

Cole Hart

SIGNATURE NOVELS

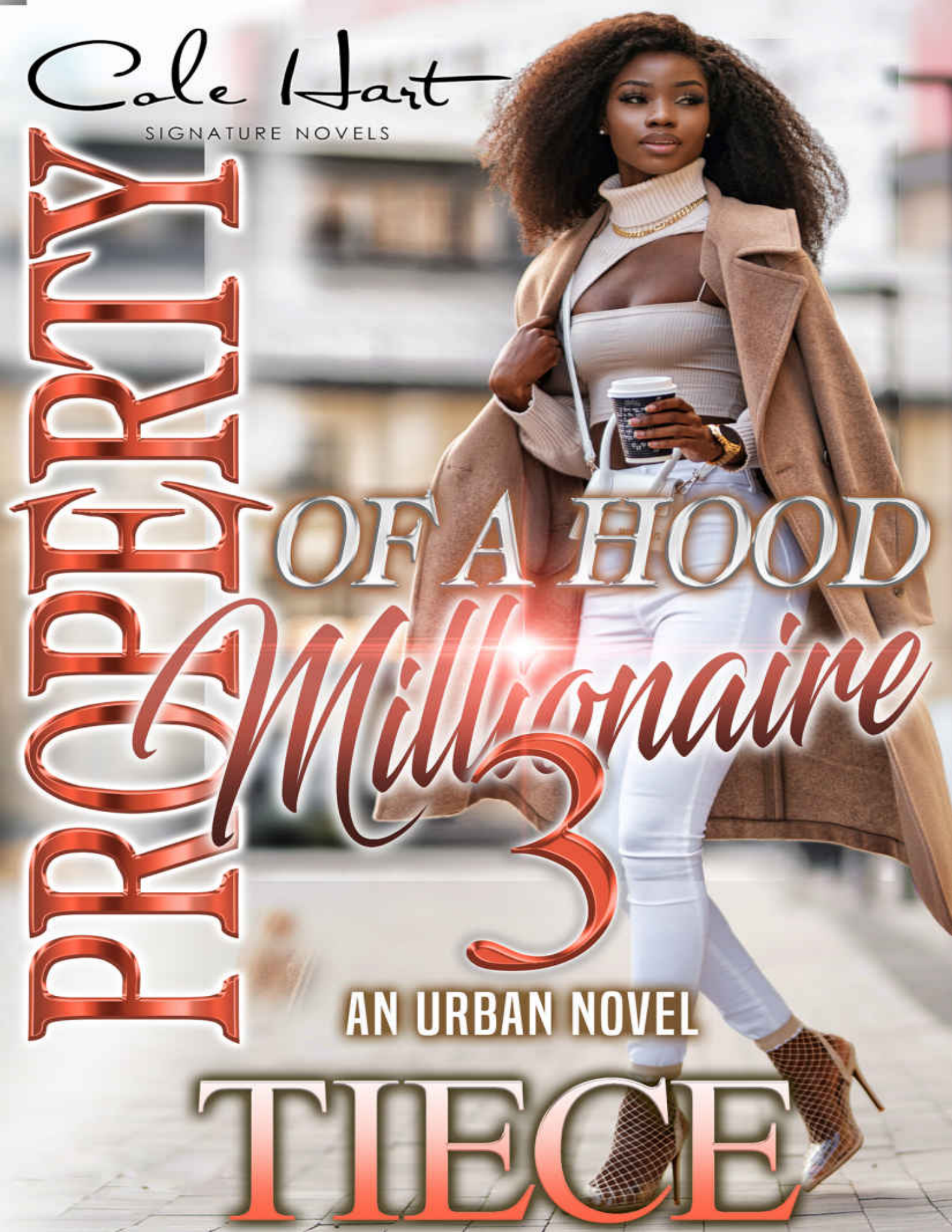
PROPERTY

OF A HOOD

Millionaire

AN URBAN NOVEL

TIECE



PROPERTY OF A HOOD MILLIONAIRE 3

An Urban Novel

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Cole Hart
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Property Of A Hood Millionaire 3

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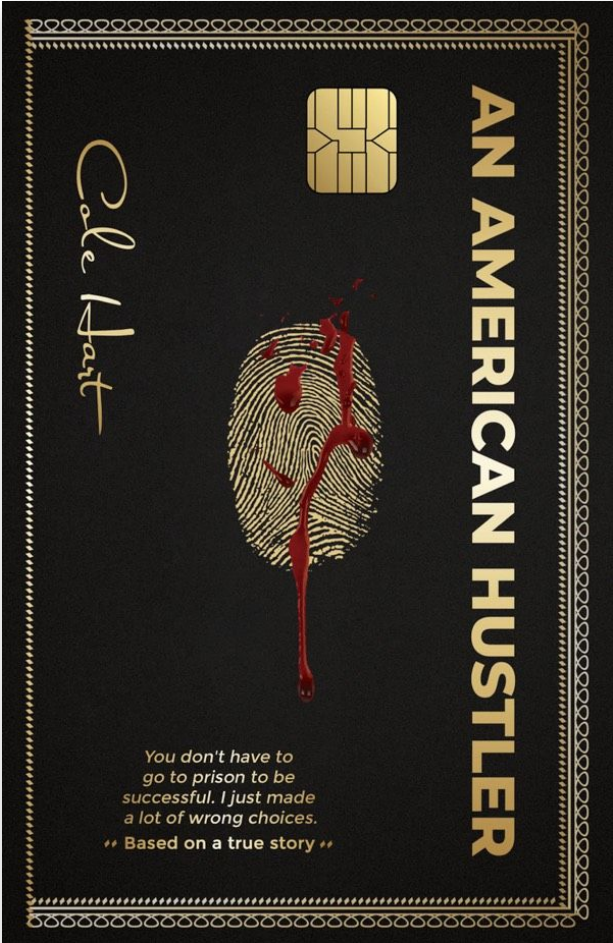
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FROM CEO COLE HART



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KIYOMI SIMMONS

Sitting on the back porch at Granny’s house biting my nails in a frenzy and listening to Dodge, his long-lost brother, Meech, and Rosco bicker back and forth had me just about to lose my fucking mind. I didn’t know what was going on, but I wished like hell this was all a dream.

“What the fuck is going on?” Dodge asked. “Talk to me. Tell us something, D.”

“You better make it quick or I’m gonna paint this muthafuckin’ city red until I get Kinsley back,” Meech angrily seethed.

“Calm down, bruh.”

“No, you calm the fuck down!” he intervened with a menacing stare, as Dodge’s brother tried his best to lighten an already unbelievable situation.

“Ayeeeeee,” Dodge cut in, “this ain’t helping none of us. We all need to calm the fuck down and figure out our next moves. Clearly, Dontae is trying to get our attention and it’s working. So, what’s next?”

“Tell us what the fuck he wants,” Meech demanded. “This has everything to do with his missing diamonds, not to mention, what the fuck happened to Polo?”

Just when it seemed like D was about to explain whatever the hell was going on, Dodge’s phone rang. My eyes instantly lit up. I could feel in my gut that this was the call we’d been waiting for. Dodge looked over at me and then back at his cell phone as it continued to ring.

“Just answer it, bae!” I nervously pleaded.

“Hello,” he answered with the phone on speaker.

A creepy, yet super cool voice began to talk. "By now, I know you've heard that I have your girl."

I frowned. "His girl?" I mumbled with a queasy and uneasy stomach.

"Make sure you do what's right and get me my shit. I'm not sure what happened to my brother, but I believe Dameon knows. I don't know what kind of games he's playing, but the only person who loses is him. Either he comes forward with my jewels or you come up with the value. On top of that, this is far from over when it comes to your brother. He's made his bed hard and, now, it's time to lay six feet under in it."

"You don't have to take it there, Dontae."

"I take it wherever I want to. Did you forget? The ball is in my court now," he said.

I looked at Dodge. The anger in his eyes was mixed with worry and guilt of not having a hold on this shit. However, I knew if he could get his hands on this dude, he'd be a dead man in a matter of seconds.

Dontae continued, "I know you're wondering how the hell will you come up with that kind of money and, honestly, I highly doubt you will. Matter of fact, I know you won't or can't, so you'll also lose. Nobody wins but me."

"What does that mean?"

"Ask your girl," he said, and the next voice on the phone was Kinsley.

"Please, Meeech baby, pleeease! I don't know what's going on. Come get mee!" she cried out.

"That's all we gotta say. One week," Dontae finished and ended the call.

I couldn't stomach no more of this shit, as I leaned over and began to throw up.

"Damn! Kiyomi!" Dodge rushed over to me, just as Meech grabbed Dameon in the neck of his hoodie.

"Talk, nigga, because if anything happens to my girl, Dontae won't have to kill you, I will!"

Rosco quickly intervened, "Yooo, we can't beat Dontae like this."

"Go 'head, bruh, hit me! I deserve it!" Dameon let out. "I deserve it!"

"No, nobody's hitting nobody!" Rosco stepped in. "Y'all chill the fuck out. Let D go!" he urged Meech. "I know you mad as hell, but this ain't the way to solve any of this shit!"

"He's right," Dodge cut in, as he tried his best to clean my face with the bottom of his t-shirt. "You ok, bae. You ok," he coached me. "And Kinsley

will be ok, too. Ok.”

“Mm-hm. Ok,” I softly responded. For some reason, I had no choice but to trust him. Then again, my heart wouldn’t let it be any other way. I loved this man, but I loved my cousin more, and just thinking about her being in a fucked-up situation that she had nothing to do with made me sick, literally. I was scared as hell for her. “He thinks it’s me, doesn’t he?”

Dodge could only nod his head with a simple mumble of the words. “Thank God, it’s not. I don’t know what I’d do.”

“We gotta get her back.”

“I know, bae, and we will. I promise you, we will. I’ll die before I let anything happen to her.”

“Noooo, nothing can happen to her or you. Don’t say that.”

“Just let me handle this. I know this shit is crazy. Trust me, I don’t understand it either, but we’re gonna get Kinsley back.”

Tears began to stream down my face. I was lost without my sus. I was hurt that she’d been taken. I felt worse that it was supposed to be me, but it was her. Like, what was going on?

“Somebody better start talking before I air this bitch out. I know you just got here, D, but you ‘bout to be gone again, and for good this time!” Meech angrily stated.

“Yooo, we gon’ get her back, but you gotta think first before you do something you’ll regret. I know you. You don’t need no bodies on your hands right now, and especially not D’s,” Rosco said.

“He’s right,” Dodge agreed.

“Fuck what y’all talkin’ ‘bout. I need Kinsley back. NOW!”

“I’m with you, bro, but we gotta be smart about this,” Dodge said, as he and I walked off the porch. “I gotta take care of her, but I can’t do that here. Y’all need to meet me back at my place. Meech, my place! Don’t take yo’ ass nowhere else. Dameon, ride with Rosco because you’re the man with all the answers, and we need to know what the fuck is going on. It’s just too much going on here for that to happen.”

“D need to ride with me,” Meech angrily glared.

“Nah, he can ride with Rosco. I don’t need no shit going down between y’all.”

Rosco concurred, “You right. But, let me just run in here and tell Granny we’re making a run and will be back. She’s having a good time, they all are, so I’m sure she’s not going to question it right now.”

“I agree.” Dodge nodded. “You handle that and then be on y’all’s way. D, I don’t suspect you wanna surprise them right now, do ya?”

“Nah, not right now.”

“I didn’t think so. What’s a few more days gon’ hurt, compared to the two years you been gone?” Dodge uttered and tightly gripped my hand as we headed for his car.

Twenty minutes later, I walked in Dodge’s house, hands nervously shaking and trying to figure out what the hell I would tell my mama. She was going to have a whole fit and get the police involved with no hesitation whatsoever, but I knew she couldn’t do that. If we had any chance of Kinsley making it back safely, calling the police would only hinder it. I couldn’t take those chances. Whatever was going on was major, and I hated that we had to be a part of it.

“Sit down, bae.”

“I can’t. All I can do is wonder what Kinsley’s going through. I know she’s scared and, from the sound of her voice on that call, she thinks it’s Meech that’s gotten her in this.”

“I know, but I promise you neither of us had anything to do with it. Unfortunately, all fingers point to my brother, and that’s why I need answers. I’ve done everything I could to keep us safe since I found out he was still alive.”

“So, you’ve known? For how long?”

“Only a few weeks, but I didn’t even know what to do with that information. The nigga told me that we’d link up at the beginning of the year and then ended the call. It wasn’t like I’d seen him face to face until tonight.”

“You think he’s in on this? Is it something he wants from you that maybe you don’t know about?”

“Nah, I highly doubt that’s it.”

“So, what the hell does this man want back? He said he wants his jewels back or you’ll need to come up with the value of it. What did he mean by that?” I curiously pondered, as Dodge headed over to the refrigerator. He pulled out a jug of milk and some cocoa powder. I simply paced back and forth with thoughts running rampantly through my mind. I just never thought this nigga would try us like this.

“Honestly, this nigga has been mad for the past two years and with good reason, for the most part. His brother has been missing also. The only

person that has turned up is D.”

“See, that’s why I’m saying this is weird, babe. I know that’s your brother, but I don’t like him. Now, my fuckin’ cousin is missing, and he knows more than what he’s saying. On top of that, what if it would’ve been me instead of her?”

“Don’t say that,” he irritably responded, shaking his head. “Trust me, I understand,” he said, placing the teacup of whatever he’d made in the microwave. “Don’t worry. The minute they get here, we’re gonna get some answers.” Once the microwave stopped, he handed me the teacup that he got out of it. “Drink this. It’ll calm your nerves. Granny used to make it for us when we were wired and all over the place. It always comforted us.”

“Thanks,” I said, quickly taking a sip of the good, chocolatey tasting drink. “This is good.”

“I know.” He smiled, softly kissing me on the lips.

“I can’t even think straight.”

“So, let me think for you. We’ll get to the bottom of this.” He pulled out his cell phone and made a call. “Where you at?”

I couldn’t hear what was being said and wasn’t sure if I wanted to, either. So, I excused myself while heading to the bathroom to wash my face and get a lil’ more clarity on this situation. Kinsley needed to be saved, and I had to make sure that I was on my A-game and not falling apart in order for that to happen. Once in the bathroom, I sat on the side of the large oval tub that was in the middle of the floor, continuing to sip this soothing deliciousness as my body began to relax a little.

I stood in the mirror, dashing a lil’ cold water on my face. Normally, I would’ve been acting a fool or definitely all over the place, but a part of me felt that Kinsley would make it back to us in one piece, safe and sound. I didn’t know why, but I had to think like this. I had to make myself believe that everything would be ok. I dried my face, grabbing my teacup and heading out of the bathroom. I walked in Dodge’s bedroom and sat on the side of his bed just as lights appeared through his windows. I stood up and peeked through the blinds to see Meech pulling up. I knew he had to be losing his mind right about now. I knew the feeling. Dodge walked outside, as Meech got out the car. They started talking. Dodge had a more reserved tone, but when Meech spoke, I could clearly hear him.

“D gotta come clean, man. I’m telling you, I’m with the shits tonight. I know that’s yo’ brother and I love him like one too, but if he don’t give us

answers, Dontae won't have to deal with him because I am."

Dodge touched him on the shoulder, said a few words or more. I couldn't hear him, but it seemed to calm Meech a little. Then, the rental car that Rosco was driving pulled up. My heart dropped from the mere fact that I knew Dodge's brother was in it also. Who the fuck was this dude? He just disappeared and led his family to believe that he was dead? Who the fuck does that? He didn't think about Granny, let alone his siblings, especially knowing that they were still dealing with the loss of their mom. That within itself made me not like his ass, and I didn't believe at this point I'd ever care for him or how he moved.

Rosco and the runaway kid got out of the car, as I quietly watched from the window. I didn't know what was going on, but the runaway kid had the floor. He was doing all the talking and they were standing around him listening. I was itching to walk out and hear what he had to say for myself, but I didn't feel like this was my moment. Suddenly, more headlights beamed coming up the long driveway towards the house.

"Who the fuck is this?" I whispered to myself. My eyes widened as the vehicle got closer. It was a black Mercedes. Looked just like the one Kinsley was thrown in the backseat of. But I knew better—

My mouth dropped, as my hands began to shake the second I saw two men get out the car with guns drawn. Just as fast as their weapons were drawn, so were Dodge's and everybody else's. Nervously, I stood, thinking this shit was about to be a blood bath of flying bullets. I couldn't move. My feet felt super glued to the floor. I wanted to scream, but nothing came out.

"Where the fuck is Dontae?!" Meech bellowed.

"Drop your guns!" one of the men yelled back.

"Nigga, drop yours!" Rosco roared.

"Where the fuck is Dontae?!" Meech asked again. "Where's my girl?!"

"Everybody calm down," the other man intervened as he lowered his gun.

"Now, nigga, drop yours!" Rosco exclaimed to the other nigga.

The other man lowered his gun, but the minute he did that, Meech was on his ass. Now with the gun pointed directly at the man's forehead, he asked. "Where the fuck is she?!"

"Yo, Meech, chill," Dodge said, just as the back door of the car opened.

"Yea, Meech, chill," the guy coolly said, as he stepped out of the car. "Dameon, oh Dameon, where have you been the past two years?"

“Dontae,” Dameon said, as he walked forward. He was the only one that didn’t have a gun drawn from his side. “This meeting has been long overdue.”

“You don’t say. Where the fuck is my brother?”

“You tell me,” Dameon said, just as Dontae went back to the car. He reached in the backseat and, in a matter of seconds, out came Kinsley with a bandana tied around her mouth. My heart felt like it stopped, as I pried my feet from the floor and bolted to the front door. The minute I bust through the door, I saw that the guy everybody called Dontae had a gun up to my cousin’s head. First reaction was lunging at him to let Kinsley go, and as I took off in their direction, Dodge caught me around the waist. I wiggled and screamed to let her go. Out the corner of my eye, I could see that Meech was filled with anger, yet worry. He had yet to drop his gun that was still pointed at the man’s forehead. It felt like a western stand-off, and everybody involved was in a no-win situation.

Suddenly, a loud pop sounded off in my ears as Meech shockingly shot the man in the head. As he dropped to the ground, I shrieked in terror. Kinsley cried out. Chaos erupted around us.

“You think this is a game?!” Dontae yelled, and another deafening pop rang out, and I realized Kinsley had been shot in the head as her lifeless body fell to the ground. I screamed out so loud, I damn near hurt myself as I fell off the bed. Dodge ran into the bedroom.

“Bae!” he called out, rushing over to help me up. “You ok?”

“Oh, my god,” I panted. “I just had the worst dream ever.”

He wrapped his arms around me. “It’s ok. You’re ok. It was just a dream.”

“It felt so real,” I cried. “Kinsley can’t die.”

“I know, and she won’t. I promise you. After talking to D, we have a lot more clarity on things, and it’ll play out just as it should. Kinsley will come back to us, safe and sound. You can trust that. Please, I got you.”

At that moment, all I could do was squeeze him tightly. Still crying, I just prayed that he was right. I definitely wasn’t going to doubt or discredit his word, because I wholeheartedly believed in what he was telling me. But a part of me needed this nightmare to be over, and the sooner the better for all of us.



I walked in the house damn near tiptoeing, not wanting Mama to even know that I was home. For one, I had a disturbing headache and didn't want to be bothered or explain anything that had happened. I scurried in my bedroom, closing the door shut behind me. I kicked off my shoes and plopped down on the side of the bed. The night's events began to unravel in my mind, as I buried my face in the palm of my hands. It was almost unbelievable how things had gone from enjoying what the night was about to be, to living a fucking nightmare in a matter of seconds. The only thing that brought me a lil' comfort was D getting a phone call from somebody telling him that Kinsley would be fine. At first, I didn't believe him, but he said that she'd call me by tomorrow, so he had better been right, or I was gonna tell him about his lying ass self. Whatever was going on, he seemed to be a couple steps ahead of it. Kinsley getting kidnapped just wasn't a part of the plan, and that's what scared me.

As I began to take off my costume, my phone rang. I glanced down at it on the bed to see that it was Dodge. Regardless of my mood, when he called, I smiled inside.

"Hey, honey."

"Hey, love, how you feeling?"

"The same," I responded.

"You were sleep by the time the guys pulled up. So, we had already talked about a lot of stuff. I have a better understanding now as to what happened and why. It doesn't excuse my brother for disappearing for two years, but I guess he felt he had no choice in the matter."

"Yea, that's just selfish to me, but he did say that Kinsley was gonna call me, right? She is gonna call me, right?"

"He said she is and I'm sure she will. I trust that she's ok. From talking to him, that wasn't supposed to happen, but Dontae is playing by his own rules, which I see why now, but it's not gon' work out for him. I'm gon' make sure of that. Just thinking about the fact that he thought he'd snatched you instead got me heated like a muthafucka, and he's gon' pay for that dearly. Trust me."

"I just don't want you gettin' caught up or in no kind of trouble. All I want is Kinsley back—"

"Where Kinsley at?"

My eyes stretched, as Mama came barging in my room. "Dang, Ma, when you gon' start knocking?" I asked, trying my best to play it off. I

didn't know if she'd heard anything I had just said, but her asking about Kinsley had definitely thrown me all the way off.

"Want me to call you back?" Dodge asked.

"Girl, didn't I tell you I pay the bills 'round this bitch. I don't have to knock to enter."

"Yea, call me back, babe," I said, giving my mom a playful side-eye but ending my call with Dodge. "Girl, what you want?"

"I wanna know where Kinsley is at?" she asked, now giving me the side-eye.

"Well, um—"

"She with Meech?" she asked. "I told her that Glenda was stopping by tomorrow and I wanted her to be here."

For a minute, I felt a lil' relief. I thought she might've heard me running my mouth with Dodge. "Yea, she and Meech went out of town. She told me to tell you she'd text later."

"I knew her ass was gon' do that. After Glenda skipped out on their first session, I figured she wouldn't want to be fooled with her. Hopefully, she shows up to the next session."

"You better hope that Glenda shows up too, because she's the one that didn't show up the first time."

"I know, but she said that she was having problems and the doctor wanted her to stay off her feet."

"Sounds like an excuse to me." I shrugged.

"You're probably right, but I'm gon' get to the bottom of it tomorrow when she stops by."

"We'll see," I said.

"What you 'bout to do?"

"Get some sleep. I'm tired," I told her with a fake yawn.

"I bet you stayed up all night partying."

"I don't know how you know." I grinned.

"Because you're my daughter and I know you." She smiled. "Anyway, get some rest. Love you. Oh, and I'm off today so, when you get up, maybe we can go out for dinner if you don't have any other plans."

"I'd break plans just to be with you." I smiled.

"Awww." She smiled back with a cute wink of the eye and walked out.

I laid back on my pillow, still deep in thought and my feelings. Hopefully, I'd hear from Kinsley tomorrow and get some sense as to what

was really going on. At least I would find out if she was really ok and, at this point, that's all I needed to know. On the ride home, Dodge admitted putting a lil' melatonin in that chocolate deliciousness and it still had me sluggish so, as I closed my eyes, I dozed off to sleep.

DODGE GAMBLE

I sat in my living room with random thoughts flooding my mind. The night's unfortunate events had been one to remember and the shit wasn't even close to being over with. One minute I was this happy go lucky, falling in love, rich nigga holding down the fort and making silent, yet major moves. Now, I'd been thrown in the line of fire, not knowing what would happen next, and the main thing I wished was for it to all end in the blink of an eye.

"How was Kiyomi when you dropped her off?"

"The same, still scared and feeling helpless."

"Shit, I know the feeling," Meech uttered. "What if her mom asks about Kinsley?"

"She has that covered. At least for now anyway," I added. "When they kidnapped Kinsley, she didn't have her cell phone. It was left in the car, so Kiyomi has it. She said that she would tell her mom that Kinsley is with you and that y'all had gone out of town for a few days. She's also going to text her mom from Kinsley's phone pretending to be her."

"Well, good thing she has it all mapped out."

"I guess, but if something happens—"

"Don't say that," he interrupted. "I won't even let myself think like that. D better know what the hell he's doing. I know that."

"I trust that he does. I was just glad to know that he had nothing to do with the foul shit that happened to Polo. I mean, damn. I can't believe he's dead."

"Yea, me either."

“A part of me thought that maybe he was alive too after D popped up, but I was wrong. What got me was hearing that the nigga was at the cabin that night, waiting to rob Polo. However, D found himself in the middle of a family war zone that originally had nothing to do with him.”

“Right.”

“Thank God he’s still here because it could’ve went way left had he not been able to fire back.”

“I know, right. Nigga almost took him out though. He’s a quick thinker and moved fast enough to protect himself, but it was definitely too late for Polo.”

I shook my head. “Just hearing that shit was crazy, almost unbelievable.”

“I know. It would explain why Dontae is so adamant about getting his hands on those diamonds. Even though D is sure of what happened, he has no proof and that’s why he’s here now. He wants Dontae exposed for the grimy nigga he really is.”

“From the very first moment I met Dontae, I knew he’d be trouble for us. I just didn’t think it’d come this way. I’m surprised he hasn’t tried to take us out long before now.”

“Nah, he couldn’t do that just yet. He wanted those diamonds. That was his way out from under his uncle. That’s why he stooped so low in trying to make sure he got ‘em.”

“My only problem is that D is still keeping secrets. Like, who the hell called him to tell him that Kinsley was safe and would call tomorrow? He’s yet to tell the entire story.”

“I know, and ain’t nothing worse than having to wait for more answers, or shall I say closure, when I know he knows wassup. One thing about it, I bet Rosco knows now. That’s his right hand. He’s always told him everything.”

“I know. You think he’ll tell us?”

“Not if D told him not to,” I responded.

“You right,” Meech said with a shake of the head. “Kinsley better be a’ight. I can’t stress that enough.”

“I know, right.” We both sat quietly pondering over our thoughts. I knew mine were all over the place. I could only imagine where Meech’s were. His phone rang, as he glanced down at it. I could tell he was on edge

and the only person he really wanted to hear from was Kinsley. However, from the way he irritably shook his head, I knew it wasn't her.

"Wassup?" he answered on speaker in an unpleasant tone.

"Dang, you ain't gotta answer like that," Thomasina griped. "What happened to you last night? I thought you were coming over when you left that party."

"It wasn't a guarantee. I told you that."

"Yea, but I had a surprise for you."

He frowned, as I rested my head back on the couch and closed my tired eyes. I needed this lil' distraction of being nosey.

"What kinda surprise?"

"I had a bitch to eat me while you watched."

I cracked my eyes and looked over at Meech. His eyes widened. "You had a what?"

"You heard me."

"You actually had another bitch over there to eat that pussy, so I could watch?"

"Damn right. I wanna do whatever you wanna do."

"Damn, I see."

"So, see, you missed out."

"You right. I definitely missed the fuck out."

I closed my eyes back, grinning to myself. Meech was a wild one. He liked the freakiest of the freaky shit. If it was nasty, nasty, he wanted it. He easily fell for the porn star types, which was so crazy that he'd fallen for Kinsley because she wasn't that type of chick. At least, not his kinda bitch.

"I'm surprised you were willing to do that again. You've only done it a few times and you claimed you didn't even like it the last time. Matter of fact, you let it be known that you weren't doing it again."

"Well, let's be clear. It's like the more I give you, the more you want. You're never satisfied. Just like when I caught the bitch sucking your dick. You didn't have to do that. I was already giving you everything I had."

"Not everything."

"You're just selfish when it comes to sex. You want what you want."

"Something wrong with that?"

"Yea," she responded. "I'm down to please you, but—"

"But, why you stopped? Why you said you weren't doing it again after the last time?"

“Listen, I didn’t mind the bitch eating my pussy. I just didn’t like the fact that when you joined us, you were showing her ass way more attention than you were showing me.”

He grinned. “That shit was all in your mind. I really showed you way more attention. You just got mad because I nutted in the bitch mouth.”

“Yea, because you were my man. You should’ve did that in my mouth.”

I cracked my eyes again, looking over at Meech. He looked at me with a smirk on his face. I shook my head, trying not to laugh out loud. These two were a trip.

“Boy, you crazy.”

He simply shook his head and muted his phone. “You know she’s full of shit, right? She ain’t had no bitch over there. She just saying that to make me feel like I missed out on something.”

I laughed. “I figured.”

“Yooo,” he sang back in the phone after taking it off mute. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“So, you just gon’ get off the phone with me?”

“Yea.”

“Hold up. What the fuck? I’m talking to you.”

“I know, but this convo’ is over.”

“Really, Meech?”

“Yea, really, Thomasina.”

“You a cold muthafucka.”

“I’ve been told that a time or two.”

“I don’t even know why I continue to waste my time.”

“You do know you don’t have to, right?”

“Fuck you, Meech!”

“Yea, maybe at a later date and time.”

“Fuck you!”

“A’ight.” He grinned and ended the call. “That woman crazy.”

I laughed. “Nah, nigga, you crazy.”

