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ME
PERMISSION

MONICA WALTERS

GIVE ME PERMISSION

A BEROTTE FAMILY BOOK

MONICA WALTERS

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INTRODUCTION

Hello, readers!

Thank you for purchasing and/or downloading this book. This work of art contains explicit language, lewd sex scenes, violence, moments of grief/depression, and topics that may be sensitive to some readers. It also contains urban elements that could have very well served as a third genre category for this book.

This is book ten of a new family of books... The Berotte Family (pronounced Bee-Rot). It starts with the father, and the following books trickle down to the kids and their friends. So if some things seem incomplete where the sub characters are involved, that was done intentionally. Those issues will be resolved in later books.

This book is about Joyy's brother, Seneca Roberts, and Axton's sister, Kaysyn Anderson, who are both honorary Berottes. Joyy is Isaiah's wife. You met her and her family in book five, *Love Me Senseless*. Axton is Alexz's husband. He and his family were introduced in book two, *Deeper Than Love*. It's highly recommended that you read the previous books of this family series before indulging in this one, because it typically picks up right where the last one left off and updates ongoing issues that I don't go into great detail about.

Love On Replay

Deeper Than Love

Something You Won't Forget

I'm The Remedy
Love Me Senseless
I Want You Here
Don't Fight The Feeling
When You Dance
I'm All In

Also, please remember that your reality isn't everyone's reality. What may seem unrealistic or unrelatable to you could be very real and relatable to someone else. But also keep in mind that despite the previous statement, this is a fictional story.

Seneca and Kaysyn's story has a lot of back and forth and plenty of drama. So brace yourselves. Again, issues from previous stories are resolved and/or updated, and new issues have surfaced. So I hope you enjoy the ride this story is going to take you on.

Monica

Berotte Family and Friends Family Chart

Sheldon (1st wife Marie) and Anissa (1st husband Dexter) Berotte (Patriarch and Matriarch)

Isaiah (Jovy)

Tatum, Tyler, and Talon
(The triplets)

Chad (Lexi)

Foster

Shyrón (Brittany)

Kinsley and Kaylee
(Twin girls)

Dylan (Skyler)

Mariena
(Expecting a baby)

Alexz (Axton)

Ariana

Dexter Dent Jr. (Shavozz)

Trayveon and Dalen
(Shavozz's sons w/ Elvis)

Jamel Dent (Sandrene)

Arrow Vaughn (Ax's brother) &
Lynn

Seneca Roberts (Jovy's brother) &
Kaysyn Anderson (Axton's sister)
Ellington and Jericka
(Kay's kids w/ Luckey)

Ali Joseph (Shy's friend)

Jericho Marcellus (Ali's friend)

Berotte Family and Friends Chart

PROLOGUE

SENECA

“So you ready to get fucked right?”

The line remained quiet, but I knew it was her. Joyy had told me that Kaysyn asked for my number to set some shit straight between us about what happened at Ax and Alexz’s wedding. It was something about her that intrigued me, and I was desperate to find out. Besides, her husband wasn’t who she thought he was. That muthafucka was a whole addict out here, spending up all their money. Honestly, I felt sorry for her. However, as long as she chose to be with his ass, I would keep what I knew to myself.

“Kaysyn, I know it’s you. What’s up, baby? You ready for daddy to stroke that sweet pussy?”

“Meet me at Holiday Inn Express on 1960.”

My eyebrows had risen. I was talking shit and pretty sure that she wouldn’t go through with what I knew she wanted. She’d been flirting with me for a long time, getting me all worked up for all that body she was packing around. Kaysyn was a big, beautiful woman that deserved a man that knew how to appreciate that shit. Her ass and thighs were from another fucking world, and those titties needed a dick between them.

“How long you gon’ wait for me? I’m in Beaumont right now.”

“I’m here all night. The kids are with my parents, and Luckey is God knows where.”

“Mm. The things I’m gon’ do to that beautiful ass body when I get there. Give me two hours, baby, and I’ll be there to make that pussy scream.”

She ended the call without another word, and my dick throbbed at the possibilities. I’d been hoping for a chance to taste her pussy. Everything about her said she was worthy of all the pleasure I had to offer.

I quickly hopped in the shower and cleaned up then got out and moisturized my body and beard. She deserved the best I had to offer. Having a woman of her caliber was new for me. She wasn’t the average hood rat. Most women that were career driven and had something to lose did their best to stay away from a nigga like me.

Lexi put up her best front. She was able to resist me, but I knew I turned her on. She was engaged to my sister’s brother-in-law, so I left her ass alone. However, if I would have come stronger, I would have gotten at that pussy before she could count to ten. I’d had women in high positions, but that shit took a lot more work than with these sack chasers.

I got in my car and headed down Highway 90 to get to Kaysyn. It was like I was shocked but not shocked that this was about to go down. I knew she was trying to mask her real feelings and desires as jokes. I could tell by the way she stared at me. Her eyes didn’t lie. They said she would suck my soul right out of me with those juicy ass lips of hers. I was anticipating this shit so much my dick was already hard as fuck.

By the time I got to Dayton and turned to head to 1960, she was calling back. I checked the time and noticed that it had been nearly two hours. “What’s up, baby?”

“Where are you? Do I have time to get a bite to eat?”

“Yep. I just turned on 1960. I’m leaving Dayton as we speak.”

“Okay.”

She ended the call but not before I could hear the tremble in her voice. She was nervous. I could sense it. That was okay

though. I was gon' love all her nerves away. Despite how attracted I was to her and how I knew this was just a fuck, I wanted to take my time with her. She was missing something, and I wanted to be sure I gave her everything she needed.

Not so Luckey had gotten ahold of some shit that had turned him inside out. I knew exactly who did it to him, but who was I to say what I knew? If I told her that shit, she would swear I was lying to get closer to her. I didn't give a fuck about that nigga. My loyalty was to Kaysyn simply because she was my sister's best friend. As soon as Joyy married Isaiah, they would be connected to the same family as in-laws. Kaysyn's brother was married to Isaiah's sister.

They were extremely close, and I knew if I fucked with her heart, it would fuck up my relationship with my sister, although I wouldn't be the only guilty party. Kaysyn was a willing participant in this shit. If she sold herself cheap, why would I be to blame for taking advantage of a sale?

Within thirty minutes, I'd gotten to the hotel. I immediately called Kaysyn to see what room I should go to. She didn't answer the phone. Instead, she sent a text. *Room 311.*

I slowly shook my head, grabbed my bag, and got out of the car. I adjusted my jeans and shirt, then sat my cap on my head. The second I walked through the door, all eyes were on me. "Hello, sir! Can I help you?"

"I'm meeting someone."

She smiled and stared at me until I left her sights. *Mm hmm. She can definitely have next.* I hit the button for the elevator, and the doors opened. My phone chimed when I got on, alerting me of a text message. I checked it to see it was from Ali. I'd only been working with him for a couple of months. *Got a job for you. Hit me back when you get back to Beaumont.*

I swore that nigga had eyes on everything and every-fucking-body. How the fuck did he know I wasn't in Beaumont? I responded in the affirmative, then got off the elevator and made it to her room. I closed my eyes for a

minute and took a deep breath. For some reason, I was feeling a little uneasy about this shit. My mind was telling me to turn around and get back to my car. I ignored that warning and lightly knocked on the door. Kaysyn opened it quickly, like she was standing at the door waiting for me.

I walked inside and turned to see her in a terry cloth robe. I scanned her from head to toe as I dropped my bag to the countertop. She put the lever over the door then turned to me. I could see the hesitancy in her eyes. I took off my hat and set it on top of my bag as she slowly made her way to me. Our eyes had locked in, and I couldn't look away from her pretty ass if I tried. Her shoulder length hair was swaying as she walked, and I could see her ass bounce from the front with every step she took.

She parted her lips as she stared at me, then slowly licked her bottom lip, allowing her saliva to roll down to her chin. By the time she got to me, she untied her robe and let it slide off her shoulders to reveal a pink, lace lingerie that set my body ablaze. "Damn, Kaysyn. You finer than—"

She put her fingers to my lips, halting my words, then slid a couple of them inside my mouth. I sucked them slowly like honey was dripping from them, imagining that I would be sucking her clit like this in just a minute.

As I did, she slid her other hand under my shirt and rubbed my chest, then lightly dragged her nails down it. I swore my dick was about to bust out of these jeans. Goosebumps were all over me, and I felt a chill go up my spine. That was a sure sign that I needed to get my ass out of here. I wasn't trying to form a deep connection with nobody. I had a feeling that this woman would turn me out if I let her.

I released her fingers, and she grabbed my shirt, pulling it over my head. I bit my bottom lip, then said, "Kaysyn."

"Shh. Don't say shit else. Let me fuck you first, then if you're able to, you can fuck me back."

I frowned, but before I could debate, she grabbed me by the dick, causing me to lose all train of thought. She quickly pulled my pants down, since they were already hanging off my

ass, and didn't waste any time sliding her hand into the waistband of my boxer briefs and grabbing ahold of my dick again. I watched her brows twitch.

"Mm hmm. This dick finna take you to another level, beautiful. This shit finna have you goofy and halfway past stupid," I said, quoting Tink's song "Goofy".

Her eyes met mine, and for a moment, I saw some shit in them that said she didn't give a fuck. That turned me on like you wouldn't believe. I grabbed the back of her neck with one hand and gripped her ass with the other, pulling her to me. A slight moan left her lips just before I slid my tongue in her mouth. When I kissed her at the wedding reception a week ago, I never imagined that just that would turn me on as much as it did.

However, that shit had nothing on what I was feeling right now. That last kiss had caught her off guard, so she couldn't adjust fast enough to really participate. But now... *shit!* I pulled away from her slowly, taking her bottom lip part of the way. I bit my bottom lip again. She was so fucking beautiful. Her big, expressive eyes, perfect, full brows and lashes, and thick ass lips... I just couldn't help it.

"Say what you gotta say instead of biting your lip."

"You so fucking beautiful. I'm anticipating what your pussy gon' feel like wrapped around my dick. You challenged me like you thought I would be scared to say what was on my mind, Kaysyn. I ain't no pussy about nothing. The only pussy in this room is the one between your legs."

"I'm not intimidated by you, nigga. This pussy finna turn yo' ass out. Don't say I didn't warn you," she said as she slid her lingerie straps off her shoulders and off her big ass titties.

As she was about to pull it over her hips, I stopped her. "Naw. Leave that shit around your waist."

I lightly slid my palms over her erect nipples, teasing her and preparing her at the same time. Her head went back slightly as her breathing got heavy. I lowered my head and licked where my hand once was, then pulled her nipple into

my mouth. I slid my hands in the sides of her thong and gripped all that ass. Shit, I couldn't wait to grip that shit while she was sliding up and down my dick.

I sucked her nipple slowly, and I swore my eyes rolled to the back of my head like I was receiving some sort of pleasure from this. I supposed my pleasure was the fact that she was being pleased. That was different. Usually, I didn't care one way or the other. I wanted to make sure Kaysyn was pleased, as with every other woman, but pleasing Kaysyn was hitting me deep, and I didn't know why.

I released her nipple and stood up straight. She grabbed me by the neck and stared into my eyes for the longest. After releasing her grip, she slid her hand up my neck to my mouth. "I love this shit," she said in a soft voice.

"What you love?"

"This grill. It's so fucking sexy."

"I'm about to give you a few other things to love in just a minute."

She slid her thumb across my top lip then the bottom one. "Mm. I hope so, because I have plans to paint your face."

I yanked her panties and tore them off her, then lifted her in my arms. The look of pleasure on her face was so fucking sexy. "Don't drop me, Seneca. I don't need you to prove your strength."

"Oh, but you do. I need you to know that I'm finna handle the fuck out of this body... every inch of it. Have you on some Lizzo shit."

I duck walked to the bed and dropped her on it, then completely pulled off my pants. The smile on her face made me smile too, something I didn't really do too often. "What'chu smiling for?"

"You duck walking. I was hoping you hadn't forgotten that your pants were at your ankles."

"I'm too smooth for that shit."

I went to my bag and pulled out the condoms and brought them to the bed. I strapped up as I stared at her. My shit was leaking already. She spread her legs and allowed her hand to travel the length of her upper torso until it reached her pussy. When she started playing with her clit, her head dropped back. *Shit!*

“Kaysyn, look at me while you do that shit. I wanna see the pleasure on your face. I’m gonna let you finish, because I want you to feel the drastic difference between your fingers and mine.”

Her breath seemed to catch in her chest as I stared at her, stroking my dick while her pussy creamed from her touch. That was some good shit. I made my way to her because I couldn’t wait any longer. “You see how long it’s taking you? Give me two minutes, baby.”

I moved her hand out of the way and slowly licked my way to her center. Pushing her legs wider, I glanced up at her to see she was playing with her nipples. I didn’t expect her to be a shit talker or to be as sexual as she was, but I was happy about both. I brought my face to her pussy and released a slow breath on her clit as I lifted her left leg, causing her to tense her body slightly. Tension made it easier to orgasm in some women... or so I heard.

I swirled my tongue around her clit, and she gasped like she’d been gut checked. I could feel the tension in her leg, and that was just what I wanted. Starting a steady rhythm, I sucked her clit slowly as I pushed two fingers inside of her. Luckily, I had long fingers. Her spot was practically hiding up there. After I began massaging it while sucking her clit, I felt the tremble in her legs. “Oh shit! I’m cumming!” she screamed out.

Her creamy goodness flooded my mouth, and I digested every bit of that shit. When I lifted my head, I could feel her juices traveling through my beard. Kaysyn’s eyes were closed, but when she opened them to see what I was doing, I shoved my dick inside of her. She wasted no time pulling my face to hers to suck my lips. Suddenly, she pushed me off her, and she squirted all over the place.

I was confused as hell as I sat next to her, reevaluating what had just happened. I would have taken that shower without a problem. She turned to me. “Sorry. I didn’t know how you felt about me squirting all over you.”

“When I’m in that tight ass pussy, don’t ever interrupt that shit.”

Her pussy had closed in around me, and I felt like I was in love. *Fuck!* She looked away from me for a moment, then she went to her knees and straddled me. “I’m sorry. You forgive me?”

Her titties were right in my face, and I could barely concentrate on anything else. She positioned my dick where he needed to be and slid down my shit. I wrapped my arms around her as she began riding me. “I can’t help but forgive you.”

She circled her hips, and I couldn’t help but curl my toes. She was doing some shit to me mentally, and I couldn’t stop it. I stared into her eyes as she stared right back, and her gaze didn’t waver. She grabbed ahold of my beard, then released it and slid her fingers through it. I glanced down at the lingerie across her stomach, then gripped her ass.

I’d never been with a BBW. I’d flirted with quite a few. Had I known the pussy was like this, I would have flirted harder. “Lay back, Seneca. Let me work this big dick.”

I bit my bottom lip and did as she asked me to. She brought her feet to her sides, and she started a slow bounce. After a couple of bounces, she grabbed ahold of the headboard to help keep her balance, and she wore my dick out. I slapped her ass multiple times, egging her on. “Oh fuck! I’m ’bout to nut!”

She fell to my side, pulled that fucking condom off, and digested all my swimmers. *Shit!* I had to protect my manhood. There was no way she would have me in here screaming. She said she wanted to fuck me, and she did that. Fucked my whole life up.

CHAPTER 1

SENECA

ONE AND A HALF YEARS LATER...

“**Y**ou got a lighter on you?”

I turned to Ali and nodded. I pulled it from my pocket and handed it to him. We were in Fiji for Chad’s wedding. I’d finally gotten a passport. That shit took forever. I never really had a reason to get one, but since I had been fucking with the Berottes and working this job with Ali, I knew I had better get one. When Chad blessed us all a few months ago, I was grateful that I’d already applied.

The only problem was that Kaysyn’s ass was here. After our first encounter over a year ago, we couldn’t get enough of one another. That pussy had my name on that shit now, but she was fucking with me. After a year of having her, she took it away from me like I meant nothing to her. Her husband was taking her through the ringer. He wouldn’t sign the divorce papers, and he hit her while he was protesting that shit. I wanted to be there for her, but instead, she pushed me away.

Now I had to sit here in an intimate space with her. She was in Chad and Lexi’s wedding also. I was irritated as fuck. I was in the wedding, but thankfully, I didn’t have to walk with her down the aisle. Ali got that task. This was silent torture. No one here knew what I was going through on the inside. Everyone knew about our affair since her mother blew up our spot the same day Chad gave us all the money months ago.

However, I believed Arrow and Ali were the only ones that knew how I truly felt about her. I’d been trying to move on, but her pussy put some shit on me that I couldn’t get rid of. The worst part was that it made me want to know more about her... her heart. I’d gotten to know every part of her, and I fell in fucking love with her ass, only for her to move on like I didn’t mean shit. *Maybe I didn’t.*

As Chad and Lexi danced, I downed my drink. “You gon’ go talk to her, or you gon’ sit here and mean mug everybody?”

I turned to see Ali staring at me with a smirk on his face. “Man, fuck you and her.”

“Mm hmm,” he said, then took a puff of his blunt.

I stood from my seat, then pushed it in as he stared up at me. “You leaving?”

“Yep. Going back to my hut. Y’all have fun.”

I glanced around the area, and everybody looked so happy, even Kaysyn. I slowly shook my head and left, only to run into Arrow and his lady, Lynn. Everybody was coupled up except me and Ali. Ali didn’t give a fuck though. Maybe I needed to be on whatever it was he was on. “My bad, bruh. See y’all tomorrow.”

He frowned, then excused himself from his lady. “What’s up? Why you leaving?”

“I sound like a weak ass nigga, and I surely feel like one. Yo’ sister. That’s why I’m leaving. You know how I feel being in her presence. I can’t handle that shit. You would think I would be over her by now. It’s been almost six months since that day that nigga assaulted her at her house. This shit ain’t like me. I’m going find some pussy to get into. Y’all have fun.”

“Man, don’t let her run you off.”

“Fuck you, nigga. She ain’t running me off. But out of my respect for you, Axton, and the Berottes, it’s best I leave. My mind keep telling me to go snatch her up and...” I glanced at him. “You know the rest. So, I gotta go.”

I walked off, not waiting for him to respond. Whoever said money didn’t buy happiness, they were right like a muthafucka. I was five million dollars richer and miserable as fuck. When Kaysyn wasn’t around, I was able to function, but at the sight of her, everything came to a screeching halt. Why in the fuck did I have to fall in love with a woman that didn’t want me? This shit wasn’t right. This was probably how women felt when I led them to believe we would be more than a fuck. This was karma. Well, I’d learned my lesson.

When I got to my hut, I undressed and took a shower, then sat on the back deck and stared out at the water it was situated on. Pulling out a joint that I'd gotten from Ali yesterday, I sparked up. I didn't know where he got the shit from or if it was even legal out here, but I was willing to take a chance. I needed it to calm my nerves.

When I heard baby noises, I knew Joyy had made her way to my hut. "Seneca? Where are you?"

I rolled my eyes and put my J out. I stood from my seat and went back inside to see her standing there with one of the boys. I still didn't know who was who. They weren't identical, but I kept forgetting. "What's up?"

She frowned. "What's up with *you*? Why'd you leave the reception?"

"I'm tired as shit. After I finish smoking, I'm going to bed."

"Are you serious? We were going to party afterward. Mama and Mama Nissa, along with Ms. Shirlene and Ms. Patricia are going to watch the kids so we can have a good time. You still tripping on Kaysyn?"

"Man, ain't nobody thinking about your lil friend. I got other shit on my mind," I lied easily.

"Mm hmm. If you say so."

Lying had become easy since I'd been Kaysyn's secret nigga. I couldn't tell anybody when I was spending time with her. I'd have to lie about my whereabouts. Ali always found out, though, so I just started telling him the truth. I just needed to get back home so work could keep me busy. I'd sold the embroidery shop in Houston, so I'd permanently moved to Beaumont. When I didn't say anything else, she said, "Okay. Well, maybe the guys will hang out without us before we leave. I hate to see you secluding yourself. I'm worried about you, Seneca."

I stepped closer to her and put my arm around her. "I'm good, sis. Worry about all them babies you gotta take care of. Which one is this?"

“This is Talon. He has the least amount of hair.”

He stared at me with a frown on his face. I grabbed him from her and said, “You ain’t gotta mean mug me like that, lil man. Quit tripping like you don’t know me.”

He smiled slightly and brought his hand to my mouth. They all did that shit when they saw my grill. I slowly shook my head, then kissed his head and gave him back to my sister. “There are plenty women out there that could probably use a good time. I think I would rather see you out there fucking around than to be in your hut by yourself.”

I frowned at her, then chuckled. “You wild. I’m good though. I just wanna rest. We had a wild night last night and barely got any sleep. I’m tired as fuck.”

“Okay. I’ll leave you alone. Get some rest.”

She kissed my cheek, and I walked her to the door, grateful that she dropped it. Joyy knew I was feeling a way about Kaysyn, but she didn’t know details. She didn’t need all the details. Kaysyn was her best friend, and I didn’t need her trying to talk to her about me, although she probably did that anyway. I didn’t need to give her new material to discuss. As I watched her walk the wooden walkway to her hut, I couldn’t help but think about Kaysyn and just how beautiful she looked.

The dress she wore had her titties on display, and besides her smile and her ass, they were my kryptonite. If I didn’t give a fuck about Axton and Arrow, I would have fucked her senseless tonight. I never pined over a woman like this, and the shit felt like a cancer eating me from the inside out. I took a deep breath and headed back inside.

When my phone vibrated, I pulled it from the pocket of my shorts and saw it was from Jungle. That nigga always had some shit going on. *How was the wedding?*

It was cool.

I supposed since I responded right away, he thought it was a good idea to call. “What’s good, nigga?”

“Yo! I got some shit for you when you get back, if you interested.”

“You know I’m always initially interested. I’ll hit you up when we touch back down from that long ass flight.”

“That’s what’s up. So I know Lexi was a beautiful bride. I always knew she was just wildin’ out because she was hurt.”

“Yeah. She *been* in love with that nigga. How many times y’all fucked?”

“Only like two or three times. I was shocked Chad broke me off though. That nigga gave me five hundred G’s. That’s a real ass nigga right there. Even though we were protecting him, he could have been salty knowing that I was a part of Lexi’s roster.”

He chuckled, then I heard him take a deep breath. He was smoking as usual. That nigga smoked more than Ali. I started running shit for him the minute he got out of jail. Actually, I was first introduced to his fine ass sister, Fawn. She was running shit for a lil while until her nigga, one of those Gutierrez brothers, helped get Jungle out of jail and set loose in the wild again.

So to say we were familiar with one another was an understatement. When I decided to leave the drug game behind, he was cool with it. His father had built a dynasty, and I knew hell would freeze over before he totally let that shit go. Milton ‘Ice’ Patterson was feared in all of Texas. When some nigga in his own camp helped take him out, along with his son Mega, all hell broke loose.

That was when the Gutierrez brothers stepped in to help since their family was friends of the Patterson family. Jungle couldn’t even attend his father’s and brother’s funerals because he was locked up. Those muthafuckas wouldn’t allow that nigga out because of the shit that surrounded their deaths. Sometimes I thought that shit still affected him. He never wanted to talk about Ice and Mega, and he was extremely protective of Fawn. She was the only family he had left since his mother had died during childbirth, just like Chad’s mother.

It was coincidental how both mothers died while giving birth to little girls. So if nothing else, he and Chad could relate on that subject. I'd overheard them talking about it once. Jungle was having a rough day and had come to the office to pick up some shit from Ali. He opened up about it, and that was when he and Chad bonded somewhat. So based on that alone, I wasn't shocked that he broke him off.

"I'm sure you getting plenty pussy out there, so I'ma letchu have at it. Don't forget to come holla at me. I got some more info that I feel like is need-to-know information."

"A'ight, nigga."

I ended the call and stared out at the water for a minute. *Fuck Kaysyn*. I couldn't let her do this shit to me. I'd been moping around too fucking long. I went to my bedroom and got dressed, then headed out to do just what Jungle thought I was doing.

The minute I stepped out of my hut in my linen shorts, short sleeved button-down linen shirt, and my canvas polo shoes, I saw her fat ass bouncing in the leggings she had on. I sniffed as I checked my pockets to make sure I didn't forget my wad of money. She stopped walking to talk to Joyy, until Joyy smiled at the sight of me.

When Kaysyn turned around to see who Joyy was smiling at, her face reddened a bit. She scanned me from head to toe, and I could tell that just the sight of me turned her on. It didn't help that I was semi-hard from staring at her. I was more than sure she could see my print when I walked. I didn't give a fuck though.

"I thought you were tired as fuck?" Joyy asked, her voice filled with sarcasm.

"I am, but how many times a nigga gon' be in Fiji? I'll sleep when I get back to boring ass Beaumont."

I walked past them, but not before licking my lips and intentionally scanning Kaysyn's fine ass body. Her nipples were happy to be that close to me, because they were hard as fuck. She couldn't deny what I did to her body, just like I

couldn't deny what she did to mine. But I wasn't the one denying it. Her ass... she was the one.

When I caught up with Ali, he said, "Nigga, I thought you were staying in."

"Naw. Fuck that. I need to see what I can see. We in Fiji, muthafucka!"

Ali chuckled. "'Bout time you came to your senses. Let her see you moving on, and she gon' be right there tryna get back at'chu when we get home. Shiiid, if she wait that long. She still staring at'chu. I would let her ass see me having the time of my fucking life."

I slapped his extended hand. "You shol right, my nigga. Let's go get fucked up."

I walked with Ali as we headed out, following behind Dylan and Skyler. We ended up at White House Night Club. I could tell it would be a whole fucking vibe in here. The music was loud, and women were everywhere. There weren't many black people here, but we were about to turn this shit out. As soon as we got a table, the women ran up on me and Ali, since we were the only two in attendance that didn't have a woman on our side.

I loved my black women, but I wasn't gon' turn down no pussy. I had a few condoms in my pouch in my pocket. One in particular came and sat her ass right on me. I didn't know what the fuck was going on, but shit, they were bold in this muthafucka. I glanced around the club to see everybody having a good time, but Kaysyn was staring right at us.

I gave her a smirk as I slid my hands over the woman's hips. She began winding her shit on me, but my gaze didn't leave Kaysyn's for a moment. When my hands slid to the woman's breasts, she finally looked away, clearly bothered. It was time for me to get back to who I was. Love was a fucking waste of time, and it had taken up residence at my address long enough. That shit was getting evicted.

CHAPTER 2

KAYSYN

“Why you don’t see how good we are together? I can take care of you and the kids. This nigga need to be handled immediately. Have you seen your eye, baby? If the police didn’t have him, I would be going find his ass to put him out of his misery.”

“That’s why I can’t be with you, Seneca. Why can’t you see how your lifestyle would destroy my career?”

“So I’m good enough to fuck, but not to have your heart. That’s what you telling me, Kay? That’s the bullshit you sticking to?”

“That’s what it was supposed to be! We were supposed to be having fun. That’s it! Now you wanna fucking change things. I’m not with that! I’m a damn school superintendent. What I look like dating a known drug dealer? For all I know, you could be the one that fucked my husband up.”

He backed away from me as his eyes turned cold. “First of all, I don’t care about that nigga enough to waste my good shit on him. I was fucking you while he was still living wit’chu. Secondly, I ain’t got shit against him. Not so Luckey ain’t did shit to me. He was actually pretty cool. So, if you wanna blame somebody, find another target. I told you what was going on with him because I felt sorry for you. You were hurting because you love that nigga. You deserved to know. But I see how you really feel about me.”

I immediately regretted what I said. I just couldn’t be in a relationship with him, and I didn’t understand how we even

got to this. "I'm sorry. I'm just frustrated. We're supposed to just be fucking. How did we get here?"

He came closer to me and wiped the tear that slid down my cheek. "You know exactly how we got here, Kay. You put that cougar pussy on a nigga and didn't hold shit back. You the only one I'll even admit this shit to. You turned me out. After the first time, I wanted to know more about the woman that took my fucking manhood and put it in her purse."

I turned my back to him, and he slid his arms around my waist. "Tell me a chill don't travel down your spine when I talk in your ear this way. Tell me yo' pussy ain't spit out its affection for me, even while we're arguing. Tell me these goosebumps on your skin ain't because you feeling me as much as I'm feeling you. Tell me your fucking heart ain't filled with love and adoration for me. Tell me, Kaysyn," he said, then licked my neck, causing a soft moan to escape me.

My head was hurting, and I was dizzy as fuck still, because of the slight concussion, but Seneca had me so fucking turned on now. I couldn't concentrate on shit but how I wanted to suck his love for me right out of his dick. "I wanna do more than have your pussy praising my existence. I want your heart, girl."

I turned to him and immediately went to my knees, jerking his pants down as he allowed his saliva to drop from his mouth right to my lips. I let it roll down my chin and continued yanking his pants down as I stared at him. I was addicted to his dick, but this would have to be the last time. Being with him wouldn't be good for my children, my reputation, or my career.

I had better cherish everything about him, because he'd just proved just how dangerous he could be. He already had my heart, but I had to take that shit back.

I woke up sweating, my clit pulsing, and my nipples hard as rocks. Seneca had been fucking up my sleep for a while, but now memories of how he pleased me were taking an even bigger toll on me. I took a deep breath and got up to head to

the shower area. Thankfully, the kids had stayed with my parents tonight since we all went out to have a good time.

Seeing Seneca give that strange woman his attention had bothered me more than I thought it would. Watching his dark hands slide all over her body after knowing just what his touch did to me pierced my heart. I thought I was over him and was totally over the time we shared. It was clear tonight that I was not.

My hut was about three down from his, and I could see when he brought a woman back with him. Why couldn't he just stick to our arrangement? My feelings had gotten involved, too, but I knew how to keep them subdued. He broke the rules and wanted me to do the same. I couldn't. My job was on the line, and he knew it. Since when did a fuckboy and whole street nigga catch feelings like this?

I allowed my wavy hair to get wet as I thought about how fucked up my life was. Although Chad had given me money like he did everyone else, if I wanted something to pass down to my children, I had to keep working. I'd put two hundred thousand in investment accounts for each of them, and I used the other money to pay off debt. Our house took up just about half of what I had left.

Since Luckey was MIA and no longer contributing to our home in no capacity, I'd gotten behind on the mortgage. After all the fees and shit that were tacked on, it took nearly three hundred grand to pay it off and another thirty grand in back taxes. It was a miracle they didn't take it from me. After paying off other random bills and my vehicle and stocking up on groceries and stuff the kids needed, I had one hundred thousand left. That was before paying for this trip.

After financing this trip, I would be down to probably a little over seventy grand. I had to save some of that for repairs at the house. One of our bathrooms was out of commission, and I didn't want that to turn into a bigger problem. I also had to reinsulate the house. I was grateful for Chad giving me that million dollars. He didn't know just how much I needed it. Nobody did.

I made decent money, but with Luckey spending up every dime we had, even with me creating another account for our bills, I quickly realized that the school district didn't pay shit. Luckey's job as an architect was what kept us afloat. His job was why we could afford everything we did. It was why I could save money. His infatuation with weed had turned into something totally different, something he couldn't fight. He had no choice but to succumb to whatever that nigga that sold it to him laced it with.

Luckey would never knowingly smoke anything more than weed. He loved his family. He wasn't the same man anymore, and that was killing me. All the arguments we had about him spending up all the money... I thought he was giving it to his mom or that he was cheating on me. I would have never thought he'd become an addict.

I was so worried about him. He'd nearly lost his career, and he'd definitely lost his family. He was out there doing God knows what, God knows where, and we were left to fend for ourselves, all because a muthafucka had no regard for another human. If Seneca wanted to kill someone, he could start with whoever did this to Luckey.

I cheated on my husband because I wasn't happy. I had no idea his changed behavior was something beyond his control. He didn't even know how it happened. Our separation was hard. Seneca had thought he revealed something to me I didn't know. By the time he told me, I already knew. Luckey had told me. That was why he was so angry that I'd filed for divorce. He promised me he would get help. I'd tried committing him, but none of that worked.

I knew I had to let go before my kids figured out what was going on. They were already devastated that he was no longer living with us. However, I needed to look out for myself too. I couldn't go through this downward spiral with him. Being that he knew something was wrong but refused to do anything about it was what had me seeking legal advice. I didn't want to give up on him. I loved Luckey with everything in me.

Knowing everything Axton's mother-in-law went through with her ex-husband was a determining factor. Mrs. Anissa

had it hard trying to help him. He only continued to drag her through hell with him. Luckily for her, her boys were older. DJ and Jamel were able to help her through it. Neither of my babies had reached ten years old yet.

My emotions overtook me, and I broke down in the shower. This was a lot, and this mess I had going with Seneca was only making shit harder. I needed to completely let go of him, but I didn't know how. I didn't know how to let go of the best dick I had in my life. Luckey had been great, but Seneca was on something totally different. He pulled the freak out of me. His dick game had me doing all types of nasty shit... stuff I would have never done before him.

Pulling myself together, I got out of the shower and began drying myself off. However, the knock at my door halted me. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning. I remained still and quiet to see if they would go away, but they knocked again. I quickly grabbed the terry cloth robe from the hook and made my way to the door.

After tying the belt tightly, I opened the door to see a shirtless Seneca. I had to have lost all the color in my face. He brushed right past me, and I hurriedly shut the door. "What are you doing?" I asked as he pulled me to him and gripped my ass.

I fought against him, but my pussy had to be leaking. The thought that he'd just been with another woman gave me the strength to fight him away from me. I stared at him as I huffed. He was drunk. "Come on, Kay Baby. I know you miss me. I fucking miss you, baby."

"Seneca, you need to leave. We can't do this. Besides, didn't you just fuck somebody?"

"Naw. I couldn't even go through with it. My dick wouldn't stay hard, because the woman I really want is three huts down. Kaysyn, put me out my fucking misery, baby. You know this your dick."

He dropped his basketball shorts, revealing my weakness. My eyes swept over every inch of his slender and slightly defined, dark chocolate body. His faded haircut and flawless

beard to his size fourteen feet had captivated me and damn near had me salivating. He walked closer to me as he bit his bottom lip. His grill caught my attention, and it was something that I loved on him. He knew that.

His dick had ruined me. When he got close to me, I went to my knees and slurped that black mamba into my mouth. “Ahh, fuck!” he yelled.

He threaded his fingers through my wet hair, then held it on top of my head as he watched me take from him what I wanted. Seeing his dick hanging there, I knew I had lost the standoff. Seneca couldn't just respect my wishes, and it was because he knew I was a fucking fiend over his dick. I deep throated it unashamedly as I stared up at him.

Before he could nut, he pulled me up from the floor and pushed me against the wall. He lifted my left leg into the crook of his arm and grabbed my neck with his other hand, then kissed my lips. My pants were the only sounds being heard, and I was at the point of begging him to fill me up. His hand slid from my neck, and he untied my robe, allowing it to fall open. He licked his lips at the sight of my breasts, then immediately brought his mouth to it.

He sucked my nipple slowly but firmly then swirled his tongue around it. When he released it, he penetrated my folds, and my eyes rolled to the back of my head. “Oh shit!” I said as I dropped my head back to the wall.

“Mm... you know I love this wet shit. Quit running from me, Kay. Fuck! Tell me how much you need this dick.”

I panted as my orgasm coated his dick that quickly. There was no way I could form intelligible words at the moment. It was impossible. “Yo' pussy need me, girl. She fucking excited about my presence.”

He pulled out of me then led me to the bed. I lay in it and spread my legs for him as I anticipated feeling his tongue on my clit. He slowly made his way to me, hovering over my body. When he kissed my lips, I felt the gush from my lower lips. The way this man ruled my body should have been unlawful.

His tongue stroked my mouth in ways that promised a time I wouldn't soon forget. There wasn't an encounter with Seneca that I could ever forget. He was eight years younger than me, but damn if he wasn't years ahead of me sexually. He pulled away from me and kissed and sucked his way to the main attraction. He didn't waste time when he got there. His tongue landed right on my clit, taking me to outer space, because I saw fucking stars.

I slid my hand over his head as he made love to my pussy like never before. I couldn't believe I had held out for nearly six months, denying him access to the very thing that gave us both life. I didn't realize that I was on a steady decline to death until now. My body was withering away without his touch... his tongue... his dick.

My orgasm was on the verge of flooding the area when he slid his fingers inside of me. I loved his long fingers. "Seneca! I need your dick! I'm telling you... I need it!"

