, wouldn't mind if we did," Kimble said kissing her again.

"It certainly wouldn't be from lack of trying on your part."

"Like you objected."

His wife didn't answer. She just snuggled closer to him and closed her eyes. When they awoke the next morning, Kimble called down for room service while Alex jumped into the shower. He was spreading some jam on his biscuit when Alex came out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel. Smiling he motioned for her to come sit in his lap, so she did.

First he took a bite, then he placed the biscuit to her lips for a bite. Between kisses and nibbles of biscuits and bacon, they managed to finish breakfast before ending up back in bed.

When the phone rang, Kimble answered.

“Hello.”

“You’re late. Get dressed and get down here now.”

“Shonna?”

“Yes Kimble, Shonna. And you were supposed to be here ten minutes ago. I stalled for you since I know your wife’s here, but you’d better hurry up.”

“Thanks. I’ll be there in ten minutes.” Hanging up the phone, he turned over and kissed Alex on her nose.

“I’ve gotta go, baby. I’m late.”

“Okay. I’m going to stay right here and get some rest.”

Turning over Alex yawned, stretched, and went right back to sleep.

The minute Kimble stepped out into the pool area, he saw Elray and Alexis sitting in makeup. Walking over to Elray he said, “Sorry I didn’t get to call you, but it was late and I was tired.”

“Whoever she is, she must have been a handful.”

Kimble realized by Elray’s snide comment that he didn’t know Alex was there. Deciding to go along he said, “Oh she was.”

The look on Elray’s face was worth it. His mouth dropped open and his eyes flashed like lightning during a summer lightning storm.

“Are you telling me you cheated on my sister?”

“No, I’m not telling you anything. Why would I do that knowing you’d go straight to Alex and spill your guts?”

“So what are you saying Kim? Either you were with someone last night or you weren’t.”

Shonna had walked up behind Kimble, and before he could remark she said, “Leave him alone and stop being such an ass.”

Kim hugged Shonna and walked away but he couldn’t resist turning around to say, “If you really want to know, search my room.”

Kimble noticed the minute Elray tried to sneak away. He knew his friend so well, and knew without a doubt he wasn’t going to be able to resist going to his room. Barely able to concentrate, Kimble asked for a fifteen-minute break, but the photographer wanted to finish all the remaining frames before breaking. The last twenty or so frames seemed to take forever to complete, and Kimble couldn’t help but wonder if Elray had discovered his sister in his room yet.



Upstairs Alex wondered why Kimble was knocking as she got out of bed to answer the door. Maybe in his haste to get downstairs he’d forgotten his key, or maybe it was Shonna. Since she wasn’t sure she grabbed Kimble’s shirt from the floor and slipped it on. Looking through the peephole she was surprised to see—of all people—her brother.

As the door opened, Alex stood behind it so her brother could enter the room but couldn't yet see who was there. Once Elray was inside Alex stepped from behind the door. It was clear from the expression on his face that he wished he hadn't come when he saw his sister standing there looking a hot mess. Subconsciously, Alex smoothed her hair. It was all messed up, and she was wearing Kimble's shirt. Even though she was married to Kimble and they had a baby, this was an image she would have been more than happy to never have her brother see.

Smiling prettily at Elray Alex said, "Good morning, big brother."

"What are you doing here Alex?" he grumbled.

"Dillon bought me a ticket and told me to stop being silly and go be with my husband. He's smarter than both of us. We're lucky to have him as a brother."

At this particular moment, Alex could imagine Elray didn't agree, but he kept his true comment to himself. Unlike Dillon, Elray wasn't convinced they should be together and this still bothered her.

"I feel so blessed," was his only statement. Before leaving, he told her after she got dressed to come down so they could all have an early lunch together.



On the ride down in the elevator, Elray couldn't wait to get back to Kimble. He had a few choice words for him. He'd deliberately sent him up to his room

knowing his sister was there, and how he'd find her. There was no mistaking that she'd been there all night or what they'd done to pass the time. As much as he hated to admit it he'd have done the same thing if he were married and his wife showed up. That's probably what bothered him the most. He and Kimble were still just too much alike.

Kimble was sitting at the table with Shonna when Elray walked over to him.

"Can I speak to you in private a minute Kim?"

Getting up from the table Kimble excused himself, then followed Elray across the large patio area so they could talk.

"You could have just told me instead of sending me upstairs."

"I didn't send you; you went on your own. Besides if you'd quit thinking that I can't wait to cheat on my wife, we wouldn't even be having this conversation in the first place."

"I'm not going to let my guard down, Kim, because I still don't trust you."

"That's fair. Are we boys again now?"

Elray laughed.

"We never stopped being boys. I'm just her brother first."

Both Elray and Kimble nodded. This was logic they both understood because they both had sisters. It would be nice for a change not to fight with Kimble.

Joining Shonna back at the table, they waited for Alex to come down before ordering something to eat. Alex and Shonna hit it off immediately.

Shonna wasn't shooting anymore that day so she volunteered to spend the day with Alex.

After the girls left, Kimble and Elray went to their separate rooms. While he had a short break, Elray called Dillon.

"Thanks, Dill you could have warned me that you were sending Alex out here."

"Why, were you causing trouble you shouldn't have been causing," Dillon said before hanging up.



Later that evening Kimble, Alex, Elray and Shonna ate dinner at Lucero's, a trendy Italian restaurant. Elray had purposely not told Alexis where they were going since he hadn't really talked to her about his decision to stay out of his sister and Kimble's relationship—at least for now. He wasn't sure if it was more shock or surprise when he saw her walk in with Dell Thompson, an ex pro basketball player for the LA Lakers. He'd made millions in real estate after an injury ended his career.

Unfortunately, it was too late to change restaurants and although Alexis was there with Dell, Elray could tell half her attention was on their table because

every time he glanced in that direction he caught her looking at him. She had that “Why is Elray having dinner with Kimble, and more importantly, why didn’t he tell me his wife was in town?” look on her face. He’d also bet money she was worried he wasn’t going to go through with the plan or pay her.

She’d kept her end of the bargain, and even though he was beginning to feel he was wrong about his new brother in law, he still intended to pay her. Kimble and his sister most likely had seen Alexis and her companion as well— though if they had, they were ignoring the hell out of her.

“Alex do you have any pictures of your son?” Elray heard Shonna ask.

“I’m sorry. I can’t believe my husband hasn’t shown you our gorgeous son. I’m sure even my mean brother has a couple pictures in his wallet.”

Elray smirked before replying.

“Of course I have pictures of my nephew.”

“See he tries to be mean but underneath it he’s a great brother.”

“Oh that doesn’t mean I trust your husband as far as I can throw him, but I may be getting there,” Elray said just as Alexis and Dell stopped in front of their table.

“Good evening,” Alexis said looking straight at Kimble.

“Alexis,” they all responded.

“Well isn’t this just one big happy family? Maybe I should join you, too.”

“I’m sure Dell wouldn’t like being dismissed or kept waiting,” Shonna said.

Eray saw Alexis cock her head in Shonna’s direction, clearly surprised that she knew Dell.

“Don’t worry about Dell. He’ll be happy to wait for me. Besides once Alex finds out you used to share her husband’s bed, she won’t like you anymore than she does me.”

Okay that had gotten by him. Eray had no idea that Kimble and Shonna had ever been intimate. He also wasn’t prepared to see a feisty Shonna stand and confront Alexis, either.

“You know what Alexis? People don’t like you because you’re a first class bitch. Whatever happened between Kimble and I was in the past. His wife is a wonderful person and dealing with you is a big enough pain in the ass!”

“Whatever,” Alexis said then walked away.

As Shonna sat back down, Eray felt so bad for her. She must be terribly embarrassed that Alexis had outed her that way. He wasn’t sure how Alexis knew about Shonna’s affair with Kimble. She’d always kept her private life private. One thing was for sure, he knew Kimble hadn’t told her. The silence at the table was awkward. Nobody knew what to say.

Since Alexis had put her business in the street, Eray decided to break the silence and give Shonna a chance to collect herself.

“Shonna, will you dance with me?” Elray asked as he got up and stood over Shonna.

He knew that Kimble and Alex needed a chance to talk after what Alexis had just said. Damn he hadn’t suspected anything. Shonna was such a sweet girl; everybody liked her.

“Yes,” she replied, getting up and accepting his outstretched hand.