He grinned. “I ain’t got time to be fucking around with her. I gotta get my woman back.”

“Shit, I feel you. We gotta get Kinsley back by any means—”

“Muthafuckin’ necessary!”

“Right,” I concurred.

“So, what are we supposed to do until D and Rosco get back?”

I shrugged. "Wait."

"This waitin' shit 'bout to drive me nuts."

"Hell, me too. D said for us to sit tight, so I guess that's what we need to do. We don't know what's really going on anyway. I just hope that whatever he's working on gets us Kinsley back and also allows him the freedom to come back home to us. Granny and Sha gon' be so fuckin' happy to see him. Everybody will be."

"I know. I was happy as hell to see the nigga. Hate I had to flip out on him, but we wouldn't be dealing with none of this shit if he wasn't involved."

"I agree. I can't even be mad at you."

"Once he explained that crazy night, though, I felt bad for him. He witnessed his good buddy lose his life and damn near lost his. I mean, he probably needed that time away to get his shit together. I doubt two whole years but, damn, what has D really been up to since he was away? He still had to live and be social at some point."

"You're right. I'm wondering the same thing. I know he just wasn't in hiding the whole time. Sitting up in a room somewhere scared to come out," I added. "He could've sold those diamonds a long time ago but, for him, timing was everything. So, to come out and do that now, he must be on to something."

"And when the shit hits the fan, I believe it's gon' be some big shit."

"Absolutely," I agreed, just as my cell phone began to ring. I glanced down at the screen to see that it was Kiyomi. Quickly, I answered.

"Wassup, love?"

"Hey, bookie."

"Bookie?" I grinned a little to myself.

"Yes, you're my boo, my bookie, my bae."

"Oh yea?"

"Yea."

"You sound a lil' better than earlier."

"I don't feel better though."

"I know, but hopefully tomorrow will bring a better day and some news we can use."

"Yes, I'm so looking forward to Kinsley calling. I already miss her so much."

"I know you do," I said.

“I just pray that she’s ok.”

“If D says she is, I believe him.”

“Well, I’m glad you do because I don’t.”

“I feel you,” I said. I knew there was nothing I could do or say to make her feel any differently about D. It would take a miracle, like Kinsley coming home, for her to even entertain the thought of liking him.

“Well, I miss you.”

“Aww, I miss you too,” she said. I could feel her blushing through the phone. All I wanted was to make her feel better. That’s why it was imperative that we get Kinsley back. “My mama asked about her. I told her that she and Meech had gone out of town. She bought it. So, tomorrow, I’ll just text her from Kinsley’s phone and that should buy y’all some time. I’m telling you, though, that if Kinsley don’t call me, then I’ll have no choice but to—”

“No, don’t think like that. She’ll call.”

“I pray she does.”

“She will,” I assured her. I really didn’t know if she would or wouldn’t. I was just banking on D coming through for us like he promised me he would.

“How’s Meech?”

“He’s holding up.”

“Is he still there?”

“Yea, I’m looking in his face right now.”

“Ok, good. Keep an eye on him. We definitely don’t need him getting into trouble before Kinsley comes back. It would be a shame if she’s free, but he’s locked up.”

“Well, if something like that happened, he’d still be free. Trust me.”

“Mm-hm, I hear ya.”

“Anyway, what you ‘bout to do?”

“Lay down. I’m super sleepy.”

“I knew that lil’ concoction will have you getting some much-needed rest. I fixed it to calm your nerves. I didn’t know what else to do.”

“Well, thanks, because I needed it. My mind has been all over the place. I honestly needed something to soothe my thoughts, or I was gonna drive myself crazy.”

“Try to get some sleep and don’t worry too much. This will all be over soon.”

“I guess I won’t completely calm down until I speak with Kinsley. I just need to hear her voice and to make sure that she’s ok.”

“I already know. I can’t wait till she calls as well. I think we all need to know that.”

“Right.” She yawned. “I’m gonna get in a nap and then I’ll wake up and text Mama from Kinsley’s phone. I definitely don’t need her coming back in here asking a million questions or calling Kinsley’s phone looking for her.”

“Well, you might need to text her now. Just say something like she made it out of town and will call tomorrow and talk to her.”

“Yeah, you’re right. That might be the best thing to do. I’ll text you back and let you know how that goes.”

“Yeah, do that.”

“Ok,” she said and ended the call.

“So, she’s gonna text her mama now?” Meech asked the second I hung up the phone.

“Yeah, I think that’s only right. Plus, we don’t need her mama prying too soon.”

“I know, right. Damn, I just feel so helpless. Things were already rocky between us. We’d just started back talking a little and now I think she feels that she’s in the shit because of me. God knows I didn’t have shit to do with this. Niggas ‘round here know not to fuck with me. Period.”

“Exactly, but Dontae’s old bitch ass—”

“Gon’ have to leave here. I don’t give a fuck who his uncle is or what connects they got. I’m killing that nigga the first chance I get. I mean that shit on everything I love.”

“I’m with you every step of the way. He really thought he took my girl, so you know he gotta go. I can only imagine how you feel, because I couldn’t tell you what I’d be doing in this situation had it been Kiyomi.”

“I’m doing everything I can not to lose my fucking cool. I know that.”

“You doing a good damn job too. I’m proud of you. Being a loose cannon right now ain’t gon’ help the situation. If we don’t hear from Kinsley tomorrow, then it’s an all-out war.”

“Damn right. That’s all I been waiting to hear. Luckily, D pumped my brakes a lil’ bit, but I still got my eye on Dontae. If I have to go to that cabin and lay low on his ass, that’s what I’ll do. Give that nigga a rendition of what happened to his fucking brother.”

“Hell yea. Same shit he set in motion will be the same shit he dies by.”

“That part.” Meech nodded, pulling his Newport cigarette box out his front pocket. Inside it were a few pre-rolled blunts. He grabbed one while standing to his feet. “I’m ‘bout to go out on the front porch. I need some fresh air.”

“A’ight, but don’t go nowhere.”

“Nigga, I’m chilling right now. I ain’t leaving.”

“Ok, I’ll be out shortly. I’m just gonna shower right quick.”

“A’ight,” Meech said. He headed outside, and I headed to my bedroom. As I went through my drawers to find something quick to throw on, my cell phone rang. I glanced at the caller ID to see that it was Keisha. Even though a part of me didn’t want to answer, I decided I would. This crazy ass girl could be pulling up for all I knew.

“Yo,” I answered.

“What you doing?”

“’Bout to shower. Wassup?”

“Did you get the sonogram pictures I sent you?”

“Yeah.”

“Why didn’t you respond back?”

“I’m not responding back to anything dealing with the baby. I’m glad you’re pregnant. Lord knows you’ve been wanting this for years, but that baby ain’t mine—”

“Can you stop saying that?”

“I’m only speaking facts.”

“You don’t fucking know, because this baby is yours.”

“A’ight, Keisha, if you say so,” I said, just ready to hang up in her face. This muthafucka always had the audacity to try me on some lame shit.

“I’ve already bought a paternity test kit so, when the baby is born, we can send off for the results immediately.”

“Paternity test kit? Nah, we’re letting the doctors do that. I don’t trust a test kit when it comes to you.”

“Really, Dodge? Wow, you are really trippin’.”

“No harder than you are by saying this baby is mine when you know you’ve been fucking with yo’ pussy, yo’ sister’s pussy, and probably yo’ best friend Vee’s pussy too.”

“Wow, just wow.”

“That’s all you gotta say?”

“Vee ain’t my best friend no more—”

“And that’s the first thing you have to say?” I chuckled a little. “She’s probably not yo’ best friend right now, but she’ll be back. The toxicity of it all will never end.”

“Whatever, Dodge. Since you got a lil’ money, you just done forgot where you came from.”

“Oh, have I?”

“You know you have. You look down on us now.”

“Oh, do I?”

“Stop being sarcastic! You’re foul for a lot of shit you say.”

“Oh, am I?”

“I’m hanging up. I don’t have time for this dumb shit.”

“Ok, good. Talk to you later.”

“I—”

On that note, I ended the call. I didn’t have time to be sucked back in by Keisha’s antics. It was always something, all the fucking time. I didn’t know when she’d learn, but I was definitely over it. I grabbed my clothes and headed into the bathroom. What I needed was to clear my mind, so I could think straight and stay focused. I had larger fish to fry, and Keisha was just a lil’ Nemo swimming in this treacherous ocean compared to the big ass sharks I was up against.

KINSLEY SIMMONS

I jumped up out of my sleep, looking around while trying to figure out where the hell I was. I believed I'd been drugged and knocked out because the last thing I remembered was screaming in the phone for Meech to save me. Now, as I sat trying to get my thoughts together, I couldn't believe that he'd gotten me caught up in some of his bullshit. Likely, it had something to do with him scamming a nigga. It couldn't have been anything at the club because even though we'd talked about it, we didn't really put the plan into action. So, now I was sitting here stuck and looking crazy. Not to mention, scared as hell. I didn't know if these niggas were gonna kill me or not.

I checked out my surroundings. *Not bad*, I quickly thought to myself. The bed I was lying on was a nice ass king size and the comforter that I laid on top of was Versace. I knew that nigga's designer shit anywhere I saw it. If I was supposed to be abducted, it sure as hell didn't really feel like it. I mean, were these boujee kidnapppers or what? The thing about it was, at first, the shit definitely scared me. These niggas had guns and all, threatening to kill Meech and Dodge, along with this Dameon dude that I'd only known a little about from hearsay and Yomi. Shit, I thought he was dead but, apparently, he wasn't. I didn't know what the hell they had going on, but Meech had to be the ringleader in this shit for them to take my ass. Ironically, this wasn't the first time I'd been in a predicament like this. I'd been kidnapped before.

I could remember the shit like it was yesterday. It was exactly a week after I turned eight years old. From what I gathered as a youngster, Glenda

had stolen drugs from the man that kept her high as a kite. Just thinking back, he was kind of like a pimp that used her for whatever he needed, whether that be for sex with other men, including himself, and for whatever else he could get out of her ass. Needless to say, to get his lick back, he snatched me up and threw me in the trunk of his car. When we stopped, it was at some old ass, abandoned-looking house. The nigga held me hostage for three days. Let's just say that had to be the longest three days of my life. I'd never forgive her for allowing that to happen to me. It was an unfortunate part of my life that I told no one about, not even Yomi and Auntie. It was embarrassing, to say the least. Plus, Auntie would've killed Glenda with her bare hands over that shit. What happened in that house, though, stirred up a lot of unresolved emotions that I still carried to this day. Seriously, after seeing my surroundings here, this should've been like a walk in the park compared to that shit.

"Oh, you're awake," a deep voice said as the bedroom door opened.

I jumped, not knowing what to expect. "Who are you and why am I here?" I nervously asked, still feeling a lil' groggy for some reason.

"None of that is important right now. How are you feeling?"

"Hungry as hell with a banging headache," I responded. "I don't know what's going on but, believe me, I have nothing to do with it. Just please, don't hurt me."

"I won't hurt you," the guy responded, as he walked closer in the light that was lit up by a lamp. I rubbed my eyes to get a good look at him. Unlike the niggas that snatched me, he didn't mind me seeing his face, and what a handsome face it was.

What the fuck is really going on here? I pondered, followed by asking, "What's going on?"

"A lot," he answered.

"A lot like what?"

"Honestly, I have no knowledge of what's really happening right now. I just know it's some deep shit going down within my family and I'm just doing as I'm told."

"What does the deep shit in your family have to do with me? I'm so confused. Is Meech your cousin or something?"

"What?" He frowned. "I don't know of a Meech. All I know is you were brought here, and I was told to keep you safe by any means necessary."

I frowned. "Who brought me here?"

“My brother.”

“Who is your brother?”

He shook his head. “Don’t worry about that. Just know you’re fine as long as you’re here. You said you were hungry—”

“What about when I leave here?” I asked.

“When you leave here, you’ll be going back to your family. Now, are you ready to eat or not?”

“How long was I knocked out? Do you know what them goons gave me? Because I feel like I was drugged. The shit didn’t have codeine in it, did it? Because I’m allergic to codeine. Why they wanna kill Meech and Dodge?”

“You sure have a lot of questions.”

“If you were in my shoes, wouldn’t you?”

“Yeah, but asking too many questions while being in your shoes ain’t a good thang. Just relax. Look at this as a mini vacation.”

“How long of a vacation?”

“Until I’m told it’s over.”

“I have to call my family, or listen,” I said with a serious expression, “my aunt will call the police.”

“Don’t worry. You can call them later today, just not right now. Do you want something to eat?” he asked again.

“I do, but I’m so frazzled I don’t even know if I can eat.”

“Ok.” He nonchalantly nodded and, just like that, he left the room.

“Hey!” I called after him, but he closed the bedroom door shut. Then, I heard him locking it from the outside as I jumped up and ran over to it. Banging on the door as hard as I could, I started yelling, “Let me outta here!” But there was nothing heard or being said back from the other side. “Please, just let me outta here!” I slid down the door, sitting on the floor and burying my face in the palm of my hands. I didn’t know what the hell was going on, but I didn’t like this shit one bit.

Once I realized I was alone again and possibly back in danger, I started to freak out a little. The guy had said I was safe, but how did I really know that? I wouldn’t know unless he proved it to me, and how was he going to do that? Was he serious about letting me call home? I didn’t know, but I sure as hell hoped so.

Memories started to creep back in of my childhood past. I’d gone through so much as a kid, and a lot of those things Glenda overlooked or

didn't care to even address. Auntie was always my lifesaver. At times, I didn't even think she knew, but I was sure a part of her did. She and Glenda stayed at each other's throats over me. Glenda felt like I was her daughter and she could very well raise me how she saw fit. However, Auntie wasn't having it. From the moment I was born, she said she loved me like her own. She knew Glenda wasn't well and she vowed to herself and to their parents that she'd look out for me. Without her, I didn't know where I'd be. I owed her everything.

Thoughts of Yomi surfaced. I knew she was clearly losing her mind. I was not sure if she had already alerted Auntie as to what had happened or not. But, knowing Yomi, she had Auntie probably out ridin' with her nine ready to knock a bitch off 'bout her niece. The only way she hadn't said anything was if Dodge had talked her out of it. If he had talked her out of it, then it had to be a good reason behind it.

I thought about Meech and what he was doing or thinking. I knew how he was and how he felt about me. I just hoped he hadn't killed nobody yet, especially knowing that I may not be in as much danger as I was led to believe. I wondered if he knew. If not, he was surely losing his cool too. Whatever the hell was going on had all of us fucked up, and the only way this would end was if I returned home safely. I could only bank on that happening or I was going to go nuts thinking otherwise.

I stood up to take a look around the space that I was in. The room was rather large but didn't have any windows. That had to be the weirdest shit I'd ever seen. The California king bed, dresser with the mirror, and two nightstands were top-of-the-line pieces of furniture. The entire décor of the bedroom looked and smelled like money. Wherever I was being held had to be at some nice ass millionaire estate; I was just clueless as to where. I walked in the master bathroom, and it was lavish as hell. Reminded me of the bathrooms at the hotel in Miami. Just bad ass throughout.

Still wearing my Storm costume, looking and feeling like I'd just caused a treacherous tsunami that I never meant to be a part of, I began to strip out of it. What I needed was a nice hot shower in one of my favorite new body washes called Baby Luv by The Spiritual Tea Company. It smelled so refreshing and clean. Wish I had it here because I really needed something soothing to take the edge off.

Quickly, I got in the shower and stood under the water as the steam filled the bathroom. For a second, I forgot I'd been abducted and held

against my will. I stood directly under the hot water, noticing a small bottle of Design Essential's shampoo. Being that my wig was only glued around the front edges and pulled tight to hold it in place, after drenching it with the hot water, it slid right off my head. Pulling my real hair out the tucked ponytail in the back, I ran my fingers through my mane as I lathered it with the shampoo while caressing my scalp. It was so exhilarating; I literally felt like Calgon had swooped in and taken me away. I rinsed my hair and began to wash my body, as I stood under the water until I'd completely zoned out.

"Um, 'scuse me."

"Ahhh!" I shrieked, trying to cover my coochie with one hand and my tatas with the other. Clearly, it was so foggy in the bathroom that he couldn't see much because I couldn't even see him but, still, he was in here.

"Uh—yo, sorry. Your um, food is on the dresser, your clothes are on the bed, and I have a lil' some extra for you on the nightstand."

I turned off the shower water, quickly grabbed a towel that was hanging close by, and wrapped it around my body. "So, you just gon' come in the bathroom like that while I'm in here naked?" I asked but got no answer. "Aye!" I called, rushing out of the bathroom and into the bedroom but, just that fast, he was gone. However, an instant smell of some good food hit my nose.

"Oh, my goodness. He went to Chops?" I questioned, opening the bag to see what it contained. Licking my lips at just the sight of the juicy cheeseburger that the Buckhead restaurant served, I got a lil' too giddy on the inside. It had to be one of the best in the city. Their meat was blended with chuck, brisket, and short ribs. Listen—to die for. It was delicious. Inside the other box was their sliced beef tenderloin steak and a loaded baked potato. I didn't know if he thought I was greedy or he was just giving me options but, either way, all this food was gonna be gon' by nightfall. As I remembered, there were no windows that I could actually look out of so, hell, it could've already been nightfall.

I looked over on the bed, noticing some leggings of assorted colors and the shirts to match each one. They were actually cute and looked like something I'd lounge around the house in. From the looks of how many sets were there, I'd be here for a few days. At this rate, I really couldn't complain as long as my ass was still alive.

I glanced back over my shoulder, searching the bedroom to make sure my visitor had left the premises. Dropping the towel off my body, I began to

get dressed. I thought it was cute that this dude had gone out his way to do all of this for me. Like, who the hell was this nigga?

As I looked over on the nightstand, a bright smile appeared on my face. “Ah shit, he done showed the fuck out.” I grinned as I saw two bottles of cold water, a bottle of 818 tequila, a shot glass, and three pre-rolled blunts. Damn, it wasn’t even Christmas, yet I felt like Santa had stopped through early. I grabbed the lighter that was next to the pre-rolled blunts and you already know what happened next. I lit that blunt and sucked so hard on it that I damn near coughed up a lung. What kind of good ass weed was this? I mean, I felt like I was already floating in air. With a smile on my face, I instantly took a shot of the tequila. I knew I had to put something on my stomach or this shit would make me sick. So, I put the blunt out and dove in teeth first on that juicy ass cheeseburger. Swear, I felt like I was sitting at the bar, minding my own business and enjoying my own company with good food, unlimited shots, and exotic smokes. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say this was the life.

I didn’t know how long it had been, but I had finished my potato wedges and my cheeseburger. I’d also had my fair share of tequila shots and was now toking on the last of the first blunt I had fired up. I was feeling good as hell. Honestly, never felt better. For some reason, this abduction was turning out to be just what my soul needed. I desired a getaway, a break from it all, a time to unwind and only think about me for once. I didn’t think I’d ever be in a position of this nature, not even in this mindset. I had to be honest with myself; it was a really good feeling.

As I heard the locks on the door being messed with, I looked back to see dude walking in.

“Damn, do you knock? You remind me of my auntie,” I said with a serious expression but, the minute I laid eyes on his handsome face, I grinned a little.

He smiled back, to my surprise. All before, he just kept a blank expression, not wanting to reveal his hand. And even though I was being held captive, he didn’t seem like the type to hold anybody against their will. I took this as a sign to feel him out.

“I see you’re ok in here.”

“I appreciate the clothes, the food, the liquor, and the blunts. How did you know I drink and smoke?”

“I didn’t.”

“How did you know what size clothes I wear?”

He shrugged. “Just a wild guess.”

“How did you know I’d like that food you bought?”

“I didn’t, but you had options.”

“And, if neither of those options worked—”

“I’d bring more options.”

I smiled inside. His handsome ass was piquing my interest. “What’s your name?”

“Let’s just stick to the script. This will be over before you know it.”

“Well, my name is Kinsley,” I volunteered, to lighten the situation. “I’m still lost as to what’s going on, but I’m glad I ended up with you.”

He looked me over. “You look different.”

“I hope that’s a good thing.”

“You don’t have the white hair anymore.”

“Oh, yea.” I slightly grinned. “It was a wig. I took it off and washed my real hair while I was in the shower.”

“You don’t need wigs. Your real hair is nice.”

“Umm, thank you.” I faintly blushed. I didn’t even know why. I shouldn’t have been blushing over nothing this man was telling me, but his kind spirit had me somewhat drawn to him.

Without saying another word, he turned to walk out.

“Wait— don’t leave me in here by myself. It’s lonely as fuck,” I told him.

“It’s best if I leave. I just wanted to make sure you were good.”

“I’d be better if you gave me a lil’ company. Please, stay.” I had grabbed him by his hand before I knew it. He looked back at me as we stared at each other with intense eyes. Gently, he pulled away.

“I’ll be back.” Just as quickly as he walked in, he disappeared right back out those doors. I heard the locks being bolted. I sighed with a disappointed shake of the head. Here I was feeling good as hell, only wanting a lil’ company, and he couldn’t even give me that.

“Dammit,” I said, plopping down in the recliner chair that was next to the nightstand. I fixed me another shot and threw it back. Its contents no longer burned my throat. I think it was now numb from the taste of the alcohol. I lit another blunt and sat back in the chair. Suddenly, I felt alone. It was strange because right before him showing up, I felt like I needed this retreat. But, once he was here and now gone again, the feeling of loneliness

crept in, taking me back to my childhood of living with Glenda. A tear fell down my cheek and then another tear. As I started to cry, I heard the locks on the door being unlocked again. I wiped my eyes as fast as I could, not wanting him to see my vulnerable side. The minute the door opened —“Damn, do you ever knock?” I said while batting away the tears, hoping he didn’t even notice ‘em.

He shook his head with a slight smile. “Um, I forgot to give you this,” he said, handing me a cell phone. My eyes lit up.

“I can call home?”

He nodded his head. “Yes.”

“How you know I won’t holler and act a fool. Give them your description and beg for them to find me?”

“I don’t.”

“So, you’re serious about letting me do this?”

“Yes.”

“Can I make more than one call?”

“You have ten minutes. I’ll be back.”

He walked out the bedroom, again securing the locks but, this time, leaving me with a whole cell phone in my possession. Although it was a flip phone and I couldn’t leave a location for somebody to find me, I still could easily call 911. As I opened the phone, I didn’t know how to feel. What the hell was taking me so long to make the call? I didn’t know if his trusting in me had caused a lil’ nervous tension in my soul, but I definitely wasted about two minutes tops trying to gather my composure. The average person in this situation or anybody looking at me from the outside would say I was crazy as hell. They’d be yelling at me to call somebody dammit!

The only numbers I knew by heart were Auntie’s and Yomi’s. Of course, I wasn’t calling Auntie so, Yomi, here I come. The phone rang once and she answered, breathing all hard in the phone.

“Hello.”

The sound of her voice brought tears to my eyes. It couldn’t have been that long since we talked or even saw each other but, because of the circumstances, this was different.

“Hello.”

“Bitch,” I softly said as tears wailed in the corners of my eyes.

“Kinsley!” she shrieked in the phone. “Oh, my god, it’s you!”

“Yes, it’s me, sus,” I said, wiping my face. “What you doing?”

“Bitch, what you mean what I’m doing? I’m sitting here missing the fuck outta you! It’s been over thirty-two hours since I last heard your voice. I didn’t know if you were dead or alive.”

“I know right but, thank God, I’m still alive.”

“Thank God!”

“So, how are you?”

“How am I? Bitch, how are you?! They let you call me?”

“Well, technically, it’s just him. The guys that kidnapped me aren’t the same person that’s keeping me here. I don’t think.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Sus, me either,” I said. “All I know is that the guy that’s on the outside of this door was told to keep me safe by any means necessary.”

“You believe that?”

“I do. He’s been treating me nice. He brought me clothes, food, weed, and liquor. Even though I’m locked in this bedroom, it’s a nice ass bedroom. The bathroom in here is like the bathrooms in Miami—”

“Bitch, stop! What kind of kidnappers do you have? Boujee muthafuckas?”

I laughed. “Same thing I thought at first.”

“I’m just saying. It sounds more like a vacation than like you’re actually trapped.”

“Yea, I mean, the only thing that makes me feel trapped is that he locks the doors when he walks out of here. Oh, and there aren’t any windows in this room.”

“No windows?”

“Nope. Speaking of that, is it night or day?”

“It’s just after ten o’clock at night.”

“Oh.”

“Don’t sound like that. I’m trying my best to hold up here. I don’t wanna cry because—”

“That’s gonna make me cry.”

“Right.”

“So, what all do you know so far? What has Meech done to get me kidnapped?”

“Well, first off, it’s not Meech. He has nothing to do with this. Trust, he’s ready to kill everybody involved. Dodge has had to keep him calm. However, Dodge’s brother, Dameon, has come back from the dead. He’s

tied up in some bullshit that has these muthafuckas thinking they've kidnapped me to make Dodge double-down on getting Dameon to come forward with the shit he stole of theirs."

I frowned. "What? So, I shouldn't even be here? Them muthafuckas were thinking they had you? Wow! This shit is getting crazier and crazier."

"Exactly, and I wish I could trade places with you because you definitely don't deserve this."

"Sus, you don't neither. I wouldn't dare trade places with you. I'm glad they fucked up, but that doesn't excuse the shit that Dameon has done. He needs to clear this shit up and asap!"

"I agree. I don't even know the nigga but I don't like him already."

"Damn, this is really fucked up."

"I know, but Dodge and Meech are going to get you back. I promise you."

"Well, I believe it. I just hope that I'm kept safe like I was told. I would really hate for those plans to change."

"Don't talk like that—"

"Is that Kinsley on the phone?"

"Dang, Ma—"

"Don't start that shit, and why you look like you wanna cry? Is that Kinsley, let me talk to her—Kinsley?" she said in the phone. I already knew she had snatched it out of Yomi's hand.

"Auntie," I said back.

"What I tell you about leaving here, especially going out of town and not telling me?"

"Um..." I paused. Just hearing her voice had me choked up.

"Don't damn um me," she sassed, as I grinned. She definitely knew how to lighten a load.

"I meant to call you, but you know how it is."

"No, the hell I don't. Somebody could've been done kidnapped y'all asses and I wouldn't even know. You and Yomi hit the streets and don't be saying shit. From now on, I don't give a damn if you're just making a run to the store, you better text and tell me. It's too much shit going on nowadays. I worry about y'all."

"I know, Auntie. I'm sorry."

"Ok, well, have fun. You know I love you."

“I know, and I love you too,” I said, now wiping the lil’ pesky tears that started to fall.

“Well, would you believe I have a date tonight?”

“Yeah, she’s being fast, Kin!” Kiyomi laughed in the background.

“A’ight, you better be home by two,” I teased.

“Girl, bye,” she laughed. “Be safe. Ok.”

“Ok,” I said, as Yomi got back on the phone.

“That lady crazy,” she said. “And knock the next time!”

“I betcha!” Auntie sassed.

I laughed. “I miss y’all.”

“We miss you too, but you’ll be back before we know it.”

“I sure hope so.”

“You will, so don’t worry.”

“Tell Meech I’m sorry I thought he was behind this and make sure he doesn’t kill anybody.”

Kiyomi laughed a little. “I’ll make sure. Matter of fact, I just told Dodge the same thing. To keep an eye on him because right now, he’s like a loose cannon.”

“I know he is.” I softly grinned as I heard the doors unlocking. “Anyway, I’ll call back when I can. Don’t worry about me. I’m fine. I love you, sus.”

With silence on the other end, she finally said, “Don’t go.”

“I have to, Yomi.”

“Love you, Kin.”

“I know,” I responded and ended the call. I could hear that she’d started crying, and I really couldn’t take that right now. As dude entered the room, I already had the phone held out for him to get it. “The police are on the way here.”

“Oh yea?” he said in a nonchalant tone like he wasn’t the least bit worried.

“Nah, but I wish,” I uttered. “Anyway, thanks for that.”

“You need anything for the rest of the night?”

“Just a teddy bear that I can hug, so I don’t feel so lonely.”

He stared at me with a blank expression. “Anything other than that?”

“Some music I can listen to. This silence is driving me crazy.”

At that moment, he reached over in the nightstand drawer and pulled out a remote control. He pressed it and a damn TV rose up out the foot of the

bed.

“What the hell?” I whispered. “You mean to tell me it’s been a TV in here all along?”

“Yea,” he casually responded while handing me the remote. “Try to have a good night.”

I looked at him with appreciative eyes. “You too. Oh, wait. You’re not leaving me here by myself, are you?”

“No.”

“You promise?”

“I’m not leaving you,” he assured me and, just like always, he made his exit while securing the locks on the other side of the door.

KIYOMI SIMMONS

Four days had passed, and Kinsley had yet to return. The only silver lining with her being gone was that she was allowed to call me every night around ten o'clock. It seriously felt like she was off on a much-needed vacation. She sounded lively and safe, making me feel better about the situation. I couldn't lie, waiting on her phone call was like waiting to hear from Dodge. Every time that number popped up, I'd get butterflies.