Before I could cum, he stopped and immediately slammed his dick into me, lifting my bottom from the bed. I wrapped my arms around him as he pulled my leg to my shoulder. I curled the other around his waist as he dug into me, showing me how much he missed me. My juices squirted all over him as he pounded me mercilessly.

He was eerily quiet until he said in my ear, "I'm not letting go. I don't give a fuck what you say. You mine. Period. You fucking belong to me."

He bit my earlobe as he destroyed my insides, grunting and whispering expletives. My nails dug into his skin as he fucked me up, causing me to flood him once again. "This my pussy, Kay. You hear me? This my shit!"

Right after, he nudded inside of me as he bit my shoulder. That was a common occurrence since my body had gone through an early menopause. It was why Luckey and I adopted a little girl. When I made the mistake of telling Seneca that, he was sure to show me his clear test results. We'd abandoned condoms ever since.

He pulled out of me, straddled my chest, and laid his dick on my lips. I sucked that shit until I damn near threw up on it, coating it with that fresh lube for what I knew he wanted next. He licked his lips then lifted my legs and guided his dick to my asshole. He pushed inside as I did my best to relax. “Ahh, fuck, Kay! Shit!”

He stroked my ass as I held in my screams. I couldn't have people coming to my hut, thinking I was in trouble. My *ass* was in trouble. I began patting my clit, and I squirted all over Seneca's abdomen, and I was more than sure that some of it went to my ass, providing more lube. I began finger fucking myself, which gave me dual stimulation. My entire body was shaking, and I could barely contain the jerks, like I had Tourette syndrome.

Seneca grabbed my neck once again and fucked my ass like he had something to prove. After a few seconds, my body seized. “Mm hmm. That was what I was waiting for, Kay.”

I couldn't fucking move. My ass had nudded all over his dick, and that was what it did whenever we were together. He began really pounding my asshole like he didn't care about its functionality, then pulled out and shot nut all over me.

He collapsed next to me, panting uncontrollably. I closed my eyes, realizing that my body belonged to him. There was nothing I could do about it. However, I knew I still couldn't give him what he wanted. My heart wasn't ready. I would fuck him forever, but nobody could know.

CHAPTER 3

SENECA

I couldn't keep my eyes off her for the rest of the trip. My drunk ass should have stayed in my hut. When I tried to spend time with her the next day, she shut me down. My feelings were all in my damn chest. She told me we couldn't be together, and I should have believed her. I didn't know why I thought my dick would convince her of how much she needed me and missed me. She didn't need me. She needed dick. That shit wasn't personal.

As I exited the plane, I watched her walk with her parents and her kids to luggage claim. "Baby, you okay?"

I looked up to see my mama walking next to me. I put my arm around her and said, "Yeah. I need another nap."

She chuckled. "Yeah. A vacation after the vacation."

"Exactly."

She walked away to get her luggage, and I made my way to Kaysyn. I stood next to her, trying not to be obvious to her kids. "Answer my phone call later," I said in a low voice, then began looking for my luggage.

She didn't respond to me, but I knew she fucking heard me. I saw the goosebumps invade her flesh. Whether she would do it or not was yet to be seen. The other night was on my mind like it was seared to it with a hot iron. My dick hadn't felt that much pleasure since the last time we were together.

I grabbed my luggage, and my eyes met hers. I thought she would look away, but she didn't. She only nodded and gave

me a slight smile. *Hmm. Interesting.* As I walked away, Ali clapped my back and asked, “What you getting into when we get back?”

“Shit. I need to go by Jungle’s place. You’ll take me, or do I need to get an Uber?”

“Naw. I got’chu. Let’s ride.”

We dapped Arrow, Jamel, and Shy. Those were our niggas. Chad and Lexi wouldn’t be coming back for another couple of days. I hugged my sister and my mama, then dapped my brother-in-law, Big Zay, and gave Dylan a head nod. I watched Ali flirt with the older women, Mrs. Anissa, Ms. Patricia, and Mrs. Shirlene, then we headed out.

“I don’t know why you tryna give women heart attacks.”

He chuckled. “Naw. It’s not that.”

“Then what is it?”

“Sometimes, women need that reassurance that they are doing something right. A kind word from me may be the only kind word they’ve gotten all day. It’s just habit to do that with all women now.”

“Yeah. That’s why Talisha ass was hooked. Her ugly ass probably never got a kind word from anybody.”

He slid his hand over his face but didn’t say shit. I was quiet for a minute, then I asked, “Yo! You fell for her something?”

“Nigga, naw! I just didn’t want to have to take her ass out.”

I nodded, not sure if I believed him or not. I hoped my boy didn’t fall for that ugly ass girl. When DJ called her ugly, I thought his ass was clowning. But shat! When I saw that fucking gremlin, I knew he didn’t stress just how ugly she was. Apparently, Ali had a soft spot for women. I’d never witnessed him disrespecting a woman until that bullshit with Talisha. Honestly, he really didn’t disrespect her. What I couldn’t figure out though was why he volunteered to take her off DJ’s hands if he knew he was that sensitive toward women.

We made it to the car and headed to Jungle's house. He didn't live too far from the airport. Ali sparked up as soon as our asses touched the seats, and he was quiet all the way to Jungle's. Although I only portrayed to be a street nigga, I had *some* sense, and my sense was telling me some shit was up with that woman. Whether he admitted it or not was another thing.

He and I were close, but I didn't know much about his inner workings. I supposed that was one of the things that made him a successful P.I. He knew shit about everybody but was still able to keep a low profile, even from his friends. I was willing to bet Shyrón knew some shit about him that none of us knew, though, since they'd practically grown up together. From what Ali had told me, they'd known one another since they were like twelve.

When we got to Jungle's, I could tell that there was something going on. A lot of cars were here, so they were probably having a meeting of some sort. Ali looked over at me. "I hope he ain't tryna get you involved in no drug shit. I been letting you slide on the weed, but you know we ain't selling that shit. I gotta stay clean, or I could be risking my business."

"Naw. I ain't sold anything in a minute. I mean, you the P.I. You would know if I was."

He gave me a smirk, and we both got out of the car. I didn't know why he was so concerned with drugs anyway. Some of the shit we did was a lot worse than drug sells. But maybe that was all Shy was checking on. We had a lot of contracts with people in high positions. It was why we moved the way we did. He wasn't for anything reckless. That was how I used to move. When he solicited my help when Chad was a target, he made it clear that everything had to go through him. Otherwise, he knew how to make a muthafucka disappear. I believed him.

When we got to the back gate, Vegas, Jungle's bodyguard and right hand, let us through. We slapped his hand and shook it, then proceeded to the backyard. Jungle was in the midst of a meeting with his top guys. I recognized all of them, so we fist

bumped. Ali knew them too, because they used to run in the same circles back in the day.

Jungle ended his meeting early and said, “I know y’all vacation niggas prolly tired and shit, so I’ll just get right to it. Seneca, I found not so Luckey. That muthafucka in rehab. Checked himself in.”

I rubbed my hand down my face. I’d planned to have him taken out, but I didn’t know now. I glanced at Ali as he stared at me. He knew about my plans. Solo shit was another rule. We couldn’t be a rogue muthafucka. I sat back in my chair as I thought about Kaysyn. If Luckey got himself together, I wondered if she would want him back. It wasn’t like he chose to be an addict, but at the same time, some things had occurred that could have her be totally done as well.

“What’chu thinking?”

“I don’t know, man. Let me think on it.”

Jungle and Ali glanced at each other but didn’t say anything to question my decision. “A’ight. Just let me know. You know we got’chu,” Jungle said as Ali nodded repeatedly.

I stood from my seat, but Jungle said, “Hol’ up before y’all go.”

I sat back in my seat, waiting for what he was about to say. He gave his guys a look, and they all stood and walked away. When they were out of sight, he said, “I got good intel that said Jericho might be in trouble.”

Ali frowned, then Jungle lifted his hand. “Before you go charging that nigga up, he don’t know. He ain’t done shit, but this nigga from his past is out for blood. Nigga moved here from Florida a few years ago and was talking to one of my guys about a hit. When he said the name Jericho, my dude came straight to me about it.”

“You know how they connect?” Ali asked.

“Mm hmm. He’s his brother.”

“Aww fuck!” I said.

Jericho was Haitian and moved to Florida when he was a kid. That was how he met Ali. Some shit went down that caused him to leave Florida in a hurry. I didn't know what happened exactly, but whatever it was had caused his brother to come looking for him. That shit could put us all in danger. "We need to tell him ASAP," Ali said. "I'll call him to the office when we get back. All hands on deck for this one... well, except Chad for now."

"Seems like not so Luckey is lucky after all, because his ass gon' definitely have to wait until we have this shit under control," I said.

"Can you come to Beaumont, Jungle?"

"Yeah. I'll follow y'all out."

We all slapped hands. and Ali and I peeled out of there. As if Ali was reading my mind, he said, "I'll let Jericho brief y'all on all the details."

I nodded as my phone vibrated. I took it from my pants pocket and saw a text from Kaysyn. I bit my bottom lip as I opened it. *I just got home and settled. I'll call you later, because we need to talk.*

I rolled my eyes. I didn't get a good vibe from that shit. "What's wrong wit'chu?"

"I fucked up the other night."

He glanced at me as he drove. "I saw yo' drunk ass. So now you all in your feelings again, only for her to tell you y'all just fucking."

"Basically. That was why I had been avoiding her. When I'm around her, I'm weak as shit."

"You're in love with her. That's what that shit will do to you. Been there, done that. That's why I ain't tryna get caught up with nobody right now. I got too much shit to accomplish."

"Shit. I wasn't tryna get caught up either. She married. I don't know if that nigga ever signed the divorce papers or not. I was just fucking around too. After that first time, she was the only woman I wanted. I tried to fuck other people, and that

shit just wasn't happening. Dick wouldn't even work right, because all I could think about was her. That shit happened in Fiji."

"Well, I don't know what to tell you. You can't force her to be with you. So either you can leave her alone, or you have to take what you can get."

"Yeah. I can't settle. That's gon' fuck me up. I'm tired of hiding shit. But whatever. I'm gon' see what she have to say tonight when I get home. She can say what she wants. What she feels for me goes beyond fucking too."

"What she feels and what she does are two different things. What good are her feelings if she won't act on them? Let's be honest, man. What we do can be a turn off. We aren't always on the right side of the law. You know that. How's she supposed to take care of her kids if the two of you don't work out? Because she will most definitely lose her job. They will look at it as she's doing everything you do. She probably signed some kind of code of ethics or some shit."

"And what is it that I do? They will be basing that on how I look, not what they know. I don't sell drugs no more, although she thinks I do. How they gon' look into me?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I guess you're right. She's just worried and paranoid. I mean, look at your IG account. You can't blame her, Seneca."

"Well, she should've kept her pussy to herself then."

He chuckled, but wasn't shit funny. If she wanted to play games, then I'd have to show her that I could play games too.

CHAPTER 4

KAYSYN

“**Y**ou slept with him again, didn’t you?”

I frowned because I was trying to figure out what led my mama to believe that I’d been with Seneca. “What?”

“Kaysyn, I’m your mother. I can see it all over you. You gon’ end up jobless. Is he going to take care of you and my grandbabies?”

“Mama, sleeping with him doesn’t equate to having a permanent relationship with him, and respectfully, if I did, that would be my business. Come on, Ell and J.”

I got out of the vehicle with my parents, and I was fuming. My mama didn’t know how to mind her business. Just because Arrow and Ax told her every second of their lives didn’t mean I would do the same. My love life was none of her business. If I wanted to talk about it, then I would, but until then, as long as I wasn’t depending on them for anything, she should leave me alone.

I would never ask them for a dime. I would take my kids to a homeless shelter before I permanently moved in with them. My business was just that... my business. No one was in danger, so I wasn’t obligated to disclose every detail. My mama watched me with sadness in her eyes, but she needed to dry that up and figure out how to come at me respectfully and not like I was still her teenage daughter.

I closed the door after the kids got out, and we made our way to the door. After unlocking it and allowing them to walk

in first, Ell turned around and asked, “Is Grandma talking about the man that came here the night Daddy hit you?”

My light skin tone had to have turned red. This wasn't something I wanted my kids worried about. They were already worried about their father. “He was on the trip too. Are y'all dating?”

“Let's get settled, baby, and we'll talk. Okay?”

“Yes, ma'am.”

Great. I didn't want to explain anything more than I already had to my nine-year-old son. We hadn't had the talk about sex yet. It made me wonder if he even knew what Mama meant when she asked if I'd slept with Seneca. I headed to my room with my luggage as I took several deep breaths. I needed time to myself, but I knew there was no way possible I would get it. Luckey was still in the fucking wind, and I surely wouldn't trust him with our kids if he weren't.

My mind was in turmoil, but not in enough turmoil to where I couldn't text Seneca. *I just got home and settled. I'll call you later, because we need to talk.*

I was more than sure he would have a whole attitude after reading that. I hated that I'd succumbed to him. He would never agree to my way. Fucking him gave him hope... false hope, although I'd said repeatedly that was all I wanted. Seneca represented so many things, but one of the main things was trouble. The nigga took pictures with his money for the gram. *Stupid shit.* If only his personal life was on the same level as his dick game. That shit could be civilized, classy, gentle, thorough, passionate, and efficient. It could also be rough, toxic, destructive, and addicting.

The bad qualities were good. I needed his life to reflect that way too. His bad qualities shone brighter than the good ones. It was like he only wanted everyone to know his bad boy qualities. I got to see how sweet and passionate he could be. The way he begged me to be his nearly broke my heart. I understood that he couldn't allow society to see his soft side, but he didn't have to show them ‘ignant muthafucka’ all the time either.

His reputation wasn't something to brag about. While he had never been to prison, his lifestyle screamed trouble. He slabbed his pants most times, wore excessive jewelry, and always flashed his money. The nigga represented fuck boy all day by unashamedly flirting with women. That shit was childish, and I didn't have time for it. *That dick was everything but childish.*

I began unpacking and reorganizing things. Disorganization irritated me. Everything had its rightful place, and I tried to help my kids understand that. Jericka seemed to understand that concept. Ellington, not so much. When I was done, I took my laundry basket to the washroom, then headed back upstairs to help Jericka.

When I walked into her room, she was sitting on the floor, separating her things. "Hey, baby girl. You need some help?"

She turned to me and smiled. "Yes, please."

I smiled back and sat on the floor with her. She instructed me like the little boss she was. "This pile is dirty clothes. These are the clothes I didn't get to wear. That's my souvenirs that I have to put on my shelf, and this is stuff that goes in my bathroom."

"Okay, baby. I'll take your dirty clothes if you're done adding to the pile."

"Yes, ma'am. Mommy, I had fun on vacation. I wish Daddy could have come with us."

I swallowed hard but smiled at her. I couldn't respond to what she'd said. Luckey had left a bad taste in my mouth. Had I known what was up from the beginning, we could have done something sooner. I hated that it had to sink to levels that I considered myself being above.

I grabbed her dirty things and headed out of her room as Ell was leaving his room with his basket. Taking a deep breath, I made my way downstairs. I started Jericka's load of laundry first, then turned to him to grab the basket from him. When I turned to leave the laundry room, he was still standing there. I grabbed his hand and led him to the couch.

After we sat, I asked, “What did you hear Grandma say?”

“That you were sleeping with someone.”

“Do you know what that means?”

“That you were hugging and kissing a man.”

I slid my hand over my hair and closed my eyes. “I was, baby. I’m sorry you had to hear it that way.”

“I saw him kiss you when he was here. I don’t know if I like him. He looks mean.”

“I know. Looks can be deceiving. He’s really a nice guy.”

“Is he your boyfriend?”

“No. I mean, I’m trying to decide if I want that with him. He makes me feel happy when he’s around, but I need to make sure that he’s a good fit for us.”

He nodded. “I wish Daddy would call. I hate what he did to you. I want to tell him that.”

I bit my bottom lip. My children should be able to stay kids for as long as possible. However, because of Luckey’s bullshit, Ell was having to grow up fast. I didn’t like it at all. He understood more than I gave him credit for. I was just grateful the word sex didn’t leave his mouth. My phone vibrated, so I looked away from him to check it. It was a message from Seneca. I looked back up at my son to see him watching me.

“It’s him. What’s his name?”

“Seneca. I don’t want you to worry about this right now. If things get more serious between he and I, then I’ll introduce him to y’all, okay?”

“Okay. I love you, Mama.”

“I love you too, baby. So much. I want you to always know that I got you and Jericka. You two are always my main priority. Stay a kid for as long as you can. Being an adult ain’t all it’s cracked up to be.”

He chuckled, then hugged me. “Okay. So can I go play my game?”

I smiled and said, “As long as all your things are put away. That has nothing to do with being an adult. That’s part of being responsible for your things and being clean and organized. Nice try, son.”

He shrugged his shoulders with a smile, then headed upstairs. I opened the text message to see, *Come outside right quick.*

I closed my eyes and huffed. This would have to be something we would discuss. He couldn’t just pop up at my fucking house. I opened the front door to see him and Ali in my driveway. He got out of the car and met me at the door. “Seneca, you can’t just—”

He laid his soft lips against mine, and I couldn’t help but concede. When he pulled away, he said, “I know we need to talk. I just needed to see you again before I left the area. I feel like this talk ain’t gon’ go in my favor. I told my boy that I refused to settle for anything less than what I want, but I need you, Kay. So whatever you want is what I’ll do. Nobody have to know, but you’re mine. Period. No other niggas. If Luckey shows back up, not even him. You *my* girl.”

“Seneca, Luckey is still my hus—”

“Naw. That nigga is the father of your children. That’s it. I been trying to give you my understanding and sensitive side, thinking that was what you needed. That ain’t what you need. You need a nigga to boss up on your ass and fuck you into submission. I’m just the one to handle that shit.”

As I parted my lips to speak, he slid his hand in my leggings and stroked my clit right up against my front door. “Make this pussy cry out to me, Kay.”

He bit my neck as I dropped my head back. This man had a hold on me and refused to allow me to let go. “Kaysyn, you belong to me, baby, and I belong to you. Real shit. Fuck! I want you.”

“Senecaaaa... oh, fuck!” I whispered harshly as I gripped the back of his neck.

My body submitted to him and gave him just what he'd asked for. He swirled his fingers inside of me, then slowly pulled them from my leggings and brought them to his mouth. “Mm. Yeah. That's my pussy. You hear me? Mine, Kay. I'll call you after my meeting at the P.I. firm. Consider yourself bossed, baby.”

He kissed my lips and walked away, leaving me breathless. *What the fuck?* I watched them back out my driveway and made my way back inside the house. I sat on the couch, trying to wrap my mind around what the hell he just said. Pretty much he just told me I was his. I'd never been the type of woman that allowed anybody to tell me what to do, but for some reason, the way he just did that turned me the fuck on.

I made my way to my bedroom and started the shower. My panties were wet as hell, and I needed to get that shit off me. Going back to the room to check on Jericka, I saw she was arranging her things on her shelf. I made my way to Ell's room, and he was stuffing clothes in the drawer. I slowly shook my head and headed back to my bathroom. I grabbed my phone and called Joyy. She was the only person I could really talk to.

“Hello?”

“Hey. You home yet?”

“Not quite. What's up?”

“Seneca.”

“Aww shit. What has he done now?”

“Make me feel things I have never felt. Joyy, I ain't supposed to be falling for him. That nigga just came here and stroked me into an orgasm on my fucking porch! He said we can be a secret, but I'm his. I was so caught off guard I couldn't say shit in response. Seneca spells trouble.”

“I'll talk to Seneca's cynical ass. He always up to some shit. Kay, in the meantime, what are you going to do? Do you want to be with him? Be real with me.”

“I know that’s your brother, but, Joyy... his dick game is unbelievable.”

“Hell naw. I almost threw up in my damn mouth. No, ma’am.”

She made the gagging sound, and I couldn’t help but laugh. “I’m sorry, but I can’t resist him when he’s in my presence. At the same time, I know I can’t be in a relationship with him. I don’t even know how I’ll respond if Luckey shows back up with some sense. Despite everything, I still love him, Joyy. What happened to him wasn’t completely his fault. I’ve been clear and straight with Seneca, but he pushes all my buttons. He says he’ll be my secret, but I feel like it’s only for a matter of time.”

“Kay, you need to cut him off until you decide what you want. He’s been clear about his wants just as you have. If you can’t give him what he wants, you need to let go. This is headed for disaster. I ain’t tryna be bailing him out of jail.”

I huffed loudly. “I know, but I told you, his di—”

“Nope. You not finna say that shit again.”

“Fine. Well, I’ll talk to you later. I’m about to take a shower. I love you, Joyy.”

“I love you too, Kay.”

I ended the call and stared at myself in the vanity. I didn’t know what the fuck I was doing. This was getting more dangerous by the day, and it seemed I didn’t have the strength to make it stop. Hell, when I tried to make it stop, he wouldn’t let me. Why did I feel trapped?

CHAPTER 5

SENECA

“I killed my father when I walked in on him raping my sister.”

We were all sitting there speechless. Jericho was enlightening us on what happened to where he had to flee from Florida. I didn't know that nigga was that rogue. Here I was thinking he had a law enforcement background and shit. He slid his hand over his face. It seemed like he was reliving the shit.

“I was eighteen and had just gotten off work. I left an hour earlier than normal because we were slow. I ran the streets at times, but I was focused on stacking my paper so I could get out of my parents' house. My pops... that nigga was something else. My older brother, Jules, was following in his footsteps. They had no regard for women. My mama and lil sister depended on me to protect them. I took that job seriously. My boy that was supposed to be looking out had to leave early due to a family emergency.”

I could tell that exposing this shit was bothering the hell out of him. He looked to be trembling. Jungle was the first one to speak. “So we need to handle Jules.”

“I really wish I could talk to him first. So if we can take him down and give me the opportunity to address him, I would prefer that.”

“I understand that's your brother and shit, but that nigga wanna take you out, Jericho. He can't be trusted, man. After y'all talk, let's say he agree to leave that shit alone, but takes

you out when you think things are cool. It'll be too late. Sometimes blood don't mean family. We ain't blood, but I consider you my brother. We been cool since we were five years old in kindergarten in Miami. You my brother, and I don't wanna see you go out that way," Ali said.

That was the most sensitive I'd ever heard him sound. He and Jericho had a past and probably shared a lot of shit with each other. If they'd been friends for that long, then he probably knew everything about him. Jericho nodded repeatedly. "I hear you. I still wanna talk to him first. Let him know that he left me no choice. I think he believes that I'm out here by myself."

"Yep, and we gon' show his ass just how many niggas got your back, bruh," I said.

I stood and slapped his hand and hugged him. When I pulled away, I said, "That's why you took that job protecting Lexi to heart."

He swallowed hard and looked away. "You still love her?" I asked.

"Naw. I think I'm over her. It's just the situation that made me soft towards her. Her dad wanted his baby safe, while mine was destroying his. Thanks for having my back."

"You ain't ever gotta thank me for that. You my nigga. Honestly, I know I'm a grown ass man, but I watch how you and Ali move. That shit made me tone down a lot. I mean, I still got some recklessness in me, because, I mean, I'm Seneca, the cynical one. But I've grown because of y'all. I always got your back, just like you have mine."

He slapped my hand and hugged me again. After everyone else had patted his back, Ali took the floor. "So I'm gon' send all y'all a picture of what this nigga look like. When he's spotted, whether here or in Houston, call for backup. I ain't tryna lose sight of him. Jungle gon' have his crew on him in Houston. They know not to kill him. Actually, ol' dude that he told that to, ought to bring him in to holla at you, Jungle. That'll be easy as fuck. Then we'll all be waiting on his ass."

“That was what I was about to say. We got it. I’m gon’ call Vegas right now and tell him to have that nigga meet me when I get back.”

“A’ight. We got a couple of things coming up. There’s a benefit for St. Elizabeth coming in a few months. I’ll need everybody on that job. That’s a big one. If we can get more like that, I can give y’all a raise.”

Some of the other guys were slapping hands. When Shy walked in, everybody got quiet. He walked over to Ali and slapped his hand. He turned to us and said, “I need a couple of bodies on Jamel and Sandrene. She’s going to court to sue her daddy’s side piece. That bitch tried to kill her. Well, a couple of her sisters and brothers came up with the bright idea to approach her and threaten her. They are barely grownups, but my worry is that they could hire someone else to carry out their dirty work. I need them to know that they done fucked with the wrong one.”

“Amiko mentioned something about that shit, Shy. I got them. Me and Ali can handle it,” Jungle said.

Ali nodded in agreement. “A’ight. Thanks,” Shy said then started talking to Ali.

Ali stopped their conversation and said, “That’s it for now, guys. I’ll be in touch with what we got for next week. In the meantime, keep your eyes open. You should have my text.”

Everybody dispersed and headed to their rides. I watched Jericho walk out with Jungle. They were probably discussing how the shit would go down. When I got to the car, I immediately called Kaysyn. It was already nine, but I knew she was still awake. It was summer, and she was off until after Fourth of July. “Hello?” she said softly.

“What’s up, baby. You good?”

“Mm hmm.”

I frowned slightly. “What’chu doin’?”

“Fucking myself,” she whispered.

My dick got rock hard within seconds. “Kay, damn. I need to be the one fucking you. I wish y’all could come to Beaumont.”

“Me too. I’d ride your dick all night. Why you show up at my house like that earlier? Mm. Senecaaaa.”

I started my car and drove my ass straight to Highway 90. My dick had me going all the way to fucking Atascocita to fuck her up. “I’m ’bout to bring you some real dick instead of that rubber shit you using.”

“I’ll be asleep before you can get here.”

“Then you gon’ wake yo’ ass up, Kaysyn. I need to feel that shit on my dick, and apparently, you need to feel me too. Whenever you need me, I’m cummin’... all inside of that fat, wet ass paradise.”

She didn’t respond to me, but I could hear her breathing. “Don’t bust, Kay. Let me take you there. You got my dick hard as fuck. I’m on my way, girl. I’m almost in Nome. At the speed I’m driving, I’ll be in your shit within the hour. Make sure yo’ kids sleep so I can get at that pussy.”

“It’s summer. They won’t be asleep, but I can sneak you in.”

“Whatever. You know I don’t give a fuck about them seeing me, but I don’t need no mishaps on your end.”

“Oh, God... Hurry, Seneca.”

She sounded like she’d been drinking. That was why she was all relaxed and shit. I was gon’ fuck her to sleep as soon as I got there.

I SENT HER A TEXT TO COME LET ME IN, AND SHE HAD ME GO to the back door. I’d gotten here in forty-five minutes. That was normally an hour-and-fifteen-minute drive. That pussy had me running red lights and shit. She opened the door in a short, silk robe, and I couldn’t help but grab her ass. Her hair

was everywhere, and that shit had me leaking. Grabbing my hand, she led me to a room off the kitchen and turned on a lamp.

As she closed and locked the door, I looked around the room to see a couch, computer, desk, and chair. This was her office... or his. I didn't give a fuck. Turning my attention back to her, she let the robe she had on slide from her shoulders. She was in a bra and panties underneath.

“You should have taken that shit off too.”

She licked her lips as she unfastened her bra and let it fall from her arms as she slid her panties off too. I watched her walk to her desk and sit on top of it and spread her legs. Quickly pulling my shirt over my head, I sat in the chair in front of her then pulled her to me by grabbing her legs and lifted them to my shoulder.

I placed my hands under her lower back, just to make sure she was good, and dove tongue first in her pussy. I closed my eyes and swirled my tongue around her clit. It was already peaking out, waiting for me. Her hands gripped my head, and she straightened her legs, holding them in the air as I sucked up her juices. I slid my thumb in her pussy to lube it up, then took it out and pushed it in her asshole while my first two fingers slid in her pussy. I continued sucking her clit while I finger fucked her, then glanced up at her to see she was pinching her nipples.

She was finna squirt all over me. I loved that shit too. Within seconds, that was exactly what happened. She creamed on my tongue shortly after. This shit was what I needed in my life. She'd turned a nigga out. I almost wanted to take out this grill and suck her juices out that shit. Pulling my fingers out of her, I unfastened my belt and yanked my pants down enough to get my dick out.

I pushed inside of her and maintained my position. I swore she gave me life. A tremble made its way through my body as I opened my eyes to stare at her. Stroking her shit slowly, I watched her lashes flutter. She dropped her head back and

moaned. “Tell me this better than that rubber shit,” I demanded.

“Yeeeeesss, Seneca. Yeeees.”

I swore a chill went up my spine. Whenever she moaned and said my name like that, it touched my soul. “Whenever you want this dick, it’s gon’ be here. You know why?” I asked as I began plowing into her.

“Cause this my shit!”

“Mm hmm. Fuck!”

Her legs were trembling, and I knew she was about to detonate on me. I was ready to see her cream all over my dick. I slowed my pace once again and applied pressure to her mound, and she came every-fucking-where. I watched my dick penetrate her repeatedly, and when that white shit appeared, I pulled out of her and sucked all that shit out of her. I loved this woman.

Pushing back inside of her, her pussy gripped me like it was scared I would leave again. That shit was about to pull the nut right out of me. I was addicted. She was the only woman I’d been with in nearly a year. That shit I tried to do in Fiji reminded me of why I hadn’t fucked with nobody else. She was it for me. If I couldn’t have her, I didn’t know what I was gonna do.

“Ahhh, fuck! I’m about to nut all in this pretty pussy. Cum with me, Kay. I know you got another one in you.”

She started crying as she nudded all over me again. I mean like audibly crying. I slowed my pace as she said through her cries, “Please don’t stop, Seneca. Please...”

I bit my bottom lip as I watched her cry and pinch her nipples. I didn’t know what was going on, but I didn’t have a good feeling about it. Although I’d bossed up, I knew that she could go extra lengths to be away from me. She just didn’t know that I’d push the fucking envelope to be in her life though. It wouldn’t be easy for her to get rid of me.

Thinking about that shit prolonged my nut. I was glad I didn’t go soft though. Lifting her leg over my shoulder and

turning her body to the side a bit, I fucked the shit out of her. She was biting herself, trying to keep quiet. Simply because I felt like I knew what she was up to, I didn't spare anything. I gave her everything I had, fucking that pussy up like it stole from me. Technically, it did. It stole my heart and soul. I didn't give it willingly, nor did I have a choice in the matter. It snatched that shit from me like my plans and feelings didn't fucking matter.

My body shivered as she whisper-screamed and cried, and I nudded as I shoved my dick balls deep in her pussy. When I pulled out of her, she sat up and pulled me to her, hugging me around my waist. She laid her head on my chest, and I kissed her while she continued to cry. I pulled away from her.

“What’s up, Kay? Why you crying, baby?”

She shook her head and looked away from me. I grabbed her chin and turned her back to me. “Tell me.”

“This has to be the last time, Seneca. If I can't give you what you want, I'm only setting us up for disaster, knowing that you want more. I'm sorry, but I can't do this no more.”

I pulled away from her and pulled my shit up over my dick. She did exactly what I thought she was going to do. I grabbed my shirt and pulled it over my head, then pulled my wet chain out of it. That shit was wet from her squirting everywhere. I brought it to my mouth and licked it while she watched. “What did I tell you, Kay?” I asked calmly.

“Seneca—”

“What did I fucking tell you?”

She remained quiet as she stared at me. I swore she was about to have me crazy as fuck. After staring at her for a moment, I said, “I told yo' ass that you were mine. Ain't shit you can say to change that. I don't give a fuck about your fears about us. I'm finna make you overcome that shit. It'll be your choice whether that's voluntarily or involuntarily. Fuck you thought?”

“Seneca, I have kids to protect.”

“What the fuck you think I’m gon’ do to ’em? They yo’ babies? They’ll be my babies too. Don’t play with me, Kay. I’m not the muthafucka for these games. I can show you better than I can tell you.”

She slid off the desk and grabbed her shit from the floor, then put her robe back on. She took a deep breath, then opened the door to make sure the coast was clear. Before I walked out, I kissed her lips and grabbed her ass. I slid my tongue in her mouth, and she reciprocated. I didn’t know how she thought she was just gon’ walk away from me.

I pulled away from her, then left out of the back door. I bit my bottom lip and took a deep breath. She was finna make me fight for my fucking life.

CHAPTER 6

KAYSYN

My phone was ringing nonstop. I was sick of the shit. I just wanted to lay up in my house today and do nothing. Ell's friend's parents had called to see if he could go to the movies with them, and I jumped on the opportunity to have time to myself. Jericka was at the mall with my mom. She came to the house earlier and apologized for the second time about her outbursts about Seneca.

The first time she brought up my affair with Seneca, she'd done it in front of all Ax's in-laws and his wife. I was so fucking embarrassed. She didn't have a clue about what was going on in this house between Luckey and me. The years of arguing about money and the last year about his whereabouts had taken a toll on me. For at least three years, we went back and forth constantly about him spending too much money, me shuffling money around trying to pay shit, and robbing Peter to pay Paul. I was sick of that shit.

It was easy to fall for Seneca's advances. He was offering me shit I wasn't receiving at home. I was naturally flirty already. I made the first move when I met Luckey's fine ass at school. I needed attention from my man. I thrived on it. When he and I started arguing, we stopped fucking. I wasn't getting so much as a 'hey, beautiful' from him. I was starving, and Seneca was offering me a meal.

When my phone started ringing again, I saw it was Axton, for the third fucking time. I answered. "Don't you have an office to run, Dr. Ax?"

“Man, I’m on my lunch break. Why you ain’t answering the phone?”

“I was trying to rest while I had time to myself. Jericka is with Mama, and Ell is with a friend at the movies.”

“I just wanted to check on you. That’s all. You good financially, right? What about the house? You need any maintenance or repairs?”

“I’m fine, Ax. A company is coming to reinsulate the house tomorrow. That should help with the light bill. A plumber is coming to check out the bathroom Thursday.”

“And you good financially?”

“Yes, Ax. Chad gave me a million dollars.”

“Yeah, but I know you. How much did you put up for the kids?”

I exhaled slightly. “Two hundred thousand each. I used the rest to catch up on the mortgage and pay it off and pay off my car and other smaller bills. After the insulation and bathroom are done, I should have about fifty-five grand left. Plus, I still have my salary from the school district. I’m good, Ax.”

I normally didn’t tell them so much, but I knew he would keep asking. It was because he and Arrow loved me like a second mother instead of just their sister. I babysat them a lot growing up while Mama and Daddy were at work. It was always the three of us. Whether I was feeding them or spanking their bad asses, we were always home alone.

“Okay, Kaysyn. If you need anything, please tell me. Don’t let any bills get behind. I got’chu, sis, and you know Arrow does too. I love you.”

“I love you too, Ax. Kiss my baby for me.”

“I will. Enjoy your free time.”

“I plan to.”

I ended the call and lay in bed, staring at the ceiling. My mind couldn’t stay off Seneca. I’d blocked his number when he left. I had to get him out of my system. My body was still

tingling from all the orgasms I had last night in such a short amount of time. I could barely make it up the stairs. I couldn't even take a shower until this morning. *This shit hurt*. I missed him already. It seemed that it was worse this time than it was six months ago.

After Chad gave me that money, I felt obligated to go to his wedding. While I really wanted to go, I didn't want to be in Seneca's presence. He'd been avoiding me too. Now we were doing this shit to ourselves all over again. He was either losing his fucking mind with his possessiveness, or he was in love with me. I wanted to believe it was the latter, although he hadn't said so.

He had me dickmatized for sure. Just knowing that I had to let it go again, had me in tears. The way I cried while he fucked me into next year was crazy. I wasn't a crier, but the thought of letting him go, once again, tore me to shreds. His dick game was impeccable. I would tell that to anyone who would listen. At this point, I didn't give a shit about what anyone in the family thought. They already knew what was going on, and no one had addressed it but my mama.

My brothers literally had nothing to say about me fucking Seneca. Arrow said that I was going to hurt him. So apparently, he and Seneca had been talking. I knew they hung out from time to time. My phone began ringing again, and the doorbell rang at the same time. "Ugh!"

I just couldn't be alone. The number on my phone was unfamiliar and wasn't saved. I got up from the bed after the bell rang again and slid on my robe. I'd been in my nightshirt all day. When I got to the front door, I checked the peephole and froze. It was Luckey.

"Why are you here? I filed a restraining order!"