“Are you okay?” Kimble asked as soon as they were alone.

“I’m fine, but you should have told me, Kim. I like Shonna. I should not have found out this way.”

“I’m sorry, baby. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to hurt you. Shonna isn’t anything like Alexis.”

“I can see that, Kim. But you let Alexis use her to hurt me, and she embarrassed Shonna. Stop giving Alexis all the power.”

“She wasn’t always this way. I hurt her. I didn’t mean to, but I did.”

Leaning over, Alex placed her hand lovingly on her husband’s cheek.

“As much as I dislike Alexis, I can see how losing someone as wonderful as you could turn someone bitter.”

Turning his head, Kimble placed a kiss in the palm of her hand.

“Baby, I was never hers to lose.” He looked deeply into his wife’s eyes before adding, “You’re the only woman I have ever said “I love you” too. You’re the only one that I have ever truly belonged to—mind, body and soul.”

The tears streaming down his wife’s face almost unmanned him. Kimble could feel the love his wife had for him. It was the same love he had for her—had for so long, that he couldn’t imagine his life without her. Nothing would ever tear them apart. He hoped her meddling brother finally understood that. Leaning into Alex, Kimble kissed her with all the passion he had in his heart. His wife accepted the kiss and returned it whole-heartedly.

When the song ended, Elray and Shonna came back to the table. Alex both surprised and made Kimble proud when she immediately looked at Shonna and said, “I hope that we can still be friends.”

Relief flooded Shonna as she shook her head yes.

“I’d like that very much.”

Surprisingly his meddling brother-in-law Elray even seemed relieved and they were able to enjoy the rest of their dinner before going back to the hotel for the night.



The next two days went by without incident. Elray had yet to talk with Alexis, because she’d spent the last couple nights away from the hotel — most

likely with Dell—and they hadn't had any sessions together. He'd see her tonight at the big party that Balla was throwing.

Entering the conference room with his sister and Kimble, he and Kimble took their places along with the other models for a last minute inspection by Balla. Alex slipped over to a corner and had a seat. No one spoke during these inspections but Balla. Halfway down the line of models Elray saw Balla when she did a double take of his sister sitting off to the side and walk over to her.

Since Balla rarely acknowledged anyone during one of her inspection sessions he was surprised when she asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm Kimble Brown's wife, Alexandra," Alex said, extending her hand to her.

Balla turned around to look at Kimble then back to Alex.

"You're exquisite. Have you ever done any modeling before?"

"Not really. I did a spread with Kim when we got married, but that's it."

"Would you like to?"

"No ma'am. I'm very happy being a wife and mother."

"Okay, but since you're coming to my party tonight anyway, would you do me the honor of wearing one of my gowns?"

"Sure."

The next thing Elray knew his sister was ushered out of the room and Balla returned to finish her inspection of the other models. After the inspection, each

model received their seating arrangements as well as any other instructions for the night before being dismissed. Elray immediately made his way over to Alexis, grabbed her by the arm, and took her to a quiet corner to talk.

“Where have you been, and why haven’t you returned my calls?”

Snatching her arm away, she glared at him.

“Where I’ve been isn’t your business, and I didn’t return your calls because I’d didn’t see the point.”

“I’m not paying you to think.”

Alexis looked confused.

“What?”

“Look, Kim and I have talked. All I’m saying is I won’t interfere anymore unless he gives me a reason too.”

“When do I get the rest of my money?”

“Give me your account number, and I’ll have the money transferred as soon as we get back to Atlanta. Don’t get it twisted. You’re still on retainer as far as I’m concerned.”

“Fine,” Alexis said as she walked off.



Everyone else left for the party with the exception of Kimble. He was still waiting for his wife to reappear after being whisked away by Balla’s assistants.

Still seated in the conference room almost an hour later, Kimble wondered what the hell they were doing. It couldn't take that long just to change a dress. He was still deep in thought when he heard the door open, and turned to see who it was. Speechless—he was absolutely speechless.

His wife stood in front of him flanked by two bodyguards. He'd never seen anything or anyone so beautiful in his life. Of course he already thought Alex to be the most beautiful woman in the world, but Balla had outdone herself. She had outfitted Alex in a lavender and silver strapless ball gown. Her hair was piled on top of her head, held in place with a stunning diamond tiara with matching necklace, bracelet, and earrings. Her makeup accented her beauty while complementing her dress.

Kimble approached her slowly; almost afraid to touch her for fear that he'd drag her back upstairs and destroy all of Balla's hard work.

Alex smiled and asked, "So what do you think?"

"I think we'd better leave now, or we will never make it to the party."

"That's fine by me."

Kimble threw his head back and laughed, loudly. No wonder he loved her so much. Any other woman would have pitched a fit about not being able to show off when so lavishly dressed. Any woman as beautiful as his wife had a right to be

vain, yet she wasn't. Extending his arm, Alex took it and he lead her to the limo waiting outside for them.

Alex rested her head on Kimble's shoulder.

"I'm so happy I came."

"Me too, baby. I'm going to be the envy of every man there. I hope I don't have to kill anybody tonight. You may get marriage proposals; you look so beautiful."

Alex lifted her hand to look at her wedding ring.

"I don't think so."

"I'm surprised Balla let you keep that. She usually doesn't let the models wear any personal jewelry even wedding rings."

"Yeah well I'm not one of her models. She asked me to remove it and I said no."

"Really! I would have loved to be a fly on the wall for that conversation. I'm sure not many people say no to her. How did she take it?"

"She wasn't happy, but like I told her—I was perfectly happy with what I had on." Reaching for her diamond crusted clutch bag Alex added, "Oh yeah, she gave me this to give to you."

Kimble looked down in her hand. It was his wedding ring. Balla kept all the model's personal jewelry in her safe until the day they left.

“Why?”

“Because I suggested it.”

Kimble laughed hard. Only his Alex would even dare to make demands of Balla of all people. After he slipped his ring back on, Kimble pulled his wife into his arms so they could cuddle while riding over to Balla’s estate. Even though he’d seen pictures, they didn’t do the magnificent structure justice.

Kimble allowed Alex to take a moment to compose herself before they got out of the limo. Everyone knew she was Kimble’s wife. If she stunk, she didn’t want it to reflect badly on him. As if he’d read her thoughts, Kimble pulled Alex into his arms for one last kiss and said, “You’ll do fine.”

The door opened, and Kimble stepped out pulling Alex out behind him. The photographers went crazy as they emerged, walked down the carpeted runway, and into the grand tent that was erected for tonight’s event. Balla met them at the entrance, and they posed for more pictures. Although several reporters asked questions, Balla answered none of them. Leaning over to Kimble, she told him to take Alex and mingle.

“How’d I do?” Alex asked, as he led her through the crowd.

“Are you kidding? A pro couldn’t have done better.”

A waiter stopped to offer them each a glass of wine. Since she really wasn’t much of a drinker Alex sipped slowly on the glass of white wine in her hand.

Kimble, standing to her side, was still talking with some of the guests at the party when he vaguely heard someone ask Alex if she'd like to dance.

Reaching over, he took her wine and said, "Go ahead honey."

"You sure."

"Yeah. It's fine."



Alex walked to the dance floor, but she had yet to actually look at the gentleman who'd asked her to dance. When she did, she wasn't surprised to see that he was extremely handsome, though he didn't hold a candle to Kimble in her opinion. He was also an excellent dancer. After the second dance she placed her hand on his arm and said, "That's it for me."

Nodding, he led her off the dance floor toward the balcony opening. While dancing, Alex had lost sight of Kimble, so naturally she assumed that's where Kimble was, until she realized they were outside alone. Turning around, she tried to go back inside, but found her way blocked.

"Excuse me. I'm going back inside."

"Please stay a minute and talk. Your name's Alexandra right? Alexandra what?"

"It's Alexandra Brown."

Raising an eyebrow he asked, "Any relation to Kimble Brown?"

“I’m his wife.”

“Really! He doesn’t deserve to be so lucky.”

Instantly Alex took a dislike to—she just realized she didn’t know his name.

“And why is that?”

“Because he’s had woman falling at his feet for far too long as it is. Then he gets a beauty like you as his own. No one deserves that much luck in one lifetime.”

“Really. I’d imagine you have had the same thing happen to you. It isn’t like you’re not a good looking man.”