Whoever the man was that was watching over her was doing a good job of keeping her safe. I just hoped it continued to stay that way. A week was quickly approaching, and that was the said time when she'd be able to come back home. That all depended on Dameon's plan of dealing with Dontae. I still didn't have much knowledge on the matter, but Dodge continuously assured me not to worry. So, even though I had faith in him, all of it was in God; therefore, I knew this said plan had to work out.

I walked out of the bathroom after washing up to get my morning started. I smelled breakfast and smiled because I was hungry as hell. I hadn't been eating much due to my nerves being shot that Kinsley wasn't around, but I think I was about to make up for those missing meals. Before I even entered the kitchen, I heard Mama talking. "Who you in here talkin'—"

"Hey, Yomi," Glenda spoke, sitting at the kitchen table eating a piece of bacon.

"Wassup, Auntie. Hey, Mama."

"Good morning, sleepy head," Mama said.

“Smells good in here.”

“Figured I’d cook breakfast since I’m off today.”

I frowned. “You’ve been off a lot lately. What’s going on?”

“I thought I told you. Anyway, somebody bought us out. So, they have been laying people off. I’m not in that crew yet, but I believe it’s coming because they keep sending my section home.”

“Dang. If they lay you off, what you gon’ do?”

“Draw my damn unemployment and sit on my ass. I’m tired of work. Been doing this shit damn near my whole life. I need a break.”

“I’on blame you,” Glenda chimed in. “You’ve done well for yourself. I’m sure you got a nice savings account put up.”

“I sure as hell do, but I ain’t gotta touch that. My man—”

“Your wheett?!” I pondered, shooting her the side-eye. “Did you just say your man?”

She blushed like a schoolgirl. “You heard me.”

“So, how long have you been talking to this said man? Who is he? Why I ain’t met him yet?”

“Breathe, child,” Glenda teased.

“Well,” I said, putting my hand on my hip. “I’m waiting.”

“She really thinks she’s the mama,” Mama teased with a slick roll of the eyes.

“I’m waiting, lil’ girl.” I playfully smirked.

“He’s someone that I like. I met him a few months ago—”

“What’s a few?”

“Six months?”

“Sounds like more than a few to me, and I’m just hearing about this.”

“Girl, hush,” Mama said. “I wanted to make sure that this was real. All these other bogus ass relationships I’ve been in is for the birds. I prayed and prayed for a real one, and I do believe God has sent him my way.”

“Oh, wow, this sounds serious,” Glenda said as she grabbed another piece of bacon.

“Damn, you may as well let me fix you a plate. Greedy ass.”

“Ok, go ahead. Guess I am hungrier than I thought.”

I looked over at Auntie. She should’ve known she was hungry by the way she looked, because I was sure that was the same way she felt.

“Back to you,” I said, directing my attention back to Mama.

“Ok, and back to me,” she sassed, fixing Auntie’s plate.

“Six whole months?”

“Yes, Yomi. I didn’t wanna say nothing, alright. He is one of the good ones though. I didn’t wanna introduce you to nobody else that may leave. Is that ok with you?”

“So, you’re thinking he’s here to stay?”

“I believe so. I hope so.”

“Dang, this is serious,” I uttered. “Well, I’m not gonna rain on your parade. I hope he lives up to the hype and I look forward to meeting him.”

She smiled. “Well, I appreciate your support,” she said, handing me a plate of grits, eggs, bacon, and French toast.

“Whew, this looks good.”

“It is good,” Glenda said, eating like she had missed more than a few meals.

“So, Auntie—”

“Where is Kin?” she asked before I could even finish my sentence.

“She’s outta town.”

“Outta town where?” she asked me, but glanced over at Mama while continuing to eat with a mouth full of food.

“She’s with her boyfriend.”

“Oh, she has a boyfriend?”

“Yea.” I nodded, and even though Kinsley and Meech weren’t exactly together, they didn’t know that.

“I’m happy for her,” Glenda said. “I really want her to be in a desired place in her life. To someday marry and have kids, if it’s in the cards for her.”

“Speaking of kids—”

“Yeah, wassup with your baby?” I cut in, as Mama looked over at me with a frown on her face for stopping her mid-sentence.

“The baby is fine and flourishing,” she responded.

“Are you still in rehab? I mean, you look better than the last time you were here. Although you could use at least three meals a day with in between snacks,” Mama said.

“Yes, I’m still in rehab. It’s a work in progress.”

“Definitely.” Mama nodded as she sipped her coffee. “So, what brought you over so early?”

“I just wanted to see Kinsley. I hate I missed our first session but, now, it looks like she’ll be missing the next one if she’s not back.”

“I can assure you that’s more than likely her plans,” Mama bluntly told her. “You can’t keep skipping out on her when it’s convenient for you. I get you had a reason, but nothing should’ve stopped you from showing up.”

“Or at least you could’ve called her,” I chimed in.

Glenda nodded her head. “I know. I just have to get used to this shit. Carrying this baby that I really didn’t even want to have at my age is stressful. Trying to stay clean while being pregnant is even more stressful. Having my daughter resent me and not even want to talk to me is muthafuckin’ depressing. Sad thing about it is it’s all my fault—”

“I was about to say that,” Mama uttered.

“I know that, and I can’t erase the past. I’m just doing my best to learn from it and move forward. I don’t know why it’s so hard for her to do the same.”

“What you not gon’ do is come in here and try to insinuate that you’re getting your life together, so Kinsley should be on your time in forgiving you—”

“I’m not saying that, Nicole. I’m just saying it will make my life easier if she’d just give me a break.”

I chuckled with sarcasm. Auntie definitely had a way of getting under everybody’s skin. She just didn’t see her ways as being that toxic, but they were.

“Auntie, when are you ever going to be accountable for the things you’ve done to Kinsley? You never own up to your shit—”

“Yomi—”

“Sorry, Mama, but she never owns up to anything. All she thinks is that we’re supposed to conform to her unbelievable way of thinking. I’m sick of her with this stank attitude. You should’ve been at that therapy session two hours early, yet you don’t show up and don’t even have the decency to call and let your daughter know that you aren’t coming. Now, you’re sitting here feeding your face like you ain’t ate in three years, yet you expect us to feel sorry for you? No ma’am. You don’t get to play the victim here. You don’t get to play the victim ever! Period!” I angrily spat.

“Kiyomi!” Mama intervened. “That’s still your aunt. Don’t sass her like that.”

“I don’t have to take this. I can leave and never come back.”

“You can, so leave!” I shouted.

“Kiyomi! Cut it out! What’s gotten into you?!”

“She don’t have to leave. I will,” I said, getting up from the kitchen table and grabbing my keys and purse. “I need some cool air anyway. I’m starting to feel claustrophobic sitting here in the company of Glenda,” I irritably expressed with an attitude. In no time, I was in my car and backing out of the driveway.

I rode around with thoughts rummaging through my mind. Aunt Glenda showing up, I was sure unannounced, didn’t make this shit going on with Kinsley any better. As I drove the streets of Conyers trying to get my thoughts together, my cell phone rang.

“Hey, Mama.”

“You ok, girl?”

“Yes ma’am. I’m just sick of Auntie with her shenanigans.”

“I understand. Trust me, I get it. But it’s something else going on with you. What is it?”

“Nothing, girl.”

“Don’t nothing girl me. Is it because I’m seeing someone?”

“Nooo, it’s not that.”

“So, it is something—”

“No, it’s not. It’s just Auntie. Kinsley has already gone through enough. I hate when she comes around playing the victim and, for once, I needed to stand on that, since Kinsley isn’t around to do it herself.”

“Ok, if that’s all you say it is.”

“It is, girl. Chill out.”

“Ok, but where are you heading?”

“Just out ridin’. Nowhere in particular. Don’t worry. I’ll be back shortly. Hopefully, Auntie will be gone.”

“I’m sure she will be. She’s been crying since you left.”

“Oh, she’s turned on the waterworks, huh? Hadn’t seen those in a long time.”

“I know, right.” Mama grinned. “Anyway, be careful and I’ll see ya when you ya get back.”

“Yes ma’am. Love you.”

“Love you more,” she expressed and ended the call.

After driving for a while, I pulled over and parked at Wheeler Park. It was a great place for tennis, bike trails, and nice playgrounds. I got out of my car, just wanting to walk off the stress of it all. I needed the break. I needed the cool air that was briskly blowing around me. These past couple

of days were just about to drive me insane. I tried to stay calm and collective, but it was starting to prove easier said than done. My anxiety was getting the best of me. I put my ear plugs in my ears and started to walk, zoning any and everything out around me. The sun was bright and beaming above, but the wind was nice and cool. About fifteen minutes in, I was already starting to feel better.

Once I completed the thirty-minute trail, I was tired, so I stopped at a park bench and sat down to take a breather. Suddenly, I felt a tap from behind.

“What you doing out here?”

I looked back over my shoulder and instantly smiled. “Taking a much-needed break from the world. What you doing out here?”

“Ironically, the same.” Hendrix smiled, showing off his cute dimples and platinum grill.

“Oooh, when you got that?”

“What?” he asked, sitting next to me.

“Your grill. It’s cute.”

He grinned. “It’s cute, huh?”

“Yeah, I like those.”

“I been had these. I only wear them on occasion.”

“So, what’s the occasion here?” I asked, looking around the park.

He grinned. “I come here to jog the trails. Can’t you tell?” He glanced down at his GSU jogging attire.

“Out here though?”

“I switch it up often. I run at the school, of course, Piedmont Park, and a couple other places. I knew you lived on this side of the tracks, but I never thought I’d run into you out here.”

“Shit, I didn’t think I’d see you out here either.”

“You never know where I might be.”

I smirked. “I see.”

“What’s on your mind?”

“Why you ask that?”

“Because you look like you got a lot on your mind. You can talk to me, ya know that, right?”

“Yeah, I know.”

“So, wassup? You good?”

“I’ve just been dealing with a lot, but I’ll be ok.”

“Well, I won’t pressure you but, whenever you wanna talk, don’t hesitate to hit me up.”

“Trust me, it’s nothing I can’t handle.”

“Oh, I’ve seen you in action. I know you can handle whatever it is.”

I grinned. “How is that working out for you now?”

“What?”

“Her,” I said, knowing that his slick-funny comment was directed toward me and Kay fighting.

“It’s not working out,” he answered. “She wants more, and I don’t. I mean, I like her. I can’t lie about that, but she’s on some other shit. Plus, shawty needs to work on her temper. Her, her sister Keisha, and my sister Vee are all the same. They can go from zero to a hundred real fast. Everybody in the circle ain’t crazy. Kay has a best friend named Tootie, but they are like night and day. Tootie is a lot more reserved and laid back. Maybe because she’s from a different side of the tracks.”

“So, how the hell she and Kay became friends?”

“Kay says that they met at some slumber party that they both attended back when they were in high school. Something like that. It was Tootie’s cousin and Kay’s friend from school. They clicked and never looked back.”

“She’s a good one, because Kay and her dumb ass sister Keisha don’t seem equipped to have friends. Both of dem bitches crazy.”

Hendrix laughed. “You ain’t lied about that.”

“I don’t see how you deal with her. I mean, she’s a pretty girl. I don’t take that away from her, but the bitch is loco.”

“Man, stop.” We laughed.

“You know I ain’t lyin’.”

“You should know. You don’ fought both of ‘em.”

“I tell you what, though, Keisha’s weak. Kay got a lot of buck in her. If she stood up to her sister, she’d beat her ass, hands down.”

“You a lil’ cocky something though.”

“I get it honest. I come from a family of fighters. My mama don’t bullshit. My auntie is deranged, especially when she’s fucked up, and my cousin will smack a bitch so quick, they won’t even see it coming. I’m working on me, though. I don’t wanna be so hot headed and quick tempered. It’s not lady-like or a cute look.”

Hendrix looked over at me with a slight smile on his face. “I think it’s big of you to recognize your flaws and work on them. Although, I think

sometimes you need to slap a bitch if they trying you,” he joked. “But, nah, I like that about you. I knew you didn’t wanna fight when you were at my apartment. You got up, went in the back, and tried not to be seen. Kay asked for that fight and, like the old folks say, *be careful what you ask for.*”

“Right, because I’m no pushover. I was just trying to avoid the bullshit.”

“And that’s why I told her I couldn’t fuck with her like that no more. She can’t just come in my shit acting a fool. She don’t pay bills there.”

“Yeah, well, she just needs someone decent in her ear. You could be that person, ya know.”

“Yeah, but what if I wanted to be your person, not hers?” he asked, now gazing intensely in my eyes with a stare that had me dazed looking back.

“I can’t—we can’t go there,” I softly said.

“Why? Because you have a man?”

“Uh—yea.”

Hendrix touched the side of my face, making me warm inside. It was still something about this nigga. He brushed the back of his hand down my cheek. As I looked at him, he continued watching me and, out of nowhere, he leaned in for a kiss just as my cell phone chirped of an incoming text message. Quickly, I drew back and grabbed my phone.

***Change of plans, bae. Come over when you get a chance. DODGE
OTW. YOMI***

“Um—I gotta go,” I said to Hendrix. “It was good seeing you, as always.”

“Same.” He smiled. He never took me doing this as rejection. He simply would shake it off and keep it pushing like nothing ever happened. As I walked off, I was thanking God that Dodge had intervened. Surely, things like that happened for a reason. *Whew, chile.*

DODGE GAMBLE

I laid my head back on the sectional sofa and let out a frustrated sigh. Closing my eyes with an irritated shake of the head, I just wanted this shit to be over and done with.

“Bro, I got it all under control,” Dameon said.

“How the hell you got this shit under control, yet I don’t even know what’s going on? All I’m privy to knowing is that Dontae is a snake that crossed out his own baby brother for his uncle’s diamonds, so he could skip the country and leave the family business to start his own.”

“That about sums it up,” Rosco chimed in.

“No, that doesn’t sum it up. Not for me,” I irritably stated. “My girl’s cousin is in danger. On top of that, it could’ve been my girl. Y’all niggas sitting here cool, calm, and collected like that shit didn’t happen—”

“I know it did, bro. I’m not taking that situation lightly and I promise we’ll get her back. It just has to go as planned. I wish I could tell you everything but, right now, I can’t.”

“You don’t trust me?”

“I trust you with my life.”

“Then, tell me what the fuck is going on!” I snapped.

“Calm down, Dodge,” Rosco coolly intervened. “Trust D. He knows what he’s doing.”

“D’s ass been gone for two fucking years. Had Granny, Sha, including yo’ ass and the rest of the family losing our fucking minds not knowing what happened to him. This nigga,” I said, pointing at him, “yea, you nigga, left us to think he was dead and, now, he’s back telling me to trust him. If

this goes left, I don't know how the fuck I'll ever be able to face my Kiyomi. Now, you're sitting here telling me that the plans have moved up a day. So, instead of us having three more days to come up with this money and for this shit to be over with, it's now two days?"

"Bro, listen. We don't even have to come up with the money. I'm handing over the diamonds, that's it."

"Dontae's taking the diamonds, that's it?"

"That's it," he responded. "Nigga, he wants yo' head. Did you forget about that part?"

"He's not getting it, because I'm getting his first."

"If you think we're meeting up so you can off that nigga, you need to come up with a better plan. He is always surrounded by muthafuckin' goons ready to pop off. Hell, he had his right-hand sniper sitting in a fuckin' tree the night he offed his own brother. You were there, yo' ass took a shot too."

"I know." Dameon nodded. "I haven't forgotten that shit. I wasn't even supposed to be there that night. I only rode back with Polo to get my fucking car. I initially showed up to the cabin to get my work. Polo asked me to park my car in the garage and ride off with him. He wanted to talk to me, but he didn't wanna do it there. So, I parked my car in the garage, and we dipped. I thought it was just gon' be a night of us hanging out, grabbing a bite to eat, fuckin' off with different women, possibly even stopping by Club Truth. Ya know, our usual when he comes down. However, he was in a different mindset, definitely not himself at all. He begins to tell me how just a couple of weeks prior, his uncle and Dontae had a few words. It was about some deep shit, family shit. Long story short, his uncle confronts Dontae about doing some shady business behind his back. Dontae goes on the offensive and denies it, but his uncle knows better. Apparently, Dontae fucked up millions in this shady deal that went sour. I don't even know what the deal was about, nor did I ask any questions. I just knew that fucking over millions was no joke, even to them niggas. More than anything, his uncle felt like it was the principle of it all and not so much about the money that he fucked up," he explained while taking in a deep breath and releasing it. He walked in the kitchen, as I sat in silence. I looked over at Rosco. Apparently, he'd already heard the story because he was cooler than a muthafucka, compared to me sitting on edge waiting to hear the rest of this shit.

Dameon returned with a cold Corona in one hand and two more in the other. He handed one to me and the other to Rosco. He then sat down to finish talking.

“Drink up,” Rosco said as he turned up his beer.

“Shit, you should’ve brought me the yak. I need something stronger than this shit,” I expressed.

“Anyway,” Dameon continued, as Rosco stood up and headed over to the bar. I already knew he was about to fix me a strong one. “Back to what I was saying. His uncle threatened to kick Dontae out of the family business, all the while giving Polo more rank than Dontae. Dontae was pissed off about this and told Polo that he should deny his uncle’s request, but Polo said that he wasn’t gon’ do that. He respected his uncle, and he appreciated any opportunity that was thrown his way. He couldn’t help that Dontae fucked things up for himself. Needless to say, Dontae and Polo weren’t on good terms after that happened. So, their uncle sends Polo here to handle his usual business. However, he also sends something extra—”

“The diamonds?” I pondered while sipping the Remy 1738 that Rosco handed me.

“Yes, the diamonds. But Polo was supposed to give them to another family member that’s also here in Georgia. Dontae must’ve known about this somehow, and he called himself intervening on the play.”

“So, the diamonds were never his?”

“Never.”

“Wow, that dirty muthafucka,” I spat.

“From what I’ve gathered since all this shit happened, he wanted the diamonds for himself and he was going on the run with ‘em. He wanted out anyway, so this was the way to do it. However, I was there that night, and I took the diamonds for myself. It fucked up his plans a little bit. Because after I took the diamonds, somehow that got him back in the good graces of his uncle, especially with Polo missing. His uncle didn’t know what to think until I sold some of the diamonds. The uncle found me and secretly reached out. Once we had a nice long talk, he realized it wasn’t me behind the shit or that it wasn’t me who killed Polo. It was Dontae—”

“His fucking thieving ass nephew,” I cut in with an irritated shake of the head. “The nigga off’d his own brother.”

“Yeap.” Dameon nodded. “Ironically, he thought that me and Polo ran off with the diamonds, but then he had a private detective that did forensics

on the blood in the car. He was told that Polo likely didn't survive and that the other person, who was me, did. It wasn't enough of my blood on the scene to indicate a deadly outcome. How the fuck his forensics guy came up with that, I don't know, but he's a good one. So, from that, he started to think that it was me that killed Polo and stole his diamonds—"

"In other words, you ran off on the plug," I uttered.

"Yeah, that part." Dameon nodded.

"So, the uncle knows everything now?"

"Everything that I know, and he put his own shit together when it came to Dontae."

"So, why did it take you so long to sell the diamonds? Why two fuckin' years, D?" I asked.

"Because I didn't know what the fuck to think. A nigga had just killed one of my closest homies, right in front of me. I had to take that nigga out. I called Hawk to help me get rid of his body—"

"Hawk was a part of this? What the fuck?! That nigga been skipped town. You knew yo' brother was in on this?" I asked, looking in Rosco's direction.

"How the fuck I knew? Me and him aren't exactly bosom brothers. Yea, he's my father's son way before my mom entered the picture, but we aren't that close," Rosco said.

"Yeah, but we are. Just because he don't choose to sit in one place don't mean he and I haven't kept in touch. What you didn't know is that he's one of the main niggas I kept supplied."

"So, he was on the scene before I even showed up?"

"Yeah, he knew everything. He just knew not to speak on it, ever," Dameon revealed.

"This shit just keeps getting deeper and deeper."

"Tell me about it, and I thought I was in on everything now," Rosco expressed with a clueless shake of the head. "Out of all people, you called Hawk, though?"

"Yeah, I knew you wouldn't have liked that, but Hawk isn't tied to our family like the two of you are. He creeps in and out. He minds his own business and, most importantly, he stays off the grid. It was our plan to have that body surface, because I was tired of being on the run with no answers. I knew if Dontae's sniper showed up that it would raise questions. Yeah, I

could've done that sooner, but timing was everything. Dontae has been wanting to finish me off since that night."

"I bet," I eased in, turning up the rest of my yak.

"Now, with Dino involved—"

"Dino? That's his name?"

"Yeah, but I don't call him that when we talk. He's Mr. Torres to us."

"Understood." I nodded.

"Yeah, well, with him involved, this lil' thing we got planned should go smoothly. He's not gonna let anything happen to Kinsley."

"I hope you know what you're talking about, because this thing can go left, way left. Dontae is very unpredictable. He's a man with nothing to lose at this point. If he finds out his uncle knows that he was behind this shit and he had his own brother killed, no telling what he's thinking about. At this point, the nigga is desperate. Can't trust a nigga like that."

"I understand, and the only thing I can say is that I'm banking on Dino's word. I believe it's bond. You gotta trust me on that."

"It's really outta my hands, so I have no choice. I just pray that it works out," I said, just as Meech entered.

"Where you been?" Rosco asked.

"To the cabin."

My eyes stretched. "To the what?!"

"You heard me. To the cabin."

"Wow," Rosco uttered, irritably shaking his head.

"Why would you do a thing like that? I asked you to chill the fuck out. You could compromise everything that's planned in getting Kinsley back."

"I had to go see if she was out there."

"Out there is where we're meeting at in two days, nigga."

"Two days? I thought it was three."

"The plan was updated as of this morning," I told him in a frustrated tone. "Who was out there?"

"Nobody. Plus, I was very careful."

"It's cameras all around that place. Somebody saw you."

Meech dropped his head. "I just want her back. She's been calling Kiyomi but hasn't called me once."

"I get that, man, but you can't be going off doing dumb shit like that or we might not get her back. Stay away from that place until we all go out there together."

“Yeah, I hear you,” he said, walking over to the bar.

“So, nobody was there?” Dameon asked.

“Nah, and I stood outside peeking through the windows, calling her name, but nothing. So, whatever’s going down isn’t happening until then, I guess. It’s just so crazy because I felt like she was in there. I just knew I’d be able bring her back.”

“Well, that didn’t work.”

“So, just chill out, bro. We got two days and she’ll be back. You’ll be there when they let her go. I’m sure you’re one of the first faces she wants to see,” Dameon said.

“I hope so.”

“So, what’s next?” I asked.

“Nothing. We wait,” Dameon said. “I’ll get a call when it’s time for us to head to the cabin—”

“Coming in,” Kiyomi said. Instantly, she rolled her eyes at Dameon. I simply shook my head. I could understand why, but I wasn’t in the mood for any of this. It was just too much going on and, if it didn’t end soon, I was going to drive myself nuts.

“Wassup, bae.”

“Hey, Kiyomi,” Rosco spoke.

“Wassup, Kiyomi,” Meech said.

Dameon simply nodded his head at her and then got up to leave. “I’ll call you later, bro.”

“I’m heading out with him,” Rosco said. “We’ll catch up.”

“I’m going in the bedroom to lay down. I need some sleep. Haven’t rested in days.”

“Go ‘head, Meech. You know mi casa es su casa,” I told him, as he got up and headed down the hallway. Kiyomi walked over, giving me a kiss.

“So, what was the change of plans?” she asked, plopping down beside me.

“We’re getting Kinsley back in two days instead of three.” Her eyes lit up.

“Two days? Are you serious? Oh, my gosh, does she know?”

I shrugged.

“I can’t wait to tell her when she calls me tonight.”

I smiled. I knew that would make her day. I was just hoping that everything worked out.

“Is Meech mad that Kinsley hasn’t called him? He definitely seemed a lot distant. Normally, he’s asking questions about her calls to me.”

“He went to the cabin to look for her, but nobody was there.”

“To the cabin where that horrible mess happened with your brother?”

“Yeah.”

“What made him think she was there?”

“Maybe a hunch or something. Hell, I don’t know. He’s not thinking straight. Meech is tired, bae. He needs all the rest he can get. I don’t believe he’s slept a wink since Kinsley’s been gone. I really hope he sleeps up until it’s time for us to roll out.”

“Can I go with y’all?”

“No.”

“Why not? I wanna be there when they release her.”

“Baby, you’re not going. I will not put you in the line of fire.”

“I thought you said that everything was going to be smooth. I can just sit in the car.”

“It’s gonna be smooth but—”

“But what? I said I can stay in the car.”

“No, you’re not going and that’s the end of that.”

“Well damn, ok,” she pouted. “She’s my cousin though.”

“I understand, but I can’t have both of y’all out there like that. Please, don’t argue with me about this.”

“I’m not arguing,” she pouted.

“You can stay here with Cobra and Jeff till we get back with Kinsley. Or you can stay home and we’ll drop her off. Either way, you’re not going with me.”

“Ok, whatever.”

“Give me a kiss,” I said, just as my cell phone buzzed of an incoming text message. I glanced down at it, checking out the message. With a frown on my face, I looked over at Kiyomi.

“What?”

At first, I just wanted to ignore it and not say nothing but, then again, I couldn’t. I didn’t even wanna pretend that I was cool with this.

“Whaaaat?” she said again.

“What’s this?” I said, showing her a picture of her and Hendrix sitting on a park bench about to kiss.

“Wow, who the fuck sent you that?”

“What’s going on with y’all?”

“Nothing. Who took that? Were you having me followed?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, wow. So, now you’re having somebody follow me? That’s bogus as hell and especially for them to send you some shit like this. I never even kissed the nigga. I got up and left.”

“So, you didn’t kiss him?”

“No, I’m telling you I didn’t kiss him. Ask the dirty muthafucka who sent it. I’m sure they saw me get up and leave. I think it’s lame as hell that somebody is watching me like that, and you not let me know.”

“I didn’t let you know because I didn’t want you tripping. But I’m doing everything I can to make sure you’re safe. Hell, if I could follow yo’ ass without you knowing, I would, but you’d notice me,” I said, now feeling somewhat bad that I even mentioned the picture. I mean, that was a bit messy, especially if she didn’t kiss the nigga.

“Look, I appreciate you being concerned and trying to make sure that I’m ok, but call your fuckin’ goons off, please. That’s an invasion of my privacy and I don’t like it.”

“You’re right. I’ll call ‘em off. I’m sorry.”

“And before your mind gets to wandering. My auntie had stopped by to visit and she always has a way of getting under my skin.”

“Kinsley’s mom?”

“Yes, her,” I responded. “So, I got in my car and rode around until I ended up at the park. I figured walking the trails would be a good way for me to cool off. Apparently, Hendrix had been out there jogging. I never saw him on my trail walk. It was just coincidence that we were there at the same time. After coming up behind me and talking a little, he sat next to me, we talked some more, it got a lil’ intense and, out of nowhere, he leaned in for a kiss. It wasn’t until then that I knew it was time for me to go. I didn’t kiss him. I left instead.”

“I believe you, and I’m sorry. Trust, I’m checking this muthafucka about sending me that shit too.”

“You better. Sounds like a messy bitch instead of a nigga.”

“Yea, well—”

“It’s cool, babe. I’m trying to keep my sanity. The last thing I want to do is fall out with you. Kiss me,” she insisted with that cute lil’ seductive smile of hers.

“With pleasure.” As we kissed, I knew her heart belonged to me. It was obvious she didn’t want another. However, between Hendrix and that ex-loser of hers, they were definitely testing my gangster. I wasn’t one to trip over no female, but I damn sure wasn’t gon’ let these lil’ niggas keep trying my lady. For now, I was on chill mode, but they had better let sleeping dogs lie before shit got real.

KINSLEY SIMMONS

I stood gazing out the window with tears flowing down my face. What should've been a moment of joy and freedom turned into a moment of confusion and doubt. Never did I think the first time I was allowed out the bedroom and left alone that I'd have a chance to actually leave this place, but I chose not to. What kind of person was I? Four days of being somewhat isolated from the world, not knowing if I'd live or die, and here I stood not wanting to leave.

Meech had actually shown up to rescue me, yet I watched him on the cameras circling the house, peeking in the windows and calling my name, but I said nothing. I had the opportunity to run in his arms and feel his loving embrace, but I didn't. I could've unlocked the front door and walked outside, but stayed put. The smell of freedom was right there, but I decided to stay here. What kind of crazy shit was that?

The irony of it all was so weird and unbelievable. I could've been home by now with the people I loved most, but I couldn't make myself leave. I'd grown close to Gianni, even though I'd just learned his name a day ago. What I liked about him was all the things I'd never experienced with a man. Hell, with no one, not even Yomi and Auntie. I talked, he listened. He wasn't a man of many words, but he was sympathetic to the things I'd gone through. His eyes were the key to his soul. It was the look he'd give me that said if he could take it all back, everything that ever hurt me, he would.