"Kaysyn, I'm so fucking sorry. I'm so embarrassed about what happened. I've been in rehab, and that's why I haven't been in touch. I know you didn't want to hear from me after what I did. I miss you and the kids. This shit has been tearing me up. Never in my life would I have ever thought about

putting my hands on you. Kay Kay, please. Please, baby. I just wanna see the kids.”

I kept the chain on the door and opened it to get a better look at him. He looked sober. “They aren’t here, Luckey.”

“Can I come in and talk?”

I shook my head. “I don’t think that’ll be a good idea. Maybe we can meet somewhere.”

“McDonald’s on 1960?”

“Okay. Give me time to get dressed.”

He smiled. “Thank you, Kay.”

I nodded, then closed and locked the door. Luckey looked so good. This was what I was afraid of and why I wouldn’t give all the way in to Seneca. I had a lot to figure out.

Nobody have to know, but you’re mine. Period. No other niggas. If Luckey shows back up, not even him. You my girl.

Seneca’s words came to mind. He couldn’t dictate who I could and couldn’t see. I shook the memory of his words from my mental. I needed to talk to Luckey and see what went on. I needed to hear his words of apology and remorse just to assure that the man I once knew was still somewhere deep inside him. Our last encounter was my last memory of him. I needed to replace it. After getting dressed, I grabbed my shades, then decided to call my mama. I didn’t want her and Jericka to come back and I not be here. I had at least another couple of hours before Ell returned.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Ma. I’m meeting Luckey at McDonald’s. He wanted to talk.”

“Okay. Be careful, Kay. You want me and Jericka to meet you there?”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. Let me scope him out first. While I know he was high before, he’s still the man that assaulted me... nearly fucked up my eye. Sorry, Mama.”

“It’s okay. I understand. We’ll be out and about. Call me when you’re heading back home or if you need me.”

“Okay.”

I ended the call, then walked outside to head to my car. My head stayed on a swivel. I was so fucking paranoid. I never heard Luckey leave. He could have been waiting for me outside for all I knew. When I got in my car, I locked the doors and headed to McDonald’s.

When I got there, I saw Luckey sitting inside. I took a deep breath. *Lord, I don’t know what I’m doing. Help me to know what to do.* I got out of the car and prepared to make my way to the entrance. Even after all this time, direct sunlight bothered my eye a bit. I put my shades back on as I walked across the parking lot.

Before I could get to the door, he stood and opened it for me. “Thank you.”

He nodded. I walked over to where I saw him sitting from outside and noticed he’d gotten me some cookies. He knew I loved their chocolate chip cookies. After I sat, I looked over at him. “Thank you for the cookies.”

He nodded again. He rubbed his hands down his pants. “Do you want something to drink?”

“Umm... a small coffee?”

“Okay. I’ll be right back.”

When he left, my phone chimed. Grabbing it, I saw a message from Joyy. When I opened it, I realized it wasn’t from Joyy. *Unblock me.* I closed my eyes. He said that he wouldn’t make it easy for me to leave him alone, and now I believed him. I responded quickly as I saw Luckey heading back to me. *I can’t do that.*

I switched my phone to vibrate and slid it back in my purse. I felt it vibrate in my purse as Luckey set my coffee in front of me with cream and sugar. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

He watched me as I added sugar and creamer and stirred it. "I'm so damn embarrassed, Kay. God, I fucked up big time."

He was so nervous his hands were shaking. I could understand why. I was never shy about saying what was on my mind. There were times where I didn't say anything about his behavior because I was tired of repeating myself, but I always expressed myself. I supposed the fact that I was so quiet was bothering him. Honestly, I was somewhat afraid of him... well, afraid of what he would do. That was why I wouldn't allow him inside the house.

I glanced up at him as he asked, "Do you still want to divorce me?"

I shrugged, but I didn't say anything. Truth was, I didn't know much of anything these days. He reached across the table and grabbed my hand. His hands were still trembling. When my eyes met his, he said, "Please give me time to prove to you that I'm better. When I first noticed something was wrong, I should have done something about it. When I went to get my normal supply, they told me my guy was no longer selling. I just... I should've never bought from that other guy. I'd never seen him before."

"I know your guy was Seneca, Luckey."

I pulled my hands away from him as my phone vibrated again. Pulling it from my purse, I needed to make sure it wasn't my mama or Rashad's mother. It was a message from Joyy's phone. I closed my eyes briefly then opened the messages.

See, you making me resort to being crazy... crazy as fuck.

The next message must have come from Joyy. *I didn't know this fool had my phone. I'm so sorry, Kay. I fussed at him and so did our mama. He was pissed, but I believe he'll be okay.*

"Can I see the kids today?"

"No. Maybe another day. I don't plan on sitting here until they both get home. I came because I was interested in what you needed to say to me."

“I wish I could see your eyes. I love staring into your big expressive eyes.”

“Well, the one you hit me in can’t stand direct sunlight. Since the sun is shining right through this window, it’s bothering me. Ever since my retina was damaged, it’s been that way.”

He lowered his head. “What else did that blow cost you?”

“I had a concussion. I was off work for two weeks. My eye looked horrible. There’s some permanent discoloration right in the corner.”

“I don’t think I could ever apologize enough. God. How are the kids doing?”

“They’re okay.”

“Do they ask about me?”

“Jericka does. Ell is really angry at you for hurting me. Maybe I’ll have them call you tonight.”

He nodded. “I won’t hold you any longer, Kay. I don’t believe there’s anything more that I need to say. Whether we move past this together or not, I want you to know that I love you. I will always regret what I allowed to happen to us and how I hurt you. This is the biggest fuck up of my life, and I’ll never stop being embarrassed about it.”

He stood and helped me to my feet. As we made our way out of the door, he grabbed my hand, and surprisingly, I allowed him too. When we got to my car, I unlocked the doors, and he opened it for me. “I hope to hear from you later so I can talk to the kids.”

I nodded. “Okay.”

After I got in the car and had cranked up, he walked away. I locked my doors and took a deep breath, grateful that things didn’t take an ugly turn. Grabbing my phone from my purse, I took my phone off vibrate, and it immediately rang. I had a feeling it was Seneca, but something told me to answer it anyway so I would know what number to block. “Hello?”

The line was quiet. So I said once again, “Hello?”

“I see you can answer that muthafucka for an unknown number.”

“Seneca, I told you that we had to stop. Why won’t you let me go?”

“Because I can’t. You really don’t want to let me go either. The way you cried before I left told me that it was killing you to do what you’re doing. I don’t know why you gotta make this shit difficult. I’ll call you later. Answer the damn phone, Kaysyn.”

He ended the call, not giving me a chance to say anything in response. I politely pulled up my call log and blocked that number too.

CHAPTER 7

SENECA

“How are you and your lady doing, Arrow?”

“We’re good.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, how much weight has she lost?”

“A little over one hundred pounds.”

“Damn. That’s good,” I voiced.

“Yep. I’m proud of her.”

Arrow, Jamel, Ali, Jericho, and I were at Pour 09, turning up. Arrow and Jamel had both come in from Houston earlier. It was Skyler’s birthday tomorrow, so Dylan was giving her a dinner, which would basically be Sunday dinner. She was pregnant and couldn’t stand a lot of different smells. So they figured their best bet would be to have it at Mr. Sheldon’s house.

I hadn’t spoken to Kaysyn since Monday. That was okay though. Tomorrow I would be going out there and showing her exactly who I could be. She wanted me to be that nigga. The kids would meet me whether they were ready to or not. I knew she’d met with Luckey. I told her that nigga was off-limits too. After the shit he did, there should have been nothing they needed to talk about other than the kids. They didn’t need to meet in person to do that.

Jungle had a guy on Luckey until I made a decision, and he saw him and Kaysyn together at McDonald’s. She was on that bullshit, and it was my job to point her in the right direction

again. It shouldn't be this damn difficult. "Yo! You good, man?"

I looked up to see Jamel sitting there, looking at me with a goofy ass smile on his face. "Yeah. I'm just thinking about something."

"I'm willing to bet three stacks on what, rather who you're thinking about," Ali said.

I stood and went to the bar to get another drink. They didn't need to see how Kaysyn had me by the balls. As I waited for my order, Arrow appeared next to me. "She's not ready, man."

Before I could filter myself, I said, "But she ready for dick. She's basically embarrassed to be with me or some shit. At least around people she knows."

"Naw. Luckey's back, and she's having doubts about which direction she wants to go."

"Fuck that nigga. Once an addict, always an addict. She's willing to put herself and her children in harm's way again because of what? Love? I'm not giving up on the woman I love. Period. She supposed to be with me, Arrow. I know that's yo' sister. Since you love her, too, you need to tell her to leave that nigga alone. If he hit her when he was high or fiending for a high, then that's who he is when he's desperate. He'll strike again. Guess who'll be there to pick up the fucking pieces."

I snatched my drink and downed it, then paid for it and left. My mood was fucked. I needed to calm down. Instead of going home, I went to the person I knew would give me the most comfort. India Roberts. My mama was in town for Skyler's party tomorrow, and she was at Zay and Joyy's house. She always stayed with them to spend time with the grandbabies. She also brought my cousin J'Niya and her daughter, Katera, with her. I hadn't seen either of them in a few months.

When I got there, almost every light in the house was on. I was sure the triplets were having a good time with Katera. She

was only about a year older than them, if that. The triplets were already ten months old. Time flew by. It didn't wait for nobody. When I got to the door, I rang the doorbell. Zay answered and stepped outside, amidst the screams of fun and laughter.

“What’s up, bruh? Shit, I need a break.”

I smiled at him, then pulled a blunt from my pocket. “I’ll share.”

“Hell yeah,” he said, leading me to the backyard.

I had never witnessed Zay smoking, but I could imagine that he needed something to mellow him out right now. Maybe this was a sign that I would fare better by talking to him. Once we sat and I lit it and got the first pull, I passed it to him. He took a pull, then passed it back. “So what’s been good wit’chu?”

“Shit. I actually came to talk to Mama about some shit, but maybe you can help me.”

He glanced at me, and a slight smile made its way to his lips. “Kaysyn, right?”

“Yeah.”

“You love her, and she fucking playing with your emotions.”

I turned to him and just stared at him. “It’s that obvious?”

“I could see it in Fiji. You know I pay attention to shit, even if I don’t say anything. I saw it in your eyes when you saw her, especially at the reception and later that night.”

“I just want to show her that I’m worthy. That she can trust herself to fall for me. We been fucking around for over a year.”

“I know that too. Joyy told me. What I find funny is that the known fuck boy has been fucked over. Well, not funny, but you get what I’m saying.”

“So it’s karma.”

“I didn’t say that. You just met the woman that made you surrender. I just hate that she won’t do the same. You can’t

force her to, though. Why don't you try to romance her? Send her flowers and shit. I know that's probably not you, but you have to do different shit to get different results. She obviously loves sex with you, but what else? Show her you have more than sex to offer."

"Yeah. I wanted to take her to Dallas for a weekend before school started back, but she blocked me. I can't get in touch with her."

"Send her a bouquet to her job Monday and ask her in the note."

I nodded. I had a better idea though. I would hand deliver them and ask her then. "Why would she want to take a man back that nearly fucked her eye up? I get that she loved him and that he's still her husband, but damn. Isn't there a limit?"

"I think she's thinking it was the drugs that had him behaving that way. She's not looking into the long term. Addiction is hard to get over. Watching Joyy fight alcoholism was hard, man. It's a daily struggle, especially when her nerves are shot. Her attitude be on one thousand. I don't think she's considering that. I believe she's thinking things will go back to the way they were before the drugs. It's her naivety and ignorance to the situation."

"I've always said, once an addict, always an addict. That's why they have you confess that you are an addict at those damn meetings, even when you've been clean."

"Yep. Just recovering... a recovering addict."

"So you telling me that my approach ain't working."

"Not for the long haul. If you need temporary relief, then go for it. But to win her in the long run, you gon' have to prove to her that you can handle being in her world. For instance, in her world, you gon' have to pull your pants up, take out your grill, and not be so flashy. That shit is immature, Seneca. I'm not saying this shit to down you or who you are, but if you want her, you gon' have to step up your game."

I sat back and took another pull on the blunt, then passed it to him. His words were floating through my mind, knowing

that if I had to change who I was, then maybe she wasn't the one. "Bruh, maybe she's not for me."

"I know what you're thinking. I'm not saying to change who you are. I'm saying to be versatile. You can't go to a school district meeting or Christmas party with your pants to your knees, man. It screams thug. People only gon' know what you show them. If all you show them is that you all about your paper and constantly flash that shit, it's not gon' go over well. That's all I'm saying. Sometimes you have to be different to gain people's respect. Show them that you are about more than what's on the surface."

I nodded, then took another pull. He glanced at me and asked, "You think I would admit to smoking a blunt at my job? Or that me and my wife fucked at church once?"

I damn near caught whiplash when I turned to him. That smoke choked the shit out of my ass. As I coughed, Zay laughed. Those nasty muthafuckas were gonna get struck by lightning. When I finally caught my breath, I said, "I know you fucking lying."

He slowly shook his head. "Yo' sister nasty as hell. That's okay though. God ordained sex in marriage. I promise God was pleased with our worship."

"Man, you full of shit," I said as I scooted my chair over. "That fucking lightning ain't about to strike me dead because of y'all nasty, disrespectful asses."

He laughed more, and I couldn't help but join him. I realized what Chad was talking about one day at the office. He'd said that Zay was a wise ass nigga. Since he was my brother-in-law, I should have taken advantage a long time ago. "You alright with me, bruh. I appreciate you."

He slapped my outstretched hand, then took another pull from the blunt and handed it back. "Senecal! What the hell you doing here?"

I rolled my eyes, then turned around to see Joyy standing there. She always called me that shit when she was trying to be funny. I pretended not to like it. Shit, I was definitely cynical

at times, so it didn't bother me. She was glowing and happy as shit. I was happy that she was in a good space. I had Isaiah to thank for that. I stood and hugged her. "I needed to talk to somebody. I just didn't know that somebody would be my brother right here."

"Apparently, y'all were doing more than talking. Zay, you smoked?"

He turned the other way and pretended not to hear her. I chuckled as she walked in front of him. When he slid his hands up her legs to her ass, I knew it was time for me to push on. "A'ight. I'm going inside."

They laughed as Joyy fell on his lap. I slid the patio door open to see the babies playing on the floor. "India! What's up, baby? You good?" I said to my mama.

"I got yo' India. Hey, baby. I'm good. What about you?"

"I'm cool. You and J'niya might as well move back. Y'all here more than not."

"Right," she said and chuckled as she stood to hug me.

I held on a little longer than normal. When she tried to pull away and I held her tighter, she wrapped her arms around me and held me until I let go. She placed her hand on my cheek and caressed it with her thumb. She gave me a small smile. "My baby. I love you, sweetheart."

"I love you too."

"You know, it may be time to lay Senecal to rest or at least move him to the background and let the sweetheart take the spotlight."

I frowned slightly until I realized she was pretty much saying the same shit Zay was saying. "I don't know if I can. I been like this a long ass time."

"Yeah, but me and Joyy don't need protecting anymore, baby."

"Joyy may not, but you still do. You my heart, Ma."

She smiled as she lifted Tatum in her arms. “Come sit down, baby.”

Growing up was hard. Once Joyy left for college, I stayed on my grind, hustling to help Mama pay bills and send money to Joyy. When she came back home, it didn’t help anything. She was depressed and not contributing financially. I was still in high school, running the streets. Joyy didn’t find out until I was graduating from school and had been offered a football scholarship to go to Jackson State. When I turned it down, she was angry. The streets was who I was by then.

“I’m so sorry for what I allowed. You were only thirteen, Seneca. I should have put a stop to all that shit back then. I was a horrible mother to allow you to be in those streets. Anything could have happened. You could have gotten killed. All for a few dollars?”

“Ma, this isn’t your fault. I remember you tryna talk me out of it, but I wouldn’t listen. You needed the help. When I gave you that first five hundred dollars, it made me feel like a man. I was taking care of you and Joyy.”

“I should have tried harder, Sen. I feel like I sold my soul sometimes. When you gave me that money, I didn’t say anything else about it. What kind of mother does that?”

“You were an amazing single mother. You were young and didn’t have anyone to help you. Those muthafuckas gave you false hope. Created life with you, then bailed. It was fucked up, and if I was to see that muthafucka and he tell me who the fuck he is, I’d shoot him in his lying ass lips. Joyy’s father too.”

“Yeah, but look where that has gotten you,” she said as Tatum crawled to me.

When I grabbed her, she immediately brought her hand to my mouth. They loved my grill. I moved her hand, then she slid back to the floor. Turning my attention back to my mama, I asked, “Where has it gotten me?”

“Longing for the woman you love. Lonely. Rich but lonely.”

I lowered my head as I thought about Kaysyn. Maybe I should just tell her how I feel, although if she were paying attention, she would already know. I missed her. “Yeah. I talked to Zay, and I’m gonna try a lil bit of what I know to do and what he suggested. If it doesn’t work, then I have to move around.”

“IT’S MY BABY’S BIRTHDAY, AND WE GOTTA TURN UP! SO I invited a couple of bruhs to help me and Shy turn up. I know you like those raggedy ass dawgs, too, so we got a show for you. Just sit back and enjoy.”

Here they go with this stepping shit. These niggas were proud as hell of these fraternities. I didn’t see the big deal. Seemed like a fucking educated gang. *Fuck that.* As I sat there watching, Skyler wiggled in her seat as Dylan shimmied right in front of her. All the women seemed to like watching them do that shit. They were all pretty boys. Shy’s ass was the worst one. Fucking show off. I chuckled to myself as I slowly shook my head.

When “Wipe Me Down” ended and “Atomic Dog” began, Chad, DJ, Arrow, Ax, and Rondo all started barking at once. I glanced over at Ali to see he was laughing and clapping. Those niggas started hopping in the air and shit. I was getting hot from watching them. When DJ did the neck roll and hung his tongue out, Shavozz almost passed out. I glanced over at Lexi to see her glance at me. I stared at her until she looked back, and I gave her a head nod. I wasn’t sure what that was about. However, the minute they finished barking and she kissed her new husband, she walked over to me with their baby.

“Hey, Seneca.”

“What’s up, baby? You good?” I asked, then licked my lips.

She slightly rolled her eyes as I chuckled. I was gonna flirt. Ali was chuckling, too, as he looked her over. Lexi was so

damn fine. Had Chad not done what he was supposed to do to win her back, I would have done my best to hit that. “Ugh! I’m good. I just wanted to check on you. You’ve been quiet. That’s not like you. You’re always talking shit.”

“Well, damn. I’m flattered that you’re concerned, lil mama.”

She rolled her eyes hard and said, “Bye, Seneca.”

Lexi was one of the last people I would tell what was going on in my life. I didn’t know her like that. Mr. Sheldon and Dylan had barbecued, and Zay and Mrs. Anissa had cooked the sides. Alexz and Skyler’s mom had done desserts. One thing I could count on when I came over was good food.

As they were gearing up to sing happy birthday to Skyler, Shy came and sat next to me and Ali. “Jungle just called. He caught somebody looking in Jamel and Sandrene’s windows.”

“Damn. Were they able to catch whoever it was?” Ali asked.

“Naw. When they approached, he took off. It was like they knew Jamel wasn’t there.”

“Why can’t people just do what the fuck they supposed to do?” I asked. “Any word on Jericho’s brother?”

“Naw. Ain’t nobody seen him. It makes me wonder if somebody tipped him off,” Shy said.

“Right. Can all of Jungle’s people be trusted?” I asked. “We had issues back in the day with a rogue muthafucka when I first started running for the Pattersons. Nigga was behind Jungle’s pops and brother getting killed. They were after his sister, too, had the Gutierrez brothers not stepped in to protect her.”

“Between me and y’all...” Ali said in a low voice, “Jericho is very capable of handling himself. Believe it or not, that nigga is the deadliest one on our team. He’s watching his own back, but I think until we find that nigga, I’m gonna put somebody on him. Sen, you want it? You a good shot, my guy.”

“I’ on know. Will he know I’ m tailing him?”

“Nope. And you won’t have to tail him all day. I think I may rotate three of y’ all out, now that I think about it.”

“A’ ight. When we starting?”

“He goes out of town for a job tomorrow. Jack is going with him. So not until next Monday.”

“Okay. I got it. Morning shift is what?”

“Eight to four. That’s cool?” Ali said.

“Yeah.”

We all looked up when we saw Arrow and his woman approaching. “We gotta go. I’ ll holla at y’ all niggas later.”

“Why y’ all leaving so early?” Shy asked.

He glanced at me, then said, “Kaysyn doesn’t want to be alone when Luckey gets there to visit.”

I quickly stood from my chair, knowing that I didn’t want to hear that fucked up conversation. I made my way inside and almost ran into Alexz. “Damn, nigga. Who you running from?”

“My bad.”

She stood there and just watched me. Too many people were starting to notice that something was going on with me. These nosy ass Berottes were all in my damn business. I went to the refrigerator and fixed me a bowl of banana pudding, trying to fight my raging emotions to what Arrow had just said. Everything in me wanted to show up in Atascocita and fuck that visit up.

CHAPTER 8

KAYSYN

“Hey, Daddy! Are you still coming today?”

Jericka was excitedly talking to her dad. They'd been talking to him almost an entire week, so he and I agreed that she and Ell could see him Sunday. Ell didn't seem too enthused. He'd expressed his anger the first time they talked, but after that, he really didn't want to talk to him. He had stepped into the role of being his sister and my protector. Despite how often I told him that I just wanted him to enjoy being a kid, he refused to lax on those duties he'd assigned himself.

“I am, baby girl! I can't wait to see you and Ell. I miss y'all.”

“I miss you too.”

As I listened to them, I could feel my hand trembling. I was nervous as hell to have him in this house. I felt like I needed to call Arrow to make sure he stayed in line. I knew he and Lynn would come without question. “Okay, baby. Let me speak with your mom.”

Jericka handed the phone to me and took off. “Hello?”

“Is six okay for me to come by? I have to run an errand before I get there.”

“Uhh, I suppose so. You won't be able to stay too late. I have to go to work tomorrow.”

“I understand. See you at six.”

He ended the call, and I stared at the phone. Something didn't seem right. I sent Arrow a text. *Can you come to my house later?*

Yeah. We're in Beaumont, but we should be leaving by four.

That's perfect. Luckey is coming to see the kids and...

I gotchu, sis. You don't have to explain. See you at five thirty.

I set my phone by my side, wishing that I wasn't having to go through this. It was at this moment that I knew Luckey and I would never be the same. I was way too nervous around him. I was afraid that maybe he'd slipped up and would be high when he got here. It was like when it came to him, his family left me alone to deal with him. He was always there to help them, but when he fell off, those muthafuckas fell off too.

I was the only person he had, but yet I was the one that got popped in the eye. I just didn't understand what I did wrong in life to deserve this. All my life, I tried to do what was right. I didn't fall off until I cheated on Luckey with Seneca. Maybe that was why I ended up suffering the fate I did. I had to pay for my sins.

After checking on the kids and loading the dishwasher, I lay on the couch, staring at the ceiling, wishing that I wouldn't have made things so messy. While Seneca knew what this was with me, I felt guilty for hurting him. Although he tried to play hard, I knew he was having a hard time with this. Joyy had told me how miserable he looked the other night.

I took a deep breath, knowing that I just needed to be alone right now. I was going to call my lawyer and have those divorce papers served again. My life was in shambles, and I had no one to blame but myself. As I lay here praying to God for forgiveness, I drifted off to sleep.

I WOKE UP TO THE SOUND OF THE DOORBELL. *SHIT*. I SLEPT TOO long, and now I wasn't going to want to sleep tonight. I looked

at the clock to see it was nearly six. *God, let that be Arrow.* When I got to the door and saw Luckey on the other side of it, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Before opening the door, I checked my phone to see if Arrow had called.

There was a text saying they were stuck in traffic. There had most likely been a wreck in all the construction on 1960. I lowered my head and prayed that God would protect us, then opened the door. Luckey smiled as I stepped aside and let him inside. “Hey, Kaysyn,” he said, reaching in like he was gonna hug me.

I flinched, and he looked at me strangely like I didn’t have a reason to be afraid or nervous. I closed the door then called for the kids. “How are you?” he asked.

“I’m okay. You?”

“I’m okay.”

“Have a seat.”

“You don’t have to tell me to have a seat, Kay. I’m not a stranger,” he said with a smile on his face.

I just stared at him. He chuckled, I supposed at my blank facial expression. “Kay, why are you so nervous? Everything is cool.”

I took a deep breath as Jericka came running down the stairs, screaming in excitement. She ran to Luckey and jumped in his arms. I smiled slightly as I glanced at how slowly Ellington was making his way to us. I hated feeling like I was making him interact with his father, especially when he had a legitimate reason to not want to.

I walked over to him and grabbed his hand after he walked down the last step. “It’s okay, Ell.”

He looked up at me, and I gave him the best smile I could muster. He made his way to the couch with Luckey and Jericka as I went into the kitchen. I felt like I was having a fucking anxiety attack. When the doorbell rang, I breathed out a sigh of relief. Making my way to it, I could see Luckey’s eyes dart to mine while Jericka talked nonstop.

I swung the door open to see Arrow and his girlfriend, Lynn. After closing my eyes briefly and taking a cleansing, deep breath, I said, “Hey. Thanks for coming.”

Lynn leaned in and hugged me, and Arrow followed suit as I welcomed them inside. “Uncle Arrow!” Ell blurted and ran to him.

They slapped hands as Lynn followed me to the kitchen. I didn’t miss Luckey’s gaze on me. “Would you like something to drink, Lynn?”

“No thank you. How are you?”

“I’m okay. I’m just a little nervous. This is our first time alone with him since that night.”

“I understand your hesitancy. I’m glad you called Arrow.”

I nodded as I sat at the table. Lynn looked to be texting someone, then looked up at me and smiled. Arrow joined us in the kitchen with a frown on his face. “Ell ain’t tryna be a part of that bullshit.”

“I know. I just want him to give his dad a chance.”

“I know. “

“Did he speak to you?” I asked.

“Yep. I gave his ass a head nod and kept it moving. But umm... listen. I kind of said where I was coming to in front of Seneca when Shy asked why I was leaving so early.”

“Shit.”

“That man been miserable, Kay. I know I haven’t known him as long as you, but I’ve never seen him like this. That nigga always running his mouth, flirting, and flashing his money when we go out. He ain’t doing none of that. He didn’t even have his grill in today. Can you believe that?”

My eyebrows lifted. I didn’t think I’d ever seen him without his grill. I shook my head. I could only hope that he didn’t show up out here. “Did you say why you were coming here?”

“Yeah.”

I slid my hand down my face, knowing that it would be some shit between him and Luckey if he showed up here. Being that he used to sell to Luckey, Luckey may take my involvement with him personal... like Seneca pursued me because of what he knew about him. I was the one who pursued Seneca... like a fucking fool.

“Kay?”

I looked up to see Arrow staring at me. He grabbed my hand. “Everything is gonna be fine. I don’t think he’ll show up. When he heard what I said, he walked off and went inside the house. He looked pissed, but not pissed enough to pull up. I just know how much he misses you.”

He glanced down at our hands as he gently rubbed the top of mine, then looked back up at me. “I have to ask. Are you thinking about being with Luckey again?”

“I was, but not now. Seeing just how nervous and uneasy I am around him is a sign. How can I be with a man I don’t trust? What if he falls off the wagon again and it’s worse than this last time? I can’t knowingly put my children in harm’s way.”

He nodded and released my hand as I heard Ellington yell. “I hate you!”

I bolted from the chair and ran to the front room in time to see him running up the stairs. “I got him, Kay.”

Arrow went up the stairs behind him as Luckey stared at me. Jericka had hugged him around his waist. “What happened?”

“Have you been talking to him about all of this?”

“No. Why do you ask?”

“He was recalling stuff I had no clue that he knew.”

I frowned slightly. “Stuff like what?”

“Just about how we were arguing about me spending money all the time.”

“Well, he’s not deaf, Luckey. It’s not like we were quiet about it.”

He kissed Jericka’s head and said, “Give me some time alone with your mother. I hope to see you in a couple of days. I have to schedule it with your mom, okay?”

“Okaaaay,” Jericka said sadly. “You just got here.”

“I know, baby. Maybe next time I can stay a little longer.”

She hugged his neck and said, “I love you, Daddy.”

“I love you too, baby.”

When she headed upstairs and I turned back to Luckey, his gaze had turned dark. “He said that you had a boyfriend. Is that true?”

My eyebrows rose. “No. I was talking to someone, but I stopped because I needed space to decide what I was going to do.”

“So the kids have met him?”

“Not exactly. He came to my rescue after you nearly knocked my eye out of the socket.”

He slid his hand down the back of his head. “Do you have to say it like that, Kay? I feel bad as it is. I wasn’t in my right mind, and I’ve apologized more times than I can count. Apparently, he went on vacation with y’all too. Where did you get money for a vacation? Did he pay for that?”

“Luckey, first of all, that’s my personal business. When you contribute to my finances, I may satisfy you with an answer to those sorts of questions. Secondly, as long as you have this attitude, I will always bring up how you were a bullshit nigga in that moment. It’s gonna take me more than a few months to get over that. The man that I loved committed the ultimate crime against me. I will never forget that.”

“So I guess I’ll be getting more papers to sign after all. I thought that maybe we could work through this. Ellington has never been a disrespectful child, but he’s changed because of all this.”

“He hasn’t changed, Luckey. He’s calling you out on what you did wrong. What did you say to him?”

“That what happened was between me and you, and that I was working on things with you.”

“Wrong answer. That baby had to see me hurting at the hands of his father. It’s not between me and you. It’s between you and everyone this affected. Your ignorance is shining through. Ell had to watch you decline the same way I did. He went from having you at every soccer practice to you missing games. So don’t tell me that he wasn’t affected. You were here but absent at the same time.”

He slid his hand down his face. “You’re right. I owe him an apology.”

I was surprised he conceded so quickly. He seemed like he was gearing up for war a minute ago. Maybe he’d forgotten Arrow was here. “Is it okay if I see them Wednesday?” he asked.

“I suppose so.”

“Who were you talking to?”

“That’s none of your business, Luckey. If I were to ever resume talking to him, I’ll let you know before introducing him to the kids.”

He took a deep breath. “Okay. I don’t have a choice but to be okay with that. What time do you get off Wednesday?”

“Three.”

“I’ll get here around four thirty or so.”

“Okay.”

He walked to the door, and I was beyond grateful. I just wanted him out of here. I wouldn’t be at peace again until he was gone. When he grabbed the doorknob, he let it go and turned to me. Before I could back away, he kissed my lips. I briefly went back in time, remembering how much I loved him. His lips were soft and inviting, and I nearly got lost from the feel of them.

He grabbed the doorknob again and rested his forehead against the door for a moment, then he opened it and left without another word. I put the chain on the door, then allowed the tears to fall down my cheeks. I hated that our marriage had come to this. We were so in love and couldn't get enough of each other at one time. His addiction came in like a raging storm and tore our union to shreds.

When Arrow came downstairs, he immediately came to my rescue. He pulled me in his arms and said, "It's okay, sis. I'm happy you called me. You usually try to handle things on your own. I want to protect you as much as possible, but I can only do that when you allow me to. I'll kill for you and those babies up there. I love you, Kay."

"I love you too."

Lynn was standing there watching us with her hand to her chest. I extended my hand for her to join us. They both wrapped their arms around me, and for the first time in my life, I allowed my family to love and protect me while seeing me vulnerable. I needed this more than I knew.

CHAPTER 9

SENECA

I was uncomfortable as hell. I'd pulled my grill out, and I was wearing a pair of khaki pants and a button-down shirt. My pants were around my waist with a belt. I didn't have on excessive jewelry, and I wasn't speaking with slang. I'd gotten a bouquet of flowers for Kaysyn, and I was now standing at the front desk of Atascocita Independent School District administration office, waiting to see her. I was taking a huge risk coming here, but I couldn't go another day without seeing her. Isaiah's advice was worth exploring.

I'd tried shit my way, and it seemed that didn't work with her, so I was willing to try something different. On my way here, I listened to the Isley Brothers to get me all soft and shit, because all I could think about was walking past that receptionist, bursting into Kaysyn's office, and fucking her into submission against the wall.

“Sir? How can I help—”

I'd turned around while Kaysyn was speaking, and when she saw it was me, her voice went on hiatus. I wondered if she was even breathing. Stepping closer to her with the bouquet in my hand, I said, “Hello, Dr. Anderson. I hope I can acquire a few minutes of your time.”

Her eyes widened slightly. I was trying to show her that I could adapt to her world. That I could be “civilized” when the setting called for it. She nodded, then said, “Yes. Follow me.”

It was hard as hell to call her Dr. Anderson. She was Kay to me. When I was feeling sensitive, she was my Kay Baby. I

followed her, staring at her ass until we made it to her office. When we entered, she turned to me. “Seneca... wow. Umm...”

She was so fucking flustered. I knew I’d caught her off guard with my appearance. I turned and closed the door, then extended the flowers to her. She grabbed them and immediately brought it to her face to sniff them. “Thank you.”

“Listen. I know you think we aren’t a good fit in public. I wanted to show you that you’re wrong. That receptionist was giving me a second look for a totally different reason. Kay, you got me in here begging and shit. I need you.”

I glanced at the floor, debating if I wanted to tell her this shit or not, but I knew she probably already knew anyway. I might as well admit it to her. “I love you, Kay Baby. I’m in love wit’chu. You got a nigga losing his fucking mind over you.”

Her eyes watered as she stared at me. She walked toward me. I thought she would stop, but she walked past me to the door. I closed my eyes, waiting for what she would say. My last-ditch effort didn’t work. She was about to ask me to leave. I was already feeling shit I had never felt for anybody, but now I would have to deal with those feelings alone and move on without her. I had to give up before she had me selling my soul.

When I realized she still hadn’t said anything, I turned to see her locking the door. *Shit*. I licked my lips as she quickly made her way back to me. She grabbed my head and pulled my face to hers, immediately kissing me like she hadn’t seen me in years. My hands slid to her ass and cupped it, causing her to moan into my mouth.

She pulled away from me and walked away. I stood there with a hammer in my pants, watching her make her way to a closet. She glanced back at me, silently telling me to follow her fine ass. I did just that. I wanted to assume there were cameras in her office. The minute I walked inside that closet and closed the door, she went to her knees, pulling my belt

loose. While nothing would please me more than to fuck up her voice box, I needed more.

I yanked her up from the floor and pinned her against the wall. “Kaysyn, hol’ on, baby. I’m not here to just fuck you so you can ignore me again. If I’m gon’ fuck you, I’m gon’ keep fucking you as your man. Not only will I know it, but every-fucking-body gon’ know it. You hear me? I’m not playing wit’ yo’ ass no more. The back and forth is on my fucking nerves. I love you with everything in me. I can be the most toxic individual in the world, but it ain’t meant for me to be toxic with you.”

She lowered her head for a moment, and when she lifted it, the tears were falling down her face. I tilted her head back and placed kisses everywhere her pain had dropped. “Let me love you, Kay. Let me show you that I can be everything you need. You already know that I can stroke that pussy just right. Let me show you that I can handle everything else too. I need you. Shit!”

I pulled her skirt up to her waist and tore those fucking underwear off as she yanked at my pants, getting my belt undone. We were like two horny teenagers. Once she freed my dick, I lifted her and slid her pussy over me like a warm fucking blanket. I bit my lip as I thrust into her. “Oh, fuck!” I whispered harshly. “I hope you know what this shit means, Kaysyn. Ahh shit!”

I closed my eyes as I allowed her hot pussy to take me down. She put her hands over my mouth and began rolling her hips on me. This woman was my fucking weakness. I wrapped my arms around her waist as I plowed into her like a damn bulldozer. Her whimpers were getting the best of me, and I knew I was about to nut. “Put me down. Let me suck that—oh fuck!”

She coated my dick with her essence, before she could finish what she wanted to say. I was able to hold my shit off somehow while her pussy spasmed uncontrollably. I was seeing stars. I thought I was about to pass the hell out. She slid out of my arms to the floor and pulled my dick in her mouth and sucked my fucking grandkids out that shit.

I had to lean against the wall so I wouldn't fall. I looked down to see she was playing with her pussy and had sprayed the floor with her juices. Damn, I wanted her again after this. When she released me, she stood on wobbly legs and wrapped her arms around me, leaning into me. "Shit, I ain't much better. My legs weak as fuck."