“I have, but I’ve also lost quite a few to your husband.”

He still hadn’t moved out of her path and she was starting to get very nervous. It wasn’t that she was afraid of him. She was afraid of what Kimble and her brother would do if he did something stupid.

“Well it’s been nice meeting you, but I better get back.”

“There’s enough people in there. He won’t notice you’re gone. Besides, I like having you to myself for awhile. Tell me something interesting about yourself.”

She had no intention of telling him anything but she’d play along for now.

“Alright. But shouldn’t I know the name of the man I’m speaking to?”

He smiled before responding.

“It’s Antonio.”

“Well Antonio, there really isn’t anything interesting to tell about me. What can I say? My life’s been rather dull.”

“Some how, Alexandra, I doubt that. Any woman as beautiful as you are must have had a pretty exciting life—if doing nothing more than turning down the countless men who’ve tried to get to know you.”

Shaking her head Alex said, “Nope. Not a problem I’ve had. I have the misfortune of being the baby of six kids.”

“Are any of your sisters as beautiful as you?”

“I don’t have any sisters; I’m the only girl.”

“So, Tony, I see you’ve met my sister,” Elray said from behind them.

Chapter Twenty-One

Both Alex and Tony turned around to see Elray Carter leaning against the door with his arms folded across his chest. From the look on her brother's face Alex would guess that he and Antonio had had a few run-ins in the past.

"I was just on my way back in, El."

"Your sister? I thought she was Kimble's wife?" Antonio responded.

"She's both. Is that a problem?"

"No. I just had no idea you even had a sister."

Oh boy, her brother and that sinister laugh, that wasn't a good sign.

"Why would you? It isn't like we're friends, now is it?"

Alex didn't like where this conversation was going. She knew how Elray's mind worked. She went to stand next to her brother and, the situation just got worse because Kimble appeared just as they were about to go back inside.

As he approached, she saw his smile turn into a frown when he saw Antonio.

"Hey, baby. Where've you been? I've been looking for you."

"Our friend, Antonio here, was keeping her company," Elray volunteered.

"Stay away from my wife, Antonio. That's the only warning you'll get."

She and Kimble had started to walk away when she heard her brother say, “Ditto.”

In all the time she’d known Kimble, Alex didn’t think she’d ever seen him so angry. He and Elray truly disliked Antonio. The question was why? Minutes later Elray caught up to them, and they all sat down together.

“Alex what were you doing outside alone with Antonio?” Elray asked in that “I’m your older brother and you better not give me any lip” tone.

“Nothing. He asked me to dance and when the songs were over, I assumed he was walking me back to where Kimble was.”

“Did he touch you Alex?” Kimble asked.

“Of course not. Why?”

“We know he likes it rough, but I’ve also heard from a couple of the girls that he’s forced himself on women even after they said no,” Elray responded.

“Why’s he still working if he’s done things like that?”

“Because they’re only rumors,” Kimble explained. “No one’s actually pressed any charges against him. As long as they’re only rumors there’s nothing anyone can do. Baby, stay away from him.”

Alex allowed her husband to pull her to him and hold her. Across the room, she saw Antonio looking at them. Tomorrow wouldn’t get there soon enough for her; she couldn’t wait to go home. All in all the trip had been very lucrative. It

appeared that her husband and brother were mending the broken fence of their friendship.

Kimble had met with several well-connected people in the industry and pitched his idea of starting his own agency. She'd say that things were definitely looking up. She hadn't seen Alexis since they arrived at the party. Hell, in her opinion, that in itself was enough to celebrate. If everything went well, maybe she'd get to have a wonderfully romantic evening with Kimble. If she was lucky, she might even get him to make an early night of it and go back to the hotel.



Over the next few hours Kimble and Elray kept a close eye on Alex as they mingled around the room with Balla's various celebrity guests. Many of the men in attendance commented to them on how stunningly beautiful Balla's newest model was. Kimble could tell that Elray was having a good time enjoying his reaction to hearing all the comments about his wife. He was just about to comment when Balla called the three of them up on stage for her finale. The auctioning of the gown Alex was wearing.

To everyone's surprise, Balla announced that she wasn't going to auction the gown that the lovely Mrs. Kimble Brown was wearing. Instead, she was auctioning the right to have Mrs. Brown do a photo shoot with her husband and brother Elray Carter, two of the top male models in the industry.

“Twenty five thousand dollars,” came from someone in the back of the room.

“Twenty eight thousand.”

“This is for a truly worthy cause. All proceeds will benefit the abused woman and children’s shelters in LA and Atlanta. Can I get thirty thousand?” the auctioneer asked.

“Fifty thousand.”

“Fifty thousand going once, fifty thousand going twice.....”

“One hundred thousand.”

This bid came from wealthy real estate tycoon Morris Towns. Kimble looked at Alex and Balla. Just as the auctioneer brought the gavel up to signify the close of the auction, Dell Thompson stepped forward.

“Two hundred fifty thousand!”

Kimble laughed because Balla almost knocked the auctioneer over grabbing the gavel from him and shouting, “Sold!”

After the auction, Kimble asked Alex, “Did you know about this?”

“Yes.”

“That’s what took so long back at the hotel, isn’t it?”

“Yes. She told me about the auction, and I suggested that it would boost her sales even more if she donated the money to a worthy cause.”

Now that the auction was over, Kimble couldn't wait to get out of there, but every time he thought they had a straight shot at the door, he and Alex were approached by someone. Finally, only steps from the door, he thought for sure they'd make it this time. No such luck.

"Mr. and Mrs. Brown, I'd like to personally thank you for what you're doing for the battered women's shelter," Dell Thompson said as he extended his hand to Kimble then Alex.

"You're welcome Mr. Thompson," Alex responded.

"Please call me Dell. You're probably wondering why I bid on this. My mother raised my two brothers and me alone after she finally got up the courage to leave my dad. He was physically abusive to my mom for years."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Dell. That must be a painful memory for you and your brothers," Alex replied.

"It was until we got older. My brothers and I tracked my dad down once we were grown and gave him an old-fashioned ass-kicking. I'll bet he never hits another woman. Well, I didn't want to keep you; again I just wanted to say thanks."

Walking out the door behind Dell to the parking area, Kimble looked for a car to take them back to the hotel. Not seeing their driver he turned to Alex.

"Baby I'll be right back. I'm going to try and find us a driver."

“Okay honey.”



While waiting, Alex noticed a few of the other models must have had had the same idea to leave, because several people including Shonna and Antonio came outside.

Shonna appeared to be with Antonio, and after what Kimble and Elray had told her about him Alex made her way over to Shonna. She felt Shonna should know about Antonio before letting herself get in a situation where she would possibly be alone with him.

“Hi Shonna,” Alex said ignoring Antonio. “Can I talk to you a second?”

“Sure.” Turning to Antonio Shonna asked, “Will you excuse me a minute?”

“No problem. I’ll get my car.”

After watching Antonio walk away, Alex turned to Shonna, “I think you should stay away from him, Shonna. My brother and Kimble think he’s bad news.”

“Don’t worry, Alex. I’ve known Tony for years and I’ve heard all the rumors about him. Tony won’t hurt me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes I’m sure. Tony hates Kimble and Elray with a passion, but that’s because they’ve had this rivalry among them as long as I can remember.”

“Okay. You know him better than I do. Are you leaving tomorrow too?”

“No I’m going to stay a couple extra days.”

Neither of them saw Alexis until she was standing right beside them.

“Well aren’t you two just the best of friends? I guess Kimble will be busy tonight. Who goes first?”

Alex had had just about enough of Alexis. Turning to her she asked, “What is your problem? Have I done something to personally offend you or something? Or are you just too stupid to know that you’re just a skank who’ll open her legs for any man who wants to get between them?”

“I told you once before, little girl. If I wanted Kimble, he’d already be mine. I’m trying to do you a favor.”

A crowd had started to gather as their voices escalated. Alex noticed but she didn’t necessarily care. She’d put up with as much of Alexis’s shit as she intended to, and when Shonna tried to get her to calm down, it didn’t work. Alexis was pushing her buttons and her luck. Alex kinda felt that Alexis had probably had one too many drinks, and it was the alcohol helping her to act a fool. She also began to realize that her behavior would reflect badly on her husband. Where the hell were Kimble and Elray when she needed them? There were just too damn many people at this party. She didn’t see either of them as she briefly scanned the crowd.