It wasn't until last night after I'd hung up with Kiyomi that I told him I'd been kidnapped before. He couldn't believe that at the age of eight, I'd already endured what some people would never in a lifetime. Out of

nowhere, he placed his arms around me and allowed me to cry. I cried for the way Glenda had hurt me. I cried for the way I'd been used as a pawn because of her deceitful ways. I cried because my virginity was stolen at the age of eight. I cried because she knew and didn't do nothing about it. My heart was broken for all the old, and all I wanted to do was heal in the new, yet it was hard to do. But last night—last night allowed me to be vulnerable and release old wounds.

After that long-awaited moment and getting my mind right, I went back to my room, cuddled up with the big lavender-colored bear that Gianni had bought me, and watched *Shameless* until I fell asleep. Morning came, and I woke up feeling refreshed and renewed. Gianni entered as he always did to let me know that he was going into town to get a few things for the fridge, and then asked what I wanted him to bring me back to eat. However, this time when he left, he didn't lock the doors behind him. To my surprise, he told me that he was leaving the door open and that I could walk out in the yard and get some fresh air if needed. He trusted that I'd stay, and even though I wanted that to be the reason why I didn't up and run off with Meech, it wasn't. Truth was that I wanted to stay just to be close to him.

In just this little time, he had given me a reason to live and forgive. Even though I'd never forget, I could move on from the trauma that had occurred and get focused on a bright new future for myself.

I heard the garage let up, feeling strangely giddy inside that Gianni was back. With the napkin in my hand, I started to wipe my tears. I didn't want him to see that I'd started back crying. Shit made me look weak. As I sat at the kitchen table fiddling with my fingers, he finally walked in. I turned in the chair to see his handsome face as our eyes connected. He looked off as if he was a bit shy, but I continued to stare. He was sexy as hell. Looking like a GQ model with a body frame that was tall, dark tanned, and handsome. His hair was cut low with silky strands, along with a beard that accentuated his deep, hazel brown eyes. He had a genuine smile that was sweet, but only if you were lucky enough to see it.

“You ok in here?”

“Um, yeah,” I responded.

“Something on your mind?” he asked while emptying grocery bags.

I shook my head. “No.”

“You sure?”

“I don’t wanna talk about it,” I said as I stood up to check through the couple of bags that were sitting on the counter. “Do you plan on cooking this steak?”

“Nah, I was hoping you would.”

I looked over at him. “Oh, really?”

He shrugged.

“What if we cook it together?”

He shrugged again. “That works.”

I pulled out a bottle of D’Usse Xo Cognac. “This shit cost two hundred dollars.

“Do you drink it?”

“I’ve never had none. They sell it at the club I work at though. Most people buy it by the bottles, which go for seven hundred or better a pop. Just depends on what night it is.”

“Do you like working at the club?”

“It’s ok. I mean, I make really good tips. The crowds are nice. I get to mix and mingle.”

“So, that’s your thing?”

“Meaning?”

“Mix and mingle?”

“Actually, it’s not, but I’ve kind of made it a thing since I’ve been doing it for so long.”

“Ok.”

“How about I cook the steak and asparagus and you make the salad? Let’s make it a lunch date.”

He looked over at me. “Let’s just prepare the food and eat.”

“Well, um, ok,” I softly responded. I knew he wasn’t about that life. Hell, for all I knew, he had a whole wife and kids running around somewhere. I think all this alone time in a cabin far out in the woods was starting to get to me. I couldn’t help but be attracted to this man.

“I saw someone on the cameras earlier looking for you.”

My eyes widened. I should’ve known he had seen that. “Yeah, about that.”

“You could’ve left here.”

“I know.”

“But, you didn’t. Why?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“You do know.”

I shrugged again. “I don’t know,” I repeated. Hell, I didn’t know, then again, I did. But it wasn’t as easy to explain. I didn’t wanna say that I stayed because of him. Not only would he think I was crazy, but what if he was married and shit? Then, he’d have to explain that we couldn’t be together. I mean, not that I was even thinking that far ahead but—

“What you did earlier showed me a side of you that I’ve never seen in anybody, not even from my family.”

“What you mean?”

“I mean, I’ve never trusted anybody in my life. My family and the business we’re in makes you this way. It’s like we have love for each other but, sometimes, that love can be overshadowed by greed.”

I looked at him with sincere eyes. He never spoke about anything this long since I’d known him. Anything he said was always short and to the point. So, for him to be talking about his family definitely had me tuned in. Although, a part of me felt bad for him. “So, you’re a part of the family business?”

“You know about the business?”

“Well, not exactly. If you’re kin to the same people that kidnapped me, then they’ve been to the club I work at, and the talk is that they be sex trafficking and shit. Also, I’ve heard they’re heavy in the drug game too.”

“Well, the sex trafficking part isn’t something I know about, meaning that it doesn’t exist. People tend to speculate things when they don’t know. The other part, well—let’s just say it’s an empire of different levels. That’s not the only thing the family business consists of.”

“So, because of all the different levels and the magnitude of whatever this empire consists of, is that why y’all can’t trust each other?”

“It’s things that have been done and said that make me trust no one. My uncle raised me and my three brothers since we were younger. My baby brother, Polo, was just a toddler when our father was killed by our mother.”

“Huh? Your mama killed y’all’s daddy?”

“Yeah, with good reason. He couldn’t keep his hands to himself.”

“Wow, how old were you?”

“I was eight years old.”

Just hearing him say that he was eight years old was such a significant number.

“I can remember the day so vividly in my mind. My mom told my oldest brother, Dontae, to get the baby, Polo, me, my sister, Penny, and my other brother, Padro, to the bedroom. Even though I was young, I knew what was about to happen. I could feel it.”

So, what happened? I pondered to myself, still tentatively listening.

“As we sat in the bedroom, the arguing back and forth continued. The sound of furniture moving banged against the walls, and the next thing we heard were gunshots.”

I gasped, “Wow.”

“We ran out the room to find our father on the floor. The neighbors called the police and the ambulance arrived and took him to the hospital. He was gone before he even made it there.”

“Dang, that’s crazy. How did that make you feel?”

“I was glad he was gone,” he bluntly stated. “He couldn’t hurt us anymore.”

“Wow, and I don’t mean that in a negative way. It’s just a traumatizing story. They didn’t lock your mama up, did they?”

“She went but got right out. My uncle made sure of that. After that, he took my mom in and literally raised me and my siblings as his own. It was weird at first, though, because initially, the family had cut my mom off because she married my dad, who was a black man. My Italian family didn’t like that at all, and it didn’t make it any better that she chose someone that would beat on her. Not saying that all black men do that—”

“I know.”

“Because I’ve never put my hands on a woman and never will. I am not a product of my environment.”

“I know. You’re one of the good ones. You’ve been very good to me while I’ve been here. Truth be told, that’s why I didn’t leave when I had the chance. I didn’t want to leave you—I mean, um—I meant—” I grinned a little to play it off. “I just wasn’t ready to face my family yet. This is the most peace I’ve had in a long time. You understand, right?”

He nodded his head. “Yeah, I understand.”

Silence entered the room for a few minutes or so, as I started seasoning the steak to cook. Gianni fixed us a mixed drink of D’Usse and Coke. I found myself sipping a little here and there as I cooked. I glanced back a few times to check him out. Eventually, he took out the salad mix and began preparing the salad.

“Hey, I, um—I’m sorry about what happened when you were a youngster. Y’all shouldn’t have had to go through that. I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s ok, but I appreciate it. It’s not something that’s bad in my life. It happened. I got over it and moved on. Since then, I’ve been laying low and working the family business.”

“But have you really moved on from things that have happened in your life?”

He frowned.

“Polo is your baby brother, right? What happened to him? Is that the reason why I’m here?”

Gianni took a sip from his drink. “It’s complicated.”

“How complicated?”

“I’ve only just begun to know what really happened to my brother. I can’t even imagine or fathom that what I was told is true, so I’d rather not discuss it,” he said, looking over at me. The look in his eyes definitely said to leave well enough alone, and that’s what I intended on doing. The last thing I wanted was smoke with the nigga that was holding me captive. I certainly didn’t wanna push any buttons and change that kind nature of his to something I’d hate to see.

“If this family business of yours is so complicated, why do you stay? It’s obvious you’re not in the business of holding people hostage.”

He shrugged. “I don’t know and, then again, it’s all I know.”

I shrugged. “Makes sense.”

Once the food was ready, we sat at the table to eat. I can’t lie, it was a bit awkward because neither of us were saying anything. I continued to sip my drink while eating my steak, trying not to make Gianni feel uncomfortable by opening my mouth and saying or asking the wrong thing.

“The steak is good. I didn’t know you knew how to cook.”

I smiled. Finally, I felt like he’d opened the doors for us to talk again. “Oh, I’m a really good cook. I just don’t because I eat out most times.”

“You should cook more though. Eating out all the time isn’t good.”

“I know.” I nodded. “I’ve said I was gonna start cooking more.”

“You should.”

I cleared my throat, feeling like fuck it. “Are you married?”

“Do you see a wedding band?”

I looked at his fingers, as if I hadn’t noticed before. “No.”

“No,” he answered.

I smiled inside. Didn't even know why, to be honest. Just because he wasn't married didn't mean he was interested in me. On top of that, I had a blossoming relationship that was put on hold because of me. Did I want to resume that or—

“You'll be going home in two days.”

My eyes widened. “Two days? I thought it was three left.”

“It was, but my uncle called last night and told me it's been pushed up.”

I sat in silence. Damn, why did I feel like that had thrown me off a little? I should've been super happy to be going home, but why wasn't I? This shit was confusing as hell. My feelings were all over the fucking place and I needed to get it together. Leaving here and returning home was the best thing for me. There was not going to be a running off in the sunset with this nigga type of moment. I needed to shake that shit right on outta my head.

“You alright? You should be happy to get outta here.”

“I—um, I am happy. You should be glad you can get back to your life and not have to babysit me.”

He grinned a little. First time I'd seen that side. All I ever got was a faint smile here or there. “I've never thought of this as babysitting. I didn't think that this was something I would've been called to do, but when my uncle calls, I move.”

“Well, I'm glad he called you. Anybody else wouldn't have let the TV up so I could watch it, nor would they have bought me a bear to cuddle with. By the way, can I take it with me?”

He frowned. “You wanna take that bear with you? You can't be serious.”

I laughed. “I'm very serious. My cousin has one too. Of course, it's not the same bear but it's just as big. Her boyfriend bought it for her birthday.”

Gianni nodded. “That's wassup. Well, I bought it so you could have company while you sleep.”

I smiled. “I appreciate that.”

“No problem.”

I stood up from the table. I figured it was time to head back to the bedroom. The thought of leaving definitely left me baffled in my feelings.

“Well, I'm gonna lay down and take a nap. Think I got the itis.” I grinned.

“The itis? Haven't heard that word in a long time.”

“Well, I do. So, I’ll see you later when I get to make my phone call?”

“Yes.”

“You aren’t leaving again, are you?”

“No, I’m in for the rest of the night.”

“Ok,” I said and headed for the bedroom. Once there, I fell across the bed and watched TV until the TV was watching me.

I didn’t know how long I’d been sleep, but I was awakened by Gianni standing over me holding the cell phone in his hand. I sat up in bed, looking over at him with a frown on my face. “Hey, it’s ten o’clock already? Damn, I slept for a long time.”

“No, but your cousin is on the phone.”

“My cousin? She on the phone?”

He nodded.

“Oh, wow,” I said, reaching for the phone. I was certainly surprised that he’d bring it to me just because I’d gotten a call. I didn’t even think this was possible. “Hello.”

“Sus!” Kiyomi shrieked in the phone.

“Girl, what the hell?” I questioned as Gianni quietly left the room, closing the door behind him. “Is everything okay?”

“You’re coming home in two days instead of three,” she said, as I sat in silence. “Bitch, did you hear me?! You’re coming home in a couple of days!”

“I know.”

“Huh? You know? Why you say it like that? Are you ok?”

“Yea, I just—”

“No, don’t tell me that you’re falling for that nigga, Kin.”

“So, I won’t tell you that.”

“You don’t even know him. He’s holding you hostage for Christ’s sake. Just because he bought you a fuckin’ bear and lets you watch TV doesn’t mean he’s not one of the bad guys.”

“He’s not one of the bad guys, Yomi.”

“Then, why he won’t set you free?”

“Actually, he did.”

“What?! Wait a minute. Did you just say he did?”

“Yes, this morning. He let me out the room and left the house. I could’ve left if I wanted to. Nobody was here with me, and the doors weren’t locked to where I couldn’t leave if I wanted to.”

“So, why the hell didn’t you run for your life?”

I shrugged like she could see me. “I don’t know. I just wasn’t ready to leave. I mean, this is the most peace I’ve had since probably before I was born. This guy treats me well. He’s good to me, regardless of what you think.”

“Girl, did he hit you upside the head with his gun? Are you losing your fuckin’ mind?”

“No.”

“I believe something happened because this ain’t you.”

“This is me, Yomi. You just don’t know this me.”

“Girl, I know all of you. You apparently don’t know you. Somewhere along the timeframe of you being kidnapped to now, you’ve lost yourself.”

I sat quietly, pondering over what she’d just said, and it wasn’t until then that I found a new voice. “What if I told you I actually found myself instead.”

At that time, Kiyomi got quiet. It seemed like she was now pondering over what I’d just said.

“Yomi, I know that sounds crazy to you because I could’ve easily left here when Meech came—”

“What?! You were at that place where Meech showed up at looking for you?!”

“Yeah, but—”

“Wow, I can’t believe what I’m hearing. You saw Meech and you didn’t run out the house when he was calling you?”

“Yea, and I know you’ll never understand that, but I didn’t come out the house.”

“Dang, Kinsley. What has that man done to you?”

“Nothing but listen to me when I needed it the most. He hasn’t judged me once—”

“His job isn’t to judge you. It’s to keep your ass hostage.”

“It’s not like that, though. He’s been really good to me without sex, without strings attached, just good to me when he could’ve really been the bad guy that you’re making him out to be.”

“I—I don’t know. Will you even leave when they release you, or do you plan on staying?”

“I’ll leave when it’s time for me to leave. Not a day sooner, Yomi.”

“Wow, I bet you’re drinking that good shit, huh?”

“This is not about the liquor or nothing else. I’m coming home when it’s time for me to leave. Just trust that I’m in good hands, I’m not falling in love, and he’s not going to let anything happen to me. I’m getting the therapy I’ve needed, maybe not in you or society’s way, but as long as it’s working for me, that’s all that matters.”

Kiyomi cleared her throat. “Well—um, I guess—um. If that’s working for you, then I—um. I’m with you. Just please make it back here safely or we’ll forever be lost without you. Plus, if Mama ever finds out what really happened to you, she will probably never sleep another wink until you’re back home.”

“I know,” I softly said. “I love you, Yomi.”

“I love you too, Kin,” she said, and before the tears even began to surface, I quickly ended the call.

Gianni entered the bedroom. “Are you done?”

“Yeah,” I responded. “Thanks for letting me take that.”

“Is everything okay?”

“Yes,” I said, as he reached for the cell phone. As I gave him the phone in one hand, I gently grabbed the other. “Please, stay.”

GIANNI TORRES

“Hey, Gianni,” I heard in my sleep as the shaking on my arm woke me up. “Your phone is beeping.”

I jumped up, looking around. After realizing that I was lying across the foot of the bed that Kinsley slept in, I remembered where I was at.

“Your phone beeping,” she repeated, this time handing me my cell. As I looked at the screen, I quickly got up.

“Put some clothes on. Hurry.”

“What’s going on?” she asked, as I headed out the bedroom.

“Put your clothes on!” I took another look at my cell phone, staring at two of Dontae’s black Tahoes driving down the path toward the cabin. I knew his vehicles anywhere. If you saw one, you saw the other. That’s just how he rolled. Always had to have back-up for whatever reason that was. But, why would he be here? The drop wasn’t supposed to take place yet. He was a day early. The only problem with being a day early was that I hadn’t gotten that message from my uncle. Quickly, I shot him a text message.

“What’s going on?” Kinsley repeated as she walked out of the bedroom.

“Come on,” I said, grabbing her by the hand and walking her to the back door. “Listen out. When you hear me say *brother*, I want you to run as fast as you can.”

“Into the woods?” she asked in a confused tone.

“Yes, into the woods.”

“Why?”

“You’re not supposed to be leaving until tomorrow, but my brother has shown up a day early. I don’t know what this is about, but I promised my uncle that I’d protect you and that’s what I’m going to do,” I explained, pulling a gun out of a nearby drawer, cocking it, and placing it in the back of my pants. “What did I say?”

“Huh?”

“What did I tell you to do?”

“When I hear you say brother, to run as fast as I can into the woods.”

“Right.”

“What happens when I reach the woods?”

“Hide until I say it’s safe to come out.”

At that time, I could see the fear in her eyes. “Gianni, I’m scared. Maybe I should’ve left yesterday.”

“You’re fine. Don’t panic. Just do as I say, and you’ll be back home before you know it.”

I looked down at my cell again, as the Tahoes pulled up in front of the cabin. “Stay put,” I told her, as I cracked the back door for her to run out once she heard my signal. “Please, just do as I say,” I told her.

“Okay,” she softly responded.

I locked the bedroom door up and headed to the front door, peeking out the side window. Dontae and his crew stepped out of the vehicles Valentino suited and booted, looking like America’s most wanted mafia family. He was always so extra, whereas the rest of us were more reserved and lowkey, including our uncle. I guess that made him look tough and more gangster. Don’t get me wrong, he was nothing to play with. Definitely a smooth-talking criminal, and along with that resume came backstabber, untrustworthy, and greedy as fuck.

I glanced back over my shoulder, looking for Kinsley. Hopefully, she was in position, ready to run. Once Dontae stepped on the front porch, I opened the door. “Brother,” I said out loud.

“Gianni,” he said back with a big smile on his face.

“What are you doing here this morning? I didn’t think you were coming until tomorrow morning with Uncle.”

“Change of plans. He didn’t call you?” he asked, walking in the cabin.

“Nah, I haven’t heard from him yet.”

Two of his guys followed him in, as the other three stayed outside.

“What’s up with all this muscle?” I asked, speaking of his crew.

“I keep my muscle. You know that,” he answered, sitting down. The two men stood behind him like they were protecting him from me. I just attentively watched them while hoping that Kinsley had done what I told her to do. “How have the past few days been?”

“Smooth.”

“No problems out of the girl?”

“None.”

“You weren’t getting sweet on her, were you?”

I frowned. “Why would I do that?”

“You know you’ve always been more of the charmer, the good boy out of us siblings. I had my doubts when Uncle suggested you be the one to watch her.”

“Why is that? I’ve always done as I was told.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t want her to sweet talk you into letting her go.” He smugly grinned. It was always something about this nigga that got under my skin. It’s no wonder we were never that close.

I grinned. “Oh, so you think I’m that sweet, huh?”

“Eh—well, you know. You’ve always been the mama’s boy, titty-fed, the weakest link—you know. Mama’s boys are usually the softer ones out the crew,” he said, as one of his guys chuckled under his breath.

“Oh yea?” I responded, shooting him and his boy a threatening stare.

“Don’t get so defensive, Gianni. You’re too emotional,” Dontae teased with sarcasm.

I simply smiled with a shake of the head. Fucking with me right now was not in his best interest. I could fire two shots in his homies’ domes before he’d even get a chance to blink an eye. Even he knew this, so I didn’t know why he wanted to try me like I was pussy or something.

“So, little brother, I’m not going to hold you up any longer. I appreciate you dropping what you were doing to watch over the female that I brought out here. But now, I’ve come to get her.”

“I thought you said that you and Uncle were coming out together though. Should I call him?”

“You didn’t already, did you?”

“Nah, haven’t had the chance. Should I?” I repeated, trying to buy some time.

“I got this. Uncle doesn’t need to be involved in everything I do. See, that’s your problem. If Uncle doesn’t say do something, you won’t do it. If

Uncle says to do something, you'll do it. Maybe it's his titty that you were fed off of." He and his goons laughed.

"Stop with the jokes—"

"Or what?" he coolly asked, like he was divinely protected but, hell, he should've known better.

"Anyway, wassup with all these lil' smart remarks? You got something you wanna get off your chest, big brother? I understand you've always wanted to be the boss of us all, but Uncle only had you as his errand boy. Am I right?" I teased back. "Sure, you ride around with your lil' homies, dressed fly as hell, Gucci this, Prada that—today, it's Valentino, tomorrow it might be Versace," I mocked, looking at the upset twitch in his eyes. "But you're the one that makes all the local runs, nothing of importance. Yo, homey!" I called out, questioning one of his goons. "Have you ever known me to make runs to Five Guys and a Burger for my uncle?" I grinned. "Not unless I was there grabbing me something to eat too."

"Don't get beside yo—"

"Nah, but that's the type of errands you run, big brother. Don't come in here trying me like I'm a sucka ass nigga. You know better. You're the one that's like Pops, may he rest in peace, although I doubt it. You like hittin' women, bossin' up to these niggas 'cause they don't know any better. Yeah, you're a killer in your own right, and maybe that's what keeps these niggas tame, but don't mistake me for the lil' mama's boy that won't handle yo' big ass," I said to the homey, then directed my attention back to Dontae. "Maybe you should've been the one titty-fed. Might've given you some manners and shit."

"Nigga, you better chill the fuck out before I forget you're my lil' brother."

"Ohh, you bossin' up on me now? That's what we doing here, Dontae?"

Dontae grinned, holding his hand up to stop his lil' homies from getting the business, because that's all that was going to happen if they stepped to me.

"Chill out, lil' brother." He grinned. "I told you. You get so emotional. Quit wearing your feelings on your sleeve.

"How 'bout I just call Uncle and see where he's at."

"I told you not to do that. I'm just here to get the girl."

"But, why are you being so secretive? If he's in on this, then he should know about you being here, right?"

“He does.”

“Does he? Let me just call him then.” I pulled out my cell phone but stopped to think about this a little more. I needed to ask a few questions of my own for clarity and, even though he and I had never discussed this, I felt that now was definitely the time for it. “What happened to Polo?”

“What you mean what happened to him? He was killed.”

“By who?”

“By that nigga named Dameon. Why you think I’m holding his brother’s bitch hostage? They gon’ learn not to fuck with the Torres family.”

“It’s funny that after two years, now you want to get revenge.”

“What you saying, lil’ brother?”

“I’m just sayin’ that shit ain’t adding up no more.”

“Well, I don’t give a fuck how you’re doing your math, but when a nigga felt like they could kill my baby brother and run off with the goods, that equaled killin’ one of their own and fuckin’ that nigga up too.”

“So, are they coming out here this morning too? It’s supposed to be an even trade of giving the girl back and taking him to do whatever you planned on doing, right?”

“Change of plans. I’m going to kill her in front of them and still take his bitch ass with me.”

I regrettably shook my head. “That’s not what’s supposed to happen. The girl losing her life to this bullshit wasn’t in the plans.”

“Since when do you care?”

“I don’t, but you’re not going to fuck up the plans, especially being that Uncle isn’t here. He’s supposed to be here too. The girl really has nothing to do with this, and Uncle’s golden rule is never to touch women or children. He’s the reason we’re all here, not you. He’s going to handle those guys in his own way. You were only supposed to take the girl and let him handle the rest.”

“Well, I’m taking matters into my own hands. I’m handling things now,” he said, just as my cell phone chirped of an incoming message. I glanced down at it, read the message, but didn’t say anything. “Who is that?”

I frowned. “Oh, so you’re regulating who’s texting me now?”

“No, but the look on your face when you read the message—”

“Said what? Because I just read the message. You trippin’.”

“Get his phone,” he told one of his goons.

“Nigga, I wish you would touch me or my phone. Play pussy today, boy, and get fucked. Fucked up that is,” I said with menacing eyes. Shit was starting to get real, but if I needed to bust a cap in a nigga’s ass, I would.

“We are not here for this. Where is she? In the bedroom?” he asked, standing up and walking down the hall to the room. I followed him. “Unlock these locks, so I can get out of here.”

“Nah, I’m not unlocking nothing until I talk to Uncle.”

“Gianni, unlock the damn door. Right now, I have nothing to lose and you’re in a no-win situation. Please, don’t make me—”

“Aye, boss, look who was eavesdropping at the backdoor.”

My eyes widened, as one of his thugs walked in holding Kinsley by the arm.

“What’s this?” Dontae grinned. “Isn’t she supposed to be behind this door, locked up, little brother?”

“Turn her loose,” I demanded but, at that time, Dontae grabbed Kinsley by the arm and, somehow, we made our way back to the living room. Kinsley was scared to death, as she began to cry. Dontae whipped out his gun and put it to Kinsley’s head.

Kinsley shrieked in terror. “Please, let me go!” she screamed, then mouthed at me, “I’m sorry.”

Dontae frowned. “She’s sorry? For what? What are you sorry for?” he asked, twirling the gun in her hair.

“Dontae, please don’t make me hurt you,” I said, pulling out my gun. “Let her go,” I demanded in the calmest tone I could muster up.

Dontae’s goons pulled out their guns as he grinned. It seemed like he got some kind of sick arousal off this shit. “No one wins today, except me.”

“No wins for you today,” I said, just as Uncle came through the front door. The same goons that were outside with Dontae were now bowing down to the real man that was in charge.

“Drop your guns,” Uncle said, as the goons in the house wasted no time putting their guns down.

Dontae’s eyes looked as if his life flashed before him. “Uncle, what are you—”

“Why am I here? Why didn’t you let me know that you were here? This was supposed to take place tomorrow, not today.”

At that time, Dontae bossed up on our uncle. “No, it’s happening today,” he said with his gun still pointed at Kinsley’s head.

“Son, if you think you’re leaving here with her, you’re sadly mistaken. That’s not going to happen. That wasn’t in the plans. We don’t hurt women or children. We also don’t hurt family,” he said, looking over at me. “Put your gun down, nephew. Let me handle this.”

“We don’t hurt family, huh? Then, why did you kill my father? He was family,” Dontae said, as I looked at him in disbelief. What the fuck was he talking about? Mom killed our father. “You think I didn’t see you leaving out the back door that day right after our father was killed? I saw you!” he said, shoving the gun in Kinsley’s head with anger.

“What?!” I asked, now drawing my gun again on Dontae. I couldn’t even think about what he was saying because my thoughts were on Kinsley and her well-being. He could pull that trigger at any given time, and she’d be gone. I couldn’t have that on my watch. “Nigga, let her go!”

“Shut up, Gianni! While you’ve been protecting this man forever, ask him what happened that day when Pops died. It wasn’t mom that pulled the trigger, it was Uncle.”

“Damn right, I pulled the trigger. How long do you think I was going to stand by knowing that your father was beating my sister like that on a daily basis? How could you stand here and justify his behavior by not wanting a sick nigga like that dead? What the fuck is wrong with you? Oh, and you think that killing your brother made up for any of this?”

“That wasn’t supposed to happen,” Dontae said in a choked-up tone, as he began scratching his head with the butt of the gun. “You didn’t treat me like you treated them! You always treated me like I was the help.”

“Dontae, you never needed for anything,” I said.

“Oh, and that was supposed to make me feel better while you and Polo got to make all the big plays? Even Penny does more shit than I do. Or should I have done like Padro and moved back to Italy to live a lowkey life with no drama or dealings with the family business? Hell, I would’ve been better off than trying to prove myself every day.”

“That’s your problem, Dontae. You’ve always wanted to be bigger than life. You’re cocky and do the dumbest shit that I have to clean up to make sure it doesn’t come back on me. I am this family, and I’ll be damn if I let you or anybody else tear down my empire. If we’re speaking the truth now, then let me say my peace before this ends. I found Dameon not long after

he went missing. The reason you couldn't find him is because I kept him hidden for a reason. For one, he told a story that I just couldn't fathom, but I didn't want to off him either, just in case it was true. Back then, we didn't have cameras around this cabin like we do now. So, I didn't know what to think. He was truthful in telling me that he had my diamonds. However, I never knew where they were. He held on to those for his protection, and I can understand why. He kept saying that one of your men killed Polo. I had no proof of that because this said man suddenly disappeared, and you had no knowledge of his whereabouts. From what I was told, Dameon killed the man and had someone dispose of his body. Polo was sent to me in a body bag."

"You saw Polo? You knew he was dead?" I questioned. I had never heard of this until now.

"I did see him, and it hurt me like hell that we couldn't grieve his death as a family, but I needed to know everything that happened. If what Dameon was saying was true, we had a snake in our den and I had to weed him out by any means necessary. Sending me Polo's body didn't prove that Dameon hadn't killed him and run off with the diamonds. I needed the triggerman that killed Polo, but Dameon offed him and the person that got rid of his body wasn't going back to retrieve it. So, that left me stuck for a long time but, in that time, I watched you," he said to Dontae with an unhappy expression. "I watched how you move. I gave you more rank to do more things and, even still, you managed to fuck that up or try fucking me over by always pinching a little bit of this or that for your own good. Even when you think I didn't know, I knew," he acknowledged. "But when that body surfaced, I put this whole scheme of things into play. It wasn't until then that I knew Dameon was being completely honest."

