

VERA ROBERTS



*Simply Complicated*

Simply Complicated

by

Vera Roberts

# Copyright

*For JESBM*

*Smashwords Edition*

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## **Blurb**

She went from negative to positive...

When legal wunderkind Savior Ellison meets college intern Keisha Jones, sparks fly. He gave her an offer she did refuse, and it only made him want her more. If Keisha wants Savior to chase her, he hopes she has a good pair of running shoes.

Keisha Jones doesn't believe in fairytales and especially the type that has a white knight in a shiny Bentley. Every girl has a past, and Keisha's is often played out on reality TV. If Savior wants her, he has 90 days to prove it.

Can Savior convince Keisha to give him forever? Or will Keisha's past revelations put a stop to the relationship before it starts?

Sex, drugs, and politics. All in a day's work.

Simply Complicated is a standalone erotic full-length novel. It deals with trust, gentrification, and true love.

## **Book II – Finna Be Lit**

Love can make you happier than you've ever been, sadder than you've ever been, angrier than you've ever been. It can elate you and deflate you almost at the same time.

- Anonymous.

## One

This nigga really doesn't show up this early unless he done fucked up.

Jalen looks like a snack and I suddenly want a nibble. He's wearing saggy jeans with a white tee that fits his muscular frame. His dreads looked like they were actually washed for a change and not smell like kimchi with a side of sulfur.

As I get ready in my bedroom, I feel Jalen's eyes on me. He's watching me do my makeup as I'm trying to figure out what shade of the Too Faced eye palette would look best with my wardrobe. It's not unusual for Jalen to watch me put on my face as he lays in bed. It *is* unusual for him to show up at seven-thirty on a Monday morning to do so.

I hadn't heard from Jalen all weekend, and that's typical with our arrangement. I call it an arrangement because it damn sure ain't a fucking relationship but I digress. I know what we are and so does he. He has plenty of chicks in his harem and I'm not sure where I am in that. I don't know if I'm a bottom bitch, side chick, or new chick. It doesn't matter.

It *does* matter, however, seeing a shiny BMW parked outside my door caused some eyebrows to be raised. No one asks questions because of my daddy, but everyone knows Jalen, for the budding drug dealer he is, doesn't exactly have the cash to get me a fully loaded Beemer. It's hard to give one girlfriend a Beemer when the others are still using their feet as main transportation.

The goal was for the car to stay fully parked in front of my home and not drive it. But each time I looked out the window, I saw how beautiful the car was and I just knew I would look good behind it. I took it out for a spin and of course; I fell in love with it. Leather seats. Panoramic sunroof. Navigation. Front and back cameras. And that sound system? You know my black ass was bumping 90's hip-hop all weekend.

Jalen has questions and unfortunately for him, I don't have any answers he needs to know. "So, who got that for you?"

"A friend." It's not a lie, but I'm not sure if it's the truth. Does a man going down on you count as just a friend?

Jalen stares down at his phone for a long moment before he looks up and watches me intently. We both know I'm lying and Jalen's eyes are questioning if it's the truth he really wants to know. "What friend?" He pushes. "Someone I know?"

I remember SoundCloud's words. *Everyone knows who the Ellisons are.* Even if people have no clue exactly what they do or know for, you do know one thing about the family – they're loaded. "No," I softly reply.

"I noticed you're not wearing your wigs anymore," Jalen replies as he glances at my nearly bald head. "I like the wigs on you."

Funny how Savior didn't like the wigs on me at all. Now I have the image of going down on Savior as he caresses my fade and I look up at him approvingly. I wonder if I would be able to take him all in or just inch by inch until I can't.

I shake the image out of my head and watch Jalen through the mirror. He goes back to checking his phone. Something captures his attention – probably another thot showing her titties for the 'Gram – and he approvingly smiles. The smile is quickly erased and he locks eyes with me. "Keish, you know I love you, right?"

Jalen wouldn't know what love is if it slid down a stripper pole. I'm sure the same thing he's telling me, he's told the other chicks. Does love have several girlfriends? Does love tell a girl not to talk anything serious with him because he doesn't want her to ruin his high? Does love blow off several dates for drug deals? And any holidays or birthdays? Forget it!

It's like the old carrot dangling in front of the rabbit deal – you tell me enough to get me to stay and drop the argument but you damn well know you won't go through with any of it.

If this is what love is, I really want the nigga to hate me. “Uh-huh.”

“I just hope everything is cool between us,” he gets off the bed and gets on the floor with me. He sits behind me and wraps his legs around my body. “I just want us to be cool.” He kisses my ear.

Jalen knows he can’t compete with a brand-new BMW and the sudden interest he has in me now wasn’t there all weekend. Our block is a small one and I know word must’ve gotten back to him that one of his girls had a gift that he didn’t give.

Maybe a week ago, his declaration might have worked. A weekend later with Savior having a face full of Keisha Jones makes a sista have second thoughts. “Your package is still in my closet. Take it with you when you leave.”



“He must really like you to give you this car,” Tasha begins as I drive her to work.

Tasha finally listened to my advice and decided Lyft wasn’t the way to go unless she was making some serious bank from it. But she likes the drive and the wonderful feeling of waking up every morning and seeing her account isn’t overdrawn so she decided to apply for a city job. Good for her. I’m proud of my bestie.

“I’m not sure if he actually gave it to me.” I am well aware the registration has Savior’s name on it. He may have “given” a car to me on Saturday but my black ass knows the following Monday, it was simply a loaner he could take back at any time.

It makes the decision to give it back to him that much easier. “If I wanted a Beemer, I could ask my daddy for one.”

“Why are you being so difficult about this? This white boy wants to spoil you and all you have to do is suck his dick and fuck him a few times?” Tasha blinks. “What’s the issue with that?”

“The issue is I don’t want to.” Bullshit. The issue is I do want to. I like Savior more than I’m willing to admit. He’s already

had an affect on me that I can't shake off and that's the problem.

The arrangement he wants is purely sexual with no-strings attached. I'm already attached and I need to end this ASAP before I get hurt. "It's best for both parties we end this now."

Tasha shrugs and shakes her head. "If you say so. I still think you're making a huge mistake."

"Well, I'll pay the cost for that." I reply. The worst thing that could happen is my internship suddenly ends and Savior's ass is blasted in the papers because I sued him for sexual harassment.

Somehow, I don't think that's going to happen.