“Looking for your husband? What you scared you can’t hold on to him?”

Alexis taunted.

Alex grabbed Alexis by the front of her dress and shoved her. When Alexis regained her footing, she attacked Alex and found herself thrown to the ground again landing flat on her ass. Alex stood over her, thinking for a woman with all that mouth, she sure couldn’t fight worth a damn.

“I’m going to tell you one last time to stay away from me and my husband.”

Alex saw Dell Thompson making his way through the crowd. She watched his gaze go from her to Alexis who was still on the ground.

“Mrs. Brown what happened?”

“Your girl thinks she can run her mouth to anybody she wants and I ain’t the one.”

“Come on Alexis, I’ll take you back to the hotel so you can sleep it off,” Dell said helping Alexis to her feet.

“Whatever,” Alexis said snatching her arm away from him once she was on her feet. “I’ll get you, you bitch. Kimble will never be yours.”



Walking back through the parking lot, Kimble saw the crowd but he didn’t know what was going on. To his knowledge, Balla didn’t have anymore events planned this evening. As he got closer, he saw Alex standing next to Shonna

talking just as he saw Alexis pulling out of a parking space ahead of him. The next thing he saw was Dell Thompson stumbling from between the parking space Alexis had just pulled out of. Rushing over to Dell he saw that he was bleeding from the back of his head.

“What happened Dell?” Kimble asked.

“Kimble, its Alexis! She’s lost her mind; she’s going to hurt your wife! Man, you better get to her quick!”

Fear like he’d never known coursed through him. He took off running in Alex and Shonna’s direction, but didn’t call out to them just in case he was over reacting. Alexis went by them and he slowed his pace, thinking he had, indeed, panicked for nothing. His relief was short-lived as he saw Alexis swing around to make another pass. He saw her face clearly. She was crying and speaking angrily to herself. The next thing he knew, Alexis increased the speed of the car. Knowing he’d never reach them in time, Kimble had only seconds to figure out how to stop Alexis from hurting the woman he loved.

Knowing he couldn’t live without Alex, Kimble did the only thing he could do. Instead of trying to reach Alex, he ran directly into the path of the car Alexis was driving.



Elray saw Kimble, then turned his attention to what Kimble was looking at—a speeding car. It was headed straight for Alex and Shonna. Frowning, he didn't realize what Kimble intended to do until he saw him dive in front of the car. Elray didn't know who to try and reach first. He heard Alex and Shonna scream and the screeching of tires.

Time stood still as he watched the speeding car Alexis was driving hit Kimble tossing him in the air before he landed several feet from where he'd been hit. In utter disbelief Elray watched as Alexis lost control of the car crashed through the fence and roll down the hill where the car landed on it's crushed roof.

He didn't realize that he had stopped and was still standing in the same spot until he looked over to where Kimble was laying again.

There Elray saw Shonna trying to pull his screaming sister away from Kimble's bloody body. He rushed over and gathered Alex in his arms. By this time, he heard the paramedic sirens. Keeping Alex out of the way so the paramedics could work on Kimble wasn't easy. She even attacked him.

“Don't touch me! Get the hell away from me! Haven't you done enough harm already?”

Once Kimble was ready for transport Elray, Shonna, Dell and Antonio talked briefly with the police. They wanted to speak to Alex, but Elray refused,

saying she was in shock and wouldn't be any help. In another paramedic rig Alexis was ready for transport to the hospital with serious injuries.

"Shonna can you take my cell phone? All the numbers you need are programmed in it."

"Yes of course. Don't worry about anything."

"I'll help her. Go on—your sister's going to need you. We'll meet you at the hospital," Dell added.



Once they got to the hospital Alex had to be given a sedative because she became hysterical when she was told that Kimble had been rushed immediately into surgery. Before going to the room they'd put his sister in Elray stopped to talk to Shonna.

"Shonna, were you able to reach anyone in my family or Kim's?" he asked.

"Yes. I talked to your brother, Dillon, and he said he'd contact Kimble's family. They were going to get flights out as soon as possible. I told him that Balla was sending cars to the airport to pick everybody up. Balla has also offered to put your families up in a hotel while they're here in LA and provide anything else your families might need.

"Thanks, Shonna. I appreciate everything you've done."

“It was no problem. And Dell said to tell you if you need anything, don’t hesitate to ask.”

“Thanks. I’m going to go and wait for my sister to come around.”

“Okay. We’ll all be here down in the general waiting area if you need us.”

Sitting in Alex’s room watching her, Elray hated himself. This was all his fault. If only he’d left Kimble and his sister alone. God, he had no idea Alexis was capable of something like this. The police had taken all their statements but at this point no one could say for certain what Alexis’ true intentions were.

Elray must have fallen asleep, because he woke up to Alex shaking him.

“Elray, Elray, where’s Kimble?”

Sitting up, he wiped his eyes to focus then answered, “I don’t think he’s out of surgery yet.”

“Hold on. Let me get out of this bed. I’ve got to find out what’s going on.”

Elray could tell she was still groggy from the sedative, so he helped her from the bed and they walked into the hall down to the waiting area where they saw Dell, Shonna, Antonio and Balla waiting. As they approached, Elray saw the gloomy looks on their faces and worried about how his sister would react. Just as he feared, Alex screamed.

“Shonna, please! Oh God, what aren’t you all telling me? Is my husband dead?”

Elray and Shonna exchanged glances before she jumped up and rushed over to Alex, wrapped her arms around her, and replied, “God no! We don’t know anything just yet. The doctors are still in surgery with him.”

“He’s hurt real bad isn’t he?”

“He was busted up pretty bad, but I’m sure the doctors will talk to you as soon as they can.”

“You’re right. I need to calm down and just wait to talk to his doctors.”

Elray stood off to the side as Shonna helped Alex over and they sat down. He wasn’t sure how much time had actually passed when he looked up saw his parents rushing down the hall. His dad opened his arms and Elray watched his sister rush into his embrace.

“Oh Daddy. I’m so glad you’re here.”

His mother came to him, wrapped her arms around him and asked, “Elray baby are you okay?”

“I’m fine, Mama,” he replied.

Out of the corner of his eye, Elray saw Alex’s reaction to their mother’s concern for him. It was clear the gesture enraged her.

“What are you consoling him for? This is all his fault!” she screamed.

Elray flinched at the pain in his sister’s voice. He knew his mother felt his pain too, and she knew he needed her. She wouldn’t deny him the comfort he

needed even if it angered her daughter. He watched as his parents exchanged gazes, silently communicating to each other what they needed to do as parents — take care of their children.

This was a tough situation, and they'd all have to pull together as a family to get through it.

“Daddy, are Kimble’s parent’s here too?” Alex asked turning her head away from her mother and brother.

“Not yet, baby. Kimble’s dad wasn’t in Atlanta. He and Keith were coming back from Savannah and his wife didn’t want to tell them before they got back. I had Dillon book flights for them before your mother and I left.”

“Thank you, Daddy.”

When Elray heard footsteps, he looked up and saw some doctors approaching them. They all stood. The doctor extended his hand and introduced himself.

“I’m Dr. William Forbes.

“Please, Dr. Forbes. Is my husband going to be okay?”

“He made it through surgery, Mrs. Brown. Let me quickly go over his injuries and what we’ve had to do for your husband.”

“Dr. Forbes I don’t care about any of that! All I want to know is will my husband be alright?”

“The next twenty four to forty eight hours will be critical. We’ll be monitoring his progress very closely.”

If her father hadn’t been holding her, Elray was sure his sister would have crumbled to the ground. Wiping angrily at the tears now streaming down her face. Alex shook her head.

“No! I won’t accept that! Kimble and I love each other and we’ve been through too much to be together. He’s going to make it. My love won’t let him die. I have to see him!”

“Alright. After he’s settled in ICU I’ll send a nurse out for you.” Turning to the large group that was obviously with her, he added.

“I’m sorry but only two people at a time will be allowed in for now, and it will be immediate family members only.”

“Thank you Dr. Forbes,” Alex said then allowed her dad to lead her back over to sit down.

Not long after Dr. Forbes left, Elray saw Mr. and Mrs. Brown and their family coming down the hall along with his brothers Dillon, Trent, Rayvon and Rayden. He watched as they all offered Alex words of encouragement.