She smiled as she pulled away from me. I stuffed my dick in my drawers as she grabbed a towel from the shelf across from us and dried her legs. As I silently watched her, I realized she hadn't responded to a damn thing I said. She hadn't said a word other than the thanks she gave for the flowers. "Kaysyn..."

She laid her hand on my chest. "I heard you, Seneca."

She took a deep breath and lowered her head. I swore, if she said anything I didn't want to hear, I was gon' jack her ass up against this wall. Lifting her eyes to mine, she said, "You said you're in love with me. Are you for real? Like... even with all the shit I have going on in my life and in my mind... you're in love with me?"

"Yeah. I've loved you for a while. I just didn't want to tell you."

"Why did you tell me now?"

"I wanted you to know just how deeply I care. I needed you to know how invested I am. This shit is tearing me apart on the inside, and it's starting to show on the outside. My family has started noticing that something is up with me. So, what'chu gon' do?"

I slid my fingertips over her cheek, wishing she could just be free. She would realize that most of her stress was self-inflicted. Luckey was part of it, but a lot of it was her beating herself up over bullshit she couldn't change. She would never be able to change how attracted she was to me. I knew deep down, she cared for me too.

"Okay."

I frowned then grabbed her chin, forcing her to look into my eyes. "Okay? As in what the fuck I said goes? You falling

in line wit' a nigga?"

She bit her bottom lip and closed her eyes, then nodded. "Yeah. I'm yours, Seneca, and I don't care who knows."

"Fuck!"

I crashed my lips into hers, kissing her with everything I had. While I was hoping she would succumb to me and quit all this fucking playing she was doing, I didn't expect to get an answer so quickly. I figured she would say that she had to think about the shit. She moaned into my mouth and pulled away from me. "Come on."

She pulled her skirt down over her hips and opened the door. Before she could walk through it, I slid my arms around her waist and kissed her neck. She chuckled softly, and I liked the sound of that. I hadn't heard her laugh in a long time, probably since that day we actually went out on what she called a friendly date.

Turning to me, she said, "I have to go to the restroom and clean up. Have a seat."

I bit my bottom lip as I watched her backpedal to the door. I wanted to take her ass right out of this building and to her house to have her screaming like I knew she wanted to. I pulled my phone from my pocket and texted Big Zay. *You were right. It worked, man. I owe you.*

He texted back. *What worked?*

I shook my head slowly. He'd forgotten already. *I showed her something different. We're a couple now. She gave in to me. We'll talk later though. I'm still with Kaysyn.*

He gave a thumbs up as I slid the phone back in my pocket. She was finally mine. It felt good to say that shit. Everyone close to me would know that shit before the day was over, so I hoped she was sincere.

"NIGGA, YOU GOING BACK TO ATASCOCITA ALREADY?"

“Hell yeah. I couldn’t get enough of her before. Imagine how I feel now. I can’t wait to surprise her.”

I was talking to Ali. We’d come to the office to get some shit straight for next week. He had been watching out for Sandrene, but today, Jungle gave him a break. I didn’t know how Ali could stay awake for a whole twenty-four hours at times. Then the nigga would take a two-hour nap and be right back at it. I supposed his sacrifices were paying off since Watchful Eyes was always busy.

Next week, my shift would begin watching Jericho’s back. I wasn’t looking forward to that shit at all. Jericho wanted to take people in for questioning. Fuck that. I was going to put a bullet in their ass first. I didn’t have time to risk my life or anybody else’s. If Jungle’s guys wanted to honor his wishes, that was on them. If I could safely take that nigga that was after him out, he would be good as gone.

Ali’s phone rang, and I could see his face turn red. I didn’t know what the fuck was up with him, but it seemed every time I wanted to ask him, something else would come up... like now. I needed to head out to get to Atascocita to see Kaysyn. I didn’t know if she wanted the kids to meet me or not, but I knew they usually went to their bedrooms to do their own thing by seven. It had just turned five thirty.

I glanced over at Ali again as he walked out of the door, talking on the phone. I slowly shook my head, then followed him out. It didn’t sound like he was talking at all. I supposed the other person was doing all the talking. “Bruh, I’m gon’ head out.”

He gave me a head nod, and I continued to my car. Maybe I would have time when I got back to talk to him. Some bullshit was going on, and my hope was that it was just something personal and nothing that would put all of us in danger. As I made it to the highway, Isaiah called. We’d been missing each other since Monday evening. “What’s up, bruh?” I answered.

“So Seneca done got his fucking woman, huh?”

“Hell yeah. I wanted to thank you for your words of wisdom, man. I appreciate you.”

“That’s what’s up. I don’t mind, bruh. Y’all going to Dallas this weekend?”

“Yeah. We’re leaving Friday once she gets off work. The kids are going to stay with Arrow since he’s off this weekend.”

“So everyone knows?”

“I don’t know who all she’s told, but I definitely told my boys. Arrow just happens to be one of them. He needed to know since he knows how much I love his sister. I needed him to know that she was making an honest man out of me.”

Zay died laughing, as did I. “Nigga, you a fool!”

I laughed more. “Well, she was the one just wanting me for a good ass time, while my heart was suffering from her absence.”

“Muthafucka!” Zay yelled as he roared with laughter.

I couldn’t help but join him, laughing at my ‘woe is me’ performance. I was happy as shit. Feeling this way was new to me. There was always drama involved everywhere I went, but now, a nigga was at peace. “You ought to come by and tell Joyy face to face. I haven’t told her, because I thought you would want to be the one to tell her,” Zay said.

Suddenly, the smile fell from my face. Kaysyn told Joyy everything. Why hadn’t Joyy called to charge me up about not hurting her friend? I hoped like hell Kaysyn didn’t just tell me that shit to shut me up. I started to remain quiet about it, but that shit wasn’t my style. “I’m surprised Kaysyn hasn’t told her. Makes me think she’s not as excited as I am.”

“Naw, don’t let your mind dip to that negative shit. Kaysyn is a superintendent. She may have been busy.”

She wasn’t too busy to fuck my world up Monday in a damn storage closet at her job. “I’m trying, Zay. They talk all the time though. I just find it funny that she hadn’t even texted her to tell her.”

“Have you talked to Kaysyn?”

“Yeah. I talked to her Tuesday a couple of times and again this morning.”

“Hmm. Well, why don’t you call her and ask. That is sort of strange that she hasn’t told Joyy.”

“I’m finna do one better. I was heading her way to surprise her.”

“Aww shit. Don’t go down there causing a scene. She has kids, Seneca.”

“I ain’t gon’ cause a scene. I’m just gon’ ask the question. Arrow knows, so maybe she has been busy,” I said more to convince myself than anything else.

“Well, if she told Arrow, I would say she’s legit, man.”

Her ass ain’t told Arrow shit. I did. “Yeah. Well, let me holla back. Ali calling.”

“A’ight, bruh. Be careful on the road.”

“A’ight.”

Ali wasn’t calling me. I just wanted to get off the phone so I could think about shit. Although I told Arrow about us, I wonder what *she’d* told him. I was more than sure the minute I got off the phone with him, he called her to confirm. I couldn’t depend on Arrow to have my back with this one, and I didn’t expect him to. That was his sister. I wished that he would at least give me a heads up though.

My mind was traveling a hundred miles a fucking minute, trying to figure out what was going on. However, when I turned into her driveway and another car was there, I had a feeling. *Muthafucking Luckey.*

CHAPTER 10

KAYSYN

“**S**orry I’m late, Kaysyn. I had a meeting today that I’d forgotten about.”

I nodded as I invited Luckey in. It was six o’clock, and he hadn’t even bothered to call and say he would be late. The kids were waiting... well, Jericka was waiting. Ell didn’t care one way or the other whether he showed up. I closed the door, and when he made it around the corner, Jericka yelled, “Daddy! I thought you had forgotten about us!”

I almost rolled my eyes. I still didn’t quite trust Luckey, but I didn’t think I needed backup. Arrow was at work anyway. Ax lived in Beaumont. I wouldn’t dare ask him to come out here. Seneca...

Shit, just at the thought of that nigga my panties got wet. I had never seen him without his grill. His teeth were perfectly straight and white. His wardrobe was what took the damn cake though. I had never seen him wear his pants correctly. The thing that really fucked me up was him speaking correct English! I was stunned.

The way he fucked me against the wall at my job the other day had serenaded my damn soul. When he told me he loved me, that shit brought me to my knees. I could no longer pretend to be unfazed by him. While I wasn’t in love, I did care for him a great deal. We’d been doing this dance for nearly two years now, and it was about time I gave him what he’d been wanting from me for the past year of it.

I knew he wanted me as his, long before he said it, but fear had held me hostage. It was still somewhat holding me hostage. I had yet to tell anyone that we were now a couple. Arrow was the only one that knew, and that was because Seneca had told him. I asked him to give me time to break the news to everyone else, and he promised me he wouldn't say a word until I did. I believed that he was just so happy that I was including him in my life more than I used to that he would do whatever I asked of him at this point.

As I made my way to the stairs to get Ell, Luckey said, "You look beautiful, Kaysyn."

A slight tremble went through my body as I turned to him. "Thank you, Luckey."

I quickly climbed the stairs and knocked on Ellington's door. "Come in."

I opened the door to find him sitting on his bed, playing a video game. "Baby, your father is here to spend time with you and Jericka."

He took a deep breath and said, "Okay."

I hated that it felt like I was forcing him to spend time with his father. I just wanted Luckey to have the opportunity to make things right with them. While he and I would never be together again, that didn't mean he shouldn't be afforded the opportunity to make things right with them, especially Ell.

When I walked down the stairs, I saw Luckey and Jericka engaged in a game of Uno. He was the one who'd taught her how to play, and now she wanted to play all the time. I smiled at the sight of them. As Ell made his way down the stairs, I decided to go to my office. I didn't need to be a part of the visitation. Once inside, I pulled out my phone and sent a message to Seneca. I couldn't wipe the smile from my face. *Hey, Seneca. I hope you had a good day. Are you busy?*

I sat back in my office chair, waiting for him to respond. I couldn't stop smiling though. This was crazy that I was feeling so happy. The divorce papers had been resent to the constable

and would be delivered to Luckey tomorrow. Everything was just falling in—

The doorbell rang, halting all my pleasant thoughts. No one just popped up at my house. Only one person had done that and... *Shit!* I hurriedly bolted from my chair to head to the door to see Luckey was already opening it. *Fuck!* Why did he have to pop up today? Any day but today would have been fine.

Luckey invited him in, and Ell's eyes widened. If I wasn't mistaken, I thought I saw a look of amusement on his face. Seneca had a slight frown on his face until he saw me. He gave me a tight-lipped smile. I had better just make the best of this situation. It wasn't like Luckey didn't know I was talking to someone. I went closer to them, and when I was within arm's reach, Seneca grabbed my hand. "What's up, baby?"

"Hey."

He leaned forward, and I refused to leave him hanging. I kissed his lips, then pulled him away from Luckey. "You're seeing Seneca?"

Fuck. Seneca and I turned to face him. "Yes, Luckey."

He frowned so deeply he should have given himself an aneurism. Seneca seemed so unbothered though. I swallowed hard, because now I felt uneasy with going too far away from my babies with him being that angry. Before we could get too far, he asked, "So you fucked me up so you could get my wife?"

I immediately went to my babies. "Let me get the two of you to your rooms."

"Gladly, Mom," Ell said.

Jericka had a sad look on her face. "Daddy, what about us?"

He never even turned in her direction. This was a huge fucking mess. "Come on, Jericka. You can come to my room. I think Mom will be okay since her boyfriend's here."

I slowly shook my head. Ellington was being messy and irritating his father. I didn't even realize he had a petty streak in him. He was worse than Axton. Surprisingly, Luckey heard that remark. I didn't like the look in his eyes, so I said to the kids, "Go, now!"

I knew I had nothing to worry about with Seneca standing there, but I didn't want the kids to see anything they shouldn't see. They took off to the stairs without looking back. The minute they were out of sight, Seneca said calmly, "Now that the kids are in their rooms, I will respond to you."

He walked over to me, making sure he was standing in front of me. That shit made me almost forget that we were in a hostile atmosphere. Seneca was in protective mode, and that shit couldn't be sexier.

"You know damn well I didn't sell that shit to you. I was in and out of the game at the time, because I was trying to make some shit shake with my embroidery shop."

I interrupted. "Plus, I came at him first. He wasn't trying to take your wife. You threw me away. I flirted with Seneca first."

"Kaysyn, I can't believe you would go after a thug. I don't want my kids around him."

"As if you're any better, Luckey! You're an addict. You physically and emotionally abused me! Why would they be safe with you? Seneca, at least, had the decency to wait until the kids were out of the room before responding to you. You aren't even thinking about them. This has to do with me. The divorce papers are being served soon... for the second time. I'm done."

He took a step toward me, and Seneca once again stepped in front of me. "You don't wanna do that. I know you still coppin' too. That rehab was for nothing. If anything, you should want better for your kids. Get Kay Baby off your mind. She's mine now. You fumbled, my nigga. I scooped it up and ran for the touchdown."

My mouth was hanging open. “Luckey! You’re still using?”

Seneca grabbed my hand as I tried to approach him. That was why he was late and probably why he didn’t stay long last time. He couldn’t fucking sit still. “I’m just gonna leave. It’s probably best. Tell my kids I love them.”

He walked toward the door, but something came over him. He turned and tried to charge Seneca. I jumped as Luckey hit the floor. “Look, man. I’m tryna be respectful as fuck, but you gon’ have to chill out.”

Luckey got up from the floor and immediately ran at Seneca again. This time, Seneca pulled his gun, aiming it right at Luckey’s head. “I don’t want these kids to lose their father. Although Kaysyn is my woman, I know she still cares about what happens to you. I’m trying my hardest not to be the cold ass nigga I used to be. Quit fucking coming at me like you don’t value yo’ fucking life. I done played wit’chu longer than necessary already. My patience is getting thin, Luckey. Don’t fall through the ice, man.”

“Luckey, just leave!”

He scowled at me and made his way to the door. This time, he left out of it and slammed it shut. Seneca checked the peephole, then opened it with his gun still drawn, watching Luckey get in his car and drive away. He closed the door and locked it, then turned to me. “I was just trying to surprise you. I know the kids are usually in their rooms by seven. I’m sorry I made things difficult.”

“It’s okay. He was going to know sooner or later, right?”

He gave me a half smile as I made my way to him. He slid the gun back in his waistband and pulled me into his arms. “I missed you, girl. I needed to see you.”

“I can’t wait until Friday. I could really use a getaway. How did you know Luckey was still using?”

“I didn’t. His mannerisms just didn’t seem right, so I bluffed him.”

My lips parted. I'd thought something was off about him, too, but clearly, Seneca had more experience dealing with addicts than I did. Before I could go to his arms again, I saw Ell peeking from the top of the stairs. "Y'all can come down, Ell. I want to introduce y'all to my boyfriend."

He smiled slightly as he turned away to get Jericka. "Come have a seat."

Seneca wrapped his arms around me before I could walk away. "You look beautiful, baby."

"In sweats and a T-shirt?"

"Mm hmm. You look beautiful in whatever you wear," he said, then kissed my neck.

The goosebumps invaded my flesh as I pulled away from him and led him to the couch. As we sat, the kids made their way down the stairs. When they came to us, Seneca stood and allowed them to sit next to me. I gave him a smile that showed my appreciation to him for understanding. He was showing me someone different, and I loved every minute of it. I loved his rough side, too, but I desperately needed that balance.

"Guys, this is my boyfriend, Seneca. The two of you can call him Mr. Seneca or Mr. Sen. Seneca, this is Ellington, but we call him Ell, and this is Jericka, who we sometimes call J."

Seneca smiled, and Jericka's eyes widened. "What happened to your teeth? They were gold, and now they're white!"

"Jericka," I said, wanting to laugh.

I didn't have to hold that laughter in since Seneca laughed first. "They are what you call snatch outs, lil mama. They are like a covering over your real teeth."

Jericka put her hand over her mouth and giggled as Seneca continued. "It's nice to officially meet y'all though."

Seneca extended his hand to Ell, and he glanced at it for a second, then he shook it. "You're Uncle Arrow's friend."

"Yep. I'm cool with your Uncle Ax too."

“I remember seeing you when we go to Beaumont. Is that where you live?”

“Yes, sir, but I’m thinking of moving back to Houston so I can be closer to y’all, if that’s cool wit’chu.”

I stared up at Seneca, and he gave me a smile. Seeing his smile so often was melting my heart. That let me know just how happy he was. Knowing that I had something to do with that made me feel good inside. That only made me look forward to Friday even more so.

Ell shrugged his shoulders. “That’s cool with me.” He turned to me and asked, “Where did Dad go?”

“He went home, I guess. He left when he realized he couldn’t intimidate Mr. Seneca.”

Ellington smiled, then turned back to Seneca. “Are you staying here tonight?”

“I umm... I didn’t plan to.”

“Can you? What if Dad comes back?”

“If it’s cool with your mom, I don’t have a problem with staying.”

They all turned to me, including Jericka, waiting for what I would say. When my eyes met his, he licked his lips and adjusted his dick. I swore, I was going to get him back for that shit. He winked at me as I cleared my throat. “Sure. Why not?”

“Mama, can Mr. Seneca come and see my room?” Ell asked.

“Sure.”

Ell stood from his seat and gestured for Seneca to follow him. Seneca gave me a smile as Jericka came to my lap. After she sat, she laid her head against me. “Mama, why is Daddy so mean now? Sometimes he’s nice, and then all of a sudden, he’s mean again.”

“He’s sick, baby. Unfortunately, he won’t get any better until he truly wants to be better.”

“Why does he want to be sick?”

“I know it’s confusing to you right now. That’s because you’re so young. You will understand when you’re much older, but he’s using drugs that make him feel good at first. Then when they wear off, he feels horrible, and he’s irritable.”

She frowned slightly. I knew she didn’t understand. I really didn’t want to explain it any further than that though. I wanted her to be as innocent as possible. Seneca came down the stairs with a slight frown on his face but smiled when he saw Jericka. She smiled at him and asked, “Can you make me one of those things for my teeth?”

I laughed so loudly I damn near scared myself. My poor Jericka was so sheltered. I loved that though. Seneca chuckled and said, “We have to wait until you have all your permanent teeth.”

She turned to me, and I could see the question mark on her face. “Until you have all your big girl teeth.”

“Oh. Well, I’m going to my room and play.”

“Okay, baby.”

She kissed my cheek and ran to the stairs as Seneca sat next to me. I laid my head on his shoulder as he said, “Ell is smart as hell.”

I sat up and looked at him. “What did he say?”

“He said that y’all won’t be able to stay here without me. He said his dad may come back once I leave. He’s right about that, baby. Even if y’all go to your mother’s house for a little while, that’ll be better than being here.”

“I may take them to her, but I have to work. Her house is over an hour away from work.”

“I guess I’ll have to stay until we leave then. Who normally watches them while you’re at work?”

“My neighbor has been watching them for me. Her son is friends with Ell.”

“Okay. If it’s okay, I wanna be here with y’all. The kids obviously like me, but until you’re comfortable, you can take them to your neighbor. Y’all just don’t need to be here by yourselves. Next week, we’ll figure something out. I have an assignment.”

I nodded. I was praying that Seneca didn’t have to shoot Luckey. I had enough trauma from this whole ordeal for a lifetime. Seeing Luckey dead would be the nail in my coffin.

CHAPTER 11

SENECA

“I need somebody to follow his ass. I didn’t know y’all stopped following him. If something happened to my baby or one of these kids, I wouldn’t forgive myself.”

“I got you, nigga,” Jungle said. “The minute he enters the neighborhood, we’ll let you know.”

“Preciate it, man.”

I ended the call as I glanced around the house. This was a really nice house, but I dead ass wanted to get them out of here. I’d been looking at houses already, but now I knew I needed to seriously consider going to an open house. We needed at least a five-bedroom house, just in case my mama, Joyy and Zay, or Ax and Alexz wanted to visit.

I couldn’t believe that muthafucka came at me Wednesday night. For him to do that, I knew he was high. He knew that I was always packing. Had it not been for Kaysyn and those kids, he’d be floating in a river by now. I never had a problem firing my gun. A few bodies had caught a bullet or two from its chamber.

I went to the kitchen to get my keys. I needed to make a run to Beaumont so I could pack and get back before Kaysyn got off work. She told me she would be leaving work around two today. It was already almost ten. I got in my car and left the driveway, heading home. As I did, my phone rang. When I saw Kaysyn’s name, I smiled. “What’s up, baby?”

“Hey. What are you doing?”

“I just left to go home and pack for our trip.”

“Oh. Be careful. I can’t wait to get out of here.”

“Yep. I plan to show you a time that you won’t forget. Next time, we can take the kids with us.”

“Yeah. They were pouting when I told them. They don’t mind staying with Arrow though. He’s the cool uncle. Ell used to be scared of Ax. You know he’s always frowning. That’s just his natural look. Ellington wasn’t feeling that one bit.”

She chuckled. She sounded happy, and I was elated about that. “Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Why haven’t you told Joyy about us?”

“I want her to see us in person. At first, I was worried she wouldn’t approve. Plus, I wasn’t in a hurry.”

“You had doubts?”

“I did at first. After Wednesday, my doubts disintegrated. I’m happy I said yes. You’ve proved to be more than I thought you would be. I can’t wait to see her face when I kiss you in front of everyone.”

I chuckled. “She gon’ beat yo’ ass.”

“She’ll try anyway.”

“I’m glad I was able to prove you wrong, Kaysyn.”

“Me too, baby. I never thought me rubbing my ass against you at Ax’s wedding would lead to all this.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle. That day was vivid in my mind. “Shit, me either. I was on something totally different back then.”

“Oh yeah? What was that?”

“Quit playing. You already know.”

“But I wanna hear you say it.”

“I was all about fucking that pussy up, not knowing that I was gon’ be the one to get fucked up.”

“Damn, baby.”

“Na, Kay. Hell naw. You better not be touching that perfect ass pussy. I’m gon’ be on that shit in a few hours. You gon’ have to hold out until then. Go do what them people paying you to do. They surely ain’t paying you to fuck yourself.”

“Seeeeeeenn, I’m so horny though.”

“Come on na. Don’t have me busting a U-turn in the middle of traffic on 1960. I’ll do it without hesitation to go fuck you in that musty ass storage closet. Don’t be playing with my top like that, baby.”

She had to have forgotten who she was fucking with. I’d been practicing with my new filter, but I was still that same nigga. “Okay,” she said and took a deep breath.

I checked my mirrors then made the turn. I was only about thirty minutes from her job. “Stop pouting. A nigga dick got you spoiled like that, Kay Baby?”

“You telling me my pussy don’t have the same effect on you?”

“Hell fucking yeah. I’ll be there in thirty minutes.”

“Quit playing with me now, Sen.”

“I ain’t playing. Don’t have on underwear when I get there so I ain’t gotta tear those muthafuckas off.”

“Mm. I didn’t wear any to work.”

“Let me find out you tryna be grown. That’s my pussy. I don’t need another nigga tryna sniff my shit out. She always leaking. You getting me all riled up, and I’m gon’ fuck you on top of yo’ desk. Cameras be damn.”

“Mm. Bring yo’ ass on then, Seneca. Come fuck this shit up for me.”

Everything went quiet, and I realized she’d ended the call. She was trying to ignite my crazy. She wasn’t slick. She wanted the Seneca she first met. The one that didn’t give a fuck. Well, that was the exact type of time I was on right now. I hoped she was ready to get fired.

“I NEED TO SEE KAYSYN ANDERSON.”

“Yes, sir.”

She got on the phone and called Kaysyn. I wasn't looking all friendly and shit like I did the other day. My pants were hanging a bit, and I wore my chain, grill, watch, and earrings. I looked like I was fresh off the block. Kaysyn peeked around the corner and waved me back. That was smart as hell, because I would have embarrassed her ass in front of this woman at the desk.

When I stepped into her office, she was already in that fucking closet. She knew better. She would have ended up spread eagle on top of that damn desk. I bit my lip, closed and locked the door, then made my way to her. When I got close, I realized she already had her skirt hiked up, and her tube top was around her stomach. She'd taken off her blazer and bra. *Yeah, I'm finna fuck her up.*

I slammed the door and pulled my dick from my pants. Yanking her from the wall, I spun her around and bent her over. When I slid my dick into her walls, she squirted all over me. I pulled her up by her hair. “You been playing with this pussy. Didn't I tell yo' ass to wait?”

I backpedaled to the other wall and fell to it, then pulled her against me repeatedly. It didn't make sense how good her pussy was. No wonder Luckey was trying to hang on for dear life. This shit would have niggas selling their fucking souls to get a taste. “Seneca! Oh my God!”

“Don't call on the Lord now. You wanted this shit. I drove an extra thirty minutes for this shit, so I'm finna knock the bottom out.”

I slumped more and lifted my hips, pumping my dick into her like a jackhammer. She was gon' have my fucking back hurting when I left from here. With each thrust, I could feel my dick chipping away at her cervix. She wanted to fuck with me, and now she was getting fucked up. I stared down at the

action, watching her pussy cream for me. She was doing her best to stay quiet, but it was killing her.

“I’m about to fucking nut! Kay, come catch this shit.”

She immediately left my dick and spun around and went to her knees. I was squeezing my dick for dear life. When she put her mouth over my shit, I released my hold. Within two strokes from her mouth, I was nutting down her throat.

“We gon’ have to stop this shit on yo’ job. You gon’ swallow so much nut they gon’ have to pump yo’ damn stomach. Keep it up.”

She laughed, and I could still see some of my shit on her tongue. Damn, if that didn’t have me standing at attention all over again. She swallowed again as I helped her to her feet. She pulled her denim skirt over her fat ass then licked her lips and puckered them for a kiss. I kissed her, then did my best to put my dick away. That muthafucka wouldn’t go down.

“You see what the fuck you do to me?”

“My pussy isn’t always like this, Seneca. You bring that out of me. That was why it was hard to let you go when I knew I wasn’t ready for what you wanted from me.”

Finally giving up, I let that muthafucka stand up and put my pants right beneath it and tried to cover it with my shirt. “Man, shit! Talk about something that’s gon’ make my dick deflate. That receptionist gon’ be all in my shit for sure if she see this anaconda through my pants and shirt.”

“Well, let’s talk about how Luckey has been blowing my phone up.”

“Fuck. I didn’t say for you to say something to piss me off.”

I walked out of the closet and sat in a chair in front of her desk while she went to her restroom to get cleaned up. If that muthafucka knew what was good for him, he’d better stay as far away from me as possible. I understood that he’d want to see his kids, but they would have to do that shit away from me. Had I known he was going to be there Wednesday evening, I

wouldn't have gone out there until much later, although it wasn't in my original plan to stay the night.

When she reemerged, she sat at her desk and stared at me. "I guess your dick went down."

I frowned at her, and she chuckled. "I haven't answered his calls, so I don't have a clue why he's calling. Hopefully, it's just to apologize."

She lowered her head for a moment and shook it slowly. "What are you thinking, Kaysyn?"

"I just... I can't believe he's an addict. Luckey had so much going for himself. He was a good man, Sen. I know you don't wanna hear that shit, but he was. A good man and a good father. That's why I had such a hard time giving up on him. It's why Jericka longs for him."

I nodded. Kaysyn was in Jericka's room for a long time Wednesday night. I knew that he was once a good man. He did his job, smoked his weed, and took care of his family. I knew exactly who fucked him up, and so did he, because he was still copping from him. It was like I hated that happened to him, but at the same time, I knew I wouldn't have fallen in love for the first time had it not happened. His fuck up was my come up.

"I get it, Kaysyn. I really do. But there's nothing any of us could do to prevent what happened. Luckey is the only one that could have prevented it. There's some shady people in this world. I know because, at times, I can be one of them. That's why Joyy calls me Senecal. My shit was usually provoked though. The nigga he copped from obviously doesn't give a fuck who he messes up. That was all about lining his pockets."

Before she could respond, my phone rang. When I saw Ali's number, I gave Kaysyn the one-minute finger and answered. "What's up?"

"You still in the Houston area?"

"Yeah. What'chu need?"

"Meet me at Jungle's ASAP."

“Yeah.”

I ended the call, knowing that whatever the problem was, he wasn't able to voice it over the phone. “Sorry, baby. I gotta go. I may not be able to make it to Beaumont. So I'll just go to the store and get some shit for our trip. I gotta meet up with Ali in Houston. He's watching Sandrene's back.”

“Okay. Be careful, baby.”

“Yeah. I will. A nigga gotta get back to yo' nasty ass.”

I bit my bottom lip as she stood from her chair. I swore she reminded me of Marti from the movie *Jason's Lyric*. She just wasn't as ghetto. I guess I was her Treach, especially when that nigga was fucking her on side of the damn house. That looked like some shit I would have done.

When she got to me, I slapped her ass and gave her my tongue. After pulling away from her, I adjusted my shit, then headed to the door. “I love you, Kaysyn. See you later.”

“See you later, Seneca.”

I walked out of her office, switching my frame of mind to whatever fuck shit was going on at Jungle's house. Thankfully, Jungle wasn't too far from here. I turned on “Dope Boy” by Dave East and vibed to the track on repeat until I got there.

When I pulled in the driveway, I noticed a gang of niggas in the back. Grabbing my heat from the console, I put it in my waistband and made my way back there. Vegas let me through the gate after slapping my hand. Once I got where everyone was, they were all surrounding some nigga. Ali saw me, and the group all parted like the fucking Red Sea.

Luckey Anderson. What the fuck? “Man, what the fuck?”

“He was stealing from Anson. You know I would have killed his ass, but I know that's yo' lady's ex-husband,” Jungle said.

I brought my hand to my head and squeezed my temples, then turned my attention back to Luckey. They had that muthafucka gagged. His eyes were wide, and his head was bleeding. I almost wished they wouldn't have told me shit and

just did what they had to do without me knowing. All I could think about was Kaysyn and those kids, especially after the conversation we just had. This was probably why he'd been blowing her up.

I took a deep breath and said, "Take the gag out."

I pulled my heat from my waistband. The minute Luckey could talk, he said, "Please don't tell Kaysyn. Let her know I love her. I still do. This shit is just hard to fight."

"You gon' have to convince me that you gon' make more of an effort. Starting now," I said, holding my gun to his forehead.

He closed his eyes. "I'm going to go to my meetings faithfully, see a psychiatrist, and pray like hell. I want to spend more time with my kids, and I'll leave Kaysyn alone. She made her decisions regarding me, and I know all that shit is on me. I should've gotten help as soon as I realized something was up. I apologize for stealing from that fuck nigga. He the one that got me like this in the first fucking place. If you gon' kill me, do that, but before you do, Anson can suck my drug addicted dick!"

I didn't know where he found his balls, but I was impressed. I lowered my gun and asked, "How much he owe?"

Jungle's eyebrows lifted for a minute, then he nodded repeatedly. Ali clapped my back. They both knew that the old me would've killed his ass without a care in the world and wouldn't have even had a guilty conscience about it while fucking Kaysyn. I supposed love brought about a change. I loved her, and in a short time, I was loving those kids. It would hurt them if something happened to their dad.

"He stole ten G's worth of shit," Anson blurted.

I turned to him and stared at him. "You a fucking lie. What he did with it? He'd be dead if he snorted, shot up, and smoked all that shit." I cocked my gun and pointed it at him. "Come at me again, because I won't hesitate to shoot yo' ass."

My face had hardened. I'd be a muthafucka if I was gonna let him beat me out of my money. Before I could even pull the

trigger, Jungle blew that nigga's brains out. "I don't do a disloyal muthafucka. I had to do time from Roulette's bullshit, and I ain't going back for no-fucking-body. That nigga only had five G's worth of product left when he told me it came up missing." He looked around at his guys and said, "Clean this shit up."

Jungle turned to me and said, "A thousand to squash this shit, bruh."

I pulled my wad from my pocket and peeled him off ten crisp bills, then slapped his hand. "Thanks, bruh."

I turned to Luckey and said, "You bite my fucking hand, you gon' be laying in this yard like Anson. That ain't a threat my nigga. Thank your kids for your life."

I turned away from him and slapped Ali's hand as he stared at me. We headed to my car, but before we could get there, he said, "She's changing you. How you feel about that?"

"I don't think she's changing me. Had he not been connected to her, I would have killed him, just like I was about to do Anson. I love her though. Seeing her hurting ain't on my to-do list. Her tears do something to me, man. This shit is different... being in love. It ain't about me no more. Those kids are just as important to me as she is. I just officially met them Wednesday. How they get that deep already?"

"You're open... your heart is open. I'm happy for you. Are you gonna tell her about this?"

"Naw. I don't need no brownie points. That shit will backfire on me some kind of way. We're heading to Dallas today, and I don't need that shit on her mind."

"I feel you. Well, we still ain't found the nigga that's after Jericho, but I believe the minute he show's himself, it's gon' be some shit."

"What about Sandrene?" I asked.

"No more attempts, but she's supposed to be having a sitdown with that bitch Tip next week. Apparently, she needs to enlighten Sandrene on some shit. If public eye wasn't on that shit, I'd..."

I frowned slightly. “You’d what?”

He looked up at me and frowned. The look in his eyes said for me not to push. We were friends and cool as hell, but some things were just off limits. I truly believed that his sensitivity to women was one of the things that I needed to stay away from. “It’s hard for me, but I’d do it if I had to. Mel is my boy, and Sandrene’s sexy ass is cool peeps too.”

I chuckled as I thought about how sexy she was. “Yeah, Mel better than me, dude. I just fussed at Kaysyn about not wearing panties to work. I had to go up there and go awf!”

He twisted his lips to the side. “She don’t even look like the submissive type. Come at me again.”

“I went up there and fucked her. Same thing.”

Ali laughed loudly. “Nigga! You wild, boy. Get yo’ soft ass ass outta here. Enjoy your weekend with your lady.”

“Preciate it, Ali.”

I slapped his hand as I noticed Luckey walking with Vegas. I assumed he was taking him wherever they’d picked him up from. I reiterated, “Starting now.”

“I got it. Thanks, Seneca.”

As I watched him get in the car, Ali said, “Yep. She done turned you into a soft ass nigga.”

CHAPTER 12

KAYSYN

“Mama, Daddy, I know y’all have met him before, but I didn’t want to leave town without introducing y’all to him. Seneca is my boyfriend now.”

Mama literally sat here and rolled her eyes. Seneca had changed for me. While I knew that the old Seneca was there, love made him different. He didn’t wear his grill when I told him I wanted to come here. He said that he needed to show my parents that he was good enough for me. His statement hurt my heart, because I knew that it wasn’t them he was speaking of. That was how he felt.

“Mrs. Shirlene, you have my word that Kaysyn is my world. I love her and the kids. They are all I think about. I can barely function without talking to Kay throughout the day. Honestly, I don’t know how I was living without her.”

“You were living foul. That was how you were living. For all I know, you’re still living that way. You have a lot to prove,” my dad added.

“No disrespect, Mr. Vaughn, but the only person I needed to prove that to is Kaysyn. I’ve done that. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be here. I can admit that I wasn’t boyfriend material when y’all met me. I was bold about what I did, but I’m going to be bold about my love for her too. Just like I flaunted my toxic ways, I’m going to flaunt how much I love her. With everything in me, I plan to keep her and the kids safe, and I plan to provide for them as any man in her life should do.”

When Mama rolled her eyes again, I said, “Let’s go, Seneca. I wanted to be an adult about this. I wanted you to officially meet my family as the man in my life, but they aren’t ready to accept who you’ve become. That’s okay.”

I kissed his lips and pulled him out of their house. I was livid. Here I was a forty-year-old woman, seeking acceptance from her parents. They’d always been there for me and considered me smart and capable of making sound decisions. I wasn’t sure what had changed to where they no longer trusted me. I was always the one that they relied on.

When we got outside, Seneca pulled me in his arms. I took a deep breath and said, “I’m sorry. I didn’t see this coming.”

“I did. Your mom never liked me. Ever since that shit with Lexi, when I first started coming around, she wasn’t feeling me at all. It’s okay.”

I took a deep breath as he opened the car door for me. Once inside, my phone vibrated. I’d gotten a text from Luckey. I rolled my eyes. Dealing with him was not something on my agenda. After taking the kids to Arrow and Lynn, I felt more at ease about their safety. I was more than sure it would be nothing for him to show up at my parents’ house, talking about how he wanted to see the kids. I’d check his message later, because I was already on edge. I couldn’t deal with any more foolishness right now.