We stop at a traffic signal and watch some touristy-looking white folks pass through the crosswalk. A few years ago, a white person wouldn't be caught dead in Inglewood unless they were trying to buy drugs or ass. Nowadays, they're up and down Crenshaw.

"Receive any more offers on your granny's home?" Tasha asks.

"About once a month," I reply as I watch Karen and the Gentrifiers talk about whatever white girls do in those TV shows. Since the new NFL stadium is being built here, land in Inglewood has become a hot commodity.

Of course, when land becomes a hot commodity, the home and rent prices naturally go up. A few people have already sold their homes and got the hell out of Inglewood as fast as they could. Others are trying to find some gigs to make ends meet.

"Are you going to sell it?" Tasha asks. I know she's low-key worried about not having a place to stay because it would mean she would actually have to become an adult and pay rent.

"I don't know yet." I honestly answer. "I have to see how the market does within the next year or two before I can entertain any offers. Right now they're just lowballing me and they hope because I'm young enough, that also equates to me being dumb enough."

“I heard the city was trying to create condos and townhomes in the area and they want to buy up all the land to make room for it.” Tasha states. “I’m sure your Granny’s home is on that land they want to purchase.”

“Makes sense.” I shrug. The thought of selling my Granny’s home has come across my mind more times that I want to admit. It’s a duplex with me and Tasha being in one home, and my auntie being in the other.

If I ever decide to sell it, I would have to inform everyone involved and I don’t know if I’m comfortable knowing Tasha and my auntie might not be able to stay in the neighborhood because they can’t afford it.

On the same tip, if this arrangement with Savior goes through, I won’t be at home to enjoy it and let’s face it, every person dreams of leaving their hometown. Some come back, some stay gone. But everyone has that dream of leaving and seeing what’s out there.

I would get mad about the blatant gentrification going on but a part of it is also the neighborhood’s fault. No one was protesting the predatory paycheck loans and gig economy hustles like those ride shares and how they predominantly post in the black and brown neighborhoods.

No one cares about how certain ads during the daytime are only aired on channels where the viewership is usually black and brown folk. No one was protesting about how there are a dime a dozen hair salons but no one owns a beauty supply shop, where the real money is.

No one cares about drug dealers, prostitution, and gangbanging until an innocent person is killed. Then all of a sudden, everyone is a damn community activist, holding up Black Lives Matter signs, knowing they know someone would kill another person for looking at them the wrong way or worst yet, wearing the wrong color.

But they don’t hear me, tho.



I’m at the law firm at nine o’clock sharp.



As my feet click-clack through the shiny polished floors of a downtown L.A. skyscraper, my stomach is cinched with nervousness I haven't felt since I lost my virginity way back when. I stand behind a group of people at the elevator, and only one name is on my mind – Savior.

Ever since he'd surprised me by showing up at home a couple days ago – and giving me the best head of my entire life – I had a lot to think about. This white boy really wants to pay for my tuition as long as I can be his fuck toy. He even gave me a car to sweeten the deal.

The offer sounds tempting and I'm sure there are a dozen women who would look at me sideways for even *thinking* about the offer when they would've said yes. But I know the type of guy Savior Ellison is. Those thick, invisible strings he has with his offer are obvious and let's face it, there's no such thing as a free lunch.

Even if the free lunch comes with an incredible tongue that can pleasure you just right.

I did my homework on one Savior Ellison. Graduated with top honors from USC, both undergrad and law school. His father, Thomas, made the rounds of the talk show pundits, appearing anywhere from CNN to 'We Hate Anyone Brown' aka Fox News to local TV stations.

Being a well-respected civil rights lawyer, Thomas helped start the law firm and is still active in the black community to this day. Seeing his profile, I do recall seeing him and probably didn't think anything of it. I try not to get into politics just because I don't believe there's a purpose of getting upset when at the end of the day, I'll still be screwed.

It seems like Savior is passionate about his work but he's the complete opposite of his daddy. Coined "The Silent Lawyer" by the press, Savior never gives any press conferences or interviews. He would rather his work in the courtroom speak for itself. He's considered to be one of the best urban development lawyers in the nation and has a track record of winning that'll make Johnnie Cochran smile.

He's been honored by the NAACP, and other civil rights groups from all over. A bit more digging revealed he pledged Kappa Alpha Psi and I don't know why I'm surprised he's a Nupe when he fits the perfect profile of one. He's a philanthropist and gives an insane amount of money to various causes every year.

To any woman, Savior would be a catch and looking at his dating life, I imagine he is. Every woman he was spotted with looked a certain way – tall, leggy, and usually blonde. I'm short, thick, and bald. I'm everything but what he's looking for.

The realization sets in. I don't know why I entertained the thought of being Savior's girlfriend when it's clear he only wants sex and give me something in return so I don't feel he's wasting my time. I wasn't stupid enough to start writing Keisha Ellison with little heart emojis and happy faces.

I never had the chance.

I straighten my shoulders and go straight to my desk. I have a list of assignments I need to do. Awesome. I'll be busy enough so I won't be distracted. Before I can do any work, I have serious business to take care of.

I walk straight to Savior's office where I'm greeted by a smiling Easton. He's dressed in his Neiman Marcus finest, staying Coogi down to the socks. "Hello, Miss Keisha," his effeminate voice has just the right amount of masculinity to it, "how was your weekend?"

*Savior slides his body down mine and pulls my jeans off me. He lies between my thighs and pulls my panties aside to see my almost-bald snatch. Without saying another word, his tongue caresses my clit and I'm sent home to glory.*

*"Oh fuck!" I cry out as he wraps his arms around my waist and pulls my pussy closer to his face. His tongue is delectable, greedy, and just fucking wonderful. My body starts riding his tongue with every stroke and lick.*

I shake the memory out of my head and force myself back into the present. *It was all right until your boss gave me head and*

*then it became absolutely splendid.* “It was good,” I manage to say. “How was yours?”

“My weekend was incredible. Lots of sunbathing and relaxing.” His smile is so charming. Easton looks like the supreme poster boy to go yachting on the weekends in Newport Beach or some other area wealthy white people roam around with an invisible No Negroes Allowed sign. “How can I be of assistance to you?”

“I have something to drop off for Savior.” I pull out the BMW keys and hand them over to Easton. “He’ll know what this is about.”