Trent then came over to him.

“How you holding up El?”

The words that came out of his sister's mouth next were ones that he never thought he'd hear a member of his family ever say to another member of his family.

"I hate you Elray! You should be the one in there fighting for your life, not Kim. Why couldn't you just leave us alone?"

"That's enough Alexandra," his father said.

"Not you too, Daddy! Elray's done nothing but try and destroy my marriage, even though he could see for himself how happy I was and how good Kimble was to me and our son."

"Alex, this isn't the time for this."

Luckily, the nurse came out at that moment.

"It'll be about ten minutes before you will be able to come in, Mrs. Brown. Dr. Forbes asked me to come and let you know."

"Thank you," Alex replied.



Dillon wrapped his arms around Alex, as he and the twins took her to sit and wait to go in to see Kimble. None of the Brown family had said much of anything, so Keith and Keaton joined Alex's brothers in giving her encouraging words. Dillon could tell that Keith, while worried about Alex, was more worried about his mother. And from the looks he'd given Elray would love nothing more

than to give Elray a good old fashioned beat-down. Luckily he knew Keith was as level headed as him and would know this wasn't the time or place.

The nurse came out to get his sister to see Kimble. He helped her stand up, and wiped her face.

"Mother Brown, will you go with me?" Alex asked then turned to the nurse and said. "Can you please let my brother come in for just a minute?"

She nodded and Dillon walked just behind them as they walked into the room hand in hand. He doubted Alex knew what to expect. It wouldn't have mattered because once Kimble came into view they both broke down into tears again. He had tubes and wires everywhere. He was almost unrecognizable, but Alex didn't want to leave when the nurse suggested they get some sleep.

Alex and Mrs. Brown kept a constant vigil at Kimble's bedside for three days, leaving only long enough to take a shower, get something to eat, and return. During this time, Elray sank into a deep depression. Because he wouldn't eat, Dillon really became worried. Everyone—even Kimble's family—tried to tell him that despite what Alex had said in her anger, this wasn't his fault. Dillon could tell that it didn't matter what they thought. The only thing his brother felt was that his sister hated him, and if her husband died Dillon believed in his heart she'd never speak to Elray again.

"El, can we talk?" Dillon asked taking a seat next to his brother.

“Sure.”

“You’ve got to snap out of this. No matter how stupid you acted everyone including Alex knows you would have never knowingly placed her or Kimble in harm’s way.”

“How can you say that? Alex hates me; she said so.”

“I swear at times you two make me want to scream. She’s upset. She’ll be okay no matter what happens. Talk to her, El.”

“I’ll try but not yet.”

“Alright, for now. But talk to her soon. Okay?”

“Thanks Dill. I will.”

Dillon felt it in his bones that there was more to what had happened than any of them knew, and he intended to get answers. There was no way he’d let his family fall apart if there was anything within his power that could be done to prevent it. Since he knew what room Alexis was in, he decided to have a little talk with her.

Walking into her room he saw the question on her face.

“I’m Dillon Carter, Elray and Alexandra’s brother,” he said. “I’d like to talk to you. Do you mind if I have a seat?”

Alexis shook her head, sitting up and adjusting the cover on her bed. She winced from the pain that moving caused, Dillon noticed.

“Would you like me to call a nurse?”

“No I’m fine. What is it you want Mr. Carter?”

“You can call me Dillon. I’d like you to tell me what happened.”

“Truthfully, Mr. Carter, I really don’t remember much of what happened.

One minute I was talking to Antonio, the next I was behind the wheel of a car.”

“You drank that much?”

“That’s the funny thing. No, I really didn’t. I’ve drunk a lot more before and haven’t been nearly as wasted.”

That was interesting. Maybe she’d been under the influence of something else.

“Had you taken anything else?”

Offended Alexis answered, “I don’t do drugs, if that’s what you mean.”

“I wasn’t trying to offend you. This just doesn’t make sense to me.”

Alexis averted her gaze as she spoke.

“I know you don’t have any reason to believe me, but I never meant to hurt anybody. I don’t know what happened. Something inside me just snapped. It was like I didn’t have any control over what was happening.”

Something wasn’t right but Dillon was fairly certain Alexis didn’t have the answers he needed. Thanking her for her time, he left. As he approached the nurse’s station outside the ICU, he noticed again that Antonio was there.

Considering Trent had told him that Antonio, Elray and Kimble hated each other, it didn't make any sense that Antonio had been there every day since the accident. Stopping at the nurse's station, he checked on Kimble's condition.

"Hi I'm Dillon Carter, Kimble Brown's brother-in-law. Can you tell me how he's doing?"

"Well he's better. He's continuing to improve."

"Thank you."

Turning to Antonio he asked, "What's up guy?"

"Nothing much. Just seeing how Alexis and Kimble are doing."

Not one for beating around the bush, Dillon flat out asked him, "Why? from what I've heard, you and Kimble are not exactly friends."

"Yeah, well that doesn't mean I'd wish this on him. Anyway, how's his wife doing?"

"My sister is fine. She has her family here for support."

Just the way Antonio looked at him, after his last statement told Dillon he was no fool. Antonio knew he disliked him immensely; so he nodded and walked away. Dillon let him believe he'd made a clean getaway before he said.

"By the way Alexis said she doesn't remember what she was drinking, but you might since you were the one who got her last drink for her before she left. Would you happen to know just how much she truly had to drink?"

Dillon noticed immediately how nervous Antonio became when he mentioned Alexis' drinking. He'd bet money that Antonio had given Alexis something in her drink. This would explain Alexis behavior and also prove to Elray that he really didn't have anything to do with what happened that night.

Discreetly, Dillon told Trent, Rayvon and Rayden about his suspicions. Not knowing for sure how the Brown brothers were handling everything, he decided only to confide in Keith. Tipping the police at this point would have been pointless. Any drugs that may have been in Alexis system would have been long gone by now, but Dillon was determined to find a way to out Antonio.



A week after the accident, Kimble finally showed enough of an improvement from his injuries to have his condition upgraded. He was moved from the ICU. Alex and his mother were still maintaining their vigil. However they now had the other family members to sit with him for short periods of time as well.

Elray also started to show signs of coming out of his depression. As he did so, he noticed all the hush-hush conversations between his brothers.

“Okay what aren't I being told and why?” he asked Dillon.

“I believe your friend Alexis may have been drugged the night of Kimble's accident.”

“By whom and why? That doesn't make any sense.”

“I don’t know. It’s just a hunch. I could be wrong. Maybe she just had too much to drink. Look I gotta go get Mama.”

“Okay. See you later.”

Sitting back in his seat Elray thought back to that night. It didn’t take long to put two and two together. He just needed to talk to Alexis to confirm what he already knew was a possibility.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Elray stood in the doorway of Alexis' room looking at her. When she opened her eyes to see him standing there, he saw the anger, hurt and fear in them. He was sure that with the fear he saw in her eyes, she realized she definitely needed to watch what she said. She didn't mean anything to him, whereas he loved his sister and Kimble was once one of his closest friends.

He continued studying her. Could Antonio really have put something in her drink that made her loose it, or had she let her own anger get the best of her? From what Dillon had told him, it was a definite possibility. Elray didn't use drugs and he didn't hang around with anyone who did – at least not to his knowledge.

Neither he or Alexis said anything. Since he was still trying to compose himself so he wouldn't explode the moment he opened, his mouth, Elray pulled the chair from the corner closer to her bed and sat down.

“How're you feeling?” he asked.

“As good as can be expected. The doctors say that I'll walk with a limp the rest of my life, so my modeling career's over.”

Unable to keep up idle chitchat, Elray got right to the point.

“Alexis, can you tell me what happened?”

“I honestly don’t know. I do know that I love Kimble. I’d never hurt him intentionally.”

“It didn’t appear you were trying to hurt Kimble.”

“I was angry with your sister, I’ll admit. But I, I just don’t believe I would’ve hurt her. Maybe try to scare her, but that’s all. Then the next thing I knew I was in Dell’s car headed straight for her.”

“Why were you angry at Alex? What were you doing before that?”

“She and I had words. It got physical.”

“What about before that? What were you doing?”

“I had a few drinks, I mingled, I danced. I mean I didn’t do anything I wouldn’t normally do, if that’s what you mean.”