"You had our brother killed, nigga?" I asked with teary eyes.

"I—"

"Did you have our brother killed?"

"Yes, he had your brother killed, so he could take the diamonds and disappear. He knew I would've never killed him over any amount of money; he's family. But he would've been an outcast for the rest of his life."

As I attempted to process the shit I was hearing, I saw two cars pull up outside. Not taking my gun off Dontae's dome, I walked over to peek out the window.

“That’s Dameon and his brother,” Uncle said. “Do I need him to come in here to verify everything I just said? Let her go! I’m not going to say it again!”

“Uncle—” Dontae let out this piercing shrill, as he let Kinsley go. She was so shook; she just stood there for a second.

“Kinsley, go!” I demanded. “Get out of here!” She wasted no time running out the front door, as I eyed my brother down still with the gun pointed at his head.

“One true value I’ve always held and maintained was that we don’t kill family, but—”

Before Uncle could finish his sentence, one shot to Dontae’s head ended his life. Uncle ran over to me and grabbed the gun out of my hand. “Son!” he called out. I was so dazed in just thinking about what I’d just done. I could hear Kinsley screaming outside. “Son!”

“Yes sir,” I finally responded.

“It’s ok. It’s ok,” he said, wrapping his arms around me.

I cried on his shoulder. For a long time, it bothered me to know that my baby brother was gunned down and it was nothing I could do about it. I had anger built up inside. I never in a million years thought that Dontae could stoop this low, but I was wrong. Now, he had to meet his maker, and I hoped that our father was there to greet him because I was sure they were both going to be in the same place.

After a few minutes, Uncle looked at the men standing around like they were in shock from what had just happened. Probably even more so from what they’d just heard. “Clean this mess up,” he told them.

He looked at me with a sincere nod of the head and then headed outside. I knew he had some unfinished business with the Dameon dude. After a few minutes, I stepped out on the porch to see the same nigga that was out here snooping around the place with his arms wrapped around Kinsley. I already figured who he was to be so bold as to show up here alone but, now, it was clear. As he opened the door to let Kinsley get in the car, she glanced back at me. Her glossy, stained eyes connected with mine. It was the deepest, most genuine stare that I’d never forget. She was someone I never expected to get that close with, but it was something about her that tugged on my heart’s strings. The only way she got in the car was for me to drop my head and go back in the house. I didn’t know what would happen after this, but it

would more than likely be the last time I'd ever see her again. *Good-bye, Kinsley.*

KINSLEY SIMMONS

“**K**in, how long yo’ ass gonna lay in bed? It’s Thanksgiving, girl. I know you smell that food Mama in there whipping up.”

“Girl, don’t you ever knock? It’s early and I worked all night. Get out of here,” I said, putting the pillow over my head.

“Early? Sus, it’s almost one o’clock.”

“Like I said—early,” I repeated.

Kiyomi grinned. “Whatever, but I’ll be back to check on you. We have guests coming over at three.”

“Okaaaay, now gone!” I groggily responded.

“Alright, bitch!”

Once my bedroom door was closed, I sat up in bed. I wasn’t sleep; I’d been up for the past couple of hours just lying here. My feelings had been all over the place. Even though I was traumatized by a gun being pointed at my head and scared shitless for that brief moment of my life, if I could go back in time for just a second to tell Gianni good-bye, I would. For many reasons, I missed him. I missed my babbling on and on about whatever the hell came to my mind and him just sitting there in his quiet state and listening. He never judged me. He never pressed me for anything. He was a different kind of man. Someone that I’d never met, but I was grateful to have crossed paths with him, regardless of why.

As I made myself crawl out of bed, my cell phone rang. I glanced at the caller ID to see that it was Meech.

“Hey,” I answered.

“You still sleeping?”

“Nah, I’m up. Just getting up though,” I responded.

“Oh, okay. I just wanted you to know that I’ll come on over for Thanksgiving dinner. My mom decided she’s taking the food she cooked and heading to the country to my aunt’s house. I ain’t ridin’ out there.”

“I see.”

“Is that still cool? I mean, I was only staying home because she act like I’m always gone. The minute I tell her I’ll stay and chill with the family is when she tells me that she’s leaving instead.” He grinned.

“You can still come over. Auntie is cooking way more than enough food. My grandparents will be here too. A few more family members will be here too. I guess it’ll be your chance to meet everybody, but I’m warning you.”

“What?”

“My family is kinda dysfunctional. So, don’t be surprised by nothing.”

“My family a lil’ off-key too.” We laughed.

“My grandparents are saved, saved. My grandfather is a preacher, and his wife is the first lady. Needless to say, my mama and my auntie couldn’t wait till they were grown to get out the house. Although, my mama been hit the streets.”

“So, you don’t mind me coming around your family, even though I’m not technically your man?”

“No, because we’re still super close and, one day, just maybe we’ll be together again.”

“You got me blushing, girl.”

I laughed. “Stop it.”

“So, how have you been feeling? We didn’t talk much yesterday. I understand you saying you needed a lil’ space to get back to you. I can imagine that was a traumatic time. Glad they took care of that nigga because if they didn’t, I would’ve.”

“I know.”

“I know you don’t like talking about nothing that happened at the cabin, even though you let it be known that you weren’t mistreated at all. But, I have a question I’ve wanted to ask you since you returned.”

“What’s that?”

“I came out to that cabin the day before we came to get you. I called your name and looked through windows and stuff, but I didn’t see you.

Were you there then?”

“Um—honestly, Yomi mentioned that to me but I had to be in that room. There were no windows in there, so I’m sure I couldn’t hear you from the inside with the door closed and locked.”

“So, that nigga had you locked in there? He wasn’t supposed to be treating you like that.”

“It was harmless. Trust me, he did everything in his power to make sure that I was taken care of.”

Meech got quiet for a second. “Oh, okay. I’m happy to hear that.”

“Anyway, so wassup with you and your ex since y’all are back fucking again?”

“What? Where’d you hear that at?”

“Come on. You ain’t gotta lie to kick it,” I playfully responded. I really wasn’t in my feelings about him fucking off. Hell, I found myself falling for another man, so I couldn’t judge or talk.

“It ain’t like that.”

“So, what’s it like?”

“We’re not serious. I was just doing something to get past this lil’ bump in the road with us.”

“I appreciate you being honest about it.” I shrugged. “Long as she don’t come around me with the foolishness, because right about now, she might just catch these hands. Trust me, I might be small, but she don’t want none of this.”

“I know,” Meech uttered.

“Anyway, I’m ‘bout to shower, so I’ll see you when you get here. Things start at three, but you know black folks. Probably won’t start till four or five.”

“More than likely five,” he joked, as we laughed.

“See ya then,” I said and ended the call.

Instead of getting out of bed like I’d planned on doing before Meech called, I crawled back under my covers and buried myself between the sheets.

“Sus!”

“Damn, Yomi, can you start knocking first? What if I was in here playing in my ass?”

“Like I haven’t walked in on that before.”

I slick rolled my eyes. “Why you back so soon, anyway?”

“Because I asked you to get up and your ass is still in the bed. Mama gonna come in here in a lil’ while to see what’s wrong with you.”

“My goshhhh! I need my own fuckin’ crib.”

“Kin,” Yomi said, lightly slapping me on the leg and then sitting down on the bed beside me. “Come on, get up. Talk to me. What’s wrong?” I could hear the sincerity in her tone, and I guess she didn’t deserve any of this bitch fit that I was going through. Hell, I didn’t deserve to be beating myself up this bad either, but that was the only way to deal with the shit I was emotionally going through.

“I don’t know if I can deal with today. You know, with family coming over and now Meech.”

“Oh, Meech is coming now? I thought he was going to be with his own family.”

“That was his plans until his mom decided to go to his aunt’s house or something. So, now, he’s taking me up on my offer to come over here. Not that it bothers me that much but, truth is, I don’t wanna give him false hope. That’s why I’ve been okay with him doing his own thang. I’m protecting my feelings and his.”

“You’re self-sabotaging.”

“No, I’m not. I’m dealing with shit.”

“You said that the cabin situation saved you. It helped you deal with shit that even a therapist couldn’t do. So, I don’t understand.”

I shrugged. “I don’t wanna talk about it.”

“Sus, you ain’t been the same since you came back. I get you’re still going through it. I would be too if a nigga had a gun held up to my head like he was going to shoot, but you’re here. Your Superman saved you. He protected you like he said he would. I know it’s hard being that you haven’t heard from him since you left that day, but he was only in your life for a reason. Sometimes, you have to just let it go.”

Sitting up in bed, I reached over toward my nightstand drawer and opened it. “Here, tell me what the hell this reason is for?”

“What the fuck, Kinsley?!” Yomi shrieked.

“Shhhh, big mouth, ugly ass. Shut the hell up.”

“Sus, this shit says you’re pregnant,” she said, holding up the pregnancy stick.

“Duh, you don’t say, Sherlock.”

“Girl, Meech is gonna be so hap—hold up, it is Meech’s, right?”

“Well—”

“Kin! I know you fuckin’ lyin’.”

“I ain’t said nothing—yet.”

“Oh, but you’re saying a lot without saying shit.”

“Okaaaaaay, we had sex the last night I was there. I don’t know what happened, it just happened. But, bitch, it was the best sex I’d ever had.”

“Wow.”

“That’s all you gotta say?”

“So, but I’m confused. Didn’t you have sex with Meech when you got back too?”

“Damn, Yomi. You know how to spoil a fuckin’ wet dream. Yes, I did have sex with Meech when I got back. I was vulnerable. Guess I was expressing my gratitude of him being there for me and attempting to rescue me on his own. However, I never meant for any of this to happen,” I said, snatching the pregnancy stick out of her hand. “I’m conflicted. Even though I’m not quite a month in, I still have my options. I don’t want Meech thinking this baby is his when it’s possibly not.”

“And if it’s not, you don’t even know how to get in touch with dude.”

“I know. The phone you called was turned off the same day I left, because I tried calling him. I just wanted to hear his voice.”

“Damn, that’s fucked up.”

“Tell me about it,” I uttered. “And if the baby is Meech’s, I don’t know what I’ll do about that either. Meech is a good guy. We had good moments, but what if he’s not the one for me? I mean, I care for him. He’s fine as fuck and is definitely A-1 in bed, but is that enough for me? I know people on the outside may think we’re this cute couple, may even have been couple goals but, girl, I felt something different when I was with Gianni.”

“Girl, I don’t know what this man did to you but, whatever it is, it’s some deep shit.”

“Who you telling? Now, I’m all fucked up. First off, I’m not about to be having a baby when my mama’s having a baby too. Talk about ghetto,” I said with a roll of the eyes. “On top of all of this, I don’t know who the damn daddy is. I fucked Gianni and then Meech the next night. I know Meech would love a kid, but what if it’s not his? I don’t even know if I wanna have a baby by him anyway, though. Then Gianni—if the baby is his, I wouldn’t know how to contact his ass. This is just too much. I gotta have an abortion.”

“Girl, breathe. Shit, you got me confused. You got a lil’ time to decide if having an abortion is something you really wanna do. Quit putting so much pressure on yourself.”

“Just when I thought I had this shit all planned out—boom! This shit happens. Now, it’s got me even more confused than I was before. I need a solid sign from the Universe because I can’t make this decision on my own.”

“So, if Auntie wasn’t pregnant, you’d have the baby?”

“Yeah, I probably would.”

“If you knew for a fact that Meech was the father, you’d have the baby?”

“I can’t really call that because I wanna be everything to my child that my mama and daddy wasn’t to me. I wanna marry my baby’s daddy—”

“You don’t think Meech would marry you?”

“It’s not about him marrying me. What if I don’t wanna marry him?”

“What’s so bad about Meech now, Kin? Your feelings are just so all over the place.”

“There is absolutely nothing bad about him, but the minute we stopped fucking around, he starts fucking with his ex and other bitches—”

“But you weren’t fuckin’ with him.”

“It doesn’t matter. If he loved me like he said he did, he damn sure wouldn’t have jumped his ex’s bones knowing how I feel about the hoe.”

Yomi shrugged. “You might have a point.”

“So, I don’t wanna risk fucking with a nigga, then the minute we fall out, he’s screwing the next bitch. That shit ain’t cute. I have girls coming up to me at work talking about what they heard Meech was doing, or shall I say who they heard he was screwing.”

“Can’t believe everything you hear.”

“True, but I damn shall believe some of it. Plus, he doesn’t deny fucking off. I can respect that about him, but it doesn’t change his ways.”

“I understand that. So, but if Gianni was around and the baby was his ___”

“I’d have this baby, hands down.”

“Damn, Sus, you really like that nigga. Your face even lit up when I said that shit.”

“It’s something about him.”

“You keep saying,” she mocked.

“Anyway, I’m gonna have to figure this out. I don’t wanna abort my baby, but I’m so confused on whether I should keep it. Maybe the time isn’t right. Who knows? This shit is supposed to be happening to you, not me. You’re the one that wants the hubby, the kids, and the big ass pool in the backyard.”

Yomi grinned. “You’re right but, either way, I’ll be a good ass auntie. I just don’t think I’m ready for a baby just yet myself. Plus, I’m still itching to find out if Keisha’s baby is Dodge’s. Hell, dealing with that stress is about all I can handle right now.”

“I’m sure,” I uttered. “Anyway, I’m getting up. At least I got that off my chest. I feel a lil’ better. What you think about this Thanksgiving dinner though, with Grandma and Grandpa coming over, along with Glenda and her baby daddy?”

“It’s gonna be interesting. We haven’t all been under the same roof in about ten years.”

“I know, right. This is either gonna be a good thing or shit show. What you thinking?”

“Mm—a shit show, definitely.”

We laughed. “My exact thoughts too!”



“Kin, keep your ass out the ham. What is going on with you? One minute you’re not feeling well, and the next minute, you’re eating like nobody’s business. Matter of fact, get out the kitchen.”

“Auntie, quit being so mean.”

“Girl, you ain’t been out that room a good hour and you’ve already taste tested everything that I’ve cooked. When it’s time to eat, you won’t even be hungry.”

“What are y’all in here talking about?” Grandma asked as she entered the kitchen.

“Tryna make Kinsley get out of here. I think she’s had her fair share of food to test.”

We laughed.

“It smells delicious. I’m glad you invited us over. We haven’t done this in about ten years,” Grandma said.

“I know. Me and Yomi was just talking about that earlier.”

“So, is Glenda coming?” she asked.

“Yeah, she said she’s coming. She’s bringing her boyfriend and he’s bringing his two sons.”

“Oh, so we’re having a real gathering today.” Grandma smiled. “Do you have a boyfriend that’s coming?”

“I’m seeing someone but he’s not coming. He was scheduled to work today,” Auntie responded.

“I was looking forward to meeting him.”

“Me too,” I said, since we still hadn’t met the guy that Auntie was always talking about. For six months, she didn’t mention him, but now she talked about him all the time. “Anyway, a friend of mine is coming and Yomi’s boyfriend is also coming.”

“So, yours is just a friend, huh?”

“Yes ma’am,” I responded with a smile. “I’m serious. We’re just friends.”

“Ok, I hear you,” she teased.

At that time, the doorbell rang. I could hear Kiyomi letting Dodge and Meech in. They probably rode together, no telling. I heard her introducing them to Grandpa, as I contemplated even going in there just yet. Ever since finding out I was pregnant a few days ago, I didn’t know how to exactly face him. A part of me felt bad because I knew what I’d done, but I didn’t do it when we were together. However, no telling what he would think to know that I had fucked the man that was holding me captive. If nothing else, I didn’t want to be enemies with this man. I still had feelings for him.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” Meech said as he entered the kitchen, giving Auntie a hug. He introduced himself to Grandma, which made my job easier, and then walked over, giving me a warm, friendly hug. Nigga always smelled so good.

“So, this is your friend?” Grandma asked. “He’s mighty handsome.”

“Thank you.” Meech smiled.

“I know, Grandma. I know,” I teased.

Auntie looked at her watch. “Ok, I don’t even know if Glenda is going to make it. It’s already after five.”

“I told you we’re on cpt.”

“Definitely, colored people’s time,” Grandma joked. “Y’all come on, so we can eat. I’m not waiting around on Glenda. Plus, your grandpa wants to

get back home, so he can watch football in his mancave.”

I laughed. “Grandpa has a mancave?”

“Yes, I do,” he said with that big handsome smile of his. “It’s nothing wrong with that, is it?”

“No sir.” I smiled back.

Yomi and Dodge walked in and spoke. Yomi introduced him to Grandma, and she definitely seemed smitten to be in the presence of two fine gentlemen. Everybody sat down at the kitchen table, as Grandpa said the grace. As we passed the food around like the rich folks did, we laughed and talked a little and then, out of nowhere, here comes Grandma.

“I’ve been dreaming about fish lately. I caught a really big one last night. Is somebody pregnant at this table?”

I almost choked on my tea.

“Not me, Mama,” Auntie said first. “Yomi is grown. I’m not starting over.”

“Don’t look at me,” Yomi said to Dodge, as he stared at her with a smirk.

“Nope, not at this table,” I chimed in, just as Glenda’s loudmouth came walking in the kitchen. “It’s her.” I pointed with a serious case of the side-eye.

“It’s me what?” she slurred. Clearly, we could all tell that she’d been drinking, and not a lil’ bit either.

“You’re pregnant,” Yomi replied.

“What? Glenda, you’re pregnant?” Grandma asked.

“Hey, Daddy,” she spoke to Grandpa. “So, this is the first time you’ve seen me in years and you’re already in my business?”

Grandma looked embarrassed, as Auntie intervened. “Glenda, what is your problem? She was just asking you a question since she didn’t know.”

“My big mouth ass daughter and Yomi running their mou—”

“Scuse me?!” I said with the stank face. “You don’t talk about us like that. If you’re pregnant, you’re just pregnant. Apparently, you don’t care about that baby, not in the condition you’re in. You should’ve just had an abortion.”

“Oh wow, Kinsley—” Grandma cut in.

“Bitch, I should’ve had an abortion with yo’ ass!”

“Glenda!” Grandpa’s voice roared as he stood up from the table. “That is enough!”

I stood up from the kitchen table. “And this why I don’t like being in the same space as this drunken, crack-headed slut.” Before anybody could say anything else to me, I started out the kitchen. Glenda snatched me by my arm.

“Kinsley, wait, I’m sorry.”

“Woman, if you don’t get your filthy hands off—”

“Kinsley, come on,” Meech said.

“Please, Meech, take her to cool off,” Auntie said. As I walked outside to completely leave the house, I bumped into a lil’ frail man holding his eye.

“Excuse me, is Glenda in there?”

I didn’t even respond, but Meech did. “Yeah, wassup?”

“I’m sorry. She had a miscarriage a couple of days ago and has been out of control ever since. I tried to stop her from coming here, but she socked me in my fuckin’ eye—”

“Meech, come on before I leave you. That’s his problem, not ours,” I irritably stated. If his lil’ ass let Glenda blacken his eye like that, then he deserved it, because I’d be damn.

Once in the car, as I was backing out of the driveway, Meech looked over at me. “I can see why you don’t like talking about her.”

“Fuck Glenda!”

HENDRIX WRIGHT

Happy Turkey Day, beautiful. HENDRIX
Thank you. YOMI
How has your day been? HENDRIX

Interesting. YOMI

Interesting as in good food or drama? 😊 HENDRIX

Both. YOMI

Damn, that's good and bad. HENDRIX

Tell me about it. My auntie showed up and showed her ass. My cousin left pissed off, and even though my mama doesn't want to admit it, she's in her feelings because her boyfriend had to work and couldn't come. On top of that, my grandparents were there, Dodge too, so it has been one of those days. The silver lining is that the food was delicious. Lol YOMI

Oh ok, sounds like it's been one of those crazy days. So, you still with ya boy? HENDRIX

Yea, we're headed to his people house now. YOMI

Cool, say less. I'll hit you up later. Be safe out. HENDRIX

Will do. & You do the same. YOMI

"Who got you smiling so hard?"

"None of yo' business," I teased.

"A'ight, if that's Dodge's new lady, you got some competition."

"Hush, Sis. Nobody's competition when it comes to me. I'm my own comp," I told her.

"Yea, I hear you. I can tell you like her though."

"She's cool."

“She’s more than cool,” Vee said. “Have you fucked her? I won’t tell Keisha.”

I grinned. “You got jokes?”

“Nah,” she laughed. “But, have you?”

“No, she’s not that type of girl.”

“Well, Dodge better stay with her because Keisha be fucking her back out. Ol’ hoe ass,” she laughed.

“So, do you know if that baby is his?”

“She claims it’s his, but I don’t know. Don’t get me to lying.”

“But it’s possible that it’s not?”

“Damn right, that’s possible. If it is his, ya lil’ friend ain’t gon’ stand a chance. Keisha is going to make that nigga’s life a living hell. She’s already talking sideways.”

“Like what?”

“Saying that she’ll be popping up all times of day and night dropping the baby off. Not wanting that girl to be around her child. Giving Dodge ultimatums and shit and taking out child support just for the hell of it.”

“She is a real bitch. It be a lot of them pretty women that’s psycho. Yo’ ass a lil’ off too, that’s why y’all fall out today and be back besties tomorrow.”

“Hush, Hendrix.”

I laughed. “I’m just sayin’.”

“Keisha is the craziest one out all of us. She got hands but only if a bitch don’t. I heard ya girl took her and Kay ass down through there,” she chuckled.

“Shit, I saw Kiyomi put them hands on Keisha in the club and shawty can go. Ya boy sister jumped in, but I believe that was just because they were together. I say that because Kiyomi didn’t need no help. Plus, no telling what Keisha done did to her brother over the years. Ol’ girl might’ve wanted to get some licks back for him.”

“Trust me, I’m sure Sha did. Keisha done did some fucked-up shit to Dodge, most that he don’t even know about. But, hey, Dodge ain’t no fuckin’ saint either now. Don’t let the handsome face fool ya. He get bitches, plenty bitches.”

I just nodded my head. I knew how niggas liked them rolled. Still wasn’t no competition for me, though.

“Be careful fucking around them ponds, bro.”

“Meaning?” I frowned.

“I’m just saying. That nigga money long. If he into this girl like I think he is, he’s gon’ spoil her to death. He’ll make it real hard for a nigga like you to get in.”

“Shit, my money ain’t short.”

Vee laughed. “It ain’t that long either, nigga. Daddy got the money, not yo’ ass.”

“But, I’ll have it when I go to the pros. You keep forgetting about that.”

“Yeah, but when you go to the pros, you won’t be stunting that girl. It’ll be so many women swarming you, you won’t be thinking about her.”

I smiled. “Shit, I’ll always be thinking ‘bout her.”

“From the googly eyes you shootin’ me, I can only imagine.”

“Whatever,” I laughed.

“So, wassup with Kay? You know she ain’t going away. Plus, you still fucking her crazy ass.”

“What can I say? Shawty got some good pussy and the head is amazing.” I grinned.

“She can suck a dick through a straw, huh?”

I laughed. “Hell yeah.”

“Just be careful. You have to keep letting her know where she stand, or she’ll try you every single time she thinks you’re feeling somebody else.”

“Oh, you think I don’t. I already know how to deal with her crazy ass.”

“She must’ve been mistaken when she came over here and showed her ass then.”

“Man, I even told her then. She knew what the deal was. I think she was just surprised to see who was over here. It’s funny though, because she knows that Kiyomi is with Dodge. That’s no secret now, but she still feels very threatened by her. Can’t keep the girl name out her mouth. I don’t be wanting to hear that shit, so I stuff it with dick every time—”

“Bitch, shut up.” We laughed.

“Yeah, that part.”

“Well, I’m back with Cobra.”

I frowned. “What you mean back with him? I thought it was over like a fucking year ago.”

“Well, it was. We ain’t exactly back together because I’d heard he’d been sleeping with Rosalyn, but the nigga showed up on my doorstep about two weeks ago drunk and, well, we fucked. Been kicking it ever since.”

“What’s your definition of kicking it though? Because Cobra wasn’t really stunting yo’ ass like that, just to keep it real. He just wanted to fuck. That’s all you’ve ever been to him. At least, that’s what I’ve gathered over the years.”

Vee rolled her eyes. “Which is why I didn’t wanna tell you this. You always think you know it all.”

“Well, what I know is that this nigga will get him a woman and make her his girl and fuck you on the side. You ain’t exactly ever been his main bitch.”

“Not true.”

“Okay, when then? Oh, you talking about when y’all first started fucking around when you were in high school? That was what, eight or nine years ago?” I questioned with a shake of the head. “He’s had about ten main women since then and you’ve always been the side bitch.”

“He knows who really loves him though. Them bitches don’t stick around.”

“They don’t stick around because he’s always with the next bitch.”

“I hate I even said something. You always try to rain on my parade when it comes to Cobra.”

“I’m just saying, you need to wake up and smell the coffee, because you trippin’, sis. I thought this time you were gon’ move on and get a man of your own. Hell, at least fuck with a nigga that acts like he likes you or don’t mind having you on his arm in public places.”

“You act like these bitches don’t know me and Cobra’s history.”

“Oh, they know. They definitely know, but they don’t give a fuck because he lets them know that he don’t give a fuck. You’re just his—”

“Side bitch, I get it, bro,” she said with an attitude.

“I’m not tryna make you mad. I just want you to see this nigga for who he really is. You’re not the one he wants to be with, yet you have held out hope for this man since the first time he fucked you. Mind you, even that was on the side of your apartment building back when you lived in the projects.”

“Why you even bringing that up?”

“Because you chose to lose your virginity to a nigga that wanted to fuck you on the side of an apartment building. Yet, you talk shit about Keisha and her hoe ways.”

“I’m nothing like Keisha!” she snapped. “Don’t fucking compare me—”

“I’m not comparing you to Keisha. I’m just sayin’—”

“I know what you saying. I don’t fuck around like her. Yes, I might’ve fucked for the first time on the side of an apartment building but, in the nine years we’ve been back and forth with each other, I’ve only fucked three other niggas. My body count ain’t nearly as high as Keisha’s, so don’t do me.”

“I’m sorry, you know I don’t mean to make you mad. It’s not intentional, sis. I just want you to be with a real nigga. I know you’re not a bad person. I’ve never understood why you were so close with Keisha. Y’all are like night and day. She brings out the worst in you, especially when y’all drink. She’s the reason you have enemies because you’re always fighting her battles. Hell, that’s Kay’s problem too. The only difference with you is that you’ll talk yo’ shit, cut her ass off, and move the fuck on. Until she calls needing you again and, then, you go running back. Sounds like a pattern, right? Because that’s the same way you are with Cobra.”

“I know. I know. Maybe one day I can let it all go and move the fuck on. Will that make you happy, Mr. Got Yo’ Life Together?”

I grinned. “Well, you knooow,” I joked.

“Nigga, you ain’t got shit together, but I knew you’d say that. Ol’ conceited ass.” She laughed. “When you stop letting Kay slob the knob, I’ll stop letting Cobra use me.”

“Did you hear yourself?”

“Shut the hell up. I said what I said. I know that nigga uses me for sex. I can’t help that he can’t find a bitch to put it on him like me.”

“So, you need to stop giving it to him. Let him feel that shit, because even in this year when you’ve called yourself moved on, that nigga was still smashing.”

She shot me the side-eye. “No, he wasn’t.”

“Yes, he was. He ain’t never stopped. Where the lie at?” I asked, just as my cell phone began to ring. Vee glanced down at the display screen.

“Speaking of the devil. Yo’ lil’ slut buddy calling,” she teased. “Now, you can get off my ass.”

“Just for a lil’ while,” I teased back. “Hold that thought.”

“Thought fuckin’ forgot about already. Move around, my nigga,” she said, getting up to walk in the kitchen.

I laughed while answering the phone. “Wassup?”

“Hey, pretty boy,” she snickered in the phone. Pretty boy was her nickname she’d given me years back. This was way before I even gave her the dick.

“Wassup, what you up to?”

“Sitting at the bar with Tootie. We just chilling today.”

“Why you ain’t with yo’ family? It’s Thanksgiving. I thought you said you and Keisha was going to your dad’s house and cooking for him?”

“We did, done ate, and then me and Tootie decided to get out and grab a drink or two.”

“Oh, okay.”

“What you did today?”

“Vee came over to cook for me since Mom and Pops went out of town to celebrate their anniversary.”

“Oh, Vee there? Tell her I said hey!”

“Kay said hey, sis.”

Vee looked back at me like the mama on the movie *Friday* when Mrs. Betty was speaking to Mrs. Parker. “Heyyy, girl,” she mocked in a sarcastic tone, followed with a silly roll of the eyes.