Easton glances at the keys and looks back up at me. His eyes are very telling, almost as if he’s pleading with me to take the keys back. I have a feeling he might know about the arrangement and he’s wise enough not to interject. “Oh...um, all right. Did you want to leave a note?”

“No,” I shake my head, “Mr. Ellison will know what this is about. Thank you.” I turn to leave and head straight to the break room.

I know what I did was a mistake and a half and I’m probably going to really regret not driving that Beemer as my Honda sputters during the cold winter, but I have to make a point to that man.

I cannot be bought. No fancy car, no paid tuition, nothing will buy me. I would rather work three jobs than to know all I had to do was suck a man’s dick to go to college free.

I grab my coffee and head back to my desk. As I approach my desk and see the familiar body outline sitting in my chair. I smelled his wonderful masculine scent before I saw him and there was a small thump in my panties.

His brown eyes drill me and his mouth crinkles just slightly as he carefully watches me. He doesn’t say a word but he doesn’t have to. My feet suddenly become cinder blocks. Anticipation and nervousness wrap around my body and I’m at a loss for words.

I'm grasping my hot coffee as hard as I can because I'm afraid I'm going to spill it everywhere. The world seemingly slowed down to a trickle, and I became increasingly aware of how attuned I was to his body and how he knew my needs without asking.

Savior Ellison is not one to be messed with and he's making sure I know that in every way possible. "Our eleven o'clock meeting just got pushed up to right now."

## Two

I stand in front of Savior and his brown eyes are dancing – dare I say, laughing at me. His presence is commanding and all he’s doing is sitting down at my desk. One leg is lazily crossed over the other and one of his manicured hands are lightly tapping my desk.

He has a look on his face that doesn’t signify he’s annoyed with me, but it’s pretty clear he’s not jumping for joy about what I did. It was an argument I was already exhausted with and we didn’t even start.

I stare at him and pretend I’m not sniffing his cologne like it’s oxygen. “May I help you, Mr. Ellison?” My voice comes out shaky and a bit emotional.

“Mr. Ellison is my father,” Savior corrects. Every word is laced with annoyance in his baritone, “are you hungry?”

I’m starving but he will not tempt me with food. The last time he did that, I almost gave him the Keisha Love You Long Time special. “I have a busy day ahead of me, sir.”

“Sir,” his voice is smoky and heavy, “I do like it when you call me sir.”

My nipples tighten with desire and I feel it down to my panties. It’s nine-fifteen in the morning. Most people haven’t had their coffee and this man already has me aroused. “May I help you?”

“Come with me to my office and we’ll talk.” He gets up and my eyes follow his body. Dressed in the finest open-collared Armani suit, Savior continues to surprise me by how gorgeous he is.

He’s second-in-command so it’s not like I can tell him I’m too busy to have a meeting. I’m sure he’s already spoken with my supervisors I’ll be unavailable for a short while. “Okay.”

Savior holds the small of my back as I walk with him to the office. His touch is demanding, yet respectful. I get the innate feeling he doesn't do this very often and definitely not so publicly at his place of business.

We pass Easton on the way in. Easton gives me a grin that's half-joyous and half-pity. Even he knows I fucked up.

I walk into Savior's office and sit down on the sofa. Two plates of food are underneath trays along with orange juice and coffee.

Savior lifts up the trays and I'm presented with French toast, bacon, and scrambled eggs. My stomach grumbles and I lightly lick my lips. The food smells wonderful.

"Dig in," he sits beside me. He removed his jacket, and his sleeves are rolled up. He wants to enjoy his food in peace and worry about appearances later.

Just even seeing him as a privilege man who's not afraid to get his hands dirty makes me wonder how dirty is he willing to get with me. Lord, please help me.

He opened up a napkin and placed it on my lap, smoothing his hands over my thick thighs. He watches my reaction as he does so, wondering how far I'm going to let him go and if he's not being obscene. "Comfortable?"

I nod as I carefully watched him move closer to me.

"Keisha..." He says whispers my before his lips take over mine. Once again, Savior's tongue makes love with mine, sweetly playing with it as it explored the rest of my mouth.

I could climax on Savior's kisses alone and had he kept at it, I probably would have. He held back and we both were frustrated he had to. His frame was powerful and strong, even while he sat. His cologne was delicious and combined with his authoritative tone, my arousal hit its peak.

I felt suffocated, yet I didn't feel I was in danger nor did I panic. Instead, I welcomed his soft lips and gentle tongue. His tongue licked mine as my clit throbbed for release. My

heartbeat was deafening and my head spun into a million directions.

“I was thinking about you all damn weekend.” Savior’s voice is heavy and primitive. His hands were all over my body, caressing my neck, trailing down to my breasts, and gently cupping them with a gentleness I never knew. His lips became greedy for mine. The arousal burned through my body. “Every time I went to sleep, I thought about how you would feel on my cock. I still taste how sweet your pussy was on my tongue.”

I try to stifle a moan but it came out regardless. I was fully aroused and the need hummed underneath my skin. He softly growled as he pulled away from me, and began eating. “Your tummy growled at me.” He gave an apology of sorts. He was right; I was famished. I took a bite of my French toast and of course, it’s perfect. The bacon is crisped to perfection and the eggs are fluffy like clouds.

I’m a bit unsettled on how he just happened to have breakfast waiting for me and I wondered if Savior knew I was going to turn down the car.

“I wanted to have breakfast with you,” he seemingly reads my mind, “I wanted to spend this morning with you alone.”

Well, that answers one question but other is the elephant in the room. “About the car...” I wipe my mouth. “...I have to decline it.”

Savior nods as if he expected that to be my answer. “May I ask why?”

“I don’t own it.” My eyes glance over to his. My breath is caught in my throat and I feel like a bumbling fool. His hair is a sexy, weird combination of bed head and small blondish-brown strands fall down in front of his eyes. This man is beyond gorgeous; he is simply breathtakingly beautiful. “You do.”

“I said it was yours. It was a gift.” He meets my eyes. His face hardens with frustration and a bit of anger. “I don’t take back

gifts.”

“Your name is on the registration. If it was my car, my name would’ve been on it.” I softly reply. “You own it. You can take it back whenever you feel like it.”

“My name is on the car because if there are any problems, I want to be assured you weren’t going to be screwed by anyone else.”

I appreciate his concern but I’m also pretty sure Savior never had the LAPD follow him because he drove a nice car. “I’ll get harassed the moment they see your name on the registration.”