Since he didn’t want to disclose what it was exactly he was looking for, he asked her more specifically who she’d had drinks with. Hopefully that would narrow down whether Antonio had a chance to slip something into her drink.

“Several people—Dell, and Antonio. Why all the questions Elray?”

“Some other time. I have to go,” Elray said as he got up to leave. Armed with what he considered some pretty strong evidence, his next move was going to be to confront Antonio. He’d better hope that he could prove that he wasn’t involved in Kimble’s accident in any way.

He'd been laying in wait for Antonio for three days now, and still he managed to miss him. Alex, whom he saw everyday, still refused to talk to him. He couldn't remember a time when one of the Carter siblings wasn't speaking to another. He hated this. Family meant everything to him. Why hadn't he just left Kimble alone? He was a good man, and deep down he'd known that all along. The problem all along was he just hadn't wanted to accept the fact that Alex was grown up.



Kimble continued to improve and the Carter and Brown family got the wonderful news that he would make a full recovery. Venice had flown in with Sherice and little Kimble just one day before the announcement. Happiness overflowed between the two families as they each took turns visiting with Kimble.

Over the next few days, everyone visited Kimble but Elray. This confused Kimble who wasn't aware that Alex and Elray weren't speaking. He was laying in bed thinking about his brother-in-law when his own brother, Keith, walked in.

“Hey little brother. Feel like some company?”

“Of course, have a seat.”

“How you feeling?”

“Pretty good. Have you seen Elray? He hasn't been in here to see me.”

“He doesn’t want to upset Alex. She’s still pretty pissed off at him. Mama said she isn’t speaking to him at all even now that she knows you’re okay.”

Letting the feud between his wife and her brother continue wasn’t an option. He loved Alex too much for that, and he knew not speaking to her brother had to be hard on her because they were so close.

Since Alex was gone to the hotel to shower and change, he said, “I wanna talk to El. Is he here at the hospital?”

“Yeah, I saw him downstairs when I came up.”

“Will you go down and ask him to come up before Alex gets back? Hopefully we can get this squashed before then.”

“No problem. I’ll be back in a minute,” Keith said as he stood and walked out of the room.

Less than ten minutes later Kimble saw Elray at the door. He seemed hesitant to enter the room.

“El, come on in. Have a seat. I’d like to talk to you.”

Slowly Elray walked into the room. Kimble had never known him to act so embarrassed or out of place. He nodded to the two chairs placed beside his bed for them each to sit in. After Elray and Keith had taken a seat Kimble asked, “Why haven’t you been to see me El?”

“I didn’t want to upset Alex, and truthfully I wasn’t sure you’d want to see me, either.”

“That’s stupid, man. Like you said—we never stopped being boys. I don’t blame you for what happened. I had a decision to make and I made it. I didn’t regret it then, and I don’t regret it now. If I was faced with the same situation I’d do nothing any different.”

Tears were running down Elray’s face when he said, “You love her that much.”

“Yes, Elray, I do. I’d die for her if I had to.”

Everyone in the room turned when they heard, “I would do the same for you.”

Alex, Trent, Little Kim, her mother and Kimble’s dad were all standing in the doorway. Elray and Keith stood. Elray started to leave, but Kimble’s words stopped him.

“Elray, Alex and I both want you here. Don’t leave.”

Coming forward with tears of her own, Kimble watched his wife stop in front of her brother, and when he reached out and pulled her into his embrace she went willingly. The entire family crowded into Kimble’s room overjoyed once again, now that the rift in Elray and Alex’s relationship had been repaired. A short

time later, the nurse came in and kicked everyone out. The only ones permitted to stay were Alex, Little Kim and Elray.

Kimble had asked Elray to stay because he and Alex wanted to talk to him. Alex had already told him everything she knew about what happened the night of his accident.

“El, can you tell me anymore about what happened the night of the accident?” Kimble asked.

“Truthfully, I don’t really know much. However, I do have my suspicions. I don’t want to say anything until for sure other than I think our old friend Antonio may have had something to do with it.”

“That’s fair, but make sure you let me know something.”

Kimble was sick to death of being in that bed because he seemed to tire so much more easily. He must have looked visibly worn out, because Alex stood and said.

“Baby we’ll be back later. Get some rest. I love you.”



Alex left right behind Elray, leaving the baby with her mom and Trent. Neither she nor Elray knew it, but they both had one thought on their minds as they left Kimble’s bedside—Antonio. Alex still couldn’t believe what she’d heard. Could Antonio possibly be responsible for what had happened to her husband?

For his sake, she hoped not, because if he was even remotely implicated, she planned on dishing out one good old-fashioned ass-whipping.

As she walked through the hall to Alexis' room, all she could think about was how she could have lost Kimble to petty jealousy for nothing. While what her brother had done was petty, she didn't for a minute doubt his sincerity when he'd told her and Kimble he would never hurt Kimble, no matter how angry he'd been with him.

Redirecting her thoughts, she glanced out the window down into the parking lot, catching site of Antonio down there. Taking off running, she barely caught the elevator before it closed. Prior to the elevator doors closing Alex saw her brother Trent coming back down the hall.

"Where are you going?" he yelled out.

Alex didn't get to answer. She'd just have to explain later. Right now she had a date with Antonio. He was about to find out just how much of a Carter and now a Brown she really was. You mess with one of them, you had to deal with the consequences.

When the elevator doors opened, Alex quickly exited and made her way down the ramp of the parking deck. Antonio had stopped and was standing there texting someone.

"You could have killed my husband!" Alex screamed.

“What the hell....” Antonio responded to being shoved.

“Don’t act like you have no idea what I’m talking about!”

Trying to ward off her attack without actually hitting her, Antonio grabbed at her arm, but she easily avoided his grasp punching him dead in the face instead of shoving him. Neither saw Elray coming in their direction — Alex because she was too angry, and Antonio because he was focusing his attention on how to calm her down. Alex’s next punch went straight into his mid-section, doubling him over in pain.

“Look I don’t want to hurt you,” Antonio said now obviously pissed. The darkening of his eyes indicated to Alex that he’d had enough of her. She watched as he straightened to his full height and prepared to go on the defensive.

“If you think you got what it takes, please try to hurt me,” Alex responded just as her brother Elray came up behind her. He grabbed her and easily moved her out of the way.

“You’re not getting off that easy Tony,” she heard Elray say and looked into Antonio’s face. His expression went from obvious relief to downright hostility.

Rolling up his sleeves, Tony prepared to take on Elray. Alex saw that Antonio’s gesture couldn’t have made her brother happier. The fight was on. No one moved to stop it.

Unfortunately, someone else must have seen the altercation, because the LA County Sheriff's Department was pulling up. It took both officers and Rayden to pull the two combatants apart. Still seething herself, Alex sucker-punched Antonio while the sheriff's deputies were holding him, and as a result all three of them went to jail.



Before leaving the hospital, Trent informed Keith and Keaton of what had gone down with Alex and Elray. He gave specific instructions not to let on in any way to Kimble what had happened.

“Don't worry, Trent. We're not going to say anything,” Keith assured him.

“Thanks. Alex would kill me. My family's about to go down and see if we can't get them out.”

Less than fifteen minutes later the Carter family, seated in the waiting area, all took turns holding little Kim and Sherice while waiting for news of when they could get Alex and Elray out of jail.

Trent saw an officer coming toward them and nudged his father.

“Dad, I sure hope they're on the way to tell us we can go. These chairs are so hard. Boy am I really going to let Alex have it. Damn, oops I mean dang girl needs to realize she can't be fighting no man.”

“Trent.”

“Yeah Dad.”

“Shut up.”

Before he could respond, the officer was standing directly in front of them. Trent and the rest of his family stood to hear what he had to say.

“Since Antonio Harris isn’t pressing charges against either Alexandra Carter or Elray Carter, they are being released after paying a fine for disorderly conduct.”

A few minutes later, Trent and his family walked out of the station and down the front stairs. When he saw Elray and Kimble’s friend Shonna coming toward them, his sister stopped and said.

“What are you doing here?”

“Antonio called and asked me to pick him up.”

“Why do you even care about him? He’s trouble and obviously not worth your friendship.”

“He’s never been anything but nice to me. I know he’s got problems, but I also know if I needed him he’d be there for me. Can you understand that?”

“Considering where my husband is and he may have had something to do with it, no, I’m not sure if I can.”