When Seneca got in the car, he leaned over and grabbed my hand. I turned to him and said, “When we get to Dallas, I want the old Seneca.”

He lifted his brows as he stared at me. “What’chu mean?”

“I want the thugged out Seneca with this Seneca’s attitude and love.”

He gave me a one-cheeked smile and pulled his grill from his shirt pocket and slid it in. That put a smile on my face as he backed out of the driveway. I was still a little in my feelings though. I should have known better. As Seneca approached the interstate, my phone rang. When I saw Axton’s number, I huffed, but answered. “Hello?”

“You’re dating Seneca now?”

“I said hello, Ax.”

“I’m sorry. Hey, Kay. You good?”

“I’m peachy.”

“Mama called me.”

“Surprise, surprise. Yes, Seneca and I are a couple now. I don’t care how you feel about it. He makes me happy. The kids like him, although I just introduced them a couple of days ago. That’s all that matters.”

“Kay... calm down, baby. I was just being nosy. I’m cool. You’ve always made pretty good decisions. I have no choice but to trust that you know what you doing.”

“I do.”

“Well, congratulations.”

“Thanks, Ax.”

“Where’s my niece and nephew?”

“With Arrow and Lynn.”

“A’ight. Let me call him so I can talk to them.”

“Okay. I’m sorry. Mama and Daddy just have me on edge. If she called and talked to you, there’s no telling who else knows my business.”

“Don’t worry about that, sis. As long as you and the kids happy, that’s all you need to care about. And since you said y’all are happy, then you’re good. They’ll come around. Give them time.”

“Yeah. Talk to you later.”

“A’ight. Love you, Kay.”

“I love you too.”

When I ended the call, I turned to Seneca. We were on 610 heading to I-45 to go to Dallas. Lifting my left arm, I placed my hand at the back of his head and rubbed it. He frowned slightly then bit his bottom lip. I noticed he did that a lot. “Kay

Baby, you gon' make me pull this car over and give you what it is you're inciting. You know I love fucking your pretty ass."

I smiled at him and continued dragging my nails over the back of his head. "Seneca, I just want you to know that you are more than good enough for me. I'm sorry I made you feel differently. When you said that earlier, it hit me in my heart. At first, I was thinking about my parents and that maybe they felt a way about you, but then I realized I created that doubt within you. I'm so sorry."

"You don't owe me an apology. Let's just forget about that shit. I can't wait to get to the hotel and fuck you like I did in Fiji. That drunken sex was everything. You can literally feel every-damn-thing when you high or drunk."

"Don't I know it. I found that out in my college days."

"I never asked if you pledged. Did you? You never participate in their bullshit on Sundays at the Berottes."

"Yeah, I did."

"Well, what did you pledge?"

"Sigma Gamma Rho."

"Why you don't ever show out like them?"

"That's not my thing. I'm not really one for the spotlight. I rarely participated in the step shows in college. I'm not a dancer, so my coordination ain't really up to par."

"Shiiid, I beg to differ. The way you ride dick says something totally different, baby girl," he said then swiped my cheek with his fingertips.

I was a blessed woman. I couldn't believe Seneca had softened up a bit just for me. I liked rough, but shit, he was too rough sometimes. As we traveled, listening to Heart Soul on Sirius XM, "Real Love" by Skyy began to play. As I listened to the words, especially the chorus, it made me evaluate my own feelings.

Don't be afraid of the way you feel. Open your heart and you'll see it's real. It's real love.

I played with my fingernails for a moment as I noticed Seneca peek over at me. “Seneca, I’m falling for you.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I think I was in strong lust for so long until that was what I attributed it to. I really am falling for you. I’m just happy that you chose to be patient with me.”

“I love you, and I’ve never been in love before. It caught me by surprise and wouldn’t let go. I wasn’t searching for love. I was content fucking around. Speaking of which, I know we’ve been having unprotected sex for a while, but I feel like I owe you this since our hiatus.”

He reached over into his glove box and pulled out an envelope. When he handed it to me, I pulled the papers from it, reading that he tested negative for any sexually transmitted diseases. It was dated toward the end of last year. “I believe that you are still clean. Besides, this is dated for last year.”

“Yeah, but I haven’t slept with anyone but you since then. That was when I realized I loved you. My shit wouldn’t even stay hard for nobody else. Same shit happened in Fiji. Shit just kept deflating. I swore I thought something was wrong with me until I would see you. Muthafucka would get so hard it felt like it was about to burst through the skin.”

I chuckled. “Well, I appreciate you showing me this.”

He gave me a smile and turned the radio up when The Isley Brothers started to play. I pulled my phone out to play a game and remembered that Luckey had texted me. When I opened it, I was surprised to see the first words were *I’m sorry*. I continued reading.

I’m sorry for my behavior, Kaysyn. Seneca was right. I fell off the wagon. I’m working on dusting myself off so I can be better for my kids. The constable just dropped the papers. I signed them. I didn’t bother to read it. Everything I put you through was fucked up. You deserve everything we built together, plus some. I love you. Always will. I want you to be happy, and I know that would be impossible if you were with me. Despite Seneca’s past, I know he’ll take care of you and

the kids. I just hope you can forgive me. When you have time, message me so we can arrange for me to see the kids.

I didn't expect that. I could only smile to myself as I closed out my messages. Knowing that this was finally falling into place made me happy. I just had to get my parents to be more accepting. Lord knows, Greg and Shirlene could be some of the most stubborn people in the world. Then they had the audacity to wonder where I got it from.

I would begin working on them next week. I just had to convince them that I was more than sure about what I was doing. Seneca Roberts was the man I wanted. He was the man I was falling for. His past wasn't worth shit, but it was just that... his past. I was falling for the man he was today, the man he proved to me he could be.

CHAPTER 13

SENECA

Kaysyn and I were enjoying ourselves in Dallas. When we arrived last night, we showered and chilled out at the hotel. We ordered room service, and before we could even dive into each other, we'd passed smooth out. I was tired as hell, and I knew she was too. Today, we'd gone to breakfast, gotten a session in, took a nap, and now we were shopping. This was the third store we'd been to, and she seemed to be enjoying herself.

As she searched for matching outfits for her and Jericka, my phone rang. I didn't recognize the number, but that wasn't unusual. I got phone calls from different numbers all the time, especially when Ali had to get a burner for whatever he had going on. "Hello?"

"The shit came together Friday. You fucked up."

"Who is this?"

"Don't worry about that shit. You *been* had it out for Anson for years, and now the shit make sense. Between three and four years ago, Anson's personal stash looked tampered with. He knew somebody had been fucking with his shit. Instead of smoking it, he sold it. That nigga the other day was the one that had gotten ahold of it. When you showed up, I knew it was you that had fucked with that nigga shit."

"You don't know what the fuck you talking about," I said as I glanced up at Kaysyn. I walked away toward another rack of clothes. "That shit is a fucking lie and assumption. Niggas get handled for shit like that."

“Yeah, they do. So if I were you, you had better have more than Ali watching your back. Your woman ex-husband was fucked up because of you. But I’m sure you already knew that shit.”

The call ended, and I felt like I was sweating. I sent a message to Ali. *As soon as I get back, I have a 9-1-1 urgent meeting.* The nigga that called me was Anson’s homie, Jontae. I recognized his voice. He’d figured shit out, and now he was gon’ have to join Anson. When I found out who had sold to Luckey, I knew what had probably happened, especially when Kaysyn said it was an accident that Luckey ended up addicted.

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

If she found this shit out, we would be done. Although it was unintentional, she wouldn’t dare hang around. I glanced up at her again to see her going to the dressing room. I slid my hand down my face as Ali messaged me back a thumbs up. Anson was an all-around bitch. He hated to see somebody else making moves. My code was, *fuck a nigga up before he can get at you.* His mannerisms and the shady shit he used to say told me that he was wanting my spot.

Jungle had noticed that shit too. He’d told me to watch my back with that nigga. While he couldn’t stand a disloyal muthafucka, he didn’t want that nigga’s blood on his hands without proof that he was shady. He’d told me that he had enough blood on his hands already and that if I wanted to take that nigga out, he would look the other way.

Because I was making my exit anyway, I didn’t give a fuck about that nigga... not enough to kill him. I figured I would just shut his ass up for a while. I’d done that shit in a hurry, because I didn’t want to get caught and end up having to kill that nigga anyway. In my haste, I was a lil sloppy. If he noticed it had been fucked with though, he was just as much to blame for selling that shit to somebody else.

“Baby, you okay?”

I almost jumped out of my fucking skin. Kaysyn had slid her arms around me from behind and scared the shit out of me. She loosened her grip, and when I turned to look at her, she

had a look of concern on her face. I was more than sure she felt me flinch. I smiled at her. “Hey. Yeah, I’m good. You scared the hell out of me. I didn’t see you coming. I was thinking about some shit I just talked to Ali about.”

“Oh. Well, I’m ready to go pay for this.”

I rubbed her cheek, knowing that I would have to divulge what happened. When I did, I knew I would lose her. “A’ight. Come on.”

She smiled at me and puckered her lips for a kiss. I smiled slightly and kissed her, then she took off for the registers. I’d worked hard to make her mine. Hard as fuck. My heart felt like a muthafucka had stabbed me in it whenever I even thought about living the rest of my life without her, but I couldn’t deceive her. I surely didn’t want a nigga to enlighten her before I could. She deserved the truth, no matter how much it might hurt.

I followed her to the register, feeling lost. However, I wouldn’t tell her anything until after I talked to Ali. Whenever I told her, I knew her mind would go to the day she accused me of doing that shit, then of course, when Luckey accused me of it. I closed my eyes for a moment and allowed my heart to harden. When I reopened them, it was just in time. Kaysyn had looked up at me for the money the cashier had asked for.

I pulled out my wad and peeled the bills off for her, then grabbed the bag. After the cashier gave her the change and wished us a good day, Kaysyn slid her hand in mine and kissed my cheek. “Thank you, baby.”

“Anything for you, gorgeous.”

We made our way to the car, and I put the bag in the trunk with the other bags, then opened her door. “Where to next?” I asked.

“Lunch?”

“Sounds good, babe.”

I closed her door and made my way to the driver’s side. This evening would have to be memorable, because it might be the last time I would be able to be intimate with her. This

shit was fucking me up, bothering me more than anything had in my life. I took a deep breath and got in the car, then headed to Meso Maya Comida y Copas. I'd heard good things about it, and I knew Kaysyn would love it since she was a huge fan of Mexican food.

The ride there was quiet, and I knew she was in her head, trying to figure out what was up with me. I grabbed her hand and kissed it. "Let's eat, because I have plans for you later."

She smiled at me, then I got out to open her door. *God, I don't come to you often, but please make this disappear.* Losing Kaysyn was eating at my soul, and I didn't know how I would avoid it.

WHEN WE GOT BACK TO THE HOTEL AND I OPENED THE DOOR, Kaysyn's hands flew to her mouth. The room was filled with flowers, and flameless candles were placed throughout. She turned to me with tears in her eyes, and I couldn't help but cup her cheeks with my hands. "I love you, Kaysyn. You're deserving of every good thing. Real shit. Don't ever let anybody convince you that you aren't, including me."

She frowned slightly, and I could tell she wanted to ask me something. The knock at the door halted that. I went to it and opened the door to find the masseuse there to take her down. I invited her in, and Kaysyn smiled. "Go enjoy your massage, baby. I'll be here waiting when you get back."

She slid her hand over my cheek and smiled. "Okay."

She followed the masseuse out of the door, and I immediately dropped to the chaise I was standing in front of. This was supposed to be a trip to solidify our relationship and what we had. It was supposed to signify a new beginning, leaving all the fucking drama behind. Well, surprise. New drama. I wasn't one hundred percent sure that Luckey had gotten ahold of that shit from Anson that I'd fucked with, but I knew it was a possibility.

The problem was that I was under the impression that I was the only one that suspected that shit. I couldn't confirm a suspicion. Who was I fooling? When I found out Anson had sold to him and his addiction was an accident, I knew it had to be the shit I had laced with cocaine and methamphetamine. I was more than sure Luckey didn't know what had hit him when he smoked that shit.

I wondered where he even was when that shit happened, because I know it knocked him on his ass. As I sat on the chaise, pondering what I would do, my burner started to ring. Sometimes I forgot I even had that shit because I rarely had to use it these days. I answered. "Hello?"

"He in the wind. I told Jungle about it, and everybody searching for that nigga. If I wasn't on my homegirl, I would be on the hunt too."

I knew it was Ali. Although we were on burners, we still didn't mention names when we talked. It was to protect us and whoever we were speaking of. He was speaking about Jontae, and his homegirl was Sandrene. How he always found shit out was a mystery to me, but since he was on my team, I didn't even care. "I know. I know. Should I tell her?"

"Naw, not yet. Wait until we know something for sure. He could be lying. Even if it's a possibility, that nigga could have seen you do it and decided to use it to pin on you."

"I mean, that's highly unlikely. It's probably true. I just don't want to lose her, man. She's my world. I never thought something in my past could come back and fuck up everything."

He took a deep breath. "We gon' nip this shit. Don't worry. We gon' handle it. I ain't never seen you like this with nobody. I'm gon' do everything in my power to make sure you don't lose it. If for any reason you have to tell her, the truth is always the best alternative, that way shit can't come back to bite you in the ass."

"Maybe I should just tell her anyway. I mean, whenever I look at her now, I see that nigga smiling at me. He couldn't

stand me, and I couldn't stand his ass. I feel guilty and like I'm deceiving her."

"Do what you gotta do, but I wouldn't say anything. That's up to you though."

"Thanks, man. I'll still holla when I get back."

"A'ight."

I ended the call and went to start the shower. I was happy that I had scheduled that massage for Kaysyn. It gave me time to get my mind right. She was already suspecting something was up. I was going to have to tell her. Tomorrow though. This evening, I wanted her to have the most amazing time. I wanted this day to be memorable... in a good way.

After taking my shower and moisturizing my body and beard, I looked at the clock to see that Kaysyn would be back in about twenty minutes. I wanted to call Arrow and let him know that I couldn't avoid what was about to happen without telling him what was actually going on. I knew that would be impossible though. He was gonna want my head, along with her entire family.

Her parents already weren't feeling this, and what I had to tell her would only prove them right. This was so fucked up. I stared at myself in the mirror and wasn't impressed with the nigga staring back at me. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, trying to relax, at least for the rest of the evening. I grabbed my peach-colored linen pants and white shirt. Dinner would be arriving at six. I went to the sitting area of our room and got a drink from the bar to help mellow me out, then I would watch TV.

When I heard the door open and close, I waited for her to walk around the wall. She didn't disappoint. I smiled at the relaxed look on her face. She smiled at me and said, "That massage was everything. Thank you."

She came to me and sat on my lap. I wrapped my arms around her, then kissed her lips. "You look so relaxed, baby."

"Why are you so dressed up though?"

“I just wanted to look nice for you. Dinner is being delivered at six, and I just wanted it to be romantic for you. I didn’t think me slabbing in a pair of skinny jeans with a T-shirt would fit the environment I was trying to create. You smell so good though, baby. I almost wanna get a taste of you now.”

“We have two hours before dinner gets here. What’chu wanna do?”

“I’m gonna wait, because I wanna take my time with you. I wanna cherish every inch of you and show you how grateful I am for your presence. You make me better, Kaysyn. I want to be better because of you... and now the kids. I can’t wait to get to know them more. But you deserve the best I have to offer, especially this weekend, baby.”

Her eyes made their way to mine as I talked. With every word I spoke, they seemed to water. I thought she was going to drop tears. She knew that something was causing me to be so expressive. I cleared my throat because it seemed like she was in a daze. She gave me a soft smile. “Okay. I’ll wait. Your words were beautiful, Sen. Is something going on that you aren’t telling me?”

“The only thing you need to worry your pretty head about is how you gon’ survive through the sweet torture I’m gonna put you through later. That’s it.”

“Okay. I’m gonna go do my hair and makeup so I can match your fly. You look sexy as fuck in peach and white. I see you, baby. Damn.”

She glanced at my crotch, and a devilish grin formed on her lips. He was rising to greet her, despite my words about wanting to wait, and she didn’t make it any better by rubbing her ass over it. “See, that’s the shit that got you in trouble almost two years ago.” I popped her ass. “Go handle your business, and I’ll pour us drinks.”

She stood and made her way to the bathroom while my dick threw a fucking fit. She knew it was hard for me to resist her sexy ass. I stood from my seat and watched her ass jiggle as she walked. “Fuck, baby. I can’t believe all that shit is just for me.”

She looked over her shoulder and gave me a smile as she headed to her luggage to get her makeup. I poured a glass of Crown Black and went to the balcony to look out at the city. As I thought about sipping it, I thought about Kaysyn slapping the shit out of me when I told her the truth. I turned it up and downed it, hoping it drowned out my feelings of disgust.

CHAPTER 14

KAYSYN

Something was going on with his ass, and I couldn't figure out just what. Although we hadn't been a couple long, I had been around Seneca long enough to know when something wasn't right. While I knew he'd made changes for me and that he was being a little softer with me, I also knew that he wasn't *this* damn expressive or *this* damn soft. He had me nervous as fuck. I was constantly questioning whether I made the right decision the entire time I applied my makeup.

After curling my hair and putting on a white sundress, I made my way out into the room to see him standing on the balcony. His bothered state was beyond obvious, and he had to know that I sensed it. While I was trying to focus on the moment, I couldn't help but wonder about how he would possibly let me down once this was over.

I glanced at all the beautiful roses and flameless candles, knowing how passionate the night would be. The rose petals on the floor and bed made my heart smile. I assumed he paid hotel staff to do this while we were gone. As I approached the balcony, I could hear that he was listening to music. I noticed that if he wasn't listening to rap, he usually played Ye Ali. I liked him too. Before I could open the door to join him, he turned and stared at me through the glass.

His eyes scanned me from head to toe, then he opened the door for me. Pulling me into his arms, he said, "Damn, baby. You so fucking fine."

"Thank you, Seneca. I told you I had to match your fly."

“Mm. You far exceeded me,” he said as his hands rested against my ass.

I lifted my hand to his cheek as I caught a glimpse of his grill. I swore I loved that shit, especially on a chocolate man like Seneca. Tonight, he wore the one he just had made. It was full of diamonds and even more flashy. I supposed the gold one would get a break tonight. “So I get to break this new grill in tonight?” I asked.

He looked confused for a moment, then gave me a devilish grin. “Mm hmm. I plan to have juices running all through it.”

The knock at the door interrupted us. It was most likely our dinner. I followed him inside and made my way to the table while he went to the door. The delivery guy helped him with the trays and set the platters in their proper places on the table. After accepting his tip, he left the room. Seneca made his way back to me and pulled out the chair for me to sit. Once I did, he pushed my chair in.

After popping the cork on our bottle of wine, he poured us each a glass, then went to his seat. Reaching across the table for my hands, he said, “Let’s bless this food first.”

I nodded. I bowed my head as Seneca thanked God for our meal and asked him to bless it. Once he was done, I opened my eyes and removed the lid from my food. There was a huge lobster tail on a bed of rice with mixed vegetables and a side salad. The aroma had my stomach growling like I hadn’t eaten all day. “This looks delicious.”

“Mm hmm,” Seneca said.

I looked up to see him staring right at me. I felt my cheeks heat up as I grabbed my fork to begin enjoying my meal. Seneca did the same. He looked slightly inebriated, but I would gladly fuck that drunkenness right out of him. We ate our food in silence until he said, “Don’t get full, Kay. You can’t be fucking up our night ’cause yo’ stomach hurting.”

I almost choked on my food. He sat there and chuckled as he stared at me. “Jackass,” I said after drinking some water.

He chuckled again and went back to his food. I rolled my eyes and continued eating dinner as well, but I decided to fuck with him while I did so. Since we were within reach of one another, I lifted my foot and slid it over his crotch. A slow smile made its way to his lips as he played with the food on his plate with his fork. He probably couldn't even focus on his food now. After licking his lips, he said, "Fuck wit' me if you want to, but I'll flip this fucking table out of my way to get at you."

I lowered my foot and took a swig of my wine, then stood from the table and made my way to his side. "Don't flip the table just in case I want to eat my leftovers later. I'm gon' put it where you can get it instead."

He stood from his seat and grabbed my hand, leading me to the sink to wash them. I was glad he was being proactive, because I wouldn't have remembered shit until my pussy was burning from the seasoning under his nails. Seneca could easily make me forget everything I was supposed to be doing.

As he stood behind me, he kissed my neck softly. The goosebumps appeared instantly. Glancing at him in the mirror, I noticed the serious expression on his face, and it caused me to shiver. "You good, baby?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes, better than good."

After he thoroughly washed our hands, he led me to the bed just as "Permission" by Ye Ali filled the silence. His gaze had me frozen in my position, waiting to see what he would do first. For a minute or so, he just stared at me, slowly caressing every part of me without touching me. My breathing was shallow as hell, and I was ready to strip this dress right off me. My nipples were throbbing, and my middle was pulsing as I stared right back at him.

He placed his hand on my shoulder and pulled the strap from my dress off it, then leaned over and lightly kissed where it had once been. My eyes closed involuntarily as he did the same to my other shoulder. Because of the way the dress was made, I wasn't wearing a bra. Since I wasn't wearing a bra, I

surely didn't put on panties. That was less shit to be in the way of him getting to his happy place.

My dress fell to the floor and pooled at my feet. Seneca backed away and stared at my naked body like someone had set a steak seared to perfection in front of him. Grabbing my hand, he slowly turned me around and wrapped his arms around me. He brought his lips to my ear and placed light kisses on it and on my neck. "I love you so much, baby."

He released me, and I turned to him to see him taking off his clothes. His body was pure perfection, especially that four iron hanging between his legs. He came back to me and placed his hands on my shoulders, causing me to sit on the bed. When I did, he got in beside me, forcing me to slide more in the middle to be closer to him. His lips and hands traveled the length of my body, not missing a spot.

My moans left me uncontrollably as he so tenderly teased me beyond my wildest fantasies. I never even thought he was capable of this much passion. He'd gone to my feet and was softly kissing his way back up to my center. Feeling my body tremble in anticipation was about to do me in. The pressure was intense, and I felt like I was going to pass out at any minute. The way Seneca was making love to me with his tongue was propelling me to orgasmic heaven.

He licked my entire pussy and sucked the inner parts of my lips before inserting his tongue. I never thought that would be as pleasurable as it was. It helped that his tongue was slightly longer than normal. I began rolling my hips against his face, feeling like I was about to erupt without him even touching my clit. My body was trembling, and before I could restrain it, I squirted all over his face.

He didn't flinch or jerk back when it happened. He went up on his knees and rubbed his hand down his face, then stood from the bed and went to the bathroom, leaving me there wondering if he was upset. His facial expression wasn't one of anger, but he didn't look overjoyed either. When he came back, he joined me in bed again as I waited for what he would say. Without saying a word, he made his way right back to my pussy and ate it like he was starving.

My clit didn't stand a fucking chance this time. He sucked it slowly and swirled his tongue around it, causing my body to jerk. I felt like I was about to die from pleasure overload. His pace was taking me down piece by piece every time his head dipped, gently pulling at my clit. "Senecaaaa!"

He slid his fingers inside, caressing my G-spot like he was massaging that shit to conquer the damn world. "I'm cumming!"

The minute my body jerked, he stood and slid his dick right to the action. I thought he would have been on some 'beat the pussy up' shit, but surprisingly, he stroked me slowly, just as he was doing orally. The difference was, this time, he was staring into my eyes. "Cum on my dick, Kaysyn."

It was like my orgasm had stalled. It felt just as intense, but I didn't peak. He stroked me harder, but still didn't change his pace. I lifted my legs and wrapped them around his waist. My legs were still trembling, and my body jerked, but nothing happened until he said forcefully, "I said cum on this muthafucka!"

My eyes rolled to the back of my head as I lost control. "Senecaaa! Oh shiiiit!"

There was no way I would be fit to do anything after this. My body felt like it was seizing from his loving. As my body calmed, he lowered his head and kissed my lips. When he moved down to my neck, I was in euphoria. "Oh my God. I love you."

I bit my bottom lip, not believing what had fallen from my lips. As I stared at him, I expected him to look shocked, but he didn't. It was as if he knew that I was in love with him and was just waiting on me to realize it. He gently glided his fingertips over my breasts, then brought it to my cheek. "I love you too, Kaysyn."

He picked up his pace a bit and stroked me powerfully, making me want to submit to his every demand. Lowering his head to my ear again, he power stroked my pussy like it would be his last time as my nails dug into his back. For the third

time, I came all over the damn place, just as he said, “I’m cumming, Kay Baby. Fuck!”

Both our bodies were shivering as we caught our breath. I was so worn out. Seneca had other plans though. He pulled out of me and rolled me over to my stomach. I was about to go to my knees and toot my ass up until he straddled me. He pushed inside of me again and rested on my back. “I already knew you loved me, baby. I could feel it. I’m just happy you’ve finally felt free enough to say it.”

Just as I was about to respond, he shoved his dick inside of me so deep he knocked the fucking sound out of me. I couldn’t say a word to save my life. If he went any deeper, whenever he nudded, his kids would spew from my lips. While he was fucking me up, it still felt like we were making love. This had to be what a happy medium felt like. It was like he was fucking and making love to me at the same damn time.

He slid his hands beneath me and grabbed ahold of my nipples, causing me to erupt. My pussy clenched him so tightly he yelled, “Oh fuck!”

He gave me a couple more strokes before he came. Neither of us changed positions. We weren’t in a hurry to move at all. This nigga’s dick had paralyzed me. When he finally fell to my side, I turned my head to face him. We lay there, staring into one another’s eyes. I wasn’t sure what he was thinking, but all I could think about was that I’d told him I loved him.

Lifting his hand, he gently stroked my cheek and slid his thumb from his other hand over my bottom lip. I kissed his hand and scooted closer to him so I could kiss his lips. I eased my body on top of his and stared into his eyes as I slid down to his dick. “Baby, I think he tired. He may be sleep for the night.”

“He better wake his ass up. I’m not done with him yet. I have some shit to digest.”

CHAPTER 15

SENECA

As we headed home, the car was quiet. I didn't know what to say to Kaysyn. When we woke up this morning, we took a shower together and ended up fucking once more. Last night, she'd incited a whole notha session on my ass, that left us sticky and trying to figure out what the fuck had happened this morning. We'd both literally passed out in our juices.

After our session in the shower, we'd gotten dressed and made our way down for breakfast, then went back to our room to pack up and leave. I was wishing we would have taken a nap before leaving, but we decided to head back. Kaysyn missed the kids, and we both had jobs to report to in the morning.

We were an hour away from Houston when Kaysyn grabbed my hand. "Whatever is on your mind is eating you alive. Is it something that you need to tell me?"

I glanced over at her and could see the love in her eyes. I swallowed hard and exited the freeway. There was no way I could tell her this without looking into her eyes. When we got to Houston, we would be going to Arrow's place to get the kids. After taking them home, I would be heading back to Beaumont. I'd spoken to Jungle this morning, and he promised me that they would keep an eye on her if she chose to stay at home after what I told her.

When I drove into the Lowe's parking lot and had parked into a spot, I turned to her and grabbed her hand. There was no point in stalling any longer. As I caressed it, I said, "The guy that sold Luckey the laced weed, umm... he got killed, mainly

because he was lying. Luckey was stealing from him, and Jungle called me because he knew that I knew him. They were going to kill him.”

Her eyebrows lifted, but I continued before she could say anything. “I paid his debt, and he was released. That isn’t the problem though. I had to give you that background for what I’m about to say. A guy called me early yesterday saying that he put two and two together. The guy that sold those drugs to Luckey was on my hit list. I laced his personal stash to fuck him up. The man that called said that Anson never smoked his personal stash because he could tell someone had fucked with it.”

Her lips parted, and she slowly pulled her hand away from me. “He sold it to Luckey, didn’t he?”

I slid my hand down my face and bit my bottom lip for a totally different reason now. I was nervous as fuck. “Yeah.”

“So, basically, what you did fucked Luckey up... ruined my marriage... took a father away from his children.”

“Kaysyn, please believe me when I say I didn’t know that was what had happened until that nigga called me yesterday.”

“You had to have gotten a clue, though, after I told you.”

“I did, but there was no point in bringing it up if I wasn’t sure. While I’m still not totally sure, the story sounds logical.”

“Please take me home.”

“Kaysyn... I’m so sorry. I wasn’t trying to hurt Luckey. That’s the truth.”

I reached out to grab her hand, and she snatched it away from me. “Seneca! Take me home.”

“What about the kids? You don’t want to get them first?”

She cut her eyes at me. “What is it about what I said that’s confusing? I said take me the fuck home.”

I nodded and headed back to the interstate. The rest of the trip was completely silent. I didn’t even turn the music on. My mind was working overtime. She hadn’t said that she was done

with me, so maybe she realized that it wasn't totally my fault. It was just the fact that what I did directly affected Luckey and the three of them, although he wasn't the intended target. My actions changed their lives.

When we got to her house, I popped the trunk and got out of the car to help her out, but she'd already gotten out and had made her way to the trunk to get her things. She grabbed her suitcase and slung it out of there. When I tried to take it from her, she spun around and popped the shit out of me. I was stunned for a minute, because her reaction was delayed. I'd expected that to come when I first told her.

I quickly made my way to her as she got to the door. When she spun around again, I grabbed her by the neck and held her against the door. "My bullshit changed your life. I get that, but don't put your fucking hands on me in that manner again. I don't care how pissed you are. That shit wasn't cool when Luckey did it to you, and it ain't cool for you to do that shit to me, no matter how much you think I deserve it."

"Take your fucking hands off me, Seneca. Your sister was right. I should have never gotten involved with a muthafucka that needed to grow the hell up. What you did destroyed my family. There would have never been a me and you had you not done that. Luckey was the man I loved."

I removed my hand from her neck but held my position against her, still pinning her to the door. "Naw. Luckey was the man you settled to love. Tell me he used to make your pussy cream like I do." I slid my hand down her chest. "Tell me he put your fucking breathing on pause like I do." My hand continued to the jackpot, and I gripped it through her pants. "Tell me he makes your heart race just from his presence."

She remained silent, clearly in a trance from what I was doing to her body. I leaned into her and kissed her lips. "Come on, Kay Baby. You know I love you. I'm the man you supposed to be with. Real shit. Ain't no muthafucka gon' have what and who belongs to me."

She swallowed hard then pushed me away from her. Turning to the door, she unlocked it then practically threw her

suitcase inside. Before I could step inside behind her, she turned to me, her lip twitching like an angry dog. “Stay away from me, Seneca.”

She slammed the door in my face, and I couldn't help but pound out my anger on it. I turned to head to my car. “Fuck!”

I wasn't angry at her. I was angry at myself. While I couldn't change the past, I was angry that the shit had to affect the only thing right in my life. After getting in the car, I just sat there. Leaving the driveway and going home, never hearing from her again would surely fuck me up. My anger was consuming me, and before I could stop myself, I called Joxy.

“Hey, Seneca! What'chu up to? You coming to Sunday dinner?”

“What did you tell Kaysyn?”

“What?”

“What did you tell Kaysyn about being with me?”

She took a deep breath and huffed like she was already irritated. “I told her to leave your ass alone before she got hurt. I told her you weren't ready to settle down, and neither was she. She needed to be alone to figure things out. She said she was having fun with you. So, I told her that it was her life, and I just hoped she knew what she was doing. Seneca could be cynical at times. If she could handle that side of you, then more power to her. She told me she could, especially since y'all weren't embarking on a relationship anyway.”

“How long ago was that?”

“I don't know. Probably when she first told me y'all were messing around. Why?”

I released the air I seemed to be holding. The way Kaysyn said that shit, she made it sound recent. “I'm coming to Sunday dinner. I'll be there in about an hour.”

“Seneca, what happened?”

“We were a couple. She just broke things off with me because of some shit that happened years ago. I'll tell you in person.”

“Okay. I’m sorry, Sen. Be careful on the road.”

“A’ight.”

As I backed out of her driveway, I felt like I wanted to cry. Maybe Kaysyn felt like we wouldn’t last. Maybe that was why she was so hesitant to tell anyone we were together at first. She was afraid that something would happen to tear us apart. That was exactly what had happened. The woman I loved never wanted to see me again. My heart was heavy and breaking. I wasn’t giving up, but I knew she needed time. That was a heavy blow I laid on her. It was a heavy blow for me, because I knew that it would kill her and everything we’d built toward a relationship.

I needed to probably accept the way things had gone and just walk away, but my heart wasn’t going to rest until I’d given my all in my efforts to restore us. I needed her, and I didn’t know what my life would be worth without her. I had to try and give it everything I had... until I had nothing left.

“WHAT’S UP, SENECA?” MR. SHELDON SAID AS HE SHOOK MY hand.

“Life, man. You good?”

He nodded as he stared at me for a second longer than I was comfortable with. All the older people had done the same when I greeted them. I’d just gotten to the Berottes’ for dinner. Mrs. Anissa had cooked some type of creole sauce and fried chicken. It was smelling good as hell, and I was just ready to eat and go home. I didn’t know why I even came here.

When I got to Joyy, she stood from her seat and hugged me. “Whenever you wanna talk about it, I’m here.”

I nodded, then continued making my rounds. When I saw the men heading outside, I knew that was where I needed to be also. Ali had just walked in and was greeting everyone as well. He gave me a head nod, and I did the same in return. The

minute I sat on the picnic bench outside, Mr. Sheldon said, “Only a woman can put that type of sorrow in your heart.”

Everyone’s attention turned to me, and I saw a frown immediately form on Axton’s face. I was sure that he knew whatever the issue was, involved his sister, especially since I didn’t deny what Mr. Sheldon said.

Zay came and sat next to me, and Ali sat on the other side. One thing about coming here on Sundays was the brotherhood I felt like I was a part of. Everybody looked out for each other, although I came in like the fucking Tasmanian Devil, immediately getting on everybody’s bad side. Breaking the silence, Axton asked, “What happened with my sister?”

Everyone’s eyes widened, with the exception of Zay and Ali, because they didn’t know we were still fucking around. I took a deep breath and manned up. Seneca wasn’t a punk by any means, so I pulled from that energy to get through this awkward moment. “I found out some shit I did years ago to someone else, negatively affected her.”

“You don’t have to go into detail, man. This ain’t nobody business. It’s between you and Kaysyn. Don’t feel pressured to tell us what y’all going through,” Isaiah said.

Mr. Sheldon nodded in agreement. I looked around the patio, and everybody here, I considered them a brother. “Naw, it’s cool. Y’all my brothers, and I could use a little support. This shit is new to me. I’m used to sticking and moving, doing my thing. While our involvement was supposed to be a fling and us just having fun, it turned into more. I fell in love with Kaysyn, and I wanted more. She didn’t want that at first. It took her some months... almost a year, but she gave in. Just the other day, we became a couple.”

Everyone was staring at me like deer in headlights. The Seneca I portrayed constantly was nowhere in sight. Instead, this heartbroken, soft ass nigga was running my whole existence, and there was no telling when he would leave. He would most likely be here until my heartbreak turned into bitterness. Then I would just be a cruel muthafucka with

nothing to live for. The thought of that only made my heart sink lower.

“While we were in Dallas yesterday, I got a phone call that changed everything. The nigga that sold Luckey some foul shit was on my hit list. I couldn’t stand that nigga’s existence. I was still in the game, but I was on my way out. I laced his private stash with some heavy shit. Cocaine and meth. I wanted him off my dick. He was always saying some shady shit, and we’d nearly come to blows a couple of times.”

“Aww fuck! I think I know where this is going. Dammit! I gotta go,” Ax said. When he got next to me, he said, “Honestly, I know that shit is tearing her apart. But I have to respect you for telling her, because it kind of wasn’t your fault. That’s my sister though. You fucked up, and it might be best that you just leave her alone.”

With that, he walked off, and Mr. Sheldon asked, “Is there more, Seneca?”

“He noticed his shit had been tampered with, so he sold it. Luckey was the not so lucky recipient of it. It happened over three years ago... probably four. I didn’t do that shit to Luckey. Anson sold it, knowing something wasn’t right with it. Because I was the one who laced it, I didn’t want the shit to come out and Kaysyn find out before I could tell her. I have enemies, not a lot of them, but I have them. Someone could have contacted her and said something.”

“So she’s angry like you intentionally fucked Luckey up?” Dylan asked.