“You know how to reach me in case there are any problems,” his eyes soften to light brown, “again, the car is yours. I don’t like repeating myself so I’m making an exception for you.”

He’s generous with his time. I wonder if he’ll be generous with this arrangement. “Do you expect me to be exclusive to you?”

“I would prefer and I’ll do the same,” he takes another bite of his omelet, “I don’t like to share.”

Jalen went from being a small problem to a big one. If he had an issue with my new car, he’s really going to have some problems when I stop giving up the punani. “It sounds like you want us to be in a relationship when really you just want me to blow you at any time you want it.” I counter.

Savior glances at the distance and slowly chews his food. He’s not a man who carelessly speaks or uses his Twitter fingers whenever he’s upset. Every word that comes out of his mouth is something methodical and to the point. “I want our relationship to be mutually-beneficial. Whenever you want to end it, we will, and it’ll stop immediately.”

“Condoms?” If we’re going to be exclusive, I can’t imagine he’ll want to use condoms all of the time.

“Maybe our first night but I would prefer not to.” He takes another bite. “I’ll pay for any birth control and doctor’s appointments you need.”



My eyebrows rise upon hearing the first talk of financial settlement. We're carefully straddling the fence of a...ahem, *mutually-beneficial arrangement* and flat-out prostitution.

"You're going to get me insurance?"

Savior glances over to me. "Yes."

This doesn't sound like a typical arrangement he has done in the past. In fact, this is sounding increasingly like a relationship. To be honest, I'm not even sure I like this guy. Yeah, he gets my motor running but really, any man can do that if they look hot enough. "90 days," I reply, "after 90 days we'll reevaluate our status and see. I think 90 days is more than sufficient."

Savior stiffens and it seems I struck a nerve. He's not used to being told no or given stipulations. His lips tighten into a flat line and his eyes have no emotion within them. "Why 90 days?"

"Why not?" I reply. "You only get 90 days on the job to make a good enough impression. After 90 days, you can decide if I'm worth your time and you can move onto someone more suitable." If that advice was good enough for Big Teeth Steve Harvey, it's good enough for Savior.

Savior takes a sip of his orange juice and blots his mouth. "Pushing me away and we haven't even started yet."

I sigh and swallow my delicious meal. I don't know why I thought negotiating with a lawyer was going to be Cover Girl easy breezy. "Savior, I..."

He turns to me and blots my mouth with a napkin. "Shh..." It's a small act yet so intimate. He carefully wipes the food and crust from my lips as his eyes dance at mine. "You want 90 days, you got it. My original offer remains the same plus you get the full benefits of being with me. I will let you know, I'm not a man who's easily deterred. I am a lawyer."

I notice he didn't say girlfriend but I'm okay with that. I'm not his girlfriend and he's not my boyfriend. I haven't met any of

his friends and family and I probably won't. It's a strictly sexual relationship and that's fine.

I'll get college tuition, a brand-new whip, and my back blown out on a regular basis. Most girls barely get a ten-dollar gift card thanking them for great pussy so I'm happy with what Savior is offering.

So why do I feel iffy about this whole ordeal?

After we finish breakfast, I'm ready for the rest of the day. I guess having a pick-me-up from Savior was what I needed, after all. "Thank you for the delicious breakfast. It was lovely."

"The breakfast was amazing." He walks me to his office door. "You're lovely."

My cheeks feel a slight tinge of pink across them and I sigh. He always knows what to say without saying too much. "I'll see you later."

Before I can leave, Savior pulls me close to him and brushes his lips across mine. He wraps his arms around my waist and his hands travel down to my ass where he takes two firm squeezes.

He moans into my mouth and I return the favor as his lips travel down to my neck. My hands become lost in his hair, clenching it tight as I pull him closer to me. I feel his hardened cock press against the vee of my sex and my body becomes heightened with pleasure. My nipples once again tighten with anticipation and my panties are moistened with *want*.

"Soon," he whispers in my ear, "I'm going to fuck you so hard, you're going to think of me whenever you walk. Have a nice day at work, Keisha."



My internship was full steam ahead for the rest of the day. I sat in on a couple of meetings, did a lot of filing, and read up on some cases that were too strange for Law & Order.

All I thought about were Savior's words. *I'm going to fuck you so hard, you'll think about me whenever you walk.* His eyes burned with desire. He taunted me, promised me, and will provide everything and then some.

My mind travels back to this past weekend when he surprised me. The way his fingers played with my sex, circling my clit until I fisted the sheets. My body moved along with his fingers as he promised me whatever I wanted.

He'd already showed me what that tongue can do, coaxing my body to an orgasm I will never forget.

And he took my three-dollar Wal-Mart panties with them. The emoji ones. What in the hell did I just get myself into?

My day wraps up and I'm so ready to leave. As five o'clock rolls around, I turn off my computer and put everything away. I gather my purse when my office phone rings.

Savior is calling me.

I hesitate answering the phone because I'm not sure if I want to talk to him. I'm not upset or angry; I just already know the affect he has on me. Our relationship is purely sexual and that's it. I refuse to get caught up with someone who will use me as a fuck toy and vice-versa.

What Savior Ellison doesn't know that he's messing with Prince Jones's baby girl, an independent woman who will get in formation with her six-inch heels. (Okay, so I need to stop listening to so much Beyoncé.)

Savior Ellison is gon' learn today that I'm not the motherfucking one, two, or three. And with that, I answered the phone. "Keisha Jones speaking."

"You have the perfect voice for a phone sex operator." Savior purrs. "Your voice...throaty, breathless, wispy...I think I can come on your voice alone."

Fuck. There goes my black fist in the air along with my Wonder Woman uniform. It dissipated at the same time my

thighs magically opened. Weird. “How can I help you, Savior?”

“I thought about you all day. I’m glad I had to work at my desk for most of it because I don’t think I would be able to explain an erection.” His voice is breathy.

“You should probably get that checked out,” I tease him. “It stays too hard you won’t be able to use it.”

“Do you want to check it out?” It feels like his deep voice is looking into the windows of my soul. “I promise I’ll be a good patient.”

I’m sure Savior would be a great patient. I’m sure my mouth and pussy would be the best doctors for him. I shake the nasty thoughts out of my head. “How can I help you, Savior?”