Shaking his head, Trent grabbed his sister’s hand and left with his family.



Luckily, over the next several weeks their lives returned to some form of normalcy. Most of the Brown and Carter families returned to Atlanta once it was determined that Kimble was out of danger. Keaton, Elray and Alex remained in LA with Kimble. No charges were filed against Alexis because according to all eyewitness testimony, Kimble ran into the path of the car she was driving. She was cited for driving under the influence and her driver's license suspended.

Shonna visited with Kimble several times, as did Balla. Alexis was released to a rehab facility due to the severity of her broken leg and pelvis. She'd have to go through some pretty intense physical therapy. Her brother Darnell had flown to LA so he could make the trip back to Atlanta with her. She didn't live there anymore, but was returning while she recuperated from her injuries. Balla arranged for everyone's transportation back to Atlanta in her private jet. However, at Kimble's request, Alexis and her brother went home first.



After getting Kimble home and settled, Alex convinced Trent and Keith to tell him what had happened between Elray, Antonio and herself. As she expected he was furious, yet at the same time, she could see in his face that it gave him tremendous satisfaction knowing Elray had delivered him a well-deserved beat-down. She was still outraged that neither Antonio nor Alexis would get any type of formal punishment for what had happened. She refused to refer to the events of

that night as an accident—in her mind an accident was an unintentional event. The events of that night were clearly intentional. Both of them were intent on causing hurt to someone else. Yeah her husband had done what he felt he had to save her, but to her that didn't excuse the original intent even if there wasn't any actual proof.



Another two months had now passed and though Kimble still wasn't one hundred percent, he was up and getting around well. He worked from home on various projects for his father's company while helping Alex with little Kim because she was taking some on-line courses to finish her degree. Both their families continued showing them tremendous support, and things couldn't have been going better for them. While Alex was still upset about Antonio and Alexis getting away with not being punished, she'd let the matter drop at Kimble's insistence.

Sitting at the computer in his office, Kimble was thinking about his wife. He loved her more than life itself, but due to his accident and his seemingly slow recovery, he hadn't made love to her since coming home. It hadn't been from lack of trying on his part, but Alex insisted that he be completely recovered before doing any strenuous activity. Damn, here he went again—just thinking about her

had him rock hard. Leaning back in his chair he closed his eyes and tried to control his libido, but it wasn't working.

Thinking about what Alex was doing in the living room wasn't helping. When he'd last gone in there, she was lying on the couch reading a book after putting little Kim down for his nap. Since he wasn't typing or rustling papers around on his desk, he could hear her footsteps.

She probably decided to see if he needed anything. When she entered his office, he pretended to be asleep. So he stayed leaning back with his eyes closed. She hadn't moved but he knew she was in the room. He could smell her vanilla and it made him desire his wife even more than he already did.

Afraid that she'd leave without moving from his position or opening his eyes Kimble said, "I'm not sleep."

Startled at first Alex responded, "Are you in pain? Do you need me to get you something?"

Swinging around in his chair Kimble opened his eyes and smiled before replying, "Oh I'm in pain, but not from my injuries." He rose from his chair to walk over to Alex. As soon as he was within reaching distance, he pulled her into his arms kissing her so passionately; she saw stars floating above them when he released her.

Sinking to his knees, he pulled Alex down with him kissing her again. Not sure how he'd accomplished it, they were now completely naked laying side by side on the floor of his office. Even more amazing was how good it felt sliding easily into his beautiful wife moments later.

Those damn injuries were the last thing on his mind as he made love to her for the first time in months. After two intense rounds of vigorous loving, Kimble lay contently beside Alex thinking what a fool she'd been to insist on making him wait. If he could make love to her the way he'd just done, oh was definitely sufficiently recovered.

Over the next couple of days, Kimble certainly made up for lost time in making love to his wife. The only time they weren't in bed was when their family was there visiting to make sure everything was going well. As a peace offering from her brother Elray, a pool table had been delivered to them, and he'd called to say everybody was coming over on Friday night. They were bringing guy's night to him since they were sure their sister wasn't going to let them take him out.

Venice and Sherice, along with Kimble's sister Kimberly, came over Friday afternoon to help get ready for the pool party that night. Promptly at seven, her brothers and Kimble's started to arrive. Alex, Kimberly and Venice were allowed to stay in order to keep the beer, pizza, hot wings, soda and whatever other

goodies the guys wanted coming. The card table had also been set up so whoever wasn't playing pool could enjoy a good game of spades or bid Wisk.

The evening was going well when around nine fifteen the doorbell rang. Since everyone they were expecting was already there, no one had a clue who it could possibly be. Kimble saw Trent follow Alex out the room when she went to answer the door. Two minutes later, he saw Trent come back into the room.

"Kimble I think you'd better come see who's at the door," he said then turned and went right back out.

Kimble couldn't imagine what had Trent so riled up. He quickly got up as did everyone else in the room to go see what was going on. To his surprise he saw his wife standing there face to face with Shonna and Antonio.

"Hi Alex, Kimble. Can we talk to you?" Shonna said.

"Shonna it's good to see you," Alex said as she hugged her, then turned angry eyes to Antonio. "But what are you doing here? And more importantly, why is he here?"

"We came because Tony and I felt you and Kimble deserved to know what really happened the night of Kimble's accident."

Kimble and Alex stepped aside to allow them both to enter. Closing the door, they all walked back into the house. You could have heard a pin drop, everyone got so quiet. Kimble looked in Elray's direction. He wasn't surprised to

see him make his way over to Antonio and without saying a word, grab him by the collar.

Shonna grabbed Elray saying, "Please, Elray, just let us say what we came here to say."

Elray looked at Shonna, then to Kimble and Alex who nodded their agreement. Letting Tony go, he walked back over and leaned against the wall.

"Why don't you all go on back inside while Alex and I listen to what Shonna and Tony have to say," Kimble suggested.

"No, please stay. We've all been affected by what happened to Kimble in some way," Shonna replied

No one moved. They all watched as Shonna then turned to Antonio, placed her hand on his arm and said, "Go on honey, tell them."

Kimble saw a different side of Antonio. He saw the loving way he gazed at Shonna, nodded, cleared his throat and began speaking.

"I did drug Alexis the night of Kimble's accident."

"Tell me something I don't know, Tony," Elray snapped.

"Elray, if you'd shut up, he's trying to tell you what happened," Shonna snapped right back.

"Like I said, I did drug Alexis, but it wasn't with the intention of hurting either of you. Well, maybe it was to hurt Kimble, but not the way you think. I'd

been talking with Alexis, and everybody knew she still had a thing for you and that the two of you had once been an item. She kept talking about how the two of you were going to get back together. After meeting your wife earlier that evening, I knew she was deluding herself. I suggested that we hook up later, and she laughed in my face and started talking about how I wasn't half the man Kimble is and all kinds of stupid mess like that. Alexis was always putting somebody down like she was all that. Hell she wasn't the one I wanted, but she'd do and I'd take her down a peg or two in the process. I intended on taking her back to the hotel, but then I ran into Shonna." Looking at her again his eyes watered but he continued, "I've been in love with her for years, but before I could tell her how I felt she started messing around with you, Kimble."

Damn, this wasn't a conversation he wanted to have in front of his brothers-in-law, but he'd just have to suck it up and hope everything would be okay. Still, what Antonio was saying didn't quite add up, but he remained quiet as did everyone else while Antonio continued.

"I ran into Shonna and she agreed to go have a drink with me somewhere else. I went to tell Alexis to get a life and find somebody else to fu..." Looking around the room, he changed what he was going to say to, "Occupy her time. She was with Dell Thompson at the time, and tried to act all offended by what I'd said.

I rejoined Shonna and we left. When we left, your wife came over to us and I left her and Shonna talking while I went to get the car.”

Shonna took up the story from there.

“As you already know, Kim, Alexis came outside and started in on Alex. Things got physical, and I’m sure what Tony gave her clouded her judgment. His intention wasn’t for anybody to get hurt. Things just got out of hand. I fault him for not making sure Alexis got safely back to the hotel. He knew what he’d given her, and it was his responsibility to make sure she didn’t hurt herself or anyone else. He came to me tonight and told me everything. After he told me, we took the first available flight to Atlanta. I told him if he hoped to ever have a future with me and I wasn’t making any promises—that he would have to tell you and Alex the truth. He didn’t hesitate to come with me, even at the risk of you going to the police.”