“Yeah. She’s more so thinking of how those events affected their marriage... their lives. I think knowing that I even played a part in that is what has her the way she is. I can understand that, but that shit killed me when she said for me to stay away from her. Taking Zay’s advice, I’d been showing her a different side of me, and she told me last night that she loved me for the first time, only for me to reveal this shit to her today.”

“That’s a fucked up predicament to be in. I don’t even know what to say,” Shy said.

It wasn't often that nigga was speechless, but I knew it wasn't anything that could be done to remedy it. As the other men gave me encouraging words, I glanced at Ali. He was staring off into space, and Shy had noticed that shit too. He knew some shit that he wasn't gonna say in front of everybody.

Mel approached me and said, "I have a feeling y'all gon' be good. We gon' have to plan a night to kick it when you have time."

He slapped my hand and hugged me. The minute he walked off, Ali said, "I told you to wait to tell her. Jontae is a done deal."

My eyebrows rose slightly as I glanced around. "When?" I asked.

"Last night, early this morning. Caught that nigga outside by himself. End of story. She wouldn't have had to know, and you could have saved yourself this heartache."

"Man. That wasn't necessary."

"You my boy. I always got'chu. You know that, so I don't know why you tripping. If my livelihood or life in general was gonna be affected negatively by something, I know you would have my back at all costs. That's why you my nigga. So you should know that I offer the same courtesy. Jontae weak ass didn't stand a chance against me. He was weaker than Anson. I don't even know why Jungle waste his time with some of those soft ass niggas."

Now I was sitting here wishing I would have taken his advice, but at the same time, I still would have felt guilty. "It was best that I told her. I love her that much. I couldn't keep looking her in the eyes, knowing what happened. It felt like I was being deceptive. She'd questioned me about that shit before, and I got all defensive. That makes me look even more guilty."

"Well, you still good with working tomorrow? Jericho gon' be in town, so you ain't got to be worried about being out of town."

“Yeah, I’m cool. How’s things going with Sandrene? When she talk to that woman?”

“Good. She talks to her tomorrow. I promised her that I would be there with her and Mel. She too cool and sweet of a woman to be having all this trouble with them people. Her pops left shit a mess. But I guess he had no idea that flight he was on would be his last one.”

I nodded. Sometimes horrible things happened to good people. I supposed I had no room to complain, because I was a fucked up nigga who was getting a dose of his own medicine.

CHAPTER 16

KAYSYN

“Dr. Anderson, you have a delivery up front.”

“Okay.”

I wasn't ready to deal with Seneca. I had no intent of telling anyone what he told me, but then he went to the Berottes' and told all our business. Ax called me, having a fit. I was already feeling fragile about what Seneca revealed. I made Ax promise to keep it to himself, but he told me he'd already called Arrow. Thankfully, Arrow hadn't told anyone else. When the kids asked where Seneca was, I just told them he had to get home to get ready for work. I just needed to deal with this issue mentally before involving anyone else.

When I got to the front and saw that the bouquet was there but no one else, I was relieved. The receptionist smiled at me as I grabbed them from the counter. Making my way back to my office, I smelled them. It caused my eyes to water because I caught the faint smell of Seneca's cologne. He was the one who delivered the flowers.

I missed him, but the shit he told me Sunday morning had me in a chokehold. It had been two days, but I hadn't felt any differently than I did when he told me. He was way too close to the situation with Luckey. If Luckey found out that he was that close to what happened, my life would forever be miserable. Although Seneca had saved Luckey's life, I didn't think that would matter, if he knew the truth.

I sat at my desk after setting them on a side table and stared at the card I pulled from them. My hands trembled as I

saw Kay Baby written on the outside. Finally gathering the nerve, I pulled the card from the envelope.

I know I fucked up... without even knowing that what I did would come back to haunt me. Consequences came swift and harsh. I love you so much, Kay. I really don't see life being worth shit without you. Despite who that shit was intended for, the point is that it destroyed innocent lives. I'll never live that down. Just the fact that it hit so close to home is karma for your ass. Please, give me a chance to make it right. I miss you, and I know you can't be that angry to where you don't miss me too. Please call me.

I'd been trying to hide my inner torment since Sunday, but after reading his note, I burst into tears. While I wanted to call him as he suggested, my mind was telling me to make sure I was really ready to talk to him. There would be no sense in calling him only to ghost him again because I couldn't handle it. I loved him, but knowing that he unknowingly played a role in Luckey's demise was hard.

Had it not been for his evil ways, Luckey and I would have still been together, in love, and enjoying our family. *Should I consider what happened to him fate?* While I loved Luckey with everything in me, I realized that Seneca brought shit out of me that he didn't. I didn't feel like I was missing anything until I had been with Seneca. I used to tease the hell out of him, but I was just playing, until Luckey and I weren't doing so great. We hadn't had sex in months, because we were constantly arguing. I now knew that it was his high that was more important.

I wiped my weary eyes and tried to go over notes for a presentation I had to make next week. After only ten minutes into it, I had to stop to go to the bathroom and throw up. This shit with Seneca had me sick to my stomach. He'd shown me so much of himself. In my heart, I wanted to say that shit happened years ago, and he was someone totally different back then, but then I remembered the countless arguments and fights with Luckey.

Luckey was my nasty ass Q Dawg. He had his shit together. I tried convincing myself that it was his fault for

buying weed from a nigga he didn't know, but when he first started buying from Seneca, he didn't know his ass either. That started before Joyy and I began working together. It wasn't Luckey's fault. As much as I felt uncomfortable with it right now, I knew it wasn't really Seneca's fault either.

I somewhat wished he would have kept it to himself. In my mind, I was gearing up to start my life with him. Starting over was hard as hell, but Seneca had won my heart. That shit wasn't easy either. I wasn't one to fall in love at the drop of a hat. I was with Luckey for a year before I fell in love with him. Seneca stuck around, waiting for the moment that I did. I didn't feel the least bit of guilt, because he was the one who reneged on our intended plans, but at the same time, he knew I was worth having.

He saw my worth and stuck around to make sure I saw his. I was an overthinker and an overachiever. It came off as me being indecisive and playing games. It wasn't that. I was so critical of myself and worried about my career constantly. I had to worry about how I was viewed by others. Sometimes my job depended on it.

After rinsing my mouth out, I went to sit back at my desk and slid a piece of spearmint gum into my mouth. My phone vibrated on the desk, and I saw it was Arrow checking on me. I sent him a text back saying that I was doing okay, when I knew that couldn't be further from the truth. Another text came through from Luckey.

Hey, Kaysyn. I hope you're having a good day. Do you think it's possible for me to spend time with the kids today?

Yes. I get off at three.

I slid the phone in my purse and went back to my notes so I could get the fuck out of this place.

“WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE WE went to Fiji! Damn, Kay! I missed you, girl.”

I chuckled at Joyy as I sipped my drink. The kids and I had come to town and were staying with Axton and Alexz for the weekend. It had been two weeks, and I believed I was ready to tell Seneca my decision. However, I believed he needed to hear it in person. According to Arrow, he'd been working a lot, but he would be off this weekend. Arrow and Lynn were in town as well, because the fellas all went out last night. We'd decided to go to brunch at Pour 09, the Berottes' normal turn up spot.

"I've had a lot of shit on my plate, Joyy. I'm more than sure either Seneca or Isaiah have filled you in by now. I just... I don't know. You know I keep things bottled in before I can talk about them."

"Isaiah told me. Seneca has been keeping to himself lately, so I haven't seen him in about two weeks... when y'all broke up! Although you never told me y'all were together."

"I'm sorry. I wanted to tell you in person, but then all this bullshit happened. We'd only been official for a few days. I was going to come to town for Sunday dinner, but after what he told me, I just needed time to myself to evaluate things. He's been sending flowers and calling me like crazy. He even showed up at the office one day, but I'd taken an early lunch."

Joyy's eyebrows lifted as she seemed to be studying my every movement. "You love him, don't you?"

I lowered my head slightly as she brought her hand to her mouth. "Yeah. He's loved me for a while. But when he showed me he was serious about us and started doing more things to show and prove, I couldn't help but cave. I mean, it helped that the dick was Satan himself."

Joyy fake gagged, then downed her drink like it was alcohol as I chuckled. "First of all, that's my brother, and you know how I feel about him being referred to in that manner. Secondly, heifer, that's my brother, and you know how I feel about him being referred to in that manner!"

I laughed so hard at her crazy ass. She said the secondly part almost an octave higher than the first. "So I suppose you saying that's the one and the two, right?"

She chuckled as she slowly shook her head. “Kaysyn, I remember asking you before if you knew what you were getting into. I didn’t want to see you hurt like this.”

I frowned slightly, then looked up at her. “Honestly, I believe I’ve hurt him more than he’s hurt me. Seneca has been good to me. I just wasn’t ready for what he was offering. Plus, I was doubting that he could adapt in my world. When he began proving to me that he could, I lost all hesitancy and inhibitions. This was the first time his past actually came back to haunt him. I just hate that it involved me and my family.”

She lowered her head to her hand and stared at me dreamily. “You know, the look in your eyes is something I’ve never seen before.”

I smiled slightly. “Seneca. The way he came in and saved the day for me and the kids was the determining factor. It’s like he grew up overnight. Whenever I think of him, his aura fills me like you wouldn’t believe. He’s in my soul.”

“So what will your decision be? When are you going to talk to him?”

“Tomorrow at dinner. I don’t want to tell you my decision before I tell him. I owe him at least that courtesy. This whole thing isn’t his fault. It’s the other guy’s fault. He didn’t even have to tell me. How was I gonna find out? I just keep feeling like I’m saying I don’t give a shit about Luckey by talking to Seneca. Luckey did some shit, but it was only after his life was ruined. Now I feel guilty for turning my back on him.”

“Damn, sis. Your mind and thoughts are all over the place.”

“They are, but I know what I have to do now. I’ve had two weeks to sit with this, and it’s clear for me now.”

“Well, I hope everything works out the way you want it to.”

As we ate, I received a text message. When I saw Seneca’s number, I opened it. *I heard you’re in town. Can we talk?*

Yeah. I planned to talk to you at dinner tomorrow.

I can't wait. I need to see you today. Can I see you today? I'll pick you up.

I took a deep breath, contemplating what I would do. I stared at my phone for the longest before I responded. *Okay.*

I looked up at Joyy, and said, "I guess I'll be seeing him today. Y'all damn Berottes can't hold cold water. He found out I was in town."

"Uhh, I'm not a Berotte by blood."

"It doesn't matter. You got Berotte running through you every night."

She almost choked on her drink. "Heifer!" she said after she recovered. "I missed yo' crazy ass."

I laughed, and she did too. "I missed you too, Joyy."

"How have things been between you and your parents?"

I hated she even brought them up. The smile fell from my face. I loved my parents, and I knew that they were only wanting what they thought was best for me and the kids, but who were they to judge what they thought was best? Only the kids and I could determine that. I hadn't seen them in two weeks and had only spoken to them once. It seemed my brothers were given all the freedom to do their own thing, whether they made bad decisions or mistakes.

With me, it was different. I wasn't given that same grace. For my entire life, I lived to please them. It was time I started pleasing myself. Now that I was trying to do that, everyone seemed to have a problem with it. It was past time that I made Kaysyn happy.

I glanced up at Joyy. "I haven't seen them in two weeks. I've only spoken to them once in that time. I just want them to respect my decisions. As long as what I do isn't hurting my kids, then I need them to allow me to do what the hell I want to do, without the pushback. I'm sure we'll fix this eventually, but this time, they'll have to be the ones to do it. I'm tired of conceding all the time. I'm so damn grown, and I've been grown since I was thirteen years old, whupping Ax and Arrow's lil asses for cutting up."

Joyy smiled slightly. “They’ll come around.”

I smiled back and finished off my meal. “Come on. I need to spend time with my babies before Seneca shows up to get me,” I said as I looked at my phone.

I’ll pick you up at five. I can’t wait to see you.

One thing about his ass, he was just gonna tell you what to do. I slowly shook my head at the message and made my way to the car.

CHAPTER 17

SENECA

“**Y**ou know that bitch had the nerve to say Sandrene’s father only stayed with her mother because he felt sorry for her? Said he only married her to have children. What kind of fuck shit is that to tell a woman about both of her deceased parents?”

Ali was hot as hell. We hadn’t talked about Sandrene’s shit since she’d spoken with Tip. We’d been so focused on Jericho and his bullshit I’d forgotten all about Sandrene. “What did Sandrene say?”

“She told her that she was a liar and that was only what *she* was for. That was why he wouldn’t leave her and her mother. She’s strong, and she’s ready to prove that Tip had everything to do with everything. Tip is saying that she had no intent of trying to get Sandrene’s money until after Dalonna convinced her to turn a blind eye to her bullshit. That was why she allowed Sandrene to work there so long untouched.”

“I guess. She is still suing her though, right?”

“Oh, hell yeah. Shy and Skyler have gotten all kinds of bullshit on Tip.”

I nodded. I was anxiously waiting for five o’clock to roll around. It had been two weeks since I’d seen Kaysyn, and every day she ignored me, I could feel my heart getting colder... harder. I hadn’t been talking to hardly anyone but Ali. Isaiah, Joyy, and my mama had been calling me almost every day, and I’d only spoken to each of them once. The only person I wanted to talk to was finally in town.

When Zay told me that shit last night, I wanted to call her right then. I needed to talk to her immediately, but I was able to restrain myself for the moment. I'd gone two weeks without talking to her, so another twelve hours wasn't going to kill me. I needed to know what her decision was going to be though.

Watching Jericho only had me even more depressed. That nigga was torn up on the inside. All the shit he was dealing with was evident when he was home alone. He stared at pictures for nearly an hour and cried. I was more than sure they were of his family. That shit with his dad and his sister had to be hard for him. If his brother was as ruthless as he made him sound, I wondered how his sister was faring out with him being the only one there to look out for her.

I knew if he knew I was watching him, he wouldn't be doing that shit where I would be able to see him. It was eye opening seeing the things people did when they thought no one was watching. It revealed who they truly were. Jericho wasn't just a ruthless killer. He was going through some shit that had crippled him beyond belief. I'd caught a glimpse of it when he was involved with Lexi.

“Yo, you good?” Ali asked, interrupting my thoughts.

I nodded as he smirked and slowly shook his head. “Why you still here, man?”

I shrugged as I lit up a blunt. We were sitting in his car in front of Mr. Sheldon's house. Since we went out last night, the women had most of the day to themselves. All the kids were inside, and I didn't know if I would be feeling that atmosphere. I didn't feel any certain way about kids, but I wasn't in the mood to be happy or to pretend to be unbothered. However, since I'd been fooling around with Kaysyn, I just felt a part of shit... like I could finally relate and know what it felt like to love a woman.

“I need to unwind. I'm going to see Kaysyn today. I'm wound tight because I don't know the fate of our relationship.” I slowly shook my head. “You know I used to consider everybody around here soft for giving in to a woman the way they had, but now I understand. I feel like a weak ass nigga

right now. That shit my fault, partially, because this wasn't ever supposed to go this far. We were supposed to just be fucking."

"So you reneged on the deal when you caught feelings," Ali added after he blew out smoke.

"Yeah. Then I tried to make her feel bad about it when she didn't just go with it. I didn't have shit going on in my life. Nothing to wrap up, nobody to tend to. She has kids, a drug addicted husband, and a career. There was a lot more for her to consider. Although he'll soon be her ex-husband since he signed the papers, he wasn't at the time. And this bullshit on top of all that didn't help the situation. It looks like I'm at fault for tearing their lives apart. I ain't never cared about shit like that until now."

"Hmm. Love will have you all fucked up. It will have you doing all kinds of shit you don't normally do and make you eat your fucking words at every turn. I've been in love before. It was a long time ago, but I remember how I felt when it was over. That shit wasn't a good feeling. I had a sinking feeling in my chest all the time, like my heart was literally falling from its rightful place, and like you, it was my fault. I fell in love with someone that didn't feel the same way."

"Well, it's not completely the same. Kaysyn told me she loved me. She does feel the same way. She finally admitted it. It was Isaiah's advice that helped me get her to commit to me. I believe she loved me all along, but me showing her that I can be more than a thug ass nigga proved that she could trust me to have her best interest at heart. You know what I'm saying?"

"Yep. That's maturity. We ain't no young bucks no more, man. I'm almost thirty-five. You about to be thirty-three. It's been time to grow up. Women usually have this shit figured out by now. We gotta get on track with that. You ready to go inside?"

I took a last puff from my blunt, and said, "Yeah, I guess."

After checking the time, I saw that I still had damn near four hours to kill. The time was moving slowly. I didn't know

why I couldn't ask to meet her earlier. As we walked up the driveway, I sent her a text. *Will you be available earlier?*

I was anxious, and the waiting was making it worse. When we got to the backyard, the kids were playing in the grass, and Chad's big ass was on the ground with them. I slowly shook my head. The kids were having the time of their lives. Chad was a big kid at heart, and that worked in their favor. Although he had a son and nephews, those girls had stolen his heart. Mariena adored him, and it showed every time she barked.

The men stood, and we slapped hands with everyone. I sat next to Arrow as he glanced at me. "Ain't nothing changed, man. I still love her. We're gonna talk today."

He nodded. "I know that shit wasn't intentional. One thing you've never had a problem doing is owning up to what you do, whether it's something good or a fuck up. I just hate to see her hurting. She carries that shit all by herself. She's finally allowing me to help out a bit, but she refuses to talk to me about what happened with Luckey. If you hadn't told everyone two weeks ago, I wouldn't know. Ax told me what all you said."

"Yeah. He was pretty pissed. I think he still is. I can't do nothing about the past. It happened, and there's nothing I can do to change it. I just hope that our talk will be good. I'm on pins and needles. I miss her, and I would hate to see who I would become if I lost her."

Arrow nodded and picked up his niece when she ran to him from Chad. "Monster!" she screamed out as Arrow laughed.

"Stay away from monsters, baby. I got'chu."

I chuckled at how she practically disappeared in Arrow's arms. When Ax came over where we were, she left Arrow and ran straight to her dad, voicing her complaints. I glanced over at Mr. Sheldon to see he was busy with Chad's son, Foster. Shy had his hands full with his twin girls until he met my eyes. He stood from his seat and came over. "Arrow, can you hold," he started.

He looked at each of them, analyzing their features. I stifled a chuckle as Zay said, “You don’t know your daughters apart, man?”

“Shut up, Zay. Your kids aren’t identical.”

When one tried to put her thumb in her mouth, he said, “Okay, this is Kinsley. Can you hold her?”

Arrow took her from him, then pulled her thumb from her and gave her a pacifier. That baby had been wanting her thumb for at least a month now, but I was sure it had been longer. She was gon’ be a fighter. She wasn’t giving up on what she wanted. He pulled his other baby close to him and said, “Seneca, let me holla at you.”

Ali smiled slightly like he already knew what was up as I stood from my seat. I followed Shy down the driveway, and he said, “Here, hold Kaylee.”

He gave me hand sanitizer to rub on my hands, then I took her. “I been smoking, man. Should I be holding her?”

“Just for a little while until I can get what I’m looking for.”

I watched him look for something in his phone for a minute, then turned my attention to the beautiful baby in my arms. She was falling asleep, but she was squirming. I was a little uncomfortable for a minute. When I held her tightly against me, she calmed down, and went straight to sleep. She was snuggled in a blanket, and she just looked comfortable. I swore these babies were Shyrón made over.

Without realizing it, I’d walked off, staring at the baby, imagining she was mine. I’d never had a desire or thought about having kids. She was just so beautiful. I slid my finger over her hair. “She steals your heart, man,” Shy said, scaring the hell out of me.

I closed my eyes for a moment, and all I could see was Kaysyn. “Yeah.”

“I wanted to show you some shit.”

He took the baby from me, then handed me his phone. It was a video. Anson was torturing Luckey. He knew he was

hooked on shit and was just giving him weed, making him beg for something stronger. “Yo, where did you get this?”

“It was in Jontae’s phone. Keep watching though; turn up the volume.”

I turned up the volume and could hear them taunting him, making him beg them for something stronger. When Luckey left, Jontae asked, “Did you give him that shit that you thought had been tampered with?”

“Naw. My goal is to make money off him, not kill him. I don’t know what the fuck is in that shit. If Seneca is the one that did it, it might be lethal as fuck. I don’t fucking trust him. I laced Luckey’s shit myself with just enough to keep him coming back.”

Jontae laughed. “Smart, my nigga. We gon’ get his ass. There will come a time that Seneca gon’ fuck up, and we’ll be right there to put that nigga in his coffin.”

“Mm hmm. Got ’em.”

The video ended, and I was angry as fuck. “Fuck!” I yelled.

So it wasn’t the shit I fucked up that got Luckey addicted. “I get you wanting to tell Kaysyn and being honest with her, but you really should have waited. Those muthafuckas were trying to set you up. Talking to her so soon was the wrong move, bruh. But at least now you can show her that shit to prove your innocence in the situation. I’m proud of you. I can see the changes in you. I swore you was either gonna be a dog ass nigga for the rest of your life, or somebody was gonna come along and turn yo’ ass out.”

He laughed, and I couldn’t help but chuckle too. Kaysyn had a nigga making life changes. Her kids were here, too, but I didn’t really want to talk to them until I talked to her. Ell had been chilling with Shavozz’s son, Dalen, and baby girl was roughing Chad up. I didn’t think either of them had even noticed I was here.

My phone vibrated in my pocket, and I was more than sure it was Kaysyn responding to my text. “I sent that video to your

email.”

I glanced up at Shy as I got my phone from my pocket. “I appreciate you for looking out. I ain’t never really had that until I met you and Ali. Your family has taken me in as family, and to have your dad and brothers to feel like my dad and brothers is a blessing. My father never stepped up to the plate. I know that nigga’s name, and that’s about it. Mr. Sheldon is the real deal, and he created sons that were the real deal too.”

Shy nodded as a smile formed on his face. “I’m glad you feel that way. Although you came in hot, nigga, we accepted you as family because of Joyy. After getting to know you, especially after Ali brought you in to help with Chad, I knew you were a real one too. So thank you for protecting my brother. Our family just keep getting bigger.”

I chuckled, and he did too. He walked back toward the backyard as I looked at my phone to see that it was indeed a text from Kaysyn. *You can come at three. Is that okay?*

She was being way too friendly to say she was going to end it all. This had to be good news. I couldn’t wait to show her this video. Although I knew it might be triggering for her to see the beginning, it would exonerate me. Those niggas were dumb as hell to record some shit like that. They were both gone now though. Checking to see it was almost two, a slow smile appeared on my face.

“Shy, let everyone know I had to leave!”

He slowly shook his head as I took off for my car. I needed to shower and get her some flowers. It was something about Kaysyn that just made me want to do the most. I’d never stopped house hunting, and I found the perfect one for her, the kids, and me. I just wanted to do whatever it took to make her happy, and instead of shunning that behavior, I embraced it. There was no other woman that would do it for me, and I was glad I had the wisdom to know that.

I flew home and took a quick shower, then put on some jeans and a T-shirt. I was sure to moisturize my skin and beard and to put in my grill. She loved that shit. I hadn’t worn it in two weeks. My entire vibe was off. The day she slammed the

door in my face after she said to stay away from her had thrown my life all the way off. I was just happy that she was giving me a chance to explain and/or make up for the hurt I caused.

I went to the store and got her flowers, then was about to head to Joyy's. I just realized that I didn't even ask where she was staying. I called her. "Hello?"

Her voice had a nigga on pause. "Hey. Umm... I didn't ask where you were staying."

"I'm at Axton and Alexz's house."

"Okay. I'm on my way."

"Okay."

I ended the call and felt the nerves crawling all over me. After taking a deep breath, I took the ten-minute drive to their house. I had only been to their house a couple of times, and that was when we were pretty much watching everybody's back with that shit with Chad. It was hard for me to forget anything though. Being on the streets, I couldn't afford to forget anything. Shit, even in my profession now, I couldn't afford to forget anything.

When I turned into their driveway, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, then grabbed the flowers and got out of the car. I walked to the front door, and before I could ring the doorbell, she opened it. She looked so damn beautiful in her jeans and halter top. I licked my lips as she blushed. "Damn, baby. You look beautiful."

"Thank you, Seneca. You look nice also."

I extended the flowers to her, and she looked like she wanted to cry. I didn't know whether that was a good sign or not. She sniffed them and said, "Thank you. Give me a second, okay?"

I nodded and watched as she disappeared inside. That only made my nerves go even crazier, although I should have been somewhat relieved. I could see the love for me in her eyes by the way they brightened when she saw me.

Within a couple of minutes, she came out and locked the door. When she turned back to me, she smiled softly. I extended my hand, and she placed hers in mine. I wanted to pull her in my arms, but I wasn't sure how she would react to that. Once we got to the car, I opened her door and watched her slide her thick ass on my leather seats. *Fuck.*

My dick was at attention prematurely. I closed the door as she stared up at me. I was trying to get my desperate ass to calm down. Only a nigga desperate for love did all the shit I was doing right now. When I got to the back of the car, I rested my hand on the back of it. My heart was pounding. I didn't know what the fuck was happening. I felt a little dizzy.

I heard the passenger door open, and Kaysyn joined me at the back of the car. "Seneca, you okay?"

I closed my eyes and bit my bottom lip and took a deep breath. I was tripping for real. When I turned to her, she slid her arms around my waist and said, "Hold me, baby."

She was trembling, and I felt like I was too. This shit was weird as hell. "Let's go to the swing and talk."

She pulled away from me, but I needed to hold her right now. "Kay Baby, hol' on."

I pulled her back to me. I was short-winded as hell, and I was getting hot. She came back to me and put her hand to my face then wrapped her arms around me, laying her head on my chest. "Take deep breaths, baby. I think you may be having an anxiety attack."

She took deep breaths as well. If I didn't feel like a weak ass nigga before, I really felt like one now. I leaned against the car, pulling her with me. "Seneca, I need you to calm down. Please. I'm here, baby. I wanted to let you know that I can't go on without you either. I just needed time. I'm sorry for telling you to stay away from me. That was the ugly side of me. I think we all have an ugly side. I hate the way my silence has affected you. I'm so sorry."

I kissed her head as I began to calm down. This shit was trying to take a nigga out. When I got my bearings, I stood up

straight and pulled her arm from around me and led her to the porch. When we got to the swing and sat, I released air like I was holding my breath. “Kay, you don’t know how nervous I was about meeting with you. I’ve missed you so much, and not knowing what you would say today had me wound tight as hell. Fuck!”

I felt like I wanted to fucking cry tears of joy and relief. She grabbed my hand and brought it to her lips to kiss. “I can’t fault you for what happened. That shit wasn’t your fault. It was that fucker that sold it to him. Plus, Luckey has to bear some responsibility as well.”

“I have evidence that proves that he didn’t even sell him the shit I fucked with. It was just as we’d been believing all along, that he intentionally laced Luckey’s weed. I wished Luckey would have rolled his own shit instead of buying that pre-rolled shit from a nigga he didn’t know. Do you want to see the video?”

Her eyebrows lifted. “Wow. Umm... no. I don’t think I want to see Luckey that way. I’ll just have to trust what you’re telling me. So the joints you laced weren’t sold to Luckey?”

“No. I should have waited before telling you, but I never wanted to feel like I was keeping shit from you, especially shit I had no control over. Had you found out on your own, I would have looked shady as hell. Then I wouldn’t have had the chance I have now. Shit. You had me listening to Otis Clay and shit, singing the blues.”

She giggled as I sang, “Please... somebody take your hand and slap some sense in me. Open my eyes, ’cause I’m too blind to see. I’ve got this woman, and she messing my mind around. She knows that I love her, but still she tried to put me down. I know I’m just a fool. Someone she can use. But I can’t help myself...”

Kaysyn pushed me playfully. “Seneca, you actually sounded pretty good. However, I wasn’t playing with you. I was firm in what I said we would be. You changed up.”

“I know, but the song still spoke to me, girl. Damn. So we good?”

“Yeah. We good, baby.”

My heart had finally lifted to its rightful place and slowed the fuck down. “Fuck. Let’s get out of here.”

Once we got to the car and I helped her inside, I walked around and got in as well. Turning to her, I slid my hand over her exposed shoulder. “I love the fuck out of you, Kay Baby.”

“I love you too, Seneca.”

CHAPTER 18

KAYSYN

“O h fuck! Right there, baby. Right there!”

I was so close to cumming all over Seneca’s dick as he fucked me hard. We didn’t make it far when we got to his place before we were stripping each other’s clothes off. He’d sat on the couch, and I’d straddled him, immediately sliding down his dick. He fucked me from below while sucking my nipples, giving me everything he had in him.

“Cum for me, Kay. Let me feel that good shit, baby.”

I did exactly what he told me to do. “Senecaaaaa! Shit! I love you.”

He wrapped his arms around me tightly, holding me close to him. I couldn’t help but bite his shoulder, then kiss it. His dick had me losing my fucking mind. It was crazy that we had the same effect on each other. Although our relationship started as a sexual one, we were buried so deeply within one another’s souls we couldn’t fathom being apart at this point. I tried to live without him, and the minute he approached me in Fiji, I caved.

I slid my tongue up his neck and bit his earlobe, causing him to groan. I loved his moans, groans, and growls. That shit was enough to take me out the game without him sliding his big ass dick inside me. He slowed his pace for a moment as his hands slid up my back then back down to my ass. “Kaysyn, give me permission to be everything you need, baby. I don’t wanna do this back and forth shit no more. I need to be in your life, and I need you in mine. I won’t make it without you.

Please let me be the man you need, baby. Please... shit. Please.”

He placed kisses on my shoulder and neck as the tears cascaded down my cheeks. His words were so heartfelt. I never would have thought he could be so passionate. A dick appointment led to all this shit? “You have permission,” I said softly. “You have permission to love me beyond what you knew you were capable of. I need you. Thank you for not giving up on me... for showing me that you were the man I wouldn’t be able to live without.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong, baby. So thank you for not turning your back on me. Thank you for opening yourself up to feel me, even when you didn’t think you were ready. You’re a strong woman, but you can trust me enough to be weak sometimes. I got’chu always. You and the kids have me. That’s real.”

After his words, he began fucking me again. I couldn’t stop the tears from falling while he stroked me into my second orgasm. My pussy clenched him... sucked him the fuck in, holding him hostage as he unloaded. “Oh, fuck!” he yelled.

He came within my depths as he held me tightly. I was panting uncontrollably, but cries of satisfaction still fell from my lips. Seneca cupped my face and gently wiped my tears. “These happy tears, right?”

I nodded because I was unable to speak the abundances of my heart. The fact that I could be blessed with two loves in my lifetime was overwhelming. Seneca was the last man I thought I would fall in love with. When he flipped the switch on me, I didn’t stand a chance.

I slid from his dick, and he immediately stood and helped me up. He grabbed my hand and stared into my eyes. “Can I take you and the kids to dinner tonight?”

“Yeah, and can I make something clear?”

“Yeah.”

“I never wanted you to change who you were. I just wanted you to adapt to your environments. I can’t dress or

behave certain ways because of my job. On the inside, though, I still want that same Seneca. I love your soft side, but I still need that rough nigga I was originally attracted to.”

“Mm. So you ready to get fucked right?”

I giggled as I recalled the first thing he said to me when I called him to meet me at a hotel for the first time. “Not only that. I was going to be with you before you told me the latest development. You are the whole reason I’m in Beaumont this weekend. Had Zay not ran his big mouth, I was going to surprise you tomorrow. I just want you to know there were no certain conditions you had to fill for me to be here. I took the time to think about everything and reevaluate it over and over again.”

“Thank you for that, Kay Baby. I’m happy you made the decision to still be with me. I hate you had to see me at my weakest though.”

“If I’m your woman, then that’s inevitable. I’m happy I was here to help you through it. Have you ever had an anxiety attack?”

He shook his head and pulled me to his bedroom. I could tell he was slightly embarrassed about it. “Seneca, that’s nothing to be embarrassed about. It touches my heart that you feel so deeply for me. However, no matter how deeply you feel, I need you to promise me you’ll see a doctor if it ever happens again.”

He turned to me and rested his forehead on mine. “When I was younger and Joyy had gone to school, I used to have them. I didn’t realize what they were though. It wasn’t as bad as it was today. My heart wasn’t racing like that, but I would get short winded, and I would have back spasms sometimes. I was worried about how my mama was gonna make it financially. That was when I went to Jungle’s family to start selling. He was still locked up, but his sister was running shit. I hadn’t had one since I started making money.”

I slid my hands up his chest to his face then brought my lips to his. He was troubled, and I truly believed he started fucking around to feel something he was lacking. I knew it

sounded cliché, but I truly believed that was his issue. He'd told me that his mom was always working, trying to put Joyy through school and take care of him. They really didn't have time to express their love when he was a teenager.

“Do you think you should see a doctor now?”

“Maybe. I know when I'm extremely nervous or under a lot of stress, I have them. I was so fucking nervous earlier.”

“I got'chu. Whatever you need. Okay?”

“Okay. Let's shower so we can get Ell and Jericka,” he said, changing the subject.

“Okay. Let me text them so they won't eat.”

I sent the text, and not long after, a text came through from Luckey. *Are y'all home? If so, can I come over for a little while?*

I frowned slightly. He never texted me without speaking first. *No. We're in Beaumont. We'll be back tomorrow evening.*

Okay. Text me when you get back.

I stared at the phone for too long, apparently. “Everything okay?”

“I don't know. Luckey just texted, wanting to see the kids.”

“What's wrong with that?”

“He's only spur of the moment when he's high. Sober Luckey makes plans, even if it's only a day in advance.”

My eyes were roaming everywhere as I thought about the possibilities when we went home. I didn't want him popping up on me and my babies. I didn't want them to see him that way either. They were traumatized enough when he hit me, then again when he tried to attack Seneca. I didn't know how Mrs. Anissa dealt with that shit. Maybe I needed to sit down and talk to her tomorrow. Luckey knew I had a soft spot for him because I knew it wasn't his decision to start using, but it *was* his decision to *keep* using.

I knew recovering from addiction was hard, but it wasn't impossible. So many people had overcome various types of addiction, Joyy being one of them. However, I knew just as many had probably died from it. That made me nervous. Reclaiming my attention, Seneca said, "What are you thinking about?"

"I'm nervous about being home alone. What if he shows up tomorrow while I'm alone?"

"Let me handle that, okay? I told you I got'chu, even in this. I'll make sure all of you are safe, including Luckey."

I threw my arms around him. I swore he got me more than anyone. It was probably my fault though. I didn't open up to everybody. When I did open up, I was often misunderstood, so history told me to keep things bottled in. That was a long time ago, and I should have come out of it by now, but I was still doing that shit. My parents used to shut me up quite a bit. I loved my brothers, but I felt like it just wasn't fair that I had to watch them all the time. I missed all sorts of events during high school. I sacrificed a lot.

My brothers got to enjoy school with their peers. They went to parties, football games, basketball games, dances, you name it. I could never attend basketball games because most of them took place during the week. When I would complain about not being able to go, they would make excuses about how I didn't need to go instead of accepting responsibility for having kids they couldn't afford. It was like older kids were live-in babysitters and housekeepers. I rarely had the opportunity to just be a kid.

When I pulled away from Seneca, he kissed my lips. "Now come on before Ell and Jericka starve to death."

"MR. SEN, WHERE YOU BEEN? WE BEEN MISSING YOU."

I took a deep breath as Seneca glanced at me. "I had a lot of work on my plate, lil mama. I missed y'all too."

“What kind of work you do?” Ell asked.

I slowly shook my head. These kids were so inquisitive. They would talk Seneca to death if he let them. However, I was happy that they loved him. They looked at him as our protector. Ell remembered how he came to the house that dreadful night when Luckey had hit me. Somehow, Jericka had blocked it from her mind.

“I work at a private investigation firm called Watchful Eyes. People hire us to watch people or find out information about people.”

Ell’s eyes widened. “Can Watchful Eyes watch us?”

I brought my hand to my chest as Seneca glanced at me again. “Why you think y’all need watching, man?”

“Well, you can’t always be there. What if Daddy is having a bad day? He said when he hit Mama, he was having a horrible day. He apologized and said he was wrong, but it still happened. I don’t want him to have to say he’s sorry for anything else.”

My heart sank as I noticed Jericka leaning toward Ell. They were scared of their father, and that broke me. I swallowed hard and cleared my throat. “Excuse me, y’all. I need to use the restroom.”