“I forgot to tell you to clear your schedule out later next weekend. There’s a Christmas gala I want to take you to. We’ll go shopping for your gown and accessories next week.”

A gala is one of those high-society, high-flaunting type of things that guarantees I’ll be on the society pages. I’m not sure how I’m feeling about this. I was strongly under the impression Savior wanted to keep me as his ghetto secret and I was about to go along with said idea. Now he wants to broadcast me to a global audience? “Okay.”

“You’ll be my date and I’ll pick you up around six.” He notes. “As for our arrangement, we’re still on. I’ll be at your house around ten at night.”

Booty call hours. I say that’s pretty convenient for our arrangement. “Okay.”

“You seem unsure.” His deep voice has an obvious question mark. “What’s up?”

“I’m just wondering what the deal is with you,” I answer, “that’s all.”

“I’m smart, rich, attractive, and I give great cunnilingus.” He casually replies as if we were talking about the Lakers game.

“I think those are four qualities every woman wants regardless of the partner’s skin color.”

I briefly put the phone on my neck and I hope I’m not blushing too hard. I also hope to hell no one is near me to hear this conversation. Savior is right on all of those points, especially the last one. Lord, I’m still screaming from the memory.

“Have a great rest of the day. See you later, gorgeous.” He hangs up.

I slowly return the phone to the retriever. Savior is a calculating executive and he didn’t just get to where he is because he’s the boss’s kid. He knows how to play the game and what to say to ensure victory.

As I walk down to the garage and get inside the BMW, I think about what’d just transpired. I know our arrangement is purely sexual but I couldn’t help but to blush at the compliment Savior gave me.

No man has ever called me gorgeous before.

### Three

It's hard to love your city when it's constantly on the news.

The news broadcasters are nice enough to call it South L.A. so they can mean a broad term of cities. But everyone who lives in or close to L.A. knows South L.A. usually means *black*. Except now, it can also mean brown.

Once a week, there's a shooting, a hit-and-run death, or some other bullshit that gets reported. I used to go jogging around the neighborhood during the afternoons until I heard there was a rapist on the loose. Now I go home and do yoga in front of my TV.

There's a lot of good in the neighborhood that doesn't get reported like how the dance academy just went to Spain and performed in front of kings. Or how every Saturday, there's a small Leimert Village farmer's market where I can get the best white sage in town and listen to African drums.

Good news doesn't make people tune in at night. It's the drama. The anger. The rage. The pity. Who wants to turn on the TV and hear about a good story of kids selling lemonade to buy a puppy when they can turn the channel and watch another police-involved shooting?

I think about the differences of my city and wonder why in the hell would a guy like Savior actually want to come here? It's not like he can never get a date. I have Google alerts set up on him and trust, his fan club grows by the day.

He's very popular in the wealthy segment of the country. After all, a billionaire's son is bound to make him a hot commodity. I read he was also featured in a listing of most eligible rich men and I'm sure all of the goldiggers' secure the bag scheme went up like a flag on Independence Day.

There's something amiss about the arrangement Savior is proposing, as if it's too good to be true. And of course, we all know if it feels that way, it's more than likely a possibility.

Still, I have to wonder, why would Savior go through the trouble of sending me to college when he could've just left the sex part out.

*I want to fuck you, Keisha. Hard. Fast. Slow. All night. Quickies. In my office. At your house. Everywhere.*

His declaration burns in my memory like an open flame and I don't want to extinguish it. Not now or ever. I can still feel his lips as they parted my cleft and sucked on my budding clit. I can remember his fingers exploring my body. As I received yet another Google alert about him, I open it and shake my head.

There was Savior and presumably, an ex-girlfriend.

It was a recent photo and it looked like they went to a gala of some sort. He's sharply dressed in a tuxedo and she's wearing this gorgeous red gown that probably came with a comma between the numbers.

She's a white redhead. The realization stuns me like a Taser.

As I go through more photos of Savior at past galas, he's never showed up with someone with darker skin. There was one girl who could've passed for Indian (dot, not feather). Another gala he went with a woman who had what I like to call the Debarge – she's biracial but she looks Latina.

I don't know if Savior goes to these things because he's expected to or if it just another way to keep the press entertained on his love life while he handles legal cases. All I know is that he's about to take a drug dealer's daughter to the fancy ball and there's no amount of glass slippers in the world that will make this all right.

Ninety days. That's all I'm giving him.



“Face,” Daddy greets me with a big hug and smile. Looking every bit like Idris's doppelgänger, Prince Daryn Jones is the man who has always had my back no matter what day.

He named me angel face when I was a baby because I reminded him of a cherub. Over the years, it's been shortened

to just ‘face, but it’s all love, no matter what. I’m the only girl out of four children he has with two different women so I get a bit extra attention.

My Daddy isn’t the typical dad, unless the typical dad is a drug dealer specializing in opioids. My daddy used to sell weed until he heard how white people would practically sell their newborns for a hit of meth. He’s never looked back.

My daddy is a drug dealer with morals, though. He won’t ever sell to the black folks but he has no problem if Becky and Tyler from Malibu want a Xanax. His justification is something about getting his 40 acres and a mule one way or another.

He built his rep being ruthless in Inglewood before he moved on. My father was known to get an enemy’s mama, sister, and auntie high on drugs to prove he runs everything in Inglewood. He never did get out of the game, but he’s definitely not as hardcore about it like he used to be.

It’s why everyone still respects him and why Jalen, for whatever reason, wants to be like my daddy. The difference between Jalen and my daddy, however, is my daddy is quiet about his gangsta. Jalen, on the other hand, is that type of nigga who thinks being the loudest in the yard makes people respect him more.

One thing my daddy has definitely taught me – if you’re going to be loud, don’t be wrong.

“I haven’t seen you since you started your internship. I was wondering if you were so used to the fancy white folks in downtown, you forgot about your poor old daddy here in Ladera Heights.” He chuckles.

“Now, you know I could never forget about my number one,” I give my daddy a big hug and we sit down in the living room to watch the Lakers game.

There is nothing poor or cheap about Ladera Heights. The wealthiest of black families live there and it’s not uncommon to see athletes, celebrities, and CEOs walking their dogs. But



that's my daddy's sense of humor. He's always had a depreciating side that made me realize he never takes life too seriously.

"Where's Ashley?" I ask.

My daddy motions behind him past the stairs. "She's showering up. We're getting ready to head to a steakhouse in a minute. She just landed a big account so I'm going to treat boo-thang and take her out shopping for some new jewelry."