I grinned. “She said ‘hey girl.’”

“Tell Henny I said what up!”

“You heard Tootie?”

“Yeah, tell her what up.”

“Ask her ass what they doing later?” Vee wanted to know.

“Aye man, I ain’t with all this phone tag shit. Call her yourself,” I griped.

“Shut up, with yo’ nappy headed ass. I’ll call her myself.”

“Good,” I commented. “Anyway, I’m ‘bout to shower and take a nap. I might get out later tonight.”

“You going to that party at Truth?”

“I don’t know. I might. You going?”

“I’d rather come see you first.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Hell yeah. Don’t you wanna see me?” she asked in a needy, cute tone.

I smiled. I loved when she drank. Shawty could get hella nasty and stayed on go. “You can fall through for a lil’ while.”

She giggled. “I can’t wait to see you.”

“Just text me when you’re on the way.”

“Definitely,” she said, and we ended the call.

“So, yo’ lil’ slut coming through?”

I laughed. “It’s funny how y’all be kee-keeing in each other face and talking behind each other’s back like y’all ain’t cool. It’s that fake love for me.”

“Call it what you want. I love them bitches, even though I can’t stand ‘em sometimes. With us, the shit is just second nature, I guess. I’m sure they do me the same way.”

“Obviously,” I noted, getting up while stretching my arms. “I sure do appreciate you coming over to cook for me. I’m ‘bout to lay it down now. I need a nap.”

“That’s cool. I ain’t going nowhere right now. I’m about to find something to watch on TV.”

“A’ight,” I responded as I headed down the hallway to my bedroom. Even though Kay wasn’t my girl, it was still something about her that I liked. She was pretty as hell, had a tight lil’ body, and actually had a sense of humor. It was the attitude and quickness to fight for me. Being aggressive in the bedroom was one thing, but I didn’t like all that other hostile shit. Her jealous rages could be a bit much and, if I was gonna keep fucking with her, she would have to tame that shit, or I was gon’ kick her ass completely to curb.

KAY HENRY

“**S**us, my ass is feeling pretty good. I can’t wait to go over to Henny’s crib and suck him off.”

Tootie looked over at me with a stare of disgust. “Eww, you one nasty bitch.”

“Bitch, don’t act like you don’t suck dick. Hell, I love when Henny’s kids are playing tag in my throat. I’m the throat game goddess,” I laughed. “Ask him, he’ll tell you.”

“I ain’t asking that man no shit like that. You are crazy.” She laughed.

“Yeah, well, I’ve been told that more than a few times in my life.”

“Hell, that’s because it’s true.” Tootie grinned.

“What can I say? I like his ass.”

Tootie turned up her mixed drink of Casamigos and cranberry juice. “You think I don’t know that? He’s the only nigga I’ve ever known you to fight over. I mean, you might be ‘bout that life—that’s for sure. But the only battles you really fight are those of Keisha’s.”

I shrugged, turning up my drink. “Can we have one more of these, please?” I asked the bartender.

“So, were you still fighting Keisha’s battle because she and that chick fought at the club? Or was that your battle this time because she was at Henny’s house?”

“Both,” I responded. “I mean, the bitch is being greedy as fuck. She can’t have all the men, and especially not two sisters’ men. I mean, who sent this bitch?”

“But they go to the same college. I believe what he told you. It’s harmless.”

“Yeah, I know what he said, but I ain’t like that shit. I mean, he got a whole bitch in his crib wearing nothing but his jersey. I was already heated because my instinct said that it was somebody there. I just didn’t know it would be her.”

“I’m sure you didn’t.”

“Even though he’s told me over and over again that she’s just a friend, I feel like he likes her a little more than that.”

“But, she has a man now and we know Dodge is thick competition when it comes to the bitch he’s claiming. I mean, have you seen his IG page? Shit, ol’ girl done took over. Hell, I believe she be the one logged into his account.”

I laughed. “It does seem that way. Shit be pissing my sister off.”

“I can see Keisha’s crazy ass now, ‘bout to lose her cool over that shit. Surprised she ain’t blocked him.”

“Nah, she gotta keep close tabs. You know how petty she is.”

“You right.” Tootie grinned. “She’s the fuckin’ petty queen.”

“Right.” I sipped from my drink, as thoughts of me and Hendrix’s relationship invaded my mind. “I gotta chill though. It’s easier said than done, but Henny has threatened to cut me off if I don’t get my temper under control. He was pissed about me coming in his crib and showing my ass like that. Every time I think about it, I get embarrassed. I should be more levelheaded than that. I don’t know where the anger comes from.”

“You’re just feisty, bestie. That’s all. I mean, I probably would’ve gone ape shit too had I liked a man the way you like Henny and caught a bitch in his crib. I can see where you’re coming from, but I also can see where he’s coming from. You’re a known hot-head and you gotta control that shit. Listen, you’re nothing like Keisha. I’ve always said this, she’s a straight bully compared to you. Why you think I don’t hang around her crazy ass like that and me and you have been besties for a long time?”

“I know.”

“I just can’t get with her foolishness. She do too much.”

“It’s true. I’ve tried talking to her, especially since she’s pregnant now. I don’t know if she’ll ever get it.”

“I think she’s bipolar, if you ask me.”

I grinned. “You’ve always said that since we were in school.”

“Tryna tell ya.” Tootie nodded, reaching for her third drink from the bartender. “Thanks.” She wasted no time sipping it. “Listen, Keisha is a beautiful girl. She can have any man that she wants. Thing is that she’ll have to get the nigga from out of town. Most men that know her reputation ain’t about to settle down with her. They just wanna fuck.”

“I don’t wanna be like that, though. So, I know I gotta change.”

“Please do, sus, or you’re gonna be an old lady with nine cats.”

“And bitch, where you gon’ be?” I grinned, taking a sip from my drink.

“Home sipping and talking to you on FaceTime, because I ain’t coming over to sit around you with no stankin’ ass house full of cats.”

We laughed. “So, you know Vee gon’ kill you ‘bout her man.”

Tootie frowned. “I ain’t fucked him—yet.”

“Ooooh,” I chuckled. “Please don’t. Cobra is a hoe and you’re a good girl. He turned Vee out a long time ago. Don’t fall prey.”

“Girl, I’m trying not to, but that nigga grabbed my hand and placed it on his dick, and whew chile—” She inhaled. “A bitch almost squirted in my panties.”

I laughed. “You stupid, you know that.”

“It’s something about that handsome ass baby face and that height do something to me. The nigga dress fly as hell, got mad money, smile so fuckin’ sexy and luring, always smelling good, and got mo’ game than Hasbro.” She chuckled.

“I don’t know how he does it. He always get the most innocent girls and turn ‘em out. I don’t think he’ll fuck with a bitch with a body count over two. Word on the streets is that he’s fucking with Rosalyn—”

“Rosco’s sister?”

“Hell yeah.”

“Oh, he’s playing it too close. I didn’t know that. Hell, why you ain’t been said something?”

“Bitch, you just told me about him last week. I wanted to see if you was really planning on going there or not.”

“So, but are they together or just fucking?”

“Shit, does it matter?”

“Yeah, because maybe I just wanna fuck.”

“You being a bad girl.” I smirked, as I spotted this muthafucka coming through the restaurant doors. “You gotta be kidding me.”

“What?!” Tootie asked, seeing the expression on my face.

“He’s here.”

“Who?” she asked, looking back over her shoulders then smiling.

“You invited him here?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Wow, you’re turning into a lil’ slut bucket.”

“Birds of a feather—”

I grinned. “Hush, tramp.”

Cobra coolly made his way over to us. “What up, Kay?”

“Hey, Cobra,” I said with a shake of the head.

“What up, sexy?”

“Heyy, Cobra,” Tootie spoke with a smile spread across her face so big. I pinched that bitch on the thigh. “Cut it out, Kay,” she snickered. “I saved you a seat.”

“’Preciate that,” he said, sitting down next to Tootie.

Oh, if she thought I was about to be a third wheel with her lil’ sneaky link, she was dead wrong. But, before I made any moves to leave, I was about to drill his ass.

“Yo, let me get two shots of D’Usse!” he called out to the bartender.

“Damn, you doing it like that?” Tootie asked, still smiling.

“Nigga must be tryna get right for that ass,” I teased.

“I don’t need liquor for that. I stay on go,” he commented.

“Scuse me!” I let out. “Aren’t you back fucking with Vee?” He cut his eyes over at me with a nonchalant smirk.

“Never stopped.”

“Damn,” I uttered. Nigga was bold as fuck.

“So, that’s yo’ girl?” Tootie asked.

“Nah,” he responded, reaching for his two shots of D’Usse.

“That’s cause Rosalyn’s his girl,” I said, to let it be known he was a straight player. He looked over at me with that lil’ sneaky, handsome ass smile.

“So, that’s your girl?” Tootie asked.

He turned up his shot. “Does it matter?”

“Yeah,” I blurted out.

“Does it?” he asked, staring in Tootie’s eyes. In other words, he didn’t give a damn about my inquiries.

Tootie glanced over at me and then back at him. “Well—”

“Damn, you weak girl,” I whispered with a slick roll of the eyes.

“So, word on the streets is that Rosalyn had a fucking wreck last month and damn near killed herself and the driver’s instructor,” I joked, making Tootie laugh out loud. “Is that true?”

“Ask her,” Cobra responded, turning up his second shot.

“I’m asking you. That’s yo’ girl and shit. I mean, they say the lady walking ‘round here with a neck brace on.”

Cobra grinned a little. “Yo, you wildn’.”

Tootie and I laughed. “I’m just sayin’, my boy.”

“Anyway, what you tryna do?” he asked Tootie.

She glanced over at me with a devious wink and, then, back at him. “I’m leaving with you.”

“Damn, you just gon’ leave me like that?” I asked with a frown.

“You got plans already. Go handle that, bestie,” she said, getting up with Cobra. “Love ya.”

I just shook my head. This heifer had tried me. “Yeah, love you too. Call me.”

“I will,” Tootie said as she and Cobra left the restaurant. I already knew what time it was. Tootie was always the more reserved one out the crew, but I saw a side of her that I’d never seen before. Homegirl was living life. Guess that stuck-up shit was out the window now. I just hate it was with a nigga like Cobra. He might’ve had money and was cute and all, but his dick was well-known. “Lord, please tell yo’ child to make him use a condom.”



“Hey, pretty boy, wake up,” I said, standing over Hendrix as he laid in bed with nothing but a pair of Polo boxer briefs. This nigga was sexy as hell. He was like a dark glass of chocolate milk. The more I drank, the more I wanted.

“Aye, what’s up?” he sluggishly said. “I told you to text me when you were on your way.”

“I did. Check your phone. You’ve been in here sleep. Vee let me in.”

“Oh, okay,” he said, sitting up and stretching his arms out. “Damn, I didn’t realize I was that tired. Vee cooked all that good food and got my ass in here knocked the hell out.”

“I smelled it when I walked in the door. She’s been cooking like that since she was in middle school,” I teased but was kind of serious.

“Yeah, she got that from her auntie.”

I sat down on the side of the bed, pulling off my Ugg boots. “I need to cuddle up with you and get me some sleep, too. I caught an Uber over here. I didn’t wanna chance driving under the influence.”

“Proud of you,” Hendrix said. I knew he would be because he’d gotten on me a few times for driving while drinking. “Tootie must’ve been lit too.”

“Honey, Tootie had other plans. She left me there.”

Hendrix frowned. “Left you there? What you mean? Didn’t y’all go together?”

“Yeah, but she left with Cobra.”

“Say what now?”

“You heard me. While we were sitting there having our drinks and talking shit, Cobra showed up. Apparently, Tootie had invited him out.”

“I’m lost.”

“See, last week, Tootie told me that Cobra had been tryna holla at her. I didn’t think it would go far because she knows he’s a hoe. But I was wrong. He showed up at the restaurant, had him a few shots, and then they left together.”

“Wow, that’s crazy. I was just talking about that nigga earlier with Vee.”

“What she said?”

“Nothing that made sense,” he responded with a disappointed shake of the head.

“She in love with that nigga.”

“Don’t I know it, but she needs to understand that it’s gotta be more to love than just that.”

“I know, right. I was trying to tell Tootie the same thing. She’s only been with one nigga all her life, and ever since they broke up, she’s turned over a new leaf. I just hate it’s with that nigga.”

“Me too.”

“Well, don’t tell Vee about this. I don’t want her tryna fight Tootie.”

“I ain’t telling her crazy ass nothing. If she wanna keep fucking with that nigga knowing what he’s about, then that’s on her.”

“I hope Tootie don’t get that crazy. I did try to call him out about Vee and a chick named Rosalyn that he’s fucking around with.”

“What he say?”

“He didn’t deny either of them.” I shrugged. “Nigga got big balls.”

“Guess he’s one of those keep it one hundred kind of niggas, and if you like it, he loves it.” He shrugged. “Ain’t mad at that. Can’t hate the player, hate the game.”

I grinned. “You’re right. So, if a female asked you if we were fucking around, what would you say?”

“First off, it ain’t none of their business.”

I slick frowned.

“But I wouldn’t deny smashing you. I wouldn’t lie either like we’re together or this couple—”

“I know we ain’t,” I said, trying not to get an attitude.

“But, hey, we fuck around from time to time.”

“Could you ever see yourself being with me, like as in a couple?”

He shrugged. “Right now, I can’t. You need to work on yourself. Plus, when I’m drafted into the NBA, and you know that’s happening soon, I won’t be thinking about settling down and shit. I’ll be focused on the game and making my money.”

“I hear ya,” I said, feeling somewhat salty and in my feelings.

“Well, since I know your ears are working, show me what that mouth do.”

“That’s all you want is this mouth?”

He smiled. “I’m tired. I just want you to put me back to sleep.”

I shrugged. “Your wish is my command,” I said, getting on my knees in front of him as he sat on the bed. I crawled between his legs and pulled his pipe out of his boxer briefs. I didn’t care if we didn’t fuck. I just wanted to please him. The more I let him nut in my mouth, the more I’d stay on his mind. I needed to be hard to get over and even harder to resist. I would be in competition with women all over once he got drafted, but there was no way I was going to lose this man to another. Putting in the work to win his heart was necessary, and I was going to do my best every chance I got.

I stuffed his hard dick in my mouth like I was packing my jaws with food. I sucked and slurped so much till spit was oozing down his balls and sliding through my fingers. I jacked and softly moaned. Just the hum of him groaning sounded so fuckin’ sexy, had my kitty purring and he hadn’t even touched it. He may not have wanted to fuck when I was done, but I was getting that dick before I’d leave.

I could promise ya that.

As I blew on his whistle, speaking our union into existence, I could see him proposing to me. Just the thought of it was so amazing that in no time, he was nutting in my mouth. The cream of it all slid down my throat doing the happy dance. He wasn't the only one that got his rocks off. I did too, which was why I didn't mind giving him head any time he asked for it. Hendrix Wright was going to be my man. I'd already manifested this shit. He just didn't know it, yet.

KIYOMI SIMMONS

I sat back on the sofa with my feet kicked up watching *Secret Society*. I couldn't believe how these trannys managed to fool the men they were fucking around with. The deceit of it all had my jaw dropped just watching it. I was sitting on pins and needles every time Celeste or Tina were in the presence of their many men. I just couldn't understand why they didn't keep it one hundred from the start. But hey, to each its own. These were some bad ass bitches and could dress their asses off. If I was a nigga, I guess I would've been fooled too. However, them niggas apparently weren't the touchy feely type. My tender ass would've been rubbing all between a bitch legs tryna see what's up.

"What you in here watching?" Mama asked as she sat down next to me.

"*Secret Society*," I answered.

"I just watched this last night. Them some pretty girls, but I don't understand why them men wasn't rubbing down there. Niggas don't finger women no more?"

I grinned. "That's the same thing I was thinking."

"It's a really good movie though. I enjoyed it."

"It's my second time looking at it this morning. I wanted to make sure I didn't miss nothing," I said. "So, about yesterday."

"I know. Glenda showed her natural born ass. I hadn't seen her act like that in years."

"That's because she ain't been around us like that in years. I was really shocked. It took me back to how she used to be back in the day, especially how she talked to Kinsley, calling her a b—"

“That really pissed me off. I wanted to slap her ass in the mouth, and the only thing that saved her was Mama and Daddy sitting there. Just because she lost her baby didn’t give her the right to come in here and act like that.”

“Dodge couldn’t stop talking about it when we left. He said they have family drama, but nothing like us.” I chuckled. “He was so tickled when Glenda’s boyfriend came in the house with that black eye.”

“Then, the nut had the nerves to swing on that man again.” We laughed. “I can’t believe he sat there and let Glenda beat on him like that. He’s a damn fool. I would’ve scooped her lil’ ass up and body slammed her.”

I laughed out loud. “Like you did her back in the day when she called herself whooping Kinsley with an extension cord.”

“I really tried to drag her ass behind that shit. She was the one walking around with a black eye,” she said with a shake of the head. “She knew better than that. That’s what made me get custody of Kin. She wasn’t gon’ beat on my niece like she was crazy and not think I wasn’t gon’ do nothing about it. Taught her ass ‘bout playing.”

“But Mama, I’m talking about how the boyfriend left her in here acting a fool. After she whopped him a few times side the head, he got the heck on. Even Grandpa got tickled about that.”

We laughed. “I ain’t never seen a nigga move so fast. I honestly believe he’s scared of her. Ain’t no way he could be with a woman like Glenda. She’ll fuck him up at any given time and think nothing of it. I just wanted Mama and Daddy to see a different side of her. Had I known she’d show up in that condition, I wouldn’t have invited her.”

“I know, right. I hate she lost the baby.”

“Me too, but let’s be real with ourselves. My sister wasn’t ready for another child. I wanted to believe she had changed and wanted to get her life on the right track, but after seeing her in action yesterday, I highly doubted it.”

“I’m with you on that one.” I nodded. “Grandma and Grandpa have seen that side of her. I hated Dodge and Meech had to witness it. That mess was so embarrassing.”

“I agree. I’m so glad Sammy had to work and wasn’t here. I haven’t explained that part of our lives to him, yet.”

“Speaking of Mr. Sammy, when is he making his way here to meet us?” I asked, just as Kinsley joined us.

“Yeah, Auntie, when is he sliding through?”

“‘Bout time you get your butt up,” Mama said to Kinsley.

“I was up late.”

“You’re always up late. Start taking your butt to bed at a decent hour when you’re not working. That way, you get to catch up on your rest. ‘Cause when you’re not rested up, you get real grouchy.”

She grinned. “I working on me, ok.”

“I hear you.”

“Now, back to you. Don’t try to change the subject,” Kinsley teased.

“Right,” I cut in.

“Since y’all nosey asses all in my business, he’s coming over tonight when he gets off work. Y’all will get to meet him in the morning.”

“Ohhh, he’s staying the night?” I asked, shooting her the side-eye.

“Yes, and don’t say shit. I pay the bills round this bitch.”

Kinsley and I laughed out loud. “Okay, you got that,” I said, as she stood up.

“Now, I’m going back in my room. I’m catching up on *YOU*. That Joe is a crazy muthafucka.”

“Wait till you see the last two seasons. He met him a lady that’s crazier than him.” Kinsley chuckled.

“If she’s crazier than Joe, then I know that shit is good.”

Mama headed down the hall to her bedroom. I heard the door shut behind her. That meant she’d be in there for the rest of the day.

“I can’t wait to meet this dude she’s been kicking it with.”

“I know, right. He seems to be the one. I guess we’ll find out after we interrogate his ass in the morning.”

I laughed. “I’m already thinking of shit I can ask him.”

“Me, too.”

After a few minutes of silence, I decided to make sure Kinsley was okay from yesterday’s shenanigans. “Hey, I hate that Auntie—”

“Unt-unt,” she shushed me. “Don’t mention that lady around me. I want nothing to do with her.”

“Ok.” I instantly shrugged. “Sorry.” I wasn’t about to push no buttons with her crazy ass. She could be as unpredictable as her mama, just on a different level. “Have you thought any more about the baby?” I questioned in a low tone. Last thing I needed was for her to shush me again.

“I’m leaning toward this abortion and not telling anybody.”

“Dang, sus, you would be a really cute mommy. Don’t you want a little one running behind you? A lil’ mini me that looks just like you?”

Kinsley smiled but cut it short. “I don’t know what I want. I could be having a baby by a man that I don’t wanna be with no more. That ain’t good. I also could be having a baby by a man that’s nowhere around. He wouldn’t even know that I had his baby. That ain’t good, either. I’m so conflicted in my feelings. What if he does show up but finds out I’m pregnant by Meech?”

“Chill out, sus. You be overthinking like a muthafucka.”

“You too.”

“I know, so I’m telling you to stop doing it. It’s a baby inside of you. You asked for a sign yesterday. *That lady* whose name I can’t call lost her baby, so that changes the narrative a bit. Y’all are no longer pregnant at the same time. I know that sounds harsh, but it’s the truth. It could also be a sign.”

Kinsley shrugged. “Could be, but that ain’t good enough for me,” she said, just as the doorbell rang. “You expecting company?”

“Yeah, it’s probably Sha and Rosalyn. Sha is going to do my hair and nails. We’re hitting the club tonight. You working?”

“Nah, I’m off and staying my ass at home. I don’t care what *it girls* are coming through. I won’t be there. It’s like I can’t get enough sleep now,” she expressed. “She doing your hair here?”

“Nah, she’s doing it at Granny’s house, and we’ll go clubbing from there,” I explained, getting up to go to the door. “Dodge is bringing me back, I guess. If I don’t stay the night with him.” Opening the door, I frowned. “What’s this?” I asked the delivery guy.

“Kinsley Simmons?”

“No, that’s my cousin. Kinsley, a delivery man is here with a big ass box for you.”

Kinsley got up and came to the door. “I’m Kinsley. What’s this?”

“Can you sign here for me please?” the delivery guy asked. Kinsley signed the paper, grabbed the big box, and walked back in the house. I sat back watching, with my nosey ass.

“Open it, bitch,” I excitedly exclaimed. “Who is it from?”

“Damn, give me some time to find out, girl.” The second the tape was removed enough for her to get in the box, Kinsley’s eyes lit up like a

Christmas tree. It was the first time I'd seen a happy glow grace her spirit in a while.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, just as she pulled out a big ass fluffy, lavender bear. Shit was bigger than my bear that Dodge had bought me. I frowned, watching her wrap her arms around it like it was a baby or something special to her. "I know that ain't the—"

"Yes! It's the bear that Gianni bought me when I was at the cabin."

"From the looks of how you're making love to it, I kinda figured that."

"Hush, Yomi," she chuckled. She then pulled out a shoe box.

"Hold up, bitch, does that box say Bottega Veneta?"

She smiled, opening the box. "I know he didn't."

"Oh, yes, the fuck he did. Bitch, those are the Bottega Teddy Green slippers. The furry ones. I swear I just told Dodge the other day that I wanted some. Now, I gotta tell him that you got a pair, and I don't." I playfully pouted, with an intense stare, as she pulled out two more Bottega Veneta shoe boxes. My jaw dropped. "Biiitch—"

"Oh, my goodness," she said, opening each box. "These are the—"

"Resort Sponge slippers," I chimed in. "He got you both pair. The green and the blue ones. You must've told him you liked these or something."

"Yeah, but just in general of us talking about the lil' Louis Vuitton furry slippers he'd gotten for me to walk around in. I was teasing him saying that he could've gotten me the Bottegas. Not only had I been eyeing those, but they were also cheaper." She grinned, trying a pair of the slippers on.

"Are you listening to yourself? You were held captive yet walking around in LV slippers that your kidnapper bought you. What kind of shit is that?"

"I told you. It was only the initial moment when I was taken and the last day I was there that I felt like I'd been abducted. The time in between was a refreshing walk in the park."

"I see. So, what else is in the box?"

She shrugged, reaching back in the box and pulling out an envelope with a card in it. "Open it. I need to know what that nigga is talking about."

She shot me the side-eye. "This is a private moment, bitch."

"Well, damn," I said, as she began putting her sentimental gifts back in the box.

"I'm going in my room to read this."

"Gone then, with your petty ass. You gon' tell me what's in the card."

“When I’m ready,” she teased, turning to lick her tongue at me. I smiled. I was actually happy for her.

“That’s your sign, bitch!” I called out.

She shrugged, stopping to look back at me. “Maybe, then again, maybe not.”



“Damn, it’s lit in here. I mean, that candle got me so relaxed. Just inhaling it brings on this peaceful state of mind. What kind is it? Because I definitely don’t have that one.”

“That one is called *On My Big Energy Shit*. It’s one of the manifestations candles they have.”

“Oh shit. Come through The Spiritual Tea Company!” I said, while sniffing the air, inhaling the good and releasing the bad.

“You were the one that put me on to them. I knew nothing about that company. Now, I can’t stay off it ordering shit. I have a few more candles I bought because while I’m working at the shop, they’ll be lit. My customers gon’ leave feeling good inside and out.”

“That’s right.” I smiled. “So, back to what we were talking about.”

“Yeah, back to that—”

“No, but hol’ up. Roz, you went to Cobra’s house last night and caught him there with a female?”

Rosalyn nodded. “Yep, and I know the girl.”

I frowned, as Sha pulled my lace wig up into a ponytail. “Who is she?”

“Tootie,” Sha cut in while smacking on her Hubba Bubba.

“Tootie? Why does that name sound familiar?” I pondered.

“She’s Kay’s best friend,” Sha added, causing me to think back at my conversation I’d had with Hendrix in the park.

“Yeah, what she said,” Rosalyn uttered.

“What you mean caught him though?”

“I mean, I knocked several times, called his phone, kept texting, and the nigga didn’t respond. So, I paid the Uber driver to park around the corner where I could see his crib, but he wouldn’t be able to see us, and an hour later emerges Ms. Tootie. I know it was her because I took pictures of the bitch coming out as she walked to her car and then sent them to him.”

“Damn,” I uttered. “What did he say?”

“He ain’t said shit. Still ain’t said shit.”

“Wow, I would’ve flattened all his tires and bust out his windows,” I coolly stated while thinking about what I’d done to Loyal’s ass when he betrayed me.

“I wonder if Vee knows that he’s fucking Tootie? You know they all run in the same circle.”

“Vee? I’ve heard that name before, too.”

“Girl, all these names probably are familiar because Vee is ya boy Hendrix’s sister,” Sha replied. “Maybe he mentioned them just in mere conversation.”

They were certainly aware of me and Hendrix’s friendship. We’d all talked about it before. I just didn’t lead on that I liked him like that, especially since now everybody knew that me and Dodge were an item. I stayed posting my ass on his IG page to let them bitches know that he was taken.

“Yeah, what she said.” Rosalyn nodded with a scowl on her face. “I oughta fuck him just for the hell of it,” she spat.

Hearing that made me feel a way but, hey, Hendrix wasn’t my man, so it was nothing I could say about it if she did.

“Girrrl, he is fine as fuck. Shit, let me have at him. I’m sure you could hook that up for me, right?” Sha asked.

I smiled but, deep down, I didn’t wanna be the one hooking her up with Hendrix. The nigga liked me, and I selfishly liked it like that.

“Girl, no,” Rosalyn jumped in. “I should fuck him, not you.”

“What is that gonna accomplish for you? Cobra gon’ know why you’re doing it. You have to get with a nigga that he wouldn’t expect you to fuck with. Somebody else that’s fly and fine as fuck.”

“You’re right. Plus, you know damn well you’re not done with Cobra’s ass. I don’t know what that nigga working with between his legs, but he have y’all women on the go.”

“He ain’t got me on the go,” Rosalyn responded with a slick neck roll.

“If you say he don’t,” Sha retorted. “Word is that he fucked Vee on the side of the apartment building when we lived in Project Ville. They say she was a virgin.”

“A whole virgin and she let him fuck her on the side of a building? That’s craaaazy.” I laughed.

“Shit yeah, and she been foolish about that nigga ever since,” Sha added.

I looked over at Rosalyn, who was conveniently typing on her cell phone. “You knew about this, Roz?”

“Yeah, I knew about that and about Vee. Who doesn’t? She’s only been stalking the nigga since she was a baby.”

We laughed. “Well, it’s true,” Sha joked. “I know you ain’t still cussin’ his ass out. If he ain’t said nothing by now, then let him have that. Show his ass tonight at the club that you ain’t nothing nice to play with. He should definitely know that.”

“I agree, girl. One thing about me, I have no problems putting hands on a bitch or showing a nigga I don’t need his ass,” I said.

“Well, we definitely know you don’t mind puttin’ hands on a bitch.” We laughed.

“Okay, I’m done. What you think?” Sha asked, turning me toward the mirror.

“As always, you slay, baby!” I exclaimed, admiring my high ponytail that hung down to my hips. “I’m club ready.” I smiled.

“Damn, you look good, baby,” my fine ass man complimented me as he entered the room. “You did that, sis.”