For the longest time no one said anything. The house was completely quiet. Kimble couldn’t believe that Tony had been in love with Shonna all this time and he hadn’t seen it. It was hard to believe that the self centered, self-absorbed Antonio could care about anybody as much as he cared about himself, but obviously he did if Shonna was able to convince him to come there tonight. Kimble could see that everyone in the room was waiting to see what he would say. After all what Shonna and Antonio had said affected him more than anyone in the room.

“Shonna, can Alex and I speak with you privately?” Kimble asked.

Shaking her head Shonna replied, “No. It seems to me that’s how all this mess got started—with secrets and lies. Anything we have to say can be said in front of everyone.”

“Alright, I appreciate you coming here because we may have never known the whole truth if you hadn’t. But do you really believe Tony doesn’t deserve to go to jail for what he did? Things could have turned out differently.”

“I know that, Kim, but they didn’t. I think everyone involved in this mess has learned a valuable lesson about keeping secrets, telling lies and meddling in other people’s lives.”

She was right, and everyone in the room knew it. Kimble again thanked them both for coming, then he and Alex walked them to the door and wished them well. After the visit from Shonna and Antonio, no one was really in the mood for continuing the pool or card games. Everyone helped put the house back together and clean up before getting ready to leave.

“Would you like Venice and I to take Little Kim home with us tonight?” Dillon asked Kimble as he helped him take a folding table out to the garage.

“Thanks, man. That would be great.”

Going back into the house, Trent, Rayvon, and Keith were standing at the door when Kimble approached them.

“Thanks for tonight even, if it was cut short. I miss our boys’ night out.”

“It’s all good. It’d be nice to get together like this at least once a month at a different house of course each time,” Trent said.

Kimble heard several, “I agrees.”

After his family and his wife’s family were gone, he and Alex went upstairs.

“How’s a nice hot bath sound?” he asked.

“It sounds wonderful.”

“Good meet you in the tub in five.”

Five minutes later Kimble sat in the tub with Alex leaning her head back on his chest.

“So what did you think of what happened tonight?” Kimble asked.

“I don’t know. I mean I still think Antonio deserves to some type of punishment. And I just hope Shonna isn’t making a huge mistake.”

“Speaking as a man who is totally and completely in love with his wife I don’t believe she is. I’m no fan of Tony’s but I saw a different man standing in front of me tonight. He took a real risk coming here. I could see in his eyes that he’d have done anything Shonna asked.”

“Yeah I know what you mean. I mean I don’t know him as well as you and Elray, but that night at the party he gave me the creeps. I didn’t like him one bit. I didn’t feel that or see that today.”

“Well then two good things came out of this.”

“Two.”

“Yes two. Your pig-headed brothers’ve finally accepted that I’m not just their friend anymore but also the man who loves their sister, and Shonna and Tony appear to have a promising future together.”

“I just wish you didn’t have to get hurt for that to happen,” Alex said.

“Me too, baby, me too.”

As the water began to get cold, they washed each other off before getting out of the tub. While Kimble got them towels to dry off, Alex let the water out and cleaned the tub.

After toweling each other dry, they both walked into the bedroom without nightclothes since they were alone anyway. Climbing into bed Kimble pulled Alex close to him before asking, “Are you okay with everything that happened here tonight?”

“Yeah I think so. I’m just happy it’s all over; we’re still together, and we’re happy. We don’t have to hide our love from my family, or should I say, my crazy brothers.”

Kimble laughed.

“I think deep down I always knew things were going to work out. I just didn’t think it would take me nearly getting killed for it to happen.”

“Me either. Now shut up and show me just how much you love me,” Alex said as she pulled him down to her for the soul-searing kiss she knew she’d receive.

More than happy to oblige his wife Kimble did just that, and before they finally fell into an exhausted sleep. Kimble was happy his son wasn’t home, because his mother had screamed more than a few times from the intense pleasure he’d given her.

Epilogue

Kimble and Alex were married again in a formal ceremony with all their family and friends on their second wedding anniversary. It was a lavish wedding straight out of a fairy tale, and even though the bride and groom were already married and had a baby, they both wore white. Alex told everyone that the white signified the purity of their love.

Both families couldn't have been happier. Trina, Lisa, Mona, Shasta, Kimberly and Venice served as bride's maids while Trent, Elray, Keith, Keaton, Dillon, Rayvon and Rayden served as groomsmen. Since the groomsmen outnumbered the bridesmaids by one, Mona got the pleasure of being escorted by both Rayvon and Rayden. As the best friend of the groom, Trent offered up the first toast of the evening.

"Can I please have everyone's attention? I'd like to propose a toast to my best friend Kimble and his beautiful wife, my sister. May they have a long and happy marriage. Kim, take care of my little sis, man."

"You know it."

The reception turned into an all night party that even the bride and groom seemed content to remain at until the very end.

Though Shonna received an invitation, the fact she came with her now-fiancé Antonio was a shock. There were obvious changes in him that he attributed to the love Shonna had shown him. Keith brought Miracle Dayton, who he'd been dating formally now for about two months. None of the other Brown or Carter brothers were dating seriously, so all the single women in attendance were open game.



Much to Mona's disappointment Alex had threatened her brothers and Kimble's to stay away from her friends unless they were interested in a serious relationship.

"Okay chickie babe. What's this I hear about you telling the finest men here, IE your brothers and your man's that they can't talk to none of your friends," Mona griped once she was able to get her alone for a few minutes.

"Girl, you are too many kinds of crazy. Yep that's exactly what I told them. I don't want to hear any of my friends complaining about being dogged out by my brothers or Kimble's"

"Oh girl please. I'm not trying to get married. I just wanna have some fun."

Alex laughed at her friend and said, "Too bad. Have fun with someone besides a member of my family."

Looking across the room Alex saw her husband and he motioned toward the dance floor.

“If you’ll excuse me, my sexy ass husband wants to dance with his sexy ass wife.”



As Kimble danced with his wife, he looked deeply into the eyes of the woman he loved and cherished above all else. The world around them ceased to exist in that moment as he lowered his head and kissed her with all the passion he felt for her. She returned his kiss just as passionately. The fact that everyone there had stopped dancing and were watching them clapping uncontrollably escaped his notice completely. He was so wrapped up in her and his emotions.

After the dance was over, he enlisted the help of his brother-in-law Elray to move things along so he and Alex could leave. Minutes later Elray had the DJ lower the music, and Kimble saw him pick up the mic.

“Ladies and gentlemen if I could please have everyone’s attention. Since we all expect Trent to say something totally inappropriate, anyway, I’m going to ask him to join me now.”

Kimble had no idea what was going on when Trent looked at him but joined his brother beside the DJ area anyway. Elray leaned over and whispered in Trent’s

ear for several moments, then Kimble saw Trent bust out in a huge grin before taking the mic.

Clearing his throat loudly in the mic Trent said, “It has been brought to my attention that due to the fact you people don’t know how to go home, the bride and groom have been stuck here all night. So I have been asked to help them make their departure. It gives me great pleasure to say you don’t have to go home but you gots to get the hell out of here!”

The room erupted into laughter as Alex and Kimble made their way through the crowd out to the horse-drawn carriage compliments of Elray, to be whisked away to an undisclosed location. Or so he thought as Kimble carried Alex through the door, up the stairs, down the hall to the bedroom of their newly purchased home, where he opened the door to the master suite.

Once inside Kimble reached over to turn on the lights, he, and Alex both were shocked to see the rose pedals spread across the floor and bed leading into the bathroom. Walking over to the bed, Alex picked up the note left there. Opening it up, she turned to him and read it aloud.

“Sorry, brother-in-law, we’re just too much alike for you to pull one over on me. Love you both and don’t worry—your secret’s safe with me.”

The note slipped from her hand as Kimble’s hand found its way to the zipper of her dress. For now his brother-in-law was totally forgotten, but he made

a mental note to call him when their three days were up to thank him again for how he'd gone all out to make up for how he'd acted in the beginning.

The End

Her Website is coming soon so watch out for it

SHORT AUTHOR BIO: Tiffany Parker currently resides in Atlanta, GA. though she is not a true southern gal. She was born and raised in the chilly Midwest where she met and married her husband. She has been writing stories of romance since her early teen years, and has contributed to several online magazines.

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