My brothers' mother is a sweetheart and always has a little bit of money for me, even though I don't need it. Ashley looks a bit like Vanessa Williams (the Miss America one, not the Soul Food one) and has the mouth of RHOA peach holder.

She was the one that taught me how to beat my face. She was the one that embraced my natural hairstyle. She was the one that taught me about sex and warned me about boys (of course my stupid ass didn't listen but you gotta be stupid at least once in your youth, right?)

She ignored all of my daddy's drug dealing and cleaned up his financial affairs so no feds could ever trace anything back to him. She was the Bonnie to his Clyde before Bey and Jay made it cool.

Things didn't work out between her and my Daddy due to a variety of reasons – he wasn't ready to settle down while she was. Daddy's had numerous forgettable girlfriends and Ashley's had boyfriends that never lasted long because of my brothers. But Daddy always took care of Ashley and made sure she never went without.

They're still very close to this day. Close as in Ashley is a regular overnight visitor at my daddy's home. Me thinks they might be getting back together sooner than they want to admit. He's been talking about settling down and with three boys between them, I can't see why not.

"I heard about you and Andrea," Daddy says as he watches the Lakers game. He winces when Lonzo Ball misses a shot.

"What's your version of events?"

My mother, Andrea, has never been a mother to me. Hopping from one dick to another until she landed the grand prize of the biggest piece of human waste known as King J, she invited me to celebrate her birthday along with the other black-famous Z-list celebrities from VH1.

After telling me I should lose weight and get some of India's finest yaki on my head, we got into it. I'm sure me telling her to fuck off didn't help matters. "She insulted me and I didn't put up with it."

Daddy is silent for a long while as he watches the game. "I don't know why they didn't just offer Phil Jackson another contract and paid him whatever the hell he wanted. It ain't like he's doing anything in New York messing up that team over there." He mutters before he addresses me again. "So what are you going to do about Andrea?"

"Ignore her and hope she doesn't ruin my life," I reply. Some kids wish for toys, others wish for new clothes. When I was child, I wished Andrea would come home. Have you ever felt like you weren't wanted? That's how I felt with Andrea.

Daddy is silent again and is watching the game. I can't tell if he's impressed with this version of the Lakers squad or he's disgusted. He's still a diehard Lakers fan, no matter what. "You tried your best. She'll come around eventually."

I don't know why my daddy is so insistent that I have a relationship with Andrea. This woman left me alone when I was four with milk, corn flakes, and the TV on the Cartoon Network while she went clubbing trying to land a baller. I blame the fact Andrea had me when she and daddy were 17 so she never got all that thotting out of her system.

When my daddy found out what she did, he cursed her out six ways to Sunday and had a look on his face that signified he could've killed Andrea. From that moment on, I always lived with my daddy. I still believe the only reason why he didn't kill her was because she was my mother and he'd hoped she would see the error of her ways.

That day never did come and I believe, it never will. “If you say so.”

Daddy is silent again. He’s not a man who rattles off nonsense because he wants to make conversation. Either he has something to say or he doesn’t. He’s like that uncle everyone has, always looking either entertained or annoyed, and wears that particular mask depending on the circumstances. “I drove past your Granny’s home the other night. I noticed there were three cars there – the Honda, a BMW, and a Bentley SUV.” He adjusts the frames on his nose. “You wanna tell me before the streets do?”

I didn’t want to tell Daddy about Savior until I could figure out where he was in my life. For all my Daddy is concerned, I just went out and got a BMW with no questions asked. “I’m seeing someone.”

“I’m assuming his name isn’t Jalen?” He asks and I shake my head. “So, who is this one?”

I’ve never lied to my daddy and I’m not about to start. But I don’t think he has to know exactly who I’m seeing. “A guy at my internship.”

Daddy pays more attention to the game than what I said. He’s silent for a bit more and gets up to stretch. He stops next to me and looks down at me. “Be careful, ‘Face.” He then walks away.

Daddy’s words are loud and clear. He knows I don’t have to give him details unless I really need to. I take his advice to heart.

“Is my baby girl, Keisha, here?” I hear Ashley’s excited voice and I jump up to greet her. Looking like a goddess personified, Ashley is dressed a dark green sleeveless dress with Louboutin heels. Her brown locks are up in a French roll and she’s wearing these ginormous diamond earrings my daddy got for her. She gives me kisses and the biggest and best mama bear hug ever. “How is my darling?”

“I’m doing great, Mom.” It’s weird to call Ashley mom when I should be calling my own mother that. “How are you? You look lovely!”

“I just landed a huge account. Those boys over at the plantation love my work so they’re going to pay me the big bucks to handle their money.” Ashley is one of the most respected accountants in Los Angeles.

She just also happens to be one of the few black female ones so she really gets a lot of business. She had to hustle and fight for her claim, though. She may be light-skinned but she didn’t have it easier. If anything, she had it a lot tougher because people thought she was a pushover.

“I told those fools if they want my business they need to do what I say.” Her voice is soft and breathy, kinda like Erykah Badu. “Like that song from Lil’ Kim, I don’t have time for fake ones.” I love how lowkey gangsta Ashley is. No wonder her and Daddy are a perfect fit.

She double-checks her Saint Laurent clutch and closes it. “How are you doing, ‘Face? Prince tells me you started an internship downtown! How’s it going?”

*I’m currently sleeping with the boss’s son on the promise he’ll pay for my tuition to any college in the world I want to go to.* “It’s going great,” I reply. I don’t think Ashley needs to know the other details.

“Good, good. You’re a bright, young woman with a beautiful future. I think you’ll do well. Now I hope your brothers can follow your lead but I digress.” My daddy approaches Ashley and they kiss. Awe, #blacklove for the win, y’all.

“Ready to go, sweet potato?” My daddy is so gushy when he comes to Ashley. He drops the hardcore drug lord for a moment when he’s around her and becomes all googly-eyed and bashful. He worships the ground she walks on and would drink her bath water if he could. It’s like he can’t help himself.

“I’m ready after you, Big Daddy.” Ashley caresses my daddy’s goatee and I sincerely hope I’m not going to get another

sibling out of them. They're both young enough where it's still a possibility and just ew.

"Lock up everything when you leave, 'Face.'" Daddy calls out to me as they leave.