I stood from my seat in a hurry, and Seneca stood as well. He gave me a sympathetic look as I took off from the table. Before I could get to the restroom, the tears broke free, and the cries weren’t far behind. I burst through the door and nearly knocked someone on their ass. “I’m sorry,” I said as I ran into a stall.

Hearing what my children were going through was hard on me. While I’d told them they could talk to me, they were following my lead. I didn’t talk much about my feelings, so they didn’t express their feelings very often either... not the negative ones anyway.

I reeled my emotions in and left the stall, grabbing tissue from the countertop to pat my face dry. I checked my appearance in the mirror and headed back to the table. When I

got back, Seneca stood from his seat, and Ell did the same as Jericka smiled. “I’m sorry, everyone. Have y’all decided what you wanted yet?”

Seneca slid his hand to my leg under the table, and I grabbed it. I knew he could feel the tremble in it. “I want grilled cheese,” Jericka voiced.

“Girl, all this food and you want something you can have at home?” Seneca joked.

She gave him a playful frown. “Well, what are you having?”

“Brisket nachos. That’s finna be so good. I might lick the plate when I finish.”

I smiled at him as the kids giggled. Seneca winked at me as the kids talked among themselves. “You good, baby?”

“Not really,” I said softly.

He squeezed my hand. “I got’chu. Can y’all stay with me tonight?”

“Ooooh, can we?” Ell asked.

I playfully rolled my eyes and took a deep breath. “Okay. We’ll stay.”

“Yay!” the kids yelled.

The waitress came to our table, and we placed our orders. Hopefully, the night would get a little easier to get through. I didn’t need any more fucking drama. I was sick of the shit, and it should have been sick of me.

CHAPTER 19

SENECA

“M ommy looked sad. Do you think she’s okay?” Jericka asked.

“Yeah. I think she just wants to protect you guys more. She’s sad that you guys are in the situation you’re in with your dad. That’s all. She’ll come back stronger than she was when she left. Watch.”

They both looked toward the direction Kaysyn went, waiting for her to reappear. I felt for them. They had a legitimate fear, and I knew that bothered the hell out of Kaysyn. I just wanted to assure her that I would be there for them. If I couldn’t be there, then someone else would, and I would make sure of that.

The kids turned back to me with hopeful eyes, so I said to Ell, “I will always make sure someone has an eye on you guys. I promise. If I can’t be there, someone will be. You may not see him, but he will be there. Okay?”

“Okay. Thank you. Umm... do you love Mama?”

“With all my heart, man. I’ll do anything for your mom.”

“Will you marry her?”

I gave him a slight smile. “I want to eventually, but we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it. Your mom and I just want to go with the flow and not feel like we’re forcing anything to happen. It will happen when it’s supposed to. Her main priority right now is you guys, as it should be.”

“I can tell she misses something. She’s not the same as she was when Dad was there, before the yelling and stuff. I just want things to go back to normal.”

“I know, man. Give her time. It’s a big adjustment. Just like you were sad that your dad was no longer there, so was she. She was really sad that things didn’t work out between the two of them. Plus, she’s now taking care of you two alone.”

“You’re gonna help her now though, right?”

“Absolutely. So we good?” I asked.

Jericka smiled and nodded, and Ell smiled and gave me a fist bump. He was worried about his mom, and I could see myself in him. As a little boy, I was worried about shit I shouldn’t have had to worry about. It wasn’t my mom’s fault, because she never asked me to help, but as a man, I felt like it was my duty to take care of her and Joyy since our punk ass fathers didn’t.

At least Joyy had her dad for a little bit, although she didn’t remember. The muthafucka that donated sperm for my existence didn’t stick around long enough to know whether I was born healthy or not, so I sympathized with Ellington. I knew what he was going through, because I felt the same way as a kid.

“Hey, Ell?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t worry. You can rest and be a kid. You ain’t gotta be a man right now. I got your mom.”

He nodded, then said, “I still have to look out for her, just in case things don’t work out with you either.”

I closed my eyes and nodded. I felt him. I’d just have to show him better than I could tell him. “She’s blessed to have a son like you.”

He smiled big. “I’m blessed too. I have a good mama.”

“That you do.”

“SO YOU FINALLY GOT THE GIRL, HUH?” MY MAMA ASKED.

“You doubted that shit?”

She laughed. “Apparently, you were. All that whining you were doing for that woman.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” I mocked.

We had just gotten to the Berottes’ for Sunday dinner and had barely gotten out of the car before my mama came to me with her foolery. Last night had been emotional for Kaysyn. I let her in on my talk with the kids and did my best to assure her that I would be there for them as long as she allowed me to be. She promised me that I was her be-all end-all unless I did something to change that.

The journey was worth it. Being persistent and determined to have her as mine had paid off. I knew she needed time to process what had happened in her marriage, and I realized that I was being impatient with her. I originally thought she needed a thug in her life to tell her what to do. Although she liked that shit, I finally realized that what she needed most was time. I was trying to force her into a commitment when she hadn’t fully gotten out of the one she was in.

She still hadn’t received the divorce decree back since Luckey had supposedly signed the divorce papers and sent them off. Hopefully she would get them in the upcoming days. It wasn’t like they were disputing anything. Luckey had agreed that she could keep the house and everything inside it. I just hoped he kept his word.

I grabbed Kaysyn’s hand as the kids ran inside and pulled her close to me. After sliding my arms around her, I kissed her lips. “Well, here goes nothing. Everybody about to see our love.”

“Mm hmm. Ready or not. They can be good with it or keep it to themselves,” she said then kissed my lips again.

Last night, our lovemaking was so passionate. I knew it was because she was feeling sensitive. I needed to upgrade my living space though, because I didn't feel right about Ell having to sleep on the couch. He assured me he was good since he got to play my game, but I knew what it was like to have to sleep on a couch. That shit was uncomfortable as hell. Although it was only for one night, that shit triggered the hell out of me.

When I opened the door and walked inside holding Kaysyn's hand, I could feel it tremble. She was nervous, despite what she said. The minute we walked into the front room, all talking ceased, and everyone was staring at us as Kaysyn said, "Hey, everybody."

All of a sudden, applause erupted. I wanted to slap every last one of them. I couldn't help but laugh at their bullshit. Mr. Sheldon stood and slapped my hand and hugged me. "I'm glad it worked out. That's how you get your woman, man. Congratulations."

Zay slapped my hand next, and I had to hug him too. He helped me to understand what I was doing wrong and how I needed to level up to get what I wanted. I appreciated him more than he could ever know. I glanced over at Kaysyn to see she was happy. Alexz had hugged her. As I watched, I noticed Ax's eyes on me. I gestured for him to follow me outside with a head tilt.

After I got outside, I noticed every fucking Berotte man was behind me. "Man, y'all asses nosy as fuck!"

Everybody laughed as Shy pushed me in the head. Ali came around the corner with a slight frown on his face, and that shit put me on alert. That nigga was a cold-blooded muthafucka at times, but he smiled a lot, especially when women were around. His expression eased when he saw that I'd noticed him. He spoke to everyone, and when he was done, Ax went in immediately. "What did she say?"

"She was going to be with me, because technically, it was Anson's fault, not mine. However, I found out, thanks to Shy, that Anson didn't use the shit I fucked with anyway. They said

that shit to make me feel guilty about Luckey and to try to destroy my peace. Kaysyn and I are in love, man. I know you don't fully trust me, and under normal circumstances, I wouldn't trust me either. Kaysyn is different. She's my heart. I took on a family, and I'm prepared to be the man of the house, so to speak."

"She's stubborn, bossy, independent, mean..." Ax started.

"Beautiful, loving, soft, sweet, passionate..." I added.

"You have to be able to accept all sides of her. I don't want to see her hurt again. She's so private. She won't tell us what she's going through unless we barge our way in. She has her faults, although she's perfect just the way she is. She's an overthinker, but she cares for others more than herself sometimes. I need to be sure that she's in good hands and that you not gon' fuck over her."

"I didn't just meet Kaysyn. I've experienced her ugly side, her pettiness, bossiness, and stubbornness, allat shit. I love everything about her. I haven't been able to even function for another woman, even when Kaysyn shut me out. In Fiji, nothing happened with that woman. I went met Kaysyn that night. She has a hold on me that I can't even explain. She made me better. Those kids made me man the fuck up. So you ain't got shit to worry about."

He stared at me for a second, then he extended his hand. I shook it, and he pulled me to him in a half hug. "My sister don't just blow whichever way the wind blowing, so I know her feelings are real. I can respect that," he added.

Once that was over, everybody eased up, and we talked about random shit. Eventually, I made my way to Ali. I slapped his hand and hugged him. "What's up, bruh?"

"Too much shit, my nigga."

I frowned slightly as I waited for him to fill me in. When he didn't, I asked, "Shit with work?"

"Naw. I'm gon' need you to head out when Kaysyn leaves and follow her home. That nigga broke in her house. Don't tell

her until she's ready to go. Jungle's crew got everything handled. The house is secure. I'm just not sure what he took."

"Fuck! They can't stay there, man."

"I know. I got somebody else to cover Jericho. You need to be with her and those kids. You feel me?"

"I appreciate that, man. For real."

"I got'chu, bruh. Congratulations on finding your one. Take some time to get settled with that. I just know I'll need you for sure for that benefit coming up in a month or so."

"I'll check in daily, as always."

"A'ight."

I headed back inside to see Kaysyn sitting with Lexi, Sandrene, and Lynn, getting more acquainted, although she probably knew Lynn already, since she'd spent time around her. That woman had lost so much weight since the first time I'd seen her. She almost looked like a different person. While she seemed happy before, she seemed even happier now.

Kaysyn caught my gaze and winked. I winked back and bit my bottom lip as I felt somebody pulling on my pants leg. I looked down to see Tatum, so I picked her up. "What's up, lil mama? You good?"

She laid her head on my shoulder, and I realized she was just sleepy. I looked around for Joyy and Mama and didn't see them. As if knowing who I was looking for, Mrs. Anissa said, "They're in the back room changing pampers."

"Thank you. How've you been?"

"Good. Thanks for asking. Congratulations on your new relationship."

"Thank you."

She walked back toward the stove where Alexz was waiting for her. Alexz rolled her eyes at me then gave me a playful smile. I swore, had she caught me not so far back in the day, I would have twisted her insides out. She had better be glad I was a changed man, or Axton would have another

reason to get at me. When Joyy and Mama came from the back, Joyy looked exhausted. I walked over to them to see what was going on.

“Everything cool?”

Joyy looked up at me and said, “Yeah. I’m just battling hard these days. I developed postpartum depression, and the fight to stay sober has been real. Some days are worse than others.”

“Does Zay know?”

“No. I don’t want him to worry.”

“Naw. You need to tell him. You know he will be there to help you. Zay is the most understanding nigga I know. So if you don’t tell him, I will. You know how I roll. I don’t mind going back to being that nigga. If you have any incentive to get help, it should be for these babies.”

“You’re right. I’ll talk to him after we leave.”

“Nope. That ain’t gon’ work for me.” I took Tyler from her while still holding a sleeping Tatum. My mama had Talon. “Go talk to him now.”

She huffed, but she went outside as Kaysyn approached me, taking Tatum from me. “What’s going on?”

“She’s having a tough day. She wants a drink. Did she tell you she has postpartum depression?”

“No, she didn’t. I wish she would have. We could have been there for each other.”

I nodded, then we headed to the couch. Kaysyn’s house was really on my mind, but if Ali said they had the shit handled, then I would wait until she was ready to head out. Besides, I couldn’t pass up Mrs. Anissa’s cooking. Those smothered pork chops were calling my name.

CHAPTER 20

KAYSYN

“**W**hen’s the last time you talked to Mama and Daddy?”
Arrow asked me.

I closed my eyes and lowered my head. “I don’t know. Maybe last week.”

“They miss you, Kay. She feels like she’s missing out on heaven,” he said, using wordplay on my middle name.

“Well since she’s in nirvana feeling blissful, she should be fine,” I threw out there, incorporating he and Ax’s middle names of Nirvana and Bliss.

He chuckled as Ax stared at us with a frown on his face. When he sat next to me, he asked, “What y’all talking about? I heard my name, so don’t lie.”

I rolled my eyes and remained quiet, so Arrow filled him in. Before Ax could respond, Ariana ran to him, and Jericka was right behind her. “Mama, I was tickling her. She got away though.”

She giggled, causing me to smile. I was about to pull her to my lap, but she took off and went and sat next to Seneca and Ali. I smiled at them as he smiled at her. She and Ell loved him, and honestly, I was surprised by that. Seneca could look intimidating and mean at times. Ell had thought so when Seneca came to the house for the first time.

Seneca glanced around the room and caught my gaze. He gave me a slight smile, but just from being around him, I could tell that something was on his mind. He didn’t look angry, but he did look slightly bothered. I supposed that came with the

territory of his job. He was probably stressed a lot. Tomorrow, we needed to call his doctor to talk about his anxiety. I was so nervous when he was struggling to breathe.

“So when are you gonna talk to Mama and Daddy again?” Ax asked.

“I don’t know. She hasn’t called me to say she wanted to talk. They both expressed their disdain with Seneca right in his face. Why should I be the one to call? They owe him an apology. They need to be the ones to reach out. Age has nothing to do with it. Respect is respect, and they disrespected the fuck out of him, even after his beautiful words of how he planned to love and take care of me and the kids.”

“You right. If she can call us to say she misses you, then she can call you. I had my doubts, but I told him about them respectfully. We’re not as close as he and Arrow are, but I can respect him. Although he was known for selling hopes to women and leading them on, I believe he’s genuine with you. I can tell just by the way he carries himself now. He’s not slabbing today.”

I chuckled. “Thanks, Ax. He said he wouldn’t do that around Ell and that he would do his best to stop doing it too. I just wish Mama and Daddy could be more open minded.”

“You know how old folks are. They get set in their ways, and ain’t shit right if it’s not what they believe in. Seneca is a good dude. You just have to pull back the layers to see it. He pulled those layers back for you. I’m proud of him for stepping up and showing you that you could trust him. It’s time you get back to who you were four years ago.”

After kissing Ax’s cheek, I turned and smiled at Arrow, then kissed his cheek. “Thank y’all for being there for me. Arrow, since we’re closer in distance, I’m sure Seneca and I will be spending a lot more time with you, Lynn, Jamel, and Sandrene. I’m gonna feel like the old woman of the group though.”

“Well, I mean, you are. At least you’re embracing it,” he responded.

I shoved him as he laughed. “You make me sick.”

“Throw up then,” he said, reminding me of what he and Ax used to say when they were little.

“Lawd have mercy.”

I couldn't be doing all this laughing. I was stuffed to the gills. Mrs. Anissa had done the damn thing. She was sitting at the table, looking through some kind of book, so I took the opportunity to go talk to her. Mrs. Patricia, Lexi and Skyler's mom, wasn't here today, because she was out of town. That was who Mrs. Anissa talked to the most. While I wasn't here every Sunday, whenever I came, she made me feel welcomed and like I was a daughter of hers. I swore she was an angel. She was one of the sweetest people I'd ever met.

As I was about to sit, she looked up at me and smiled. “Hey, Kaysyn. Congratulations on your new relationship, girl.”

She shoulder bumped me, and I giggled like a schoolgirl. I fidgeted a bit because I didn't know how I would just ask her what I wanted to know. She tapped my hand to get my attention. When I looked up at her, she smiled. “What's up?”

I took a deep breath. “My ex-husband is addicted to drugs and has been for the past three years or so. I found out about seven months ago. I guess my question is how did you deal with it for so long? Luckey's weed was laced, and he got addicted unknowingly. I felt guilty for giving up on him. He's been battling it the entire time. I just couldn't take it anymore.”

“Dealing with a loved one who is struggling with addiction is hard. Everyone's tolerance levels are different. We all handle things differently, Kaysyn. Don't beat yourself up. You endured for as long as you could. Some people wouldn't have lasted that long. I endured longer than I should have. Worrying about Dexter and putting up with his behavior was slowly killing me. It took DJ to make me see that.”

Her face had reddened, so I grabbed her hand. “I'm sorry for making you rehash that. I just... Luckey needs help.

Honestly, I'm afraid of what he could do next."

"Well, at least you have Seneca to look after you and the kids."

"Yeah, but he lives here. He said he has people looking out for us, but I just wish we didn't live so far apart."

"I understand, baby. Make sure you pray. God will definitely take care of you and the kids."

"Yes, ma'am."

She squeezed my hand as I noticed Jamel, Arrow, Sandrene, and Lynn about to leave. I probably needed to be leaving, too, so I could get home and get some rest. Shy and Skyler were talking to Sandrene, I assumed about her upcoming court date. It had been pushed back some, so they were going to court tomorrow. They should have gone a week or two ago. I was more than sure she would win.

As I stood, Seneca approached me and slid his arms around me. I couldn't help but smile at just how comfortable he was. It was almost impossible to be uncomfortable with the Berottes though. "Listen. I need to go home before taking you to get your car. Ali allowed me to take a leave of absence, so I'll be with y'all for a month or so. That cool wit'chu?"

I frowned slightly. Something was going on, and I needed him to share what was going on with me. "Sen—"

He put his fingertips over my lips. "I want to talk to you about it when we can get some privacy. So when we get to my place, we'll talk. Okay?"

I nodded, and he kissed my lips then grabbed my hand. We made our rounds around the room, telling everyone bye, then headed to the car. However, we couldn't get in the car good without seeing Ax, Arrow, DJ, and Chad putting on a step show in the front yard. I swore they thought they had to do the aerobics they called a stroll at every family dinner. When they started barking, Mariena burst out on the front porch and started barking.

"That's unc's baby!" Chad yelled as he ran to her.

He scooped her up and brought her to the yard where they were stepping. All that could be seen of her were her curls bouncing, and she was screaming with laughter. It was too cute. She had to grow up and be a Delta. Skyler and Dylan had better just accept it now. Seneca opened the door for me and then the back door for Jericka, and we both slid into our seats.

He closed the doors and walked around the car. Before he got in, he said something to Ali. Once he got in, he grabbed my hand and kissed it. "I love you, Kay Baby."

"I love you too, Seneca."

With that, he backed out of the driveway, and we took the ten-minute drive to his apartment. "I thought we were leaving," Ell said.

"We are, baby. Mr. Seneca needed to get some clothes. He's gonna stay with us for a little while."

"Yay!" Jericka said.

I wasn't as elated as they were, because I knew some shit was up for him to want to do so... or rather for him to actually do so. He opened our doors, then grabbed my hand. We got to the door, and he unlocked it, Ell going straight to the video game. Jericka sat next to him as Seneca led me to his bedroom.

Once inside, he closed the door. "Baby, Luckey broke into the house."

I frowned as my heart crumbled in my chest. "He what? How? The alarm should have gone off."

Seneca grabbed my hands and backpedaled to the bed. He sat and pulled me next to him. I sat, but my eyes never left him. I needed answers. If Luckey broke into the house, surely, he stole something. What would be the point otherwise? I was praying he didn't take anything that belonged to the kids. Jericka had a bank in her room. She liked to see her money accumulate before we took it to the bank. *God, no.*

"He broke a window. Apparently, he used a phone to say everything was alright after unarming the alarm. The code is still the same, right?"

“Yes. Shit! I never thought to change the code after we changed the locks or to take him off the call list for the alarm. Fuck! I’m so stupid!”

“Naw, baby. Don’t blame yourself. This is on him,” Seneca said, pulling me into his arms. “I don’t know what he took, but we need to get there so you can find out. That’s why I’ll be off work for a month or so. I need to make sure y’all are safe.”

“Is my house secure?”

“Yeah. I’d been having my boy keep an eye on Luckey. That’s how I know what happened.” He stroked my cheek after I pulled away from him. “Look at me, Kay.” When I did, he continued. “I found another house. If you cool with trusting me and plan to be with me, I want y’all to move in with me.”

My heart was beating so fast. I didn’t know what to say. Although Seneca and I had been knowing one another for a while, I still needed to take things slow if I could. However, I also knew that we needed to do something about Luckey. If he broke in and thought he got away with it, then what would keep him from coming back?

“I want to be with you, that’s for sure, but let me talk to the kids. I don’t want them to be uncomfortable. I don’t think they will, but I need to consider them before I give you a definite answer. Okay?”

“Of course.”

That decision didn’t weigh on the kids. I just needed time to think. I was more than sure the kids would be completely good with living with Seneca. “Where is the house?”

“It’s in Atascocita. I didn’t want to uproot y’all. That’s where your job is.”

My job. I stared him in the eyes, because I wanted him to see the sincerity in mine. “Honestly, Seneca, I’m thinking about resigning. I don’t want to be in Atascocita anymore.”

He brought his hands to my face and stroked my cheeks with his thumbs. “Don’t let Luckey run you off. If your heart isn’t in it anymore, I get that, and I’ll stand behind your decision. Luckey shouldn’t be a deciding factor.”

“But he is!” I broke down. The stress was a lot. My mind couldn’t focus on anything but making sure my children were safe. When I went to work, all I could think about was their safety. I called the neighbor constantly, checking on them like they were infants or toddlers. “This shit with Luckey is stressing me the fuck out! I just want to get away from it all. I can’t handle this. I can’t!”

“Shh. It’s okay, baby. I understand. Where do you want to move? I’ll go wherever you wanna go.”

“It doesn’t matter. Beaumont is convenient for you, and we’ll be surrounded by family. Let’s look for a house here.” I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. “I’m sorry. I know the kids will be okay with it. I’m just scared, Seneca. I know because of my situation with Luckey, we’re moving faster than what we would have, but my mind is filled to capacity about what ifs and bullshit. I love you, and I’m trying my best to just focus on that.”

“I already knew that. Just because I was being an ass, trying to force you to be with me, don’t mean that I don’t know how you move. When you have too much shit on your plate at once, you gon’ push something off, something that can wait. You have time to decide if you want to live with me or not. The more pressing issue is the safety of your kids. I get it, baby.”

I stared at him in disbelief. His actions never said that he understood where I was coming from with the decisions I made. He only made decisions more difficult for me. That only meant that he knew how I felt about him without me even saying so. “So basically, you’re saying you were just throwing a fit because you couldn’t get your way?”

A slow smile crept on his face. I shook my head slowly and huffed. “Come on and pack your things so we can get out of here. I don’t like driving at night. Spoiled ass nigga.”

CHAPTER 21

SENECA

When we got to Atascocita, I quickly got out of my car to help Kaysyn out of hers. I knew her nerves were on edge about what we would or wouldn't find inside. My boys didn't say whether or not he came out of the house with anything, and I didn't ask. The minute she stepped out of the car, I could see just how on edge she was, especially at the sight of her window.

I pulled her to me and said, "Take deep breaths, baby. We gon' deal with this together. Okay?"

When she hugged me back, her arm brushed against my gun. She stared up at me, but she didn't say anything. I always had my heat on me. Otherwise, Luckey would try me, and I would hate to fuck him up with my hands. At least if I pulled my gun, I would think twice before shooting his ass. If I hit him with my fist once, I was gonna hit again, and I didn't want to take the chance of losing control.

She pulled away from me and said, "I'm glad you have it. I heard that you're an excellent shot."

"Can shoot the nuts off a mosquito, girl."

Her eyebrows lifted, and a soft chuckle left her lips. "You crazy as hell. Come on."

"Mama! What happened to the window?" Jericka asked, interrupting us.

Ell was staring at Kaysyn, waiting for an answer as well. I didn't miss the slight frown he wore. He already knew what happened to the damn window. I hadn't been around him long,

but I could see him maturing right before my eyes. This bullshit with his dad was making him become the man of the house. I loved Kaysyn, but Ell was another reason why I wanted them with me. He didn't need to be the man of the house. He needed to stay a nine-year old little boy.

She didn't respond to Jericka, and I knew it was because her nerves were on edge. Once she unlocked the door and opened it, we all walked in and stood at the threshold in horror. Luckey had destroyed the house. Shit was everywhere. Jericka started screaming, and Ell ran up the stairs, I was sure to check his room. Kaysyn turned to me and collapsed against me as Jericka clung to me at my right side. This shit had me so angry. Although Luckey wasn't in his right mind right now, I wanted to show him that I wasn't in my right mind either.

"He stole my PlayStation and my games!" Ell yelled as he came down the stairs.

Jericka let me go, tears still falling down her cheeks, and ran up the stairs. Ell was so angry. The tears were falling down his cheeks as he approached Kaysyn. "Mama, he took my stuff. What are we going to do?"

I didn't know how he figured out who had come in the house, but he obviously knew it was Luckey. Before she could answer him, baby girl came down the stairs crying. "He took my money! My bank is in pieces. I had a lot of money in there."

I closed my eyes for a brief moment, trying to get a handle on my anger. "Y'all come to the couch. Let me talk to y'all," I said to them. Kaysyn finally pulled away from me and walked to the couch in silence, her shoulders slumped. They all looked so defeated. The minute I sat, Kaysyn and baby girl scooted close to me.

"Don't worry about material things. We gon' get all that back. Okay?" They all nodded. "I need y'all to go through your rooms and check to see if anything else is missing. Write it down or put it in your notes app on your phone, Ell. Then pack some clothes. We'll get a room tonight, then we'll go back to Beaumont tomorrow."

Ell grabbed his sister's hand, and they went up the stairs to do as I asked of them. "Seneca, how could he do this to us... to his children?"

"Addiction has no respect of persons, baby. That's probably why he called to see if he could see the kids. He was trying to see if you were in town. Do you want to call the police?"

She shook her head rapidly. "No. I just want to get out of here. I'm sick to my stomach."

I kissed her head. "I know, baby. I know. We need to go check your room out and see if anything is missing."

"Oh, I'm more than sure he took my jewelry. He wouldn't take our baby's games and not take that," she said softly.

"Let's still go see."

She nodded, and I helped her up from the couch. As we walked up the stairs, she said, "I don't know what we would have done without you, Seneca. Thank you for being here."

I turned to her. "You don't have to thank me for wanting to protect my family. Just like you're mine, those kids are mine. I'm gonna always be here for y'all, Kay Baby."

She had my heart soft as shit. Seeing how hurt they all were had me angry as hell at first, but now, seeing them look so defeated just made me want to hold all of them all night. *Where this soft ass Seneca come from?* She wrapped her arms around my waist when we got to the landing, and I could feel her trembling.

"He took my Jordans and the gold chains and watch y'all bought me a couple of years ago," Ell said. "I'm gonna go help Jericka."

"A'ight, man. I got y'all."

Kaysyn still hadn't said anything to her kids. I knew she wanted to address their concerns when she wasn't in the state she was in. When she opened the door to her bedroom, shit was everywhere. It was like he wanted to fuck with her. The kids' rooms weren't torn apart like this one was. There was

paper on the floor, so I bent over and picked it up as Kaysyn went to her bed and sat on it. It was their divorce decree. At least she wasn't legally bound to his ass anymore. I slid the pieces in my pocket to give to her later.

As I approached her, she stood and went to her dresser. She pulled open a drawer, then turned to me. "My dresser had a built-in jewelry box. It's empty. He took everything, including my grandmother's ring that I wore for our wedding as something old. I'd planned to give it to Jericka one day. I can't replace sentimental things. My grandmother is dead. That was the only thing I had of hers."

"I'm sorry, baby," I said as I did my best to comfort her.

She pulled away from me and got a duffel bag. "I need to get out of here. I feel like I'm suffocating."

As she moved around the room, getting what she needed, my phone chimed. When I saw it was from Ali, I opened it. *Everything good?*

Naw. He fucked this house up. Stole jewelry, money, Jordans, and a PS5 with games. That nigga must've had a bag with him to haul all that shit off.

Damn. How is Kaysyn?

Not good. She's hurt, disgusted, and angry. So are the kids. We're gonna get a hotel room for the night. We'll make our way back to Beaumont tomorrow.

Breaking me away from my convo with Ali, Kaysyn said, "I need to go to my job tomorrow before we leave."

"Okay, baby."

I watched her continue to pack her things and go to the bathroom. When she started laughing, I got nervous. "This muthafucka stole my damn flat iron. What the fuck!"

I went to the bathroom to see the word bitch written on her mirror in her favorite color lipstick. Water was in the sink, and most of her makeup was floating in it. "Why in the fuck he hate me? What the fuck did I do to him?" she screamed.

I'd never witness Kaysyn so broken. She wasn't this way after he hit her. "Baby—"

"No! I don't want..." She held her hand out to me, her palm halting me. She closed her eyes. "I'm sorry. This is just too much. It's too fucking much. I can't do this shit."

"Let's go. We can go to the store if we need to. Let's get out of here."

She walked toward me, and I could see her swallow hard as she walked past me. I grabbed her duffel bag after she added her deodorant to it, and we made our way out of the room. The kids were standing near the stairs, waiting for us. "Mama, my jewelry was missing too," Jericka said.

Kaysyn didn't respond to her. She slid her arm around her, and they headed downstairs, Ell right behind them. When they got to the door, I said, "Hol' on, baby."

I pulled my gun from my waistband as the kids' eyes got wide. After scanning outside and seeing Jungle outside, I waved them out of the house. They made their way to my car and loaded their things in the trunk. Jungle made his way to me. When he got close, we slapped hands. "How bad is it?"

"He fucked that house up."

"You want me to find his ass?"

"Naw. She just wants to be done with it. Him turning up dead will break all of them. If I could get away with it, I would put a bullet in him myself. Seeing those kids' faces when they realized their father stole from them is heartbreaking."

"I can only imagine. Y'all go try to get some rest. She want me to send someone to clean this shit up?"

"Let me check with her, man." I went to the car and cranked the engine. After she gave the approval, I made my way back to Jungle. "She said yeah. Thanks, man," I said, handing him a key. "If we had to come back to this tomorrow, it would probably fuck her up."

"I got'chu. Wait on a text from me before y'all come back here."

I slapped his hand. “See you tomorrow to tighten you up, man.”

“Don’t worry about that shit. Y’all family. You know that.”

“That I do. For the past twelve years when you got out the joint.”

“Hell yeah.”

I slapped his hand again and made my way to the car. “Well, we gon’ make the best of this. So, we gotta celebrate a new beginning. What y’all wanna eat?”

No one answered me. I grabbed Kaysyn’s hand, and she gave me a soft smile. “Can we go get a room first? We’ll figure it out by then.”

“Of course, baby.”

I took off toward Residence Inn so we could get a suite. If I had to, I would sleep in a bedroom with Ell to assure he didn’t have to sleep on a sofa this time.

“WHY DID HE DO THAT? MY MAMA IS SO SAD. SHE STILL hasn’t said anything.”

I was in bed with Ell, talking. I knew it would be a while before he dozed off. We’d opted to get something quick to eat and come back to the room so everyone could take showers. We’d also gone to Walmart so they could get a few things. Kaysyn had been quiet as hell, and I could understand why. I knew she needed me, but Ell sleeping on that sofa didn’t sit right with me, even though it was a pull-out.

“Your dad is addicted to drugs, man. When people are addicted to that shit, they’ll do anything to get their next fix. It makes them spend all their money to buy drugs, and once they’ve run out of money, they’ll steal whatever they think is worth some money to get what they need.”

He nodded. “So are we going to your apartment?”

“Yeah, but I gotta get you a bed. I don’t like you sleeping on that couch.”

“I’m not gonna mess it up.”

“Naw. It’s not that I think you gon’ mess it up. I just want you to be comfortable in a bed. I slept on a couch for a year when I was little until my mama was able to get us a bigger apartment where I could have my own bedroom.”

“I’m not gonna be on it that long though, Mr. Sen. It’s okay. Is that why you’re in here with me, and J is in there with Mama? I can sleep on the sofa. It’s just one night. I think my mama needs you in there with her.”

“You’re wise, lil man. I don’t think Jericka will be okay with sleeping alone tonight though.”

“We can sleep in here together.”

“Naw, it’s cool. We’ll be in a better situation tomorrow.”

I also remembered why I was sleeping on the couch in the first place. Joyy and I shared a room until I started jacking off. My mama beat my ass. It wasn’t like I was jacking off to visions of my sister or nothing like that. If anything, that shit would have made a nigga soft. I guess she didn’t want me getting ideas. It was inappropriate. I was too young to know why. My shit would be throbbing at night though.

Ell stared at me for a moment, like he was trying to analyze me or some shit, then he finally said, “Okay. I’m going to try to go to sleep.”

“A’ight, man. Good night.”

My mind was trying to figure out how I could ease their pain. This shit was so hard for them to carry. I grew up seeing fiends all the time. I figured out what that shit was a long time ago. By the time I was Ell’s age, I was a pro on the topic. I grabbed my phone and sent Kaysyn a message.

Try to get some rest, baby. I can feel your angst in here.

I need you, Seneca. Can you and Ell sleep in here with us? It’s a king size. We should all be able to fit.

I smiled slightly, then said, “Come on, Ell. The women need us.”

He sprang from the bed and made it to the other room before I did. I nodded repeatedly. It wasn't that he wanted to sleep on that couch. He wanted me to take care of his mama. I planned to do that for as long as I lived.

CHAPTER 22

KAYSYN

“I ’m leaving. I can’t be in this city anymore.”

“What about your career, Dr. Anderson? You’re just going to throw it all away?”

“My sanity is more important right now. I need to be there for my children as we work through this. My mind is going insane worrying about whether or not he will come after us again. I can’t live with that type of stress. I’m sorry to leave before the school year starts, but that’s what an assistant is for. Dr. Allen should be fine taking over. He’s wanted my job for a couple of years now anyway.”

I grabbed my box from the desk, and I proudly walked the fuck out of that office. Seneca was standing outside, waiting for me to emerge. When he saw the box I was carrying, his eyes widened. I didn’t tell him that I was going in there to quit. He ran to me and asked, “You sure about this?”

“Yes. I can’t deal with it right now, Seneca. I’m sorry for putting this burden on you. I can go live with Ax and Alexz if need be.”

He frowned as he took the box from me. “Man, come on. You know I got’chu. I just don’t want you making a decision you gon’ regret.”

“I’ll never regret putting me and my kids over that job. I still have some money left from what Chad gave us. The only bills I really have is our cell phones and insurance policies. I’m sure I’ll need to get health insurance before the month is out.”

He nodded, then kissed my head. “Let’s go get y’all some more shit packed and get your car so we can head to Beaumont.”

I nodded, then made my way to the car to see Ell staring at me wide-eyed. The boy was too smart for his own good. It seemed he just grew up overnight. As Luckey declined, he got smarter. When I’d walked in that house yesterday evening, I couldn’t believe my eyes. Luckey could have broken in and taken whatever he wanted to take, but it showed a level of hate I had never seen with the way he tore the house up.

Broken dishes and furniture and the way he destroyed my makeup killed me inside. My damn heart felt like it melted away in my chest. He had never called me out of my name. Maybe he was upset about the divorce being final, but it wasn’t like he didn’t know what was coming. I just didn’t understand why I was the one at the brunt of his frustrations now.

When Seneca got in the car, I turned to him and said, “I want to file a police report. The kids took pictures of their rooms. I took a couple of pictures in the bathroom as well. He needs help. As long as he’s on the streets, he won’t get that.”

“I’m glad you’re choosing to do that. He *does* need help, but I don’t want to have to shoot him to protect y’all. I know he’s not well. Shooting him won’t be good for anybody. I love y’all too much to hurt y’all even more.”

“I love you too, Mr. Sen,” Jericka said.

He smiled and winked at her, then backed out of the parking spot and headed to my house. I took the opportunity to text my brothers and let them know what was going on. I knew they were both at work, so they would see the message later. I thought about reaching out to my parents because I missed them, but because of the way they spoke to Seneca, I was hesitant.

When we got to my house, my heart sank. My car was gone. I immediately called the police. Seneca had a deep frown on his face. I supposed he’d told Jungle that he no longer needed him to look out since he was with us. It was

clear somebody needed to subdue Luckey and hand him over to the authorities. I understood Jungle and his guys probably wanted no dealings with the cops though.

He was on the phone as I talked to the police. They told me that a car would arrive soon. Once I ended the call, I turned to my kids and said, "Pack as much as you can, babies. We aren't coming back."

I could see the sadness in their eyes. I knew I would have to explain to them what was going on and assure them that everything would be okay. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath. "I promise to explain everything I can on our way to Beaumont. Okay?"

"Okay," Ell said.

As we exited the car, I received texts back-to-back. Looking at my phone, I saw it was the thread with my brothers. After unlocking the door and disarming the alarm system, I looked at it to see what they had to say.