“Awww, thanks, bae.” I blushed with a smile. He leaned down and kissed me softly on the lips.

“See, that’s what I need,” Rosalyn stated.

“I thought you had this,” Dodge responded. “My boy ain’t being good to you?”

Rosalyn’s eyes widened. “How you know about us?”

“Shit, everybody knows about y’all.”

“Rosco too?”

“Well, everybody but Rosco. You already know he gon’ have something to say about that.”

“I’m surprised you ain’t told him yet.”

“Tryna spare yo’ ugly ass. Know them feelings easy to get hurt,” Dodge teased.

“Hush, nigga. My feelings ain’t easy to get hurt. I’m hard in all aspects of life.”

Dodge grinned. “Says the girl that had a wreck ‘cause a bug flew on her.”

“It was a roach!” Rosalyn shrieked, as we laughed out loud.

“I heard that damn lady walking around with a neck brace on.”

“Stop lyin’!” Rosalyn exclaimed, hitting Dodge on the arm.

“You know I ain’t lyin’.” He laughed, pulling me by the hand. “Come on. I ain’t fooling with these bums.”

“Nigga, you the bum.” Sha laughed.

“His ugly ass,” Rosalyn added with a silly roll of the eyes.

Dodge and I ended up in his bedroom, as I looked around at the décor. It was really nice with colors of indigo blue, gray, and white. “How you have a house of your own and a bedroom in Granny’s house also?”

He shrugged. “I stay here sometimes too. You know that. Granny loves having me around.”

“Oh, I know.” I smiled, sitting down on the bed. “You’re her favorite, I believe.”

“Since D is back, I believe he’s taken my spot.”

“Never,” I said with a shake of the head. “He was just gone for a long time. Now that he’s back, she feels like they’re making up for old times. After all, he’s not such a bad fella once I really found out what happened. We actually get along much better now.”

“I’m glad,” he said, going into the walk-in closet. “So, what are you wearing tonight? Club Truth gon’ be packed with Ari and Jayda Wayda coming through.”

“Truth be bringing out all the *it people* now.”

“They know how to bring in the crowd. Those girls are really popular when it comes to club events. They attract women and niggas.”

“I know,” I said, as Dodge stepped out of the closet holding a Bottega Veneta bag in his hand. A big cheese smile appeared on my face. “Hold the front door!” I shrieked.

He grinned. “I got you something to wear tonight. I don’t care who’s gonna be there. You’ll be the flyest female in that bitch.”

I grabbed the bag, peeking inside it. He grinned with a shake of the head. “Omg!” I let out. I really did mean Omg. That was my way of saying *Oh, my god* without using God’s name in vain. I pulled out a shoe box and opened it. Inside of the box were a pair of platform Bottega Tire boots, the cream and black ones. “I’ve been wanting these.”

“I know. I’m taking you to the store, so you can get the slippers you’ve been dying for.”

“Baaaaby,” I anxiously said. “I can’t wait to show Kinsley these. She’s not the only one that has some Bottegas.”

“Oh, Meech got her a pair too? Nigga didn’t even mention it when I was buying yours.”

“He didn’t get her those.”

Dodge frowned a little. “She bought ‘em herself?”

“Well—um, no,” I responded, trying not to stumble over my words. I tended to do that if I didn’t have my lie thought out.

“Hey, I don’t even wanna know,” Dodge assured me, going in the bag and pulling out a one-piece, all-over-black, fitted jumpsuit by Bebe. It was something I’d pointed out a couple of days ago in the mall but was acting modest like I didn’t want him to buy it. For some reason, I figured he would. I just wasn’t thinking it would be today. “I actually circled back that day and bought it and told the cashier to put it up till I return.”

“You gotta be the best boyfriend on this earth.” I cheesed.

“I know,” he said, leaning in to kiss me again. “Wanna shower?”

“Together?”

“Mm-hm.”

“Hell yeah!” I grinned.

“I got one of your favorite body washes here.”

My eyes lit up. “Stop lyin’! Hol’ up, you either got Unicorn Kisses or Golden Goddess, which one?”

“What if I told you I got both? Pick and choose.” He smiled.

“Look at you, shopping on The Spiritual Tea Company’s website for your girl.”

“Yeah, look at me.” Dodge came out of his shirt and his pants, standing in front of me with nothing but a pair of white Celine boxer briefs.

“Ooooh, those must be new?”

“Mm-hm.” He smiled.

Damn, every time this nigga was in my space, I was turned on. I didn’t care what he had on, but seeing him naked with that third leg hanging did something to me. He had the most handsome face and smile. I couldn’t resist it. Hell, I could see why his DMs had bitches always tryna get at him. Even though I never responded back, I would read ‘em. Felt good knowing that women wanted him, but he was respectfully taken.

“Come here, with yo’ fine self,” I seductively demanded.

“What you want?”

“I just wanna thank you.”

“Oh yeah?” he said, kissing around my neck.

I reached in his boxers at the same time as he slipped off my panties, followed by my skirt. Pulling out his candy cane, I wasted no time guiding it to my most sacred place on earth.

I gasped, as he slowly entered me. “Baby—”

He groaned a little, had to be the sexiest melody ever to my ears. My walls always welcomed him, as my insides gripped his shaft. He slid in and out of me slowly, always taking his time to make sure I was pleased first. Honestly, it took no time sometimes, especially if I was horny. This joker had learned my body well. He knew just where to probe to find my weak spot. I didn’t believe I could cum until he wanted me to. Anytime he felt it coming on, he calmed down, pulled out, or just stopped and sucked my titties to keep me aroused. Then, he’d go back at it.

“Turn over.”

I always loved hearing that. “With pleasure, Zaddy.”

I bent over, face down, ass up, and anxiously squirmed with joy when he slid inside of me. Shit felt amazing. As he was stroking my cookies with intense enjoyment, I could feel myself creaming all over him. It was wet and gushy, definitely driving him crazy. Just as he’d learned my body, I had learned his.

I moaned louder while thinking I was glad that Dodge had sent Granny and her sisters on a mini vacation to Hawaii for Granny’s birthday. His bedroom was closer to hers than any other room in the house. I’m sure she would’ve been eavesdropping, with her nosey tail, and I would’ve been embarrassed to walk out and face her.

My mind zoned in on the moment, and before I knew it— “I’m cummin’!”

“Mm-hmmm,” Dodge groaned, and within seconds of me cummin’, he was too. He pulled it out, slapping me on the ass, followed by a kiss from one butt cheek to the other. “Come on, let’s shower. I have a feeling we got a long night ahead of us.”

I smiled, feeling good that he had put the *wham bam thank you ma’am* on me. Shit, that’s all I needed. As I crawled out of the bed, I thought about what he had said and with a nod, I agreed, “Me too.”

ROMEO "ROSCO" GUNNER

I grabbed the back of Apple's hair and wrapped it in the palm of my hand, as she slurped on my dick like it was a chocolate popsicle. One thing I liked about her, she was just as horny as me. I didn't have time to even fuck another bitch because she wanted to fuck damn near every day. Sometimes, I was tired. Never thought that would happen, but shawty didn't mind taking me down through there and back.

"Ahhh, damn, suck this dick."

"Mm-hmm," she moaned, enjoying every gulp while gagging almost to the point of throwing up.

"Damn, girl," I groaned. She liked when I pressed her head up and down on it. She loved when I talked shit. It turned her on when I spanked her ass. She was everything I wanted when it came to sex, but I was still on the fence when it came to a serious relationship. I couldn't lie; I definitely liked her, but what I noticed over time was that she was getting a little too clingy.

She began licking the tip of my head with her tongue twirling in a circular motion. It was something about that tongue ring that did the trick. Then, she began slurping and gurgling all at once, fast then slow then fast.

"Oh shit," I groaned.

"Damn, she sucking his dick in the car," a bitch said as they walk past my ride. I cracked my eyes to see three girls giggling as one was pointing at us. Damn, I needed to get darker tint.

"Fuck them," Apple said as she paid them no mind and continued to handle her business. I closed my eyes back and made her head go up and

down at a steady beat.

“I’m ‘bout to blow.”

“Come on baby, blow.”

“Ahhh, fuck!” I let out, as Apple swallowed every bit of it. I didn’t even have to clean myself up because she did it for me. She sat up while licking her lips, and then she wiped her mouth.

“That shit taste like pineapples.”

I smiled. “That’s why I keep ‘em on the menu.”

She pulled down the visor to check herself in the mirror. “Damn, it’s packed tonight. I knew Ari and Jayda were going to bring the people out.”

“No different than when they brought Alexis Skyy and her crew last week.”

“I guess those are the *it girls* right now.”

I shrugged. “I guess.”

“So, you ready to go in?”

“Yeah, because everybody else is already in there,” I responded. “Let’s go.” We got out the car and walked to the front of the line. A hundred dollars a head got us right on in.

“I’m glad I’m off tonight. Last week, you had them women all over you, but this week—”

“Yo’ ass is cock-blocking,” I teased, as she playfully hit me on the arm. We headed straight to the VIP section where I spotted Cobra and Meech standing up, looking around. Jeff was over by the bar talking to some female, and Dodge was sitting down sipping his drink next to his lady. Those two were damn near inseparable. Honestly, I loved to see it. I walked up, giving Cobra and Meech dap. We all spoke to each other and then headed for the bottle of Patrón that was sitting in the bucket of ice. On my way to it, I stopped to speak to Dodge and his lady. Apple sat down next to Kiyomi.

“Fix me a drink, babe.”

“A’ight,” I said. Once I’d fixed our drink, I headed over to give Apple hers, but I wasn’t about to sit down. I wanted to mingle and check out all these beautiful ladies that were in the club.

“Where you going?”

“To talk with the fellas.”

“Okay,” she responded.

I walked over and stood by Meech and Cobra. “This bitch is live tonight.”

“Hell yeah,” Cobra agreed.

“Ah shit, I see Vee heading this way,” Meech said as he turned up his drink.

“I see her,” Cobra said, as I grinned under my breath. Them two were a damn trip. On and off repeatedly for years.

“Wassup, fellas,” she spoke, as I nodded my head and sipped from drink. I didn’t wanna look too hard, but Vee had a fat ass back there and looked damn good tonight. Cobra would be crazy if he wasn’t going to hit that.

“Hey, big head. When you got here?” Rosalyn asked, appearing out of nowhere.

“Shit, me and Apple just walked in not long ago.”

“Oh, okay,” she said.

“How long you been here? Have you seen the *it girls* yet?” I asked, but I noticed her body language, and she really wasn’t paying me much attention.

“Aye, how long you been here? Have you seen the *it girls* yet?” I repeated.

“Oh, yeah, I seen ‘em. They’re over there.” She pointed.

“Why you looking at Vee and Cobra like that?”

“Huh?”

“You heard me.”

“I ain’t looking at them. I’m looking past them,” she said, but nah, I saw that look. Before I could question her some more, she walked off. Next thing I knew, I spotted her laughing and brushing her ass up against another nigga. Now, Rosalyn knew I didn’t play that shit. If she wanted to have fun, that was fine, but don’t be doing all that crazy flirtatious shit ‘round me.

“Nigga, so you fuckin’ Tootie?”

Cobra frowned, as I listened carefully. Shit was ‘bout to get real with him and Vee. “Where you hear that lame shit from?”

“Don’t fuckin’ play with me. I got the picture of her coming out your house in my phone,” she said, pulling her cell phone out her purse and showing it to him.

“Girl, don’t play with me. Take that petty shit on somewhere. I came out to have fun, not to be bothered with you and your bullshit. You ain’t my

lady anyway.”

“Yeah, because word on the streets is that Rosalyn is your lady.”

I damn near choked on my drink. Cobra cut his eyes over at me but quickly looked away. I had already seen it. He wasn't fooling nobody, at least not me.

“Girl, gon' with that bullshit.”

“You think you can keep fucking off and I'm gon' stick around? I'm gon' show yo' ass!” Vee exclaimed, as she damn near stomped off.

“Damn, man,” Meech said, as he looked from me then over to Cobra. “You fuckin' Roz?”

“Yeah, you fuckin' my sister?”

“Um—well—we been kicking it,” Cobra hesitantly responded.

“Kicking it, and you didn't think I needed to know that?”

“Well, we're not exactly kicking it no more,” Cobra admitted, as I did everything I could to not punch this nigga in his face. He knew I wouldn't agree to him fucking with my sister, and only because he fucked around with a lot of bitches. I didn't think my sister was ready for a nigga like him. She had to have tough skin, and Roz was far from having tough skin. Plus, I couldn't imagine him fucking her. I couldn't imagine nan nigga and none of my sisters in that way. I'd seen firsthand how Cobra sluted bitches out right in the same room as us. All the wild parties we ever had began to flood my memory. “Rosco, man—”

I held my hand up. In other words, not right now, nigga. I ain't wanna do nothing I'd later regret. Cobra had been down with us for over ten years. He was like a lil' brother to me, so my best bet was to just walk off. I went over and sat next to Dodge, as I continued watching Rosalyn out on the floor showing her ass. I leaned over to holla at Dodge.

“Ain't that your lady's ex that Roz is dancing on?”

Dodge coolly nodded his head. “Yeah.”

“Did she have a lot to drink tonight?”

“Shit, I don't know. I haven't been watching her like that,” he responded.

“Where's Sha?”

“Sha been on the dance floor since she got here. You see her over there?” He pointed.

I looked through the crowd but didn't see her. Apparently, Dodge had that sniper vision. Once his eye was on her, he wasn't gon' lose sight of her.

“What’s going on with Vee and Cobra? Looked like she wasn’t too happy.”

“She trippin’ about him fucking around with some female. But check this, then she blurted out that he and Roz were fucking around. To be exact, she called Roz his lady.”

Dodge glanced over at me, scratching his head. “That’s what she said?”

“Hell yeah.”

“How you feel about that?”

“How would you feel if Cobra was messing around with Sha?”

Dodge sipped from his drink. “Aye cuz, I don’t wanna think about nothing like that.”

“I figured you’d say that.”

“Well, ask your lady if Roz knows about her ex.”

Dodge leaned over, wasting no time asking. He then leaned back my way. “She said she mentioned him, but she never elaborated about their relationship, nor did she ever show Roz who he was.”

“Well, I think she need to let it be known because they all over each other.”

“Aye man, quit watching yo’ sister and go dance with Apple or something—where the fuck did Keisha and Kay come from?”

“Ah shit, I hope they be on their best behavior.”

“Somehow, I doubt it.”

“Now you know damn well they weren’t about to miss this party,” Apple cut in. Her ass must’ve been ear hustling.

“Long as they keep their distance,” Dodge said, just as Keisha made her way to our VIP section. “Ah, damn.” Instantly she started dancing on Jeff, twerking and all. Jeff was trying to respectfully push her back, but she kept bending that ass over, doing the most.

Dodge sat shaking his head. “She do the fucking most.”

“Definitely do,” Kiyomi chimed in.

“Ain’t she pregnant?” I asked.

“Like she give a damn,” Apple said. “She must be carrying it in her butt because that stomach still flat.”

“Or she lyin’ as usual,” Dodge slid in. Just as he said that, Keisha walked over to us. She put her foot up on the sofa right between Dodge’s legs.

“Tie my shoe,” she bluntly told him. She was wearing a pair of heels that were strung up her legs, but after all that crazy dancing, one of the

strings had come loose.

Dodge stared at her with a blank expression. It was obvious he could give two fucks about her or her shoes. Kiyomi shook her head with a roll of the eyes. “This bitch,” she said as Apple chimed in.

“Wow, girl, are serious? Come here. I’ll tie the damn shoe.”

Keisha grinned. “Okay, girl.” She moved her foot, heading over to Apple. “Baby daddy can’t even tie my shoe. Guess that’s because he’s ‘round his lil’ girlfriend. Niggas act different ‘round their bitches.”

“Girl, stop being so messy,” Apple told her while tying her shoe.

“I’m doing everything I can not to snatch this bitch and drag her ass,” Kiyomi uttered.

“Just chill, bae. Let her have her fun,” Dodge said, grabbing her by the hand. “Come on, let’s walk around and possibly even hit the dance floor.”

“Oh, really?” She blushed. She and Dodge got up and headed out of the VIP section, leaving Keisha standing there looking like a desperate fool for attention.

“You know you shouldn’t have done that,” I told her.

She grinned. “I do what I wanna do when it comes to Dodge. I don’t care about his bitch. She hasn’t gone through the mud with that nigga.”

“I think you only make shit worse by acting the way you do. Right now ain’t the time to be over here shaking yo’ ass on his home boy. What you be thinking ‘bout, girl?” Apple asked.

Keisha looked at us like something in the air was stank. “Y’all have a good night,” she said and walked off.

Apple laughed. “That woman is psycho.”

I laughed. “You are right about that. Dodge really wanted to slap her foot out his face. She lucky she’s pregnant.”

“I know. I saw the way he was looking at her. Listen, Yomi is definitely working on herself, because pregnant or not, she would’ve put them hands on her ass.”

“I’m glad she didn’t. They don’t need to be fighting.” I couldn’t get those words out fast enough, because a fight broke out. “What the hell?!”

“We can never go out without the bullshit,” Apple said, as we quickly stood up to head out. It was definitely time to go. “Damn, I hope it ain’t Yomi.”

The second that came out of her mouth, I saw Dodge scooping up Roz, as Cobra was tussling with Vee trying to stop her from fighting. Shit pissed

me all the way off. Roz wasn't a fighter. She was known as the silly one out the bunch that would be quick to cry just by looking at a commercial of mistreated animals. I knew she didn't start that fight. That was for sure. So, as I'm making my way through the disheveled crowd, Sha came out of nowhere and punched Vee so hard in the face. At that time, it was on. Sha and Vee went at it. Jeff was able to pry Sha off Vee because somehow they ended up on the floor with Sha on top, but Vee was like a wild bull still trying to fight until Cobra snatched her ass up. I mean, really manhandled her to hold her back. Jeff carried Sha out the club with me and Apple right behind them.

Once in the parking lot, it was straight mayhem of people trying to leave at the same time, but somehow my people all ended up by Dodge and Meech's car. I needed to check on my sister. She was in the front seat of Dodge's car crying. I could tell she was more upset than anything.

"She put her hands on me."

"And that's why I put my muthafuckin' hands on her," Sha angrily stated, still looking around the chaotic crowd. She wanted all the smoke.

"Sis, chill out," Dodge told her.

"If I see that bitch, it's on."

"No, you need to get in the car," Dodge insisted in a stern tone. "I don't wanna have to knock a bitch out tonight about y'all."

"Right, because if Vee brings her ass over here, I'm laying her ass out," I said with anger in my eyes. Just then, I saw Meech and Cobra making their way over to us. The second Cobra walked over—

"How's Roz?"

I punched that nigga right in his shit. Quickly, Dodge and Meech got between us, but I wanted all the smoke. This nigga had some fucking nerves getting my sister caught up in his sleezy ass entanglements.

"Babe, take them home," Dodge said, handing Kiyomi his keys. "Y'all gon' and leave." He kissed her and made sure everybody in the car was good before she pulled off.

As they left the parking lot, I looked over at Cobra. "This shit ain't over, nigga."

KIYOMI SIMMONS

“Last night was a shit show,” I said to Kinsley as she flipped through the TV looking for something to watch.

“Girl, do tell,” she nosily said.

“First off, I gotta tell you about that damn Keisha.”

“Oh hell. Please don’t tell me you had to beat her pregnant ass.”

“No, but I was this fucking close,” I said, holding up my hand with just a smidge of space between my thumb and my index finger. “That hoe be really trying my gangster,” I expressed as Kinsley laughed. “The shit she do for Dodge’s attention or to get a reaction out of him is un-fuckin’-believable.”

“I already know.”

“So, anyway, check this crazy shit out. Roz caught some chick named Tootie, which happens to be Kay’s best friend, coming out of Cobra’s crib. She snapped a picture of the chick walking out and sent it to him to let his ass know she was on to him.”

“Say what?”

“Yes, she took a picture of the chick and not only sent it to him but also got the other female’s number who he’s fucking with and sent it to her too.”

“Who is the other female?”

“Hendrix’s sister,” I responded. “Her name is Vee.”

“Hol’ up. So, you telling me that Keisha and Kay’s best friends are fucking Cobra, Meech and Dodge’s homey? What kind of weird, keep it in the circle, crazy shit is that?”

“I have no clue, but they are definitely fucking him. Unfortunately, Roz is now in the center of this fiasco. So, at the club last night, Vee had the nerves to sucker punch Roz in the back of her head. They started fighting, but honestly, Dodge and I were close by, so the fight didn’t really go far. However, Sha saw what happened and ran over and punched Vee’s ass right in the face. They went at it.”

“At the club, sus?”

“Hell yeah, at the club with the *it girls* there.”

“Damn, I hate I missed that shit. But then again, I’m glad I did. You ain’t get in no shit, did you?”

“None, I was on my best behavior.”

“Good girl.”

“Anyway, I ended up dropping Sha off at home and Roz decided she wasn’t ready to go home, so she rode back with me and stayed the night here.”

“Roz is here?”

“Yeah, she’s still sleeping in my room. I felt so bad for her because clearly she’s not a fighter. I wanted to beat that bitch’s ass for her, but Sha handled it. I didn’t even need to jump in it.”

“That’s good for her ass.”

“So, what was in that letter yesterday?”

“None of your business.” Kinsley smirked.

“Does that mean you’re keeping the baby?”

“Doesn’t mean nothing right now. I’m just conflicted, especially not knowing.”

“Trust me, I get that part.”

“Good morning, my favorite people,” Mama said as she entered the living room.

“Hey, Mama.”

“Good morning, Auntie.”

“Sammy is here.”

“I was just about to ask you if he had stayed the night. I didn’t see a car outside.”

She smiled. “I picked him up from work. His car is in the shop.”

“Oh, ok. I can’t wait to meet him,” I expressed.

“He’s cooking us breakfast,” she said with an elated smile.

“Breakfast?” Kinsley asked.

“Yes, he’s a really good cook.”

I smiled. “That’s wassup.”

“Good morning, ladies.”

My eyes widened as the infamous Sammy joined us in the living room. He was certainly a handsome man. “Good morning.” I smiled.

“Hey, baby,” Mama said, smooching him softly on the lips.

Baby? Oh, she in love, love.

“This is Kiyomi, my daughter, and Kinsley, my niece.”

“Hey, Mr. Sammy. We finally get to meet you,” Kinsley said.

“Yes, finally. It’s nice to meet the both of you, too. I’ve heard so much about y’all.” He smiled.

“I hope it was good,” Kinsley chimed in, cutting her eyes at Mama.

“Of course,” he responded. “Are you gonna help me in the kitchen?”

“Yep,” Mama replied.

“I know y’all wanna know all about me. So, y’all can interrogate me at the table over breakfast. Sounds good?”

“Perfect,” Kinsley responded.

“Sounds good,” I chimed in.

The minute he headed into the kitchen, Mama looked at us with the thumbs up. “What y’all think?” she whispered.

“He is cuuuute,” I responded.

“Yeah, Auntie, what she said. He seems nice, especially cooking us breakfast. That’s sweet of him.”

“Same thing I was thinking. Yeah, you may have found you one.”

Mama smiled. “I know. I’m so happy.”

“We’re happy for you.” I smiled, as she headed in the kitchen. “Stella’s got her groove back.”

“I know right.” Kinsley cheesed. “At least somebody ‘round here got their shit together.”

I frowned. “Oh, bitch, I’m not in the boat with you. I finally got my shit together.”

“Oh, yeah. You do.” Kinsley grinned, as my cell began to ring. I looked at the display screen. Not knowing the number, I usually wouldn’t have answered, but for some reason, I did.

“Hello.”

“Hey, Ki.”

My heart dropped, but I quickly picked it back up. “Loyal, or shall I say, Disloyal.” I looked over at Kinsley as she rolled her eyes.

“Hang up in his face,” she whispered.

“You still on that disloyal shit? I figured we would’ve gotten past that already.”

“Who is we? Because I’m still on that.”

“I’ve missed you.”

“You can miss me with the bullshit. Whose number is this anyway?”

“Mine. I got my number changed just so I could call you.”

I rolled my eyes. “Didn’t my man tell you to stay away from me? Apparently you haven’t learned your lesson.”

“You wanna go there? Your man sucker punched me, and I could’ve handled that at the club last night, but hey—if I was him, I would’ve done the same thing. I overstepped, so I’ll take that. But the next time he put his hands on me, he gon’ wish he wouldn’t have.”

“Oh, stop it, Disloyal.” I wanted to tell him he’d gotten knocked the fuck out, but since he took that lick like a champ, I’d let him keep the remainder of his pride. “Speaking of last night at the club. You do realize the girl that you were groping and dancing with is my best friend.”

“You got a best friend? Since when?”

I rolled my eyes. “Since I started school.”

“Ki, you’ve never gotten along with girls, at least nobody but Kinsley.”

“I do get along with girls, just not the bitches that had a thing for you.”

“So, does your best friend know that she was dancing on your ex?”

“No, because I’ve never talked about you like that,” I sassed, like I could give two fucks about his ass.

“You plan on telling her?”

“No, because I’m asking you to back off.”

“How you know we’ll even see each other again?”

“I’m just saying, Disloyal. Don’t make me hate you no more than I already do.”

“Come on, Ki. I know you don’t hate me. That’s a strong ass word.”

“You’re right. I don’t hate you. I just don’t like your ass. What happened to your lil’ bald-headed ass girlfriend, anyway? The way you was hunching on my best friend was giving single vibes.”

“I believe you were jealous, Ki,” he responded, overlooking my initial question about the bald-headed ass girlfriend.

“Boy, bye. Never jealous. I know you saw me with my man. I’m happy, baby.”

“Yeah right, that nigga can’t love you like I do. When that lil’ relationship over, you’ll be back.”

I laughed. “You’re so full of yourself. Sorry, that definitely won’t be happening.”

“So, you’re telling me to move on?”

“Nigga, where have you been these past few months? I been told you to move on. Hell, I thought you had moved on first. Either way, it’s over between us.”

“Okay, so you shouldn’t mind me talking to your best friend then. After all, she did give me her number last night before she walked off.”

My eyes stretched open. “What?”

“You heard me. She gave me her number. I had walked off right before she got in that altercation. I saw your boyfriend carrying her out the club. So, he’s just captain save everybody that’s close to you, huh?”

“That’s his first cousin, asshole.”

“Ohhhh, it is?”

“Yeah, so leave her alone.”

“If you’re over me you wouldn’t care what I’m doing or who I’m seeing, best friend or not.”

“And if you ever loved me, you’d leave her alone.”

“What’s love got to do with it? Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?”

“Okay, Tina,” I irritably said. “You got all the jokes.”

“I’m serious. If you’re so over me then leave me be to do whatever I choose to do. If you wanna tell her about me, go ahead. But that just means you’re a hater and you really don’t mean it’s over.”

“Whatever, Loyal,” I huffed. “I don’t have time for this. Have a raggedy ass day, sir.” He laughed, as I ended the call in his face. Fuck him.

“Sus, so Loyal and—”

“Good morning, y’all,” Rosalyn said.

“Hey, Roz,” Kinsley spoke. “How’d you sleep?”

“Like a baby. Girl, your bed is soft and comfy.”

“I know, that’s why I can’t get out of it sometimes.”

“It smells good. Your mama cooking breakfast?”

“Her boyfriend.” I smiled. “Honey, Stella got her groove back.”

Rosalyn laughed. "That's good."

We talked about the crazy shit that had happened at club, clowned around a little, and within about thirty minutes, Mama called us in the kitchen to eat. Kinsley got up, I followed her, and Roz was right behind me. I didn't know what Sammy was cooking, but it sure as hell smelled good. As I sat down at the table, Sammy turned to greet us.

"Daddy?" Rosalyn said with surprised eyes. "What are you doing here?"



It was later in the day, and I'd made it over to Dodge's house just trying to get out of my house for a breather. Chaos had erupted during breakfast, and it had yet to settle down, and that was only because Mama wasn't sure if she was being played or not.

"Babe, so Unc is dating your mama?"

"Yezz! He is dating my mama and mama's in love with this man. I was so shocked when Roz called him daddy. Hell, Mama almost choked on her coffee."

"So, what happened after that?"

"Roz took off outside and he went after her. He came back in and apologized but said that he was taking Roz home, so they could talk. Not long ago is when she called to tell me that her parents were in the midst of getting a divorce."

"Wow, they kept that under wraps. We didn't even know they were having issues, let alone a divorce."

"I know right. Roz brags on her daddy all the time. He takes care of home like a real man should and he makes sure that all his children are good."

"Yeah, that's Unc. A stand-up guy. I mean, but damn, it's a small ass world. Every-fucking-body know somebody that knows somebody. Who would've ever guessed that he and your mama would've been an item?"

"You got that right." I nodded. "So, wassup with Cobra and Rosco?"