I watch a bit more of the Lakers game before I turn it off and get ready to head home. I set the alarm and leave in my BMW, thinking about the interaction between my daddy and Ashley.

My daddy lucked out finding a woman who was so ride or die. She never tried to convince him to stop dealing nor did she demean him in any way. She just told him to be smarter about it and he listened.

As I drive my car, I wonder why it took the appearance of Savior to make Jalen act like he cares.

## Four

Wednesday's internship was here before I knew it.

The holiday rush officially appeared and it seemed everyone was in a hurry to get cases settled and started before people went away for the holiday. As I did typical 'let's not waste the intern's time and put her to free slave labor' work, I overheard exciting plans such as going to the French Alps, visiting family out of state, and seeing the snow in Big Bear.

I never went anywhere.

It's not that I didn't want to go. But if you're a person who's excited and never wants to stay home and you have friends who are very comfortable sitting their asses on your sofa, you tend to do a lot of solo excursions.

Maybe this is where I become the weird one with my friends. I was the first to go natural, the first to enter college and actually might graduate from it, and I'm the first to go out just for the sake of going out.

I want to venture somewhere during the Christmas vacation. Sure, I'll spend time with Daddy and Ashley, but I want to venture far. Maybe during the break, I'll look at a map and see where it'll land me. I might surprise myself.

"Hey Keish," the other intern, Rosa Ortiz, greets me as I'm in the copy room. She's a Latina who probably spends a lot of time at the hair salon, the gym, and the shoe store. She always looks put together and I'm sure she's very expensive to maintain. It doesn't surprise me she drives a Mercedes.

While Rosa is nice to me, I can't shake the feeling it's a forceful niceness. Had we not been at the internship, she would probably be talking about me in Spanish and calling me a *puta*. "Hi Rosa!" I make sure my white voice is on point and bubbly like a 90's pop starlet.

"What are you up to?" She walks over to me and checks out the copies I'm making. I don't know why she's all up in my

Kool-Aid when she doesn't even know the flavor.

"Just making copies for Marc and Steven. They have a meeting tomorrow and I need to set up the conference room." I feel like I gave her too much information.

"Ah, I see." She goes back to looking at supplies. "I'm about to take notes for Thomas and Janice. They're working on a major civil rights case so they need me to get the notes just right. They're going to present their findings to other lawyers in the firm and make a final decision if they're going to take the case." She's lowkey bragging about her skills. She doesn't realize I know she's taking notes alongside the paralegal, who will then present *his* notes to the other lawyers.

"Oh, cool." I don't know what to say to that so I keep it cute and mute.

"So, do you have any plans for the weekend?" She asks.

*Going to a gala with Savior and then getting my back blown out by him.* "Um, not really. You?"

"I'm thinking about going hiking with some girlfriends up in the hills. It's so beautiful up there! And then I'm going to do my usual Zumba, tanning, and training for the L.A. marathon!" She's unusually excited about running 26 miles. Good for her?

"Sounds like a jam-packed weekend." Like, honestly, I don't know if she expects me to kiss her ass or give her a cookie?

"The colleges like students who are well-rounded and do lots of activities. It makes you look more interesting." Oh, okay. So, she was shading me. I thought it was a bit bright in here.

"Keisha!" Marc pops his head in and greets me. He's a younger black man with a smooth fade and goatee. He's what fashion magazines would call as classically handsome, and he always seems to leave many women in the firm breathless. What's awesome is he knows he's got it going on but he keeps it professional. "Can you make about five more copies? I just got a few last-minute RSVPs."

“Not a problem!” I promise to him and he winks at me.

Rosa walks over to a desk and begins to sort out the supplies she’s picked up. I honestly don’t think she needs any of the supplies she has chosen and she just wants to be in my business. “Marc is a nice guy. Happily married with two beautiful children. His wife is a doll.”

“I know! He showed me a pic of his family the other day and oh my gosh, I could’ve died!” I have to make sure the Becky white voice is completely bubbly and totally laced with raw sugar.

Rosa glances at me with a smile. It’s clear she’s trying to figure me out but she’s not sure how to proceed. Obviously warning me to stay away from a married man isn’t doing the trick, nor did telling me I need to start becoming more active outside of the internship.

I would tell her how I usually spend my weekends volunteering at a convalescent home, spending time with the elderly patients but knowing her ass, I’ll probably start seeing her there, too.

Everyone keeps talking about how us women should stick together and support one another and if we happen to be minorities, they’ll throw in black and brown pride for good measure, but bitches like Rosa really be fucking it up for the rest of us.

I wonder how long she’ll be here until someone catches her on her knees servicing one of the older lawyers. “Anyway, I gotta go now! Talk to you later!”



My internship wrapped up just as soon as it started. I barely had time to eat lunch but Marc was gracious enough to save me a plate at his business luncheon and I got to nosh on some expensive food for a change.

Now I’m about to head home, bury my nose into the Federalist papers, and pretend I know what the hell is being said over three pages when it could actually be said in two sentences.



As I walk through the firm, I hear muddled voices shouting at each other. I follow where I hear the noise and I see Savior and his father, Tom, battled in an argument with each other. Savior is gesticulating wildly and his sleeves are rolled up. Tom is leaned back in his leather chair and nursing a tumbler full of dark liquid.

I stop and stare for a moment, studying how each man has taken his position. It's not a faux-trial mockup, nor is it them being passionate about the football game. Something serious happened between the pair and I'm curious as to why Savior acts like he wants to kill his father.

"They always get into it," Marc comes up from behind, "it's nothing new. You get used to it, really."

I remember Savior's eyes when he briefly talked about being embarrassed by a parent. I had no idea he referred to his father. "What's this one about?"

Marc shrugs. "The weather? Parking? A potential case? Who really knows? They'll fight it out for a few days and then it'll be back to normal like nothing ever happened. They're complicated. There's a lot of love between them but there's also a lot of resentment. One day, you'll know the full story." He turns to me. "A few of us are going out for Happy Hour. Do you want to join?"

I finally peel my eyes away from Savior. He looks like he's about to cry but pride is stopping him. "Yeah, that sounds great."



"Why is a sista from Inglewood here at this law firm?" Marc begins over beer and wings.

I chuckle as I munch on an onion ring. "We all gotta leave the 'hood one way or another. Everyone keeps talking about leaving the hood but no one ever does."