Ax: Where are y'all gonna stay? What are you gonna do for money?

Arrow: WTF! Somebody need to find Luckey's ass ASAP!

I rubbed my temples as I sat on the couch. Seneca sat next to me. Glancing around the house, I saw it was spotless. Whoever Jungle had come over did an amazing job cleaning it. However, that was the least of my worries. I was going to sell the house anyway. That would be more money to add to my stash. It should sell pretty fast after I got the window fixed. I responded to my brothers as Seneca rubbed my back.

Seneca is taking care of everything, Ax. I'm selling the house, so when it sells, I'll have that money to hold me over until I decide to reenter the workforce. I believe Jungle is going to find him. I overheard Seneca on the phone a little while ago. I think we're going to go by Mama and Daddy's house before we leave. She still hasn't called me.

"I'm gonna go outside and wait for the police. Is there anything you need me to do?"

"No. Thank you for being here... for everything."

I rested my head against his, then kissed his lips. Oh what I wouldn't give to feel his dick right now. It had the power to make me forget everything I was going through. The strongest drug I would ever experience hung between his legs. When he slept with me last night, he held me in his arms and constantly wiped my tears. I didn't know when he slept. I barely got any sleep myself.

Luckey was out of control. It was a lot worse than the first time, but I supposed he felt like he had no one to keep it together for now. Even now, I still felt sorry for him, but I couldn't allow this to damage our kids any more than it already had.

Seneca pulled away from me and put his hands to my face. "Everything gon' be good. I promise. Don't worry about anything. Jungle gon' find Luckey and hold him for me. He has cops on payroll that will take him in. Hopefully, he ain't fucked your car up. If he has, we'll just get a new one. Kaysyn, whatever you need, I'm at your disposal. I don't know what you did to a nigga. You must've had voodoo in that pussy."

I couldn't help but smile. "I need some of that thug loving when we get to Beaumont. You have a way of making me forget about all my troubles when you slide inside of me."

"Shiiid, I'll slide this shit in you right now. I wanted to fuck you so bad last night. After the kids fell asleep, I was tempted to pull you to the other bedroom and put you to sleep too."

He slid his hand between my legs and slowly rubbed his fingertips over my pussy, causing my eyes to flutter. A soft moan left my lips as he nibbled on my earlobe. "Damn, baby. I can't wait to take care of you tonight and have that pussy lubing shit up."

"You saying you want to be in my ass, Seneca?"

"Yo' pussy, yo' ass, yo' mouth, and between those big ass titties."

He licked my neck as someone knocked at the door. That nigga had my pussy so wet, it felt like I had pissed on myself. “It’s probably the police, Seneca.”

“Mm hmm. You gon’ have to go to the door until I can calm my dick down.”

I chuckled as we both stood. His dick was showing out and making me want to drop to my knees in worship. My mouth watered, and he brought his mouth to mine and kissed me until I was weak in the knees. When who I assumed was the officer knocked again, I separated from him. “As soon as he leaves, you gon’ have to fuck me until I say stop.”

“Hell yeah. When you say stop, you better sound like you mean that shit. You say that shit while you moaning and shit, I’m gon’ keep fucking you up.”

Somehow, I pulled away from his ass and made my way to the door. I checked to see the officer standing there, so I opened the door, determined to get this over with so we could get the fuck out of here.

HI, KAYSYN. I JUST KEEP DOING WRONG BY YOU. I’M SO SORRY. I just want what’s best for you. Although it seems like you’re making hasty decisions, I also know who I raised. You’re a wise woman and capable of making sound decisions, no matter what type of pressure you’re under. I love you so much. Your dad and I both do. If Seneca has changed like he says he has, we will just have to believe that and support your decision. We refuse to live this life without you and our grandbabies. Call us when you have time.

I sat on the bed in my room and cried my eyes out. Since the kids were packing their final bags and Seneca was outside talking to Jungle, I took the alone time to purge. I held my emotions inside all the time, so I knew my body needed this. Being strong for everyone made me weak as hell. The last thing I wanted to do was explode on anyone, especially Seneca or one of the kids.

Packing our belongings had taken longer than I thought it would. Whoever said that you didn't realize how much shit you had until you had to move was right on the money. Seneca's vehicle was nearly packed to capacity. I stood and went to the bathroom to clean my face. Once I was done, I read my mother's text again, then responded.

Hi, Mom. I appreciate your apology. The kids and I are moving to Beaumont. Luckey broke into the house and stole nearly everything of value that we had, including from his own children. Seneca is going to take care of us and has been taking care of us, especially emotionally. I love you and Dad with all my heart. I'll call as soon as I can.

I knew I wouldn't be able to call until later tonight, and I didn't want her to think I was ignoring her text. There was no way I could go to their house feeling this vulnerable either. There was a knock on the doorframe, so I walked out into my room to see Arrow standing there. He gave me a tight smile as I approached him. When he held his arms out, I went to them and allowed him to comfort me. I was glad I'd purged earlier. If I hadn't, I would have broken down just now.

"I'm so proud of you, sis, for doing what you needed to do for you and the kids. Whatever you need from me, consider it done. You have an amazing influence on everyone's lives you touch. I hope this restart is just what you need. Seneca has proven to love you beyond anything else. I'm happy you have him."

"Thanks, knucklehead. I appreciate you and Ax for having my back."

"Always. You got anything for me to take to the car?"

"Yeah. That's the last bag."

He grabbed the trash bag of clothes and headed downstairs as I looked around the room. After taking a deep breath, I headed down the stairs and heard a big commotion. The kids peeked out of their rooms. "Stay up here!" I yelled out to them.

When I got to the bottom, Luckey was standing there with a bloody mouth, and Seneca had a gun to his head. Tears fell from my eyes uncontrollably at the sight of him. He literally looked like someone I would pass on the side of the road with my nose slightly turned up. A once classy, educated architect had become someone I barely recognized. “Luckey! What are you doing?”

“I came back to say I’m sorry, Kaysyn. I love you. I just want you to give me another chance. Please, Kaycee. I love you, baby.”

I closed my eyes and shook my head rapidly. He used to call me Kaycee when we were in college because he thought that was what I had said my name was. After he found out what my name was, we’d laughed about it for days. He only called me Kaycee when he was feeling sensitive or desperate, kind of like when Seneca called me Kay Baby.

“Luckey, we’re divorced. You signed the papers. I’ve been through enough heartache with you. I couldn’t do it anymore. I’ve moved on and fallen in love with someone else. I love Seneca now. You need to focus on getting better for your children.”

When Ali walked up the driveway, Seneca took his gun from Luckey’s head. I assumed he’d done that to keep Luckey in line. While I knew he probably wouldn’t shoot him, Luckey didn’t know that. I could imagine Seneca was very convincing when he put the gun to his head. He put his gun in his waistband, and Ali and Jungle stood on the other side of Luckey as Arrow approached as well.

“Where’s my car, Luckey?”

He looked up at me and fidgeted like he was itching. “I don’t know.”

“So how am I supposed to get to work or get your children to school when it starts?”

“Seneca. That’s who you love now anyway. You don’t wanna fucking be with me anymore! You probably fucking all three of these niggas!”

Seneca was about to fuck him up, but Ali grabbed him as Jungle restrained Arrow. The police had gotten here. Had they seen Seneca and Arrow out of control, they would have arrested them too. When the cop walked up, they pulled Luckey to Seneca's car to handcuff him. Seneca came closer to me and asked, "You okay, Kay Baby?"

I only nodded. Luckey's eyes never left mine. I knew the hateful words he'd spewed were because of the drugs, but I still wondered if any part of him actually believed the words he said. Were the drugs only making him boldly spew the thoughts he'd been having already?

Seneca wrapped his arms around me tightly as I shivered from the nervousness I felt from the whole situation. I closed my eyes and tried to allow him to absorb the pain he was doing his best to take from me.

CHAPTER 23

SENECA

“How are things going with Kaysyn since she’s moved to Beaumont?” Ali asked.

“Good, man. She was a little jumpy the first and second days, but now she seems to be her old self. I still can’t believe she quit her job. It couldn’t have been easy to obtain a job like that. Aren’t they under contract or some shit like that?”

“Hell if I know.”

“I guess it don’t matter. I’m prepared to take care of her for the rest of her life should she choose not to go back to work.”

His eyebrows lifted. “That’s what’s up, man. I’m happy for you.”

“I’m a little nervous though. Her parents are coming down, and we’re supposed to be having a do over. I’m nervous the old Seneca is going to make an appearance and cuss one of those old people out. Her mama got one more time to roll her eyes at me, and I’m gon’ tell her something she ain’t gon’ wanna hear.”

“Aww, man, you’ll be fine. If they are making the effort to come down and have a do over, then they wanna make things right between y’all.”

“Yeah, that’s what Kaysyn said. I hope y’all right, because I’m prepared for their asses today.”

“Isn’t that how it works though? When you prepared, don’t shit happen. It’s when you not prepared that shit go crazy. She got any updates on Luckey?”

“As far as we know, he still locked up. Since the divorce was final and he agreed to give her everything, he had no legal right to the house, the car, or anything inside either one of them. Had he done this a couple of weeks ago, he probably would have been out, walking around scot-free. Hopefully, they keep his ass locked up, because I would hate to pop his ass. He wearing my patience thin as fuck.”

“Shiiid, nigga, I’m surprised he done made it *this* long.”

I was at the office because Ali had called a meeting. Everyone would be in attendance, including Jungle. The only people we were still waiting for were Chad and Jericho. Shy had just walked through the door and had stopped to talk to Jungle. He’d been keeping things tight with Sandrene. They’d gone to trial, and Sandrene had won. Everything was handed over to her, but Tip and her kids were really out for blood. It was seen all over the courtroom. Ali had told me that Tip’s son, Jeremiah, had testified against her.

Sandrene had immediately shut down the restaurant and offered the employees a nice severance package. Shy had uncovered a couple of other business ventures Tip had started that were all awarded to Sandrene as well. Everything was far from being over though. Dalonna still had a trial coming up. She’d appealed her ruling.

Jericho walked in with a slight smile on his face, and Chad was right behind him. Ali didn’t waste any time getting started. “We gon’ start, because I got shit to do. The benefit at the hospital is in three weeks. Again, I need all hands on deck. As you can tell, we’ve been doing more security jobs. The need for a private investigator isn’t as steady as I would like it to be right now, so I have to take what we can get.”

Everyone nodded in understanding, then he continued. “Jericho’s brother has to have skipped town, because the nigga is nowhere to be found. Jericho wants to suspend our search for a while. You wanna elaborate, Jericho?”

He stood from his seat. “If he’s running anything like my father used to, he’s made his splash. Now he’s gonna go into

hiding until he's ready to make a move. That's usually when he's forgotten about."

"Sounds like that's more of a reason to keep looking for his ass. I'm just saying," Jungle added.

Jericho nodded. "There's no sense in wasting manpower on him. He's not here."

Ali glanced at him, then continued. "I may have another job coming up. It will last for three weeks, but it's 'round the clock. Serious inquiries only. I can't even give the details out to everybody. So holla at me after this if you're interested. Jungle is going to need a body on Luckey Anderson when he gets out."

I frowned slightly. I wasn't sure what that was about, but I sure in the hell was going to find out. Ali's burner lit up. He glanced at it and looked to be pissed. I didn't know what shit he had going on, but I was gonna approach him before I left to go shower. Kay and the kids were already at Axton's. We'd gone house hunting earlier and had found one that we both liked. I couldn't wait until Monday to inquire about it.

Once Ali wrapped shit up, he went to a corner of the room away from everybody and did some shit on his phone. I made my way to him. Before I could get close, he asked, "What's up, man?"

He'd never looked up from what he was doing. "You sure you cool?" I asked.

"Yeah. Just some personal bullshit."

"What's up with Luckey though? Why Jungle need an extra body on him?"

"That nigga fucked the nigga up that had an eye on him. He said the guy was cool with Anson and probably wouldn't say shit. That was why we were always a step behind Luckey. He wants someone that's not in his camp until he flush out the disloyal ones."

"Oh, a'ight. Well, I'm about to head out then."

"Okay."

As I walked away, I noticed Chad and Shy approach him. As they talked, Ali turned slightly red. I didn't know what was going on, but I felt slightly annoyed about being left in the dark. On my way out, I slapped Jericho's hand. "I hope you know what you doing, bruh," I said to him.

"I'm good, Seneca. I know y'all have been watching me. I'm too trained for bullshit like that. I miss my sister. I haven't heard from her in a couple of weeks, and I'm afraid that he's killed her. I'm thinking about going back to Florida."

"That's not wise, man. I heard that your brother was extremely connected out there. We need him on our turf."

He nodded, then walked off. Jericho was gon' fuck around and end up dead. I couldn't worry about either of their asses, him nor Ali. I had Kaysyn and the kids to take care of. I still had plenty of time off to spend with them, and I planned to spend every minute with them until the kids started school and I had to go back to work. Maybe that was why Ali had chosen to keep me out of the loop. I had enough shit going on, which was why I was on leave.

Kaysyn had gotten a friend of hers to mail the kids' school records to where it would be easier to get them enrolled in school. We'd gone looking for a car as well. She told me that she didn't want another SUV, but I knew she loved that Sequoia. We still had a lot to do, and we would start with calling the realtor about the house we liked.

I got in my car and glanced around the premises and saw Ali leaving the building. He was on the phone, and he looked pissed. Some shit was going on, and eventually, that shit was gon' reveal itself.

"YOU THE LAST NIGGA I THOUGHT WOULD BE HAVING DINNER at my house. No offense, Kaysyn," Alexz voiced.

Kaysyn giggled as I frowned at Alexz. I nodded. "Well, this the last place I thought I would be having dinner at too, shit, with yo' mean ass."

“Nigga, ain’t nobody mean. I just don’t tolerate bullshit. You can say what you want, but you used to be on that good bullshit.”

“You know, I think you my least favorite Berotte. You wanna talk about me, but yo’ ass always on some bullshit too.”

She laughed loudly, then wrapped her arms around me as I sat, holding Kaysyn’s hand. When the doorbell rang, I tensed up a bit. “Sen, it’s gon’ be cool, baby. I promise,” Kay reassured.

I leaned over and kissed her lips. Her words did nothing for my nerves. I didn’t give a fuck about making a good impression. I was gonna be who the fuck I was; take me or leave me. I wished I would have been on that same wavelength the last time. Ell, Jericka, and Ariana came to the front room when they heard the doorbell as well. When Mr. and Mrs. Vaughn entered the room we were seated in, I stood from my seat, giving them respect as my elders. However, that was as far as the respect would go until I saw what type of time they would be on.

Mrs. Vaughn approached me with an outstretched hand. “I’m sorry we got off on the wrong foot, Seneca. Hi, baby.”

“It’s cool. Hi, Mrs. Vaughn,” I said as Mr. Vaughn approached.

“Hello, Seneca.”

I nodded as I shook his hand. Once we all went to the kitchen and sat, Alexz began serving us like we were strangers she was trying to impress. I was dying to crack jokes on her ass, but I didn’t want to embarrass her and really be on her shit list. They sat, and the grandkids were beyond excited to see them. It had been over a month since they’d last seen them.

When Alexz finally sat, Mr. Vaughn blessed the food, and we all dug in. Dinner was relatively quiet, at least toward me anyway. They all talked among themselves, laughed and caught up, but I remained silent because I was uncomfortable as hell. The only thing I had in common with anyone in that house was Kaysyn.

After we were done eating and had moved to the family room, Alexz, Kay, and Mrs. Vaughn went to the kitchen to clean up. Ax and his dad talked freely, but again, I was quiet. Trying to break the ice, Ax said, “Nigga, you ain’t never been this quiet. What’s up?”

I glanced at him, but I didn’t respond. Instead, Mr. Vaughn said, “That’s our fault. I know he’s just trying to keep from saying what he might think is the wrong thing around us. Kaysyn is a grown woman. She’s been married, has two kids, and she’s educated. At the same time, though, she will always be our baby. Luckey got grilled too, but you got it worst than him because we’d seen you in action. It was hard to respect the way you came to us, because we thought it was a game.”

I nodded as he talked. My inner Seneca was wanting to say, *fuck this*, but I knew I had to endure for Kaysyn’s sake. Meeting parents and all this shit was foreign to me, but I knew it was important to her. She wanted me to be able to get along with her family. Arrow was my nigga, and I wished he would have been here today.

Mr. Vaughn noticed that I’d zoned out apparently, because he said, “Despite your official introduction, you’re cool to be you. If who you are is good with our daughter, then it has to be good with us too. We trust her to make sound decisions. I apologize, Seneca, for how we made you feel. I can tell that you’re still uncomfortable.”

“I was uncomfortable the first time,” I said, breaking my silence. “While I was taught to be respectful, I started living by the code of the street. This lifestyle is still new to me, so to assure I wouldn’t say anything disrespectful, I was keeping my mouth closed. Respect is something that’s reciprocated. When it’s not given, it’s not a requirement, no matter the age or relation. It irritated me because I didn’t come to you guys disrespectfully. The old me would have been done. Today wouldn’t be happening. But I love Kay Baby and those kids in there, and I’m willing to give this another try for them.”

“I can respect that, and I appreciate you for telling it like it is. You did come to us respectfully. However, just out of

curiosity, did you ever think you would be in a relationship with my daughter? Was that your goal?"

A slow smile came to my face. I really wanted to tell him how I just wanted to fuck her. Kaysyn would kill me. "A relationship with a woman had never been my goal. Kaysyn caught me off guard. I felt like I was losing who I was because I was changing so much just to prove to her how much I needed her. She didn't cut a brother no slack. I had to come with it. Big Zay had to help me through that, because I was depressed and shit without her. Then I realized that I wasn't changing. I was maturing because, suddenly, shit that I thought was important was insignificant."

"I definitely started seeing the change in you before the two of you got together," Ax added.

I nodded. "She told me that she still loves that old Seneca too though. She fell for who I was so not to lose him completely. I just have to know when to assert him. Going to her job with my pants hanging off my ass was the wrong place."

"Did you tell her to quit?" her dad asked.

I knew that was probably something they were thinking... that I'd somehow brainwashed her into doing something I wanted her to do. Kaysyn was extremely headstrong. She did what the fuck she wanted to do. I shook my head. "I was shocked when she walked out of there with a box. I thought she was just taking a leave of absence. Luckey had her nerves all over the place. She couldn't even explain to the kids what had happened until the next day, although Ell knew exactly what had gone down."

Mr. Vaughn nodded as quietness fell on us again until the women joined us. Kaysyn sat right on my lap. She shocked the hell out of me with that. Her mom smiled at us, as did her dad. Kay kept playing, and I was gon' grab her ass in front of them. I wrapped my arm around her and said in a low voice, "You better get this fat ass off me, girl, before I give yo' people something to see."

She bit her bottom lip and slowly slid off my lap. She was teasing me, but she knew she had the wrong one. I would pull her to the bathroom and fuck the shit out of her. I was willing to bet that was exactly what she wanted.

“Seneca, I appreciate you taking the time to meet us officially again. This means a lot to me and Greg, and I hope you can forgive us and accept us as your family too.”

“It’s cool, Mrs. Vaughn. All is forgiven.”

“Then call me Mrs. Shirl or Mama Shirl. Mrs. Vaughn is just way too formal.”

I gave her a half smile as Kaysyn ran her nails down the back of my head. I glanced at her, giving her a chance to rectify her decisions. “Kaysyn, leave that man alone. Ain’t shit finna go down in my house unless I’m involved. So that rules everybody in here out except Alexz,” Ax said, causing me to chuckle.

Her face turned completely red as Axton laughed. “You make me sick!”

“Throw up then, girl.”

Apparently, that was an inside joke, because she huffed loudly. I pulled her in my arms and kissed her cheek then her ear as I felt her breathing hitch. “Hol’ on, bruh. That shit go for you too. It would be a shame to get kicked out on your first visit.”

I kissed Kaysyn’s cheek again and said, “Sounds like we already have an active hater, baby.”

“That’s his occupation, and he’s extremely good at it.”

I chuckled and kissed her lips. “Should I show him how I react to haters?”

“Naw. We’ll save that for when he’s at our house.”

Axton rolled his eyes as I said, “Get ready for this forever relationship, bruh. You stuck with my ass now.”

CHAPTER 24

KAYSYN

“Mama, I love my room! I can’t believe we have a new house!” Jericka said.

I smiled at my baby as she ran around her room. It had been two weeks, and Seneca had found us a house and paid cash for it. We were moving in today. I had never asked him how much money Chad had given him, but I knew it was a significant amount by the way he hugged him when he handed him that envelope. He’d purchased us a five-bedroom beauty in Beaumont’s west end.

I’d gotten the kids enrolled in school that would be starting in a week and had also checked into positions in school administration. Joyy had told me to apply for whatever position I wanted, and she would be sure to put in a good word for me. After three weeks of quitting my job, I knew I wasn’t fit to be a stay-at-home mom. It was fine right now, because Seneca was off work and the kids were at home, but when I was alone, I would get bored quickly. He’d taken the kids out for some bonding time one day last week, and I was about to drive myself insane.

We’d also gone to the doctor to talk about Seneca’s anxiety. When he started recalling instances, I realized he’d been dealing with anxiety for a while but didn’t know that was what it was. The doctor prescribed him medication, but Seneca wasn’t too excited about taking it. So I promised to try to help keep his stress to a minimum. Every Thursday would be massage day. He’d thoroughly enjoyed his massage last week,

and I was more than sure he would enjoy tonight's massage as well.

Seneca and Ell were out buying another light fixture for the laundry room. I hated the one that was there. It was the only thing I hated about the house, so that was an easy fix. Ell stayed under Seneca, wanting to go everywhere he went. I was grateful that the kids loved him as much as I did. I believed Ell was craving that fatherly figure since Luckey was no longer around.

He'd been granted bail. I wasn't sure exactly who had bailed him out, but he had yet to contact me. I was more than sure he would be once he got himself together. Seeing him beg me for forgiveness and to be in his life hurt, but I knew what was best for the kids and me. He was no longer it. While I felt like I had given up on him too soon, I realized that I'd been putting up with his behavior for years.

Just because I didn't know why he was behaving erratically didn't mean I wasn't dealing with it. I gave that man my all. I no longer felt guilty about my response to his addiction. That wasn't healthy for me, and ultimately, what wasn't healthy for me wasn't healthy for my kids. The past two weeks had been eye opening, and I had to thank Isaiah for that. We'd had a few talks where he was able to help me through some of my thoughts and feelings. I couldn't keep this bottled up like I used to. I owed myself better than that as well as Seneca and my children.

The doorbell rang, so I left Jericka in her room to go see who was there. As I came down the stairs, I could hear Seneca talking. Whoever it was must have gotten here right before he did. I continued down to see what I could put away in the kitchen. I'd chosen to get our bedrooms together first, because I couldn't sleep with chaos around me.

After that, I'd started on the kitchen. I only had a couple more boxes to go through. We'd spent quite a bit of time hanging curtains yesterday. Alexz, Lexi, and Joyy had come to help me, while Seneca, Ali, Ax, and the Berotte men moved furniture in. A lot of it had been delivered, but they came to help anyway. I glanced out of the window to see Ali was

outside pacing back and forth. I frowned, because I never really saw him worked up about anything. I opened the door, and he and Seneca became extremely quiet.

“Hey, Ali. Are you gonna stay for dinner?”

“Naw. Thanks though.”

I nodded as I looked for Ell. When I heard a basketball bouncing, I gave Seneca a soft smile and wink, then headed back inside. Jericka came running down the stairs, and asked, “Can I help you cook?”

“Of course. Let’s see what Mr. Sen took out for us.”

I grabbed some gloves from the drawer and went to the sink to see what type of meat Seneca had taken out to thaw. I turned to Jericka and said, “Your favorite.”

She smiled big. “Chicken!”

I chuckled. “He’s learning you well.”

“Mama, I know Daddy is feeling bad and when he’s better, he can be there for us again, but you think it’ll be okay if I call Mr. Sen daddy?”

The lump filled my throat instantly, and my eyes watered. We were really a family unit again. Seneca was nothing like Luckey, but he was just right for us. He was everything we all needed. I smiled at her and said, “It’s okay with me, but you need to ask him when he comes inside. Okay?”

She smiled back. “Okay!”

We got started on dinner and turned on music to help us through. While we cooked sides, Ell came inside to shower, and not long after, Seneca came inside as well. He immediately kissed my lips. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah. He just has some personal shit going.”

I nodded as he moved to Jericka. “What’s up, lil mama? You learning to cook?”

She smiled, and I could see her nervousness. “Seneca, Jericka has something she wants to ask you.”

He glanced at me, then gave his attention back to her. “What’s up, baby? Hit me with it.”

She fidgeted slightly and began ringing her fingers, causing the gloves to make a crunching sound. Suddenly, she decided to just come out with it. “Can I call you daddy?”

Seneca looked to have stopped breathing for a second. He was in shock. Once again, he glanced at me, and I gave him a reassuring smile. “Umm, what makes you want to call me dad?”

“You act like one. I love you like you’re my dad.”

He closed his eyes for a second and nodded. “That sounds like a good enough reason to me, baby girl.”

She smiled big as he leaned over and picked her up, giving her the biggest hug. His eyes closed once again, and I could tell that his emotions were on overload. My eyes watered once again, and this time, I couldn’t stop the tears from falling. It was a beautiful moment that I couldn’t hide my approval of if I tried.

When Seneca put her down, he said, “I’m gonna go take a shower.”

He kissed my lips and got out of the kitchen fast as hell. I closed my eyes for a moment and silently thanked God for allowing everything to come together for us. He didn’t allow us to suffer for too long, and for that, I was grateful.

“FIRST OF ALL, YOU CAN KISS MY ASS!” CHAD YELLED AT Seneca.

I only rolled my eyes. I didn’t have the slightest clue what they were in there going back and forth about, and I didn’t care. We were having our housewarming party, and everyone was here, even Jungle and Jericho. We’d already eaten and cleaned up. As we sat in the family room, we talked about what we would do for next Sunday. It felt great to be in the

loop. Although they never made me feel like it before, I still felt like an outsider.

Now that I was here in Beaumont and could hang around everyone every weekend, my soul was settled and at ease. I'd gotten closer to all the women, especially Alexz. Although she had been my sister-in-law, we never really got to bond. I didn't come around as often, because no one knew what I was dealing with, and I didn't want them to know. However, being open had been beneficial for me, and I liked the way it felt to be able to express myself without fear of judgment.

As we talked about menu options for next week, the guys all joined us in the family room. They were just kind of standing there, so I wasn't sure what was going on. Seneca, Jamel, and Arrow were kind of huddled like they were planning something. I frowned as I watched them. They were being weird. I glanced around the room to see Ali and Jericho had looks of amusement on their faces, and Ax had his normal unamused expression on his face.

When they finally broke apart, Jamel went to Sandrene, Arrow went to Lynn, and Seneca came to me. They all went down on one knee, and the room erupted. *Shit!* I was about to hyperventilate. We hadn't been together long, but here he was, on his knee, staring at me. The love was evident in his gaze, and when he looked at me that way, I had a hard time looking away. The moisture was already accumulating between my thighs.

Breaking the silence, Jamel said to Sandrene, "It ain't no secret how deeply I love you. You've been my obsession since day one. I know you said you didn't need a title, but I want you to have a couple... one of them being my wife. Please tell me you want that, baby, because I promise, there is nothing I want more than to be able to call you Mrs. Dent."

Sandrene was crying hard, but somehow, she managed to pull it together. "Bandz, you are my everything. Family was something I didn't really get to experience until you came along. The attraction I felt to you was something I never wanted to let go of. I would be crazy not to marry you. I love

you, and I would be beyond happy and honored to be your wife.”

Everyone applauded as they kissed, and Jamel slid the ring on her finger. As she stood and hugged him, Arrow, my baby brother, poured his heart out to Lynn. He didn't have a lot of words, but I knew that she would get more words in the privacy of their home. “Lynn, I love you. For a long time, I didn't think love would ever find me. But like Mel, the day I met you, I knew that I wouldn't be the same. I love my new normal with you, and I want to spend eternity this way. Will you marry me?”

She nodded and said yes, then did the same as Sandrene. I knew she didn't want to really speak freely in front of everyone either. Her story about family was similar to Sandrene's, and it was why they had become so close.

My gaze had once again become trained on my man as he stared at me. I could see from my peripheral that his eyes had never left me. When everyone quieted down, he said, “You took a hard thug and turned him into a passionate softie.” He frowned and looked around. “A softie for Kaysyn and Jericka only!”

Everyone laughed, and I knew the guys would be fucking with him later. Jericka came over and stood right next to me, waiting to see what else Seneca would say. He smiled at her, his grill shining and making me woozy with desire.

“I don't have all those sweet words like those niggas over there. You knew what it was between us. I couldn't stick to that agreement because nobody ever made me feel like you made me feel. You deserve the world, and I wanna make sure I give you that. I can only do that if you my wife though. It ain't been long since we committed to each other, but I been committed to you for two years. So this ain't premature for me. Show me that you feel the same, Kay Baby. Show me that you wanna feel this shit forever.”

I extended my hand and said, “Hell yeah I do. Yes. I'll marry you.”

He smiled big and slid the ring on my finger, but then he turned to Jericka. “I got you something too, lil mama.”

Jericka smiled so big. It brought tears to my eyes. “I never knew I wanted kids until I met you and Ell. Y’all are everything a man could dream of. I’m not your biological dad, but I promise to show you that you won’t feel a difference. Officially, I want everyone to know that you’re my daughter. You cool with that?”

She threw her arms around Seneca as all the women wiped the tears from their faces. He slid a ring on her finger as she said, “Thank you, Daddy. I love you too.”

He stood from his knee and looked around the room for Ell. He gestured for him to come over, and he hung a chain around his neck. Ell’s eyes lit up, then he hugged Seneca too. I loved my kids, but I was getting impatient. I needed to feel his kiss after all the beautiful words he’d spilled. He grabbed my hand, helping me from my seat, and wrapped his arms around me.

When his lips landed on mine, I moaned into his mouth as everyone applauded. He pulled away from me, and as the women looked at Sandrene’s ring, Seneca grabbed my hand and led me to the bathroom. I had a frown on my face until he locked the door. A slow smile spread on my lips. “Sit up there and spread them legs so I can taste and feel my pussy.”

“Fuck. Gladly, baby.”

When I pulled my dress up, and he saw I wasn’t wearing underwear, he unzipped and immediately pushed his dick inside of me. “Fuck! You know I can’t resist this hot, wet shit, especially when you ain’t got drawz on.”

“Mm hmm. Na fuck me, baby.”

He gave me three or four quick thrusts, then went to his knees. “Give me permission to make you cum all over the fucking place.”

From his words only, I felt the liquids leaving me. My head fell against the mirror as he indulged in my flavors for a couple of minutes. When he reentered me, stroking me like he

was trying to give life to my uterus, there was a knock at the door. Seneca never stopped. He didn't stop until he nutted within my depths. "I'm gon' fuck you up tonight."

"And you have permission to do that shit too."

The End

If you did not read the author's note at the beginning, please go back and do so before leaving a review. 😊

FROM THE AUTHOR...

Whew! For a while, I didn't think these two would get it together. I'm glad it all worked out in the end though. Kaysyn had a lot going on, and I applaud her for keeping Seneca at arms' length emotionally until she felt she could give him more. He just refused to let her be. LOL!

The drama was a lot! However, before committing to this story, I knew it would be. Seneca surprised me though. I wasn't expecting him to be so soft with her. He found a different side of himself with his love for her.

I know Kaysyn will receive some ridicule, but... she did what so many men tend to get away with. She made her intentions known. Seneca caught feelings. That wasn't her fault. Seneca was a known fuckboy. He was probably the last man she thought would catch feelings. However, just because he caught feelings didn't mean that she needed to concede. She tried to give him space, but he wouldn't allow that.

She wanted him just as badly as he wanted her, but she felt like it wasn't best to act on her feelings until she got shit in her life together, including her perception of who she thought he was. Although we say it's not right to judge people, we do it all the time. All Seneca showed people was the ignorant ass thug he was, and she knew that image didn't fit in her world with her kids and career. When he was able to show her that he was so much more, she folded like origami. LOL!

I can't wait to reveal what's going on with Ali! He's next up. His story, with the exception of a prologue, will pick up exactly where this one left off (the knock on the door). There's

some drama that will unfold that will leave you shocked and speechless!

I truly hope that you enjoyed this drama filled ride that probably had your feelings all over the place. As always, I gave it my all. Whether you liked it or not, please take the time to leave a review on Amazon and/or Goodreads.

There's also an amazing playlist on Apple Music and Spotify for this book, under the same title that includes some great R&B and rap tracks to tickle your fancy.

Please keep up with me on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (@authormonicawalters), Twitter (@monlwalters), and Clubhouse (@monicawalters). You can also visit my Amazon author page at www.amazon.com/author/monica.walters to view my releases.

Please subscribe to my webpage for updates and sneak peeks of upcoming releases! <https://authormonicawalters.com>.

For live discussions, giveaways, and inside information on upcoming releases, join my Facebook group, Monica's Romantic Sweet Spot at <https://bit.ly/2P2106X>.



OTHER TITLES BY MONICA WALTERS

Standalones

Love Like a Nightmare
Forbidden Fruit (An Erotic Novella)
Say He's the One
Only If You Let Me (a spin-off of Say He's the One)
On My Way to You (An Urban Romance)
Any and Everything for Love
Savage Heart (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with Shawty You for Me by T. Key)
I'm In Love with a Savage (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with Trade It All by T. Key)
Don't Tell Me No (An Erotic Novella)
To Say, I Love You: A Short Story Anthology with the Authors of BLP
Drive Me to Ecstasy
Whatever It Takes: An Erotic Novella
When You Touch Me
When's the Last Time?
Best You Ever Had
Deep As It Goes (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with Perfect Timing by T. Key)
The Shorts: A BLP Anthology with the Authors of BLP (Made to Love You-
Collab with Kay Shanee)
All I Need is You (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with Divine Love by T. Key)
This Love Hit Different (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with Something New by T. Key)
Until I Met You
Marry Me Twice
Last First Kiss (a spin-off of Marry Me Twice)
Nobody Else Gon' Get My Love (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with Better Than
Before by T. Key)
Love Long Overdue (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with Distant Lover by T. Key)
Next Lifetime
Fall Knee-Deep In It
Unwrapping Your Love: The Gift
Who Can I Run To
You're Always on My Mind (a spin-off of Who Can I Run To)
Stuck On You (available for preorder)
Full Figured 18 with Treasure Hernandez (available for preorder)

Behind Closed Doors Series

Be Careful What You Wish For
You Just Might Get It
Show Me You Still Want It

Sweet Series

Bitter Sweet
Sweet and Sour
Sweeter Than Before
Sweet Revenge
Sweet Surrender
Sweet Temptation
Sweet Misery
Sweet Exhale

Never Enough (A Sweet Series Update)

Sweet Series: Next Generation

Can't Run From Love
Access Denied: Luxury Love
Still: Your Best

Sweet Series: Kai's Reemergence

Beautiful Mistake
Favorite Mistake

Motives and Betrayal Series

Ulterior Motives
Ultimate Betrayal
Ultimatum: #lovemeorleaveme, Part 1
Ultimatum: #lovemeorleaveme, Part 2

Written Between the Pages Series

The Devil Goes to Church Too
The Book of Noah (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with The Flow of Jah's Heart by
T. Key)
The Revelations of Ryan, Jr. (A KeyWalt Crossover Novel with All That Jazz by T.
Key)

The Rebirth of Noah

The Country Hood Love Stories

8 Seconds to Love
Breaking Barriers to Your Heart
Training My Heart to Love You

The Country Hood Love Stories: The Hendersons

Blindsided by Love

Ignite My Soul
Come and Get Me
In Way Too Deep
You Belong to Me
Found Love in a Rider
Damaged Intentions: The Soul of a Thug
Let Me Ride
Better the Second Time Around
I Wish I Could Be The One
I Wish I Could Be The One 2
Put That on Everything: A Henderson Family Novella
What's It Gonna Be?
Someone Like You (2nd Generation story)
A Country Hood Christmas with the Hendersons

The Berotte Family Series

Love On Replay
Deeper Than Love
Something You Won't Forget
I'm The Remedy
Love Me Senseless
I Want You Here
Don't Fight The Feeling
When You Dance
I'm All In
Give Me Permission