"They're pissed with each other right now, but they'll get over it. We're boyz for a reason. We all fall out and make back up. It'll be no different this time. Even though punches were thrown, Cobra knew he was wrong. He'll

be the bigger guy and apologize. I'll have a talk with him tomorrow because right now, I'm preoccupied," he said, looking me over with his seductive, luring brown eyes.

"Yes, you are." I blushed. "So, but about Keisha," I said, definitely not wanting to let that slide.

"Yeah, I know. She always do the most. I wanted to shove her ass out my face last night, talkin' 'bout tie her damn shoe. The fuck she mean tie her shoe?"

"I was mind blown by that lil' stunt. She really has the biggest balls on this planet. It was just the audacity of it all for me."

"I know right. I couldn't believe it."

"You're gonna have to really have a good talk with her before that baby comes, especially if it's yours."

"It's not."

"Either way, for one, she's not running me off. I don't care what she tries to pull. For two, unless she wanna keep getting her ass beat, she better start playing nicely."

"I'll talk with her."

"It might not do any good, but I'll feel better knowing you tried." Dodge leaned over and kissed me on the head.

"You are the best girlfriend a guy could ask for."

I smiled. "I know." As he kissed on me, I began to unbuckle his pants. After the day I'd had, all I wanted was a lil' sex to ease my nerves. But the minute I came out my shirt, his doorbell rang. "Who is that?"

"Probably one of the guys. Could even be Dameon."

"He's back in town?"

"Uh," he said, getting up, "he wasn't as of last night, but who knows."

I sat on the sofa feeling a lil' irritated. This had better be good, or their asses were getting kicked the hell out. I had to make sweet love with my man. As I grabbed the remote to find something to watch, I heard, "Keisha what the fuck are you doing here?"

"Dodge," she said as I looked up. The bitch pushed him to the side and walked straight in the house. I shot her ass the stank face the minute we locked eyes. "I should've known. You got company."

"Yeah, and it's not you. So, you need to get fuck on."

"She needs to get the fuck on," Keisha spat. "We need to talk."

"We ain't got shit to talk about. What's yo' fucking problem?"

“I’m not leaving and I’m not talking around this bitch, so you make up yo’ mind as to what you wanna do.”

“Listen, bitch, you don’t bring your lil’ funky ass in here calling the shots,” I said, now standing to my feet.

“Bae—”

“No,” I responded, holding my hand up in Dodge’s face. “I don’t know what the fuck you think you’re doing, but this ain’t it, baby girl. You look stupid.”

“Bitch, how the fuck I look stupid and I’m here to talk to my child’s father?”

I grinned. “Your child ain’t even here, dumb ass.”

“Hey, y’all chill out. This ain’t even necessary because Keisha, you’re leaving,” he said, grabbing her ass aggressively by the arm. “Don’t come back here uninvited.”

“Turn me loose,” she yelled, swinging on him. Dodge swiftly moved to avoid getting hit, just as Keisha screamed out in pain. She grabbed her stomach. My eyes widened.

“What the fuck is going on?” I asked, as Keisha went down on her knees. I knew she was hurting because of the look on her face. Without saying a word, Dodge scooped her up in his arms.

“I’m taking her to the hospital. Come on, bae.”

“Um—uh, nooo,” I expressed. “I’m not going to no hospital with her. You go. I’ll be here when you get back.”

“You sure?”

“Yes, go!” I said, as Keisha groaned out in pain.

“Okay, I’ll be back,” he said, rushing out the front door. I sat staring at the door with a blank expression. I don’t know what the hell had just happened, but this shit was un-fuckin’-real. What the fuck?! Yet again, Keisha was having her way. I didn’t know if it was intentional or this bitch was really about to lose her baby, but damn, would we ever really be able to get this bitch out of our lives?

It was the end of November and I’d already endured way too much as is. I sure as hell hoped that the next year was a lot better to me, because I didn’t know how much more of this foolishness I could take. New Year me, please. Damn!

KINSLEY SIMMONS

I woke up to hearing the doorbell ringing. I looked over at my alarm clock. It was ten o'clock in the morning. No telling who that was. Sitting up on the side of the bed, I rubbed my stomach. Even though I was still in pickle about who the father was, I'd decided to keep my baby. It was now Valentine's Day, and I was just a couple of weeks shy of being four months pregnant. Nobody knew but Yomi. I wanted to tell Apple being that she was the only best friend I had, but I couldn't trust that she wouldn't tell Rosco. After all, she was so stuck up his ass now, it wasn't funny. Plus, I didn't need nobody telling Meech shit because that was my job, and I'd planned on doing that today before I started showing good. My stomach was already starting to show, but it looked like I was just bloated. At least, that's what I told Auntie.

"Wake up."

"Speaking of the devil," I said. "Can't you—"

"No, the fuck. I'm not knocking," Auntie sassed before I could even get out.

I grinned. "I'm gonna start locking my door. That'll stop you."

"There has always been a no-lock policy in my home. So, if you're playing in ya lil' coochie and you want some privacy, go in the bathroom where you can lock the door. Or do it under your covers, but you ain't locking your room door, missy."

"Yea, yea," I said, as I finally looked over at her. She was holding a vase of lavender roses. My favorite color.

"These are for you." She smiled.

“For me? For little ol’ me?” I teased with a smile. As I stood up, she walked over handing me the vase holding at least two dozen of roses.

“Somebody loves you.”

The first guy I thought about was Gianni, especially since he’d gotten me the lavender teddy bear. “Oh my gosh!” I excitedly said.

“Open the card, and yes, I’m being nosey.”

I cut my eyes at her. “Definitely being nosey,” I joked, as I opened the card.

Happy Valentine’s Day, Beautiful.

I frowned, looking over at Auntie.

“That’s it?” she asked. “No name? It doesn’t say who they’re from?”

I curiously shook my head. “Nope, that’s it.”

“You know who they’re from?”

I shrugged.

“Meech, girl. Just because y’all aren’t in a relationship doesn’t mean that he wasn’t thinking about you today.”

“I guess,” I said, sitting the vase of beautiful roses down and then opening my closet to find something to put on.

“What’s wrong with you? You’ve been acting really strange lately. Always sleeping, just wanting to stay to yourself—it’s not really a bad mood, just an expressionless type of mood. I can’t read you, Kin, and normally I’m able to read your ass,” she acknowledged.

“Mm-hm.”

“Turn around.”

“For what, Auntie?”

“Turn around, so I can see you.”

Oh boy, I knew where this was going. “Okay, what now?” I asked, as she eyed me down.

“I see.”

“See what?” I asked in a high-pitched tone.

“I see you’re depressed.”

I exhaled with a sigh of relief. “Yes, I’ve been a lil’ depressed. You know how it is with me. I just sometimes wanna be by myself, you know to sort things out in my head—”

“Girl, hush, your ass is pregnant.”

My eyes spread wide open. “What?!”

“Don’t what me. I been knew, I was just waiting for you to say something, or at least tell me without me asking you.”

“Auntie—”

“Auntie my ass. I’m disappointed in you, Kin. You could’ve come to me with this. You know I love you.”

“I know. I just didn’t know if I wanted to keep the baby, and I knew how you were about abortions.”

“I don’t believe in ‘em, but I would’ve still wanted what was best for you. So, how far along are you?”

“I’m three months, almost four.”

“So, it’s Meech’s baby? Is that why you broke up with that man? I know better.”

“No, actually it’s not. I didn’t know I was pregnant until way after the break-up.”

“Oh, okay. So, does he know?”

“No.”

“When do you plan on telling him?”

“Today,” I told her. “I think it’s time, especially before I get too far along.”

“I agree.”

“So, about that though. I don’t know if this baby is Meech’s.”

Her eyes stretched. “Kin—”

“I know, Auntie.”

“So, who is this other guy? And it better only be one other guy.”

“It is just only one other guy,” I admitted.

“So, have you told him?”

“Uh—I don’t exactly know where he’s at.”

Auntie frowned. “That’s strange. Was this just a one-night stand Kin?”

“Yeah—but not exactly—um, yeah—” I shrugged. “Kinda.”

“Well, damn. Do you know him? You at least know him, right?”

“Kinda.” I shrugged again.

“My goodness. This is too much,” she uttered with a shake of the head. “Well, I think that both men should know, and you need to get on that ASAP.”

“Yes ma’am. I agree.” I nodded. But how the hell would I tell Gianni? He was like a thief in the night that stole a taste of my pussy and then

hauled ass. Well, not exactly, but yeah—kinda. “What are your plans today? I know Sammy is coming through.”

She smiled. “We’re actually going out of town this weekend. I don’t know where he’s taking me yet. It’s a surprise.”

“Aww, that’s sweet. I’m so glad things worked out for y’all.”

“Me too. We have a lot to celebrate. His divorce was finalized on yesterday. I couldn’t be happier because I be damn if at this age I was cutting myself short when it came to bedding another man.”

“That’s right, Auntie. Know your worth, girl.”

“Anyway,” she said, giving me a hug and kissing me softly on the cheek. “I’m here if you need me, and I’m glad you decided to keep the baby.”

“Me too, but you do know that I’m eventually moving out. I really need my own space now.”

She smiled. “I saw that coming too and I wholeheartedly support you.”

“Thanks, Auntie.”

“Always, baby.” She smiled back and then she left out. As I found an outfit to wear, I realized I had a lot on my plate for the day. First things first, I had to talk to Meech about this baby. I didn’t know how he’d take the news, but I was certainly about to find out within the next hour or two.



“So, do you want something to drink?” Meech asked.

“Uh—nah. I’m good,” I responded, sitting down on the sectional, just ready to get this shit over with.

“Well, let me fix me a drink. I have a feeling I’m gonna need it.”

“Go ahead, but this is only going to take a second,” I told him.

“The last time you wanted to talk, we ended our relationship.”

“Not exactly, we’re still cool with each other.”

“Yeah, but not that cool,” he said, as he poured himself a glass of Remy 1738. He didn’t even add any chaser, just ice. “You stopped sleeping with me, so that’s why I said we’re not that cool.”

“Yeah, but why would I continue to sleep with a man that’s clearly fucking multiple women?”

“I only fuck with other bitches because you won’t give me none.”

I grinned. “Typical thing a nigga would say.”

He sipped from his drink. “So, clearly you’re not here with good news.”

“That depends.”

“Oh yeah? Well, let me drink some more. You know if you are here because you wanna get back together, I’d drop all dem hoes for you.”

I grinned. “You’re cute. I mean, really, really cute,” I teased but was dead serious. The nigga was fine as hell and hella handsome. “But um—no!”

He laughed. “I figured that.”

“How long were we together?”

He shrugged. “Maybe like four months.”

“Four whole months, huh? Longest relationship I’ve ever been in.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah, I’m sure it’s me, but relationships don’t seem to work out for me.”

“It’s definitely you. I feel like we had a good thang. I had fallen—”

“Stop it,” I intervened. I wasn’t trying to hear that, not right now. My feelings for Meech were all over the place. I definitely cared for him, but love was such a strong word, especially when I felt like my heart belonged to another. I knew that sounded crazy and definitely to the people on the outside looking in, but I promise I’d never felt such a strong connection in my life until I met Gianni.

“You’re so cold, Kinsley. I really thought we had something special. I was ready to go to war just to get you back, but it didn’t dawn on me until after you were back that you didn’t want me like that no more. Yeah, we had sex, but it wasn’t like before. It was different, and ever since then you’ve not let me touch you like that again. So, wassup?”

I frowned. “What you mean?”

“I mean, I know about the time when I came out to the cabin that day and you saw me. You could’ve come out at any given time, yet you didn’t. You risked your life to stay, but why?”

I sat in silence with a blank stare. Who the fuck told him that? The only people I told were Yomi and—fuck! That damn talking ass Apple.

“Matter of fact, just tell me why you’re here. Is there something you need? Whatever you gotta say, just say it so I can be on with my day.” Meech started off cool, but once revealing that lil’ bit of information, his whole attitude changed.

“Meech, it really wasn’t like that. You have no idea what being in that cabin did for my mental. This may sound crazy, but being there helped me with a lot of shit I’d been dealing with.”

“Mm-hm.”

“Don’t act like this.”

“Act like what, Kinsley? You’ve definitely shown me a side of you that I didn’t know. I get you had issues growing up, but I could’ve been there for you had you let me in.”

“That wasn’t your job.”

“Apparently—”

“I’m pregnant,” I blurted out.

He frowned. “You’re what? Say that again.”

“I said, I’m pregnant. I’m three and half months pregnant.”

Silence sat in for about a minute, as Meech looked at me with a blank stare. It was like he didn’t know what to say or think. “You’re pregnant?” he pondered.

“Yes,” I responded. “That’s why I’m here. I thought you should know.”

“Oh wow, you’re pregnant. You’re having a baby,” he repeated, but this time with a bit more cheer in his tone.

“Um—I um—need to tell you more.”

He frowned, while staring at me. “Tell me more?” With a slight sarcastic grin, as if he could read my fucking mind, he asked. “Is it mine?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know.”

The look in his eyes was mixed with anger and sadness. An instant glossy effect covered his pupils, like he wanted to cry but there was no way he was letting me see that happen. “Is it his?”

“Whose?”

“Don’t play with me, Kinsley. Is the baby Gianni’s?”

I shrugged. This nigga knew more than he let on. “I don’t know.”

He nodded his head with a disappointed expression covering his whole face. “I think it’s time for you to go.”

“Okay,” I responded, as I got up. He was pissed, and I didn’t want to say anything else to add to that.

“Oh, happy fucking Valentine’s Day. I hope you liked your roses.”

I glanced back over my shoulder, now with tears in my eyes. I had hurt him, and I knew it. Feeling bad as fuck, I replied, “I did. Thank you.”

After that I walked out. I knew we'd see each other again. Hell, we had no choice because I needed to know if he was the father of my baby. If so, I hoped we could co-parent cordially. But if not, I guess I'd be parenting alone, and that gave me even more shit to think about. Either way, this wasn't going to be a fairytale of an ending. Whoever had said that dreams come true, had to be still dreaming, because right now, this wasn't it. The only thing I could hope for was that things got better, and life would eventually give me a break. However, I wasn't holding my breath for it though. That was for certain.

Once back in the car, I started the engine to Aretha Franklin, "It Hurts Like Hell," playing on the radio. I opened my glove box and pulled out the letter that Gianni had sent me a couple of months back. I just wanted to read it. It always made me feel closer to him.

Hey, Sunshine. I hope this message reaches you in good spirits and in great health. I'm writing this letter to let you know how sorry I am that things started and ended the way it did for us. Had it not started the way it did, I wouldn't have ever met you. Had it not ended the way it did, I wouldn't have ever had to let you go.

The night we shared was special and I'll always cherish it. I hope you will too. I felt something with you that I've never felt with another. You brought out something in me that I never knew existed. I felt something real, and I can't say if I'll ever have that feeling again. I've been holding on to this bear because it was my way of holding on to you, but I knew it was time to let go. I hope it brings you just as much peace as it has brought me.

I appreciate the chats we had, and the things we shared. I know you talked trash about having Bottega Veneta slippers over the LVs I'd gotten you, so I thought I'd make your day. I hope every time you wear them you think of me. If only my life wasn't so difficult, I'd have you in it. But being that it is, I want you to live yours to the fullest and if ever we cross paths again, I'm going to take that as a sign to lock you in.

Always, Gianni

DODGE GAMBLE

I walked out of the bathroom with a gray towel wrapped around my waist. I had just taken a long, hot shower and was ready to get the day started. As I entered my bedroom, I was greeted by the most beautiful smile that ever graced a woman.

“Wassup, sexy?” Kiyomi smiled.

“Hey, Yum-Yum.” I smiled back. Yum-Yum was what I’d started calling her. I mean, what can I say? It just fit everything about her like a glove.

“I always like the way you say that.”

“You do?” I asked, smooching her on the lips.

“You know I do,” she answered, as I walked into the closet to find something to wear. As I looked through the clothes that were hanging up, I thought about my lady and all the crazy shit that had been going on. I knew I’d have to address it sooner than later, because I knew a part of her was definitely bothered by it.

“So, wassup with you and Roz now? Have y’all talked about what’s going on? It’s been a couple of months now, and I really think the talk is needed.”

“Well, Roz hasn’t really been the talkative type, as of lately. She’s holding this childish grudge against me because her father is seeing my mama. I have told her more than once that I have nothing to do with that. Unfortunately, she’s not trying to hear it. I even went by the shop to get my hair done, and well—Sha was trying to get us to talk, and Roz blew me off. I’m not kissing ass.”

“Well, you shouldn’t. It’s not your fault at all, babe. Roz is going through some things. Not only has she been playing a fool for Cobra, but she’s going through a hard time. I’ve never understood how parents divorcing could have such a devastating effect on kids, let alone adults, but I guess it does. I’ve never experienced it because my mom or dad weren’t really around, so I can’t say how it should or shouldn’t make people feel. I just figured it’s something people go through and get over.”

“I know right, and I feel bad for her.”

“As a good friend should, but don’t let it bother you too much. Roz is just a sensitive person. She’s always been that way. She wears her feelings on her sleeves. Everybody knows when it’s something wrong with her.”

“So, you do know she’s taken up time with Loyal now, right?”

“She’s what?”

“Yeah, her and Loyal have been talking more and more as of lately. Sha told me about it. Sha thinks it’s a means of getting over Cobra. However, I think it’s a means of getting under my skin.”

“Could be both, but he’s a real pussy to even play that game with her, knowing y’all are close with each other.”

“Maybe he doesn’t know.”

I stepped out the closet fully dressed, as I grabbed my shoes. “Maybe he doesn’t know what?”

“That she’s playing games to get under my skin.”

“Because if anything, he’s the one playing games to get back at you, wouldn’t you think?”

She nodded. “You’re right. I’m sure he is.”

“For that matter, they could both be doing this to get back at you. I think it’s petty and I’ll have a talk with Roz about that. She should know better.”

“You don’t have to say nothing to her. She’s grown. If that’s how she wants to play, then that’s on her. I just hope she don’t fall under Loyal’s spell, because he’s only going to hurt her.”

“Well, she’s gonna learn the hard way, I guess.” I shrugged while putting on my shoes.

“When I pulled up I saw Rosco and Cobra outside talking and laughing. They were smoking a blunt too. I’m glad to see that.”

“Yeah, it took Rosco a minute to get over the slick shit Cobra was doing behind his back with Roz. But even he had to realize that his sister is

fucking. He's done everything he could to protect her, now he has to step back and let her live."

"Well, that's good," she said, walking over and standing between my legs. I grabbed her fat ass. "You know this mine, right?"

"Oh, it's definitely yours." She blushed. "All yours."

I kissed her. "Damn right."

"So, Keisha's having the baby some time tomorrow?"

"Yeah, they're giving her a c-section."

"How do you feel about going over there to talk to her?"

I shrugged. "I don't know, but it needs to be done. I hadn't really talked to Keisha since that day I rushed her to the hospital. When I was told that nothing was wrong with her, I felt stupid once again. She had managed to play me like a fool with all that dramafied shit like she was in so much pain."

"Hell, she played us both. I thought the crazy bitch was losing the baby."

I laughed. "She's a real good actress. She should've taken on movie roles instead of doing hair."

Kiyomi grinned. "I agree."

"I really just want her to know that once I find out the baby ain't mine, to please just leave us alone. Our relationship been ran its course. Things were never the same after we lost our first child. That baby I do know was mine. After that, Keisha became totally unpredictable in everything she did. Even though she was already coo-coo, she took that shit to another level."

"I ain't never seen nothing like it before in my life. I hope she takes heed to what you're saying, because I'm gonna karate chop that hoe if she tries me again."

I laughed. "I'm hoping the baby gives her a new lease on life. Maybe she'll act more like a lady."

"I hope so."

"So, how's Kinsley? How far along is she now?"

"She's six months, going on seven. I can't believe how big she's gotten."

"I know. When I saw her last week I was shocked. It's like she grew overnight."

"I know right. How's Meech? I know they aren't exactly on speaking terms right now."

“I think that’s on Kinsley though. Meech still loves her; he won’t admit it, but he do. He’s gotten over her and Gianni sleeping together, but I don’t know how he’ll feel if that baby ain’t his. He acts like he’ll be cool either way, but I know better. He’ll be hurt.”

“I’m sure,” Kiyomi uttered. “I hope it works out for them.”

“Has Kinsley heard from Gianni?”

“No, nothing.”

“I wouldn’t know how to get in touch with them, even if I wanted to. Once our dealings were over and the truth came out, the numbers we called weren’t active no more.”

“I know.”

“The Torres family is like no other. She might wanna thank her lucky stars that she’s not a part of it.”

“That’s the same thing I’ve been trying to tell her. She needs to just let it go.”

“Hopefully, she’ll get the picture and move on with her life,” I said. “Well, I need to get out of here. My first stop is Keisha’s then I’ll be heading over to Granny’s. Dameon is home and Granny’s cooking a big ass dinner for all of us.”

“Yeah, I know. Sha invited me.”

“How she invited you somewhere without giving me a chance to?” I teased.

“You should’ve been a lil’ quicker than her. You know that’s my girl.” She laughed. “But I don’t know if I’m coming. With Roz acting out, I don’t wanna have to front like everything is cool between us when clearly it’s not.”

“Now, I know I need to talk with her. You can’t stop coming to my family events just because you and Roz aren’t on the same page.”

“I know, but I’ll probably sit this one out.”

“A’ight, well stay here till I get back.”

“I’m not staying here by myself. You just call me when you get back.”

I nodded. “A’ight,” I responded, kissing her on the lips. “You walking out with me or you locking up?”

“I’m walking out with you,” she replied. Once outside, I smacked her on the ass again, and then opened her car door for her to get in. “Love you.”

“Love you too,” I said back with a smile.

“Y’all boys ready?” I asked Cobra and Rosco.

“Yeah, we ridin’ together. You can go ‘head and handle your business. We’ll see you at Granny’s when you get there,” Rosco said.

I got in my car and headed over to Keisha’s house. We hadn’t been talking period. No lie, it kinda scared me that she’d been so quiet. No post on social media talking shit. She wasn’t even posting her clients’ hairstyles that she’d been doing. Everything going on with her wasn’t of the norm. I didn’t know what to think. Even when I called to tell her that I was stopping by, she was cool, calm, and collected. I hope I wasn’t walking into a bear trap. Fucking with this dizzy bitch, it was no telling.

Within twenty minutes or so, I pulled up to Keisha’s house. For some reason, I was nervous. I hadn’t been in this bitch since I choked her crazy ass out. I didn’t know if she’d have her back against the wall ready to shoot my ass when I entered or not. “Fuck it. I need to get this shit off my chest, and the sooner the better,” I uttered to myself, while getting out of my car. I walked up to the door and knocked twice, followed by ringing the doorbell. Kay snatched the door open.

“Wassup, Dodge? Long time no see,” she spoke.

“Hey, Kay, your sister here?” I asked. I really didn’t have a whole lot to say to Kay either. She was crazy as hell too.

“Yeah. Keeeisha! Dodge in here. You can sit down. She’s coming.”

“Okay, but I’ll stand. I ain’t staying long.”

“You really need to have a heart to heart with her. She’s not quite herself,” Kay revealed. “I’m a lil’ worried about her.”

I frowned. “What you mean by that?”

“You’ll see,” she said, just as Hendrix walked out of the kitchen with a red plastic cup in his hand.

“Wassup, Hendrix?” I coolly spoke.

“Nothing much,” he said, giving me dap. I had nothing against this lil’ nigga. If I was him, I’d have a crush on my girl too. But from what I could see, he and Kay must’ve still been kicking it. I didn’t know how strong, but she was definitely still hanging in there. Shouldn’t have been a surprise because once those Henry girls latched on, it would take a miracle to get ‘em off.

“Congratulations on being the first-pick draft.”

“Thanks man, I appreciate it.”

“No problem.”

“You ready, babe? Movie starts in thirty minutes,” Kay said.

“Yeah, let’s get outta here,” Hendrix replied, giving me another fist bump.

They walked out the house, leaving me alone with crazy. Ten minutes had passed, and she had yet to come out the back. “Yo, Keisha!” I called out. “I got somewhere to be, so can we just talk already?”

“Yeah,” she said, as my jaw dropped the second she hit the corner. This bitch was holding a baby.

With a clueless expression on my face, I asked, “Who baby?”

“Yours,” she answered with a smirk.

“When the fuck did you have the baby, Keisha?”

“Last week. He’s a week old today.”

I shook my head. “Are you fucking serious? You had the baby and didn’t tell me? Oh, you must know it ain’t mine?”

“Nah, he is yours,” she nonchalantly stated.

“Well, if he was mine, why you ain’t tell me?”

“Because I was waiting for you to show up and check on us.”

“You ain’t making no damn sense.”

Keisha shrugged. “Wanna hold him?”

I stood in one spot looking at her like I was the crazy one. This bitch had given birth and didn’t think to let me know. I had never seen no dumb shit like this before.

“Do you wanna hold him?” she asked again.

I didn’t even know what to say, as Keisha walked over and handed me the baby. I looked him over. I couldn’t tell who he looked like. He was definitely precious though. “It’s a boy?”

“Yes, it’s your son.”

“Keisha, why you just ain’t tell me you had the baby?”

“Dodge, why are you here if you didn’t come to check on us?”

“Hell, I didn’t know you’d had the baby, but I came here to tell you that after we take the test and you see that he’s not mine, then I want you completely outta my life.”

“But he is yours,” she stated.

I frowned with a clueless expression. “Is something wrong with you? You’re acting different.”

“I’m fine,” she answered.

I was still in shock, while holding a whole baby while this nutcase had sat down acting like nothing had happened. Clearly, she needed psychiatric

help or something. “Can we do the test tomorrow? Had I known you had the baby I could’ve just brought it with me. It’s at my house, but I can come back early in the morning, and we can swab his mouth. Is that okay with you?”

“Yeah, we ain’t going nowhere.” She smiled. “You look good holding your son.”

“Get him,” I said, pushing the baby back off on her. I didn’t wanna be mean to the lil’ fella, but I wasn’t trying to get attached, and I didn’t need her thinking nothing stupid like we could be a family. She didn’t put up a fuss. She simply took him back. “A’ight, well I’ma go now,” I hesitantly said.

“Okay, we’ll see you in the morning.”

I walked out the house feeling uneasy as a muthafucka. For some reason, Keisha was up to something, I just didn’t know what it was. I had right mind to show back up with the police just in case this bitch was out her mind and trying to set me up. I’d never seen her this cool before. Shit had me a bit worried. I got in my car and pulled off, the whole time thinking, *Keisha, what in the hell are you up to?*



The next morning, I woke up with the woman of my dreams wrapped in my arms. I literally could wake up like this for the rest of my life.

“Good morning, handsome.”

“Good morning, Yum-Yum.” I smiled, kissing her softly on the back of her neck. “How did you sleep?”

“Like a baby,” she responded. “Anytime I’m with you, I always sleep peacefully.”

I smiled, feeling giddy inside. “We need to do this more often.”

“Definitely,” she said. “So, how did you sleep? I know you went to bed with a lot of Keisha’s bullshit on your mind. I just can’t believe she had the baby and didn’t tell you.”

“I’m still baffled by that shit. I just got an unsettled feeling about this. Keisha’s demeanor was way too cool. Even Kay told me that I needed to talk to her because she wasn’t herself. I didn’t know what to make out of that at first because Keisha is never herself. But when she stepped out the

back holding the baby, I almost had to pick my jaw up off the floor. I was beyond stunned.”

“I know you were. Hell, my jaw dropped when you told me about it. That woman needs a mental check.”

“Same thing I was thinking when I left there.”

“I hate to say it, but I feel like you should’ve took the baby with you.”

“Shit, that fool would be knocking on my door right now looking for him.”

Kiyomi laughed. “You got a point,” she said, just as the doorbell rang. “You expecting company?”

“Nah, not this early. It’s just past six o’ clock in the morning,” I said, getting out of bed. I had to slip on some pants and a shirt.

“Why I got a feeling it’s Keisha? Didn’t you tell her that you had the test here?”

“Yeah, but I also told her that I was coming over there. She’s not allowed at my house no more. She knows that,” I expressed, making my way to the front door, as Kiyomi got out of bed and followed me. I opened the door to see nobody standing there.

“What the fuck?” I said, looking around.

“Babe, look down.”

I looked down and was damn near startled at first. It was a car seat covered with a throw blanket. “I know damn well—” I said but stopped mid-sentence when I pulled the blanket from over the car seat to see a baby in it with a note.

“What the fuck?! Is that the baby?”

“Yeah, I’m most certain it is,” I responded. Kiyomi pushed me to the side, grabbing a note that was laying on top of the sleeping baby.

“Here’s a note. Read it,” she said, handing it to me as she grabbed the car seat and walked back in the house. I cautiously opened the note. “What does it say, bae?” she asked, as I began reading the note out loud.

Mommy is leaving town for a lil’ while. Daddy, please take care of me till she comes back.

To Be Continued...

AFTERWORD

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 - *The First Wife 1-3 (Part 4 still in the works)**
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