"I feel you. I grew up in Baldwin Hills. It's not a bad place and I still have a lot of great memories there. My mom and pops

still live there. But man, growing up...I couldn't wait to get out of there!" Marc exclaims.

"Whatever, dude," another attorney, Paul Rios, comments. He's a Latino man in his forties and specializes in immigration law. He's between being portly and muscular and can honestly go either way. "Imagine growing up as one of the few Mexicans in Compton back in the 80's. Yeah, there's a dime a dozen Mexicans there now but back then? If I didn't prove my loyalty, I would've been a goner."

"It's not how you start," Marc holds up a beer and clinks it with Paul, "but how you finish."

"Word." Paul agrees.

"So do you have any advice for me?" I cautiously ask. "I could really use some."

"Mmm..." A Filipina lawyer, Primalyn "Lyn" Medina, chimes in. She's a petite woman in her forties and always wears her hair in a perfect French roll and red lippie. She specializes in employment law. "...watch your back from some of these ruthless bitches."

My eyes widen at Lyn's blatant honesty. I didn't expect it from her. "Oh wow."

"Girlfriend, I've seen some shit," she nods, "the higher up you go, the worse it gets. They'll sell you out for a cheeseburger. Real talk."

My beer became harder to swallow. Is a legal career something I really want?

"You just have to fight it out. The best survive," Lyn chews on a mozzarella stick, "and the others never cared that much."

"Don't forget to tell her the real truth, Lyn," another lawyer, Yun Hee Ha, gives her opinion. She's an older Korean woman with shiny black hair and a soft face. She often uses that to her advantage because I've heard she's a real pit bull behind the scenes battling it out about discrimination.

She's also a bit of a fashion plate, matching her accessories based on how shiny her wheelchair wheels are. "Some will fuck their way to the top. They are the worst ones."

"Damn straight," Lyn shakes her head before something catches her attention, "kinda like that one right there."

I glance over to what Lyn is talking about and my heart bottoms out. Rosa showed up to Happy Hour – with Savior.

## Five

Savior locks eyes with me as he approaches our table. There's a small storm brewing between them and I'm not sure if he's unhappy to see me or if it's leftover from the blowout with his father.

There's a sensual energy that is present between us that wasn't here before and I hope it quiets down before people start figuring out what's going on. Rosa already went ahead and did her standard hellos with all the ass kissing a girl could muster. Her lips must be tired.

"Lyn, Yun, Marc, Paul, nice to see you." Savior greets everyone before he turns his attention to me. "Keisha, great to see you here as well."

His voice is clinical without a hint of emotion. I don't know why I'm surprised by it nor do I know why I'm acting like the world is about to fall apart inside. Savior's made it very clear I was not his girlfriend and we were in an arrangement of sorts.

Still, if he wanted me to be exclusive with him, I guess he doesn't necessarily have to be exclusive to me. Fuck my life.

"If it isn't the wunderkind of the firm!" Marc held up a beer. "I'm glad Daddy was gracious enough to let you out to come play with us."

I glance over at Marc, who blows Savior a kiss. Clearly, they have a more personal relationship because I can't imagine talking to the boss like that and being okay with it. "We go back a very long time. Undergrad at USC, both pledge to Kappa Alpha Psi, and now I'm a partner in his law firm." Marc smiles. "I put up with his shit in a way no one else can."

"Lucky you," Yun rolls her eyes, "lucky you."

"So, what did I miss?" Savior takes a pull from his beer. "My ears feel fine so I take it I'm in the clear."

“Nah, we were just giving Keisha life advice.” Lyn nods, “preparing her for the real world.”

“Keisha, have you started looking at four-year universities?” Paul asks.

“Starting to. I haven’t really been that focused on them until recently.” I turn towards him. Savior and I both knew he’s the only reason why I started looking at colleges. “I do know I want to get as far away from L.A. as possible, though. I want to see what’s out there. I don’t think there’s anything here that’ll keep me.”

“Oh, there has to be something here,” Savior interjects. His eyes glitter with an amusement. “Your family?” He pauses for a beat. “A love interest?”

I meet Savior’s eyes again. There’s a small crowd of us at the booth, yet it seems we are the only ones at the bar. Savior’s brown eyes are brilliant, with the light shining just perfectly on the ambers.

He wants an answer from me. He wants to know if I would actually leave him here in Los Angeles while I go out and explore other places in the world. As I thought about my answer and consider the fact he arrived to Happy Hour with Rosa, Yun chimes in. “Girl, do not get caught up with any dude here. All they want is a wet ass and a dumb brain. All they’ll leave you with is a wet ass and a dumb brain. Save your energy for when you’re out of school.”

With a declaration I never felt before, I continue to look at Savior. “Nothing is keeping me here in L.A.”



It was nice to see Savior out of his element.

He laughed and smiled with his colleagues and his best friend, Marc. Everyone talked about anything than legal matters and they didn’t care how stupid or mundane it was. Paul, Lyn, and Yun talked about the latest Stranger Things season while Marc and Savior talked about football games.

That left me with Rosa.

I watched her in awe, really. She tried so hard like the little engine that could as she interjected herself in every conversation. She listened to what the lawyers were talking about when they referenced an episode on Stranger Things. She knew what play Marc and Savior referred to when they talked about Sunday's game.

She worked the group like a pro, making sure she was always involved somehow in the conversations. It was no surprise the entire time she was at the happy hour, she never left Savior's side.

Jealousy raged inside me like a wild beast. Rosa wasn't a threat but the fact Savior let her hang onto him like a lap dog waiting for his owner bothered me something fierce. I mentally claimed Savior as mine, possessing him, putting him on lock.

I'm pissed at myself because I knew this was going to happen. He gave me some awesome head, buys me a brand-new car, and he can fuck me anytime he wants at his bidding, not mine. All I can do is just wait for him to approach me because I already know where my place is.

I sigh and start to gather my things. I've been at happy hour for most of the hour and I still need to go home and study. Maybe I can kill off what's leftover of my moscato and wonder how did I go from being a bird to one guy to being a bird to another guy. At least Jalen was honest with me – he always told me there were going to be others.

I say my goodbyes and head out to the ladies' room. After I do my business, I'm surprised to see Rosa, once again playing with her hair and putting on yet another ton of makeup on her face. I bet she looks like a completely different person in the morning hours and her real name isn't Rosa but some backwoods name like Brittany Lynn. Must investigate this. "It was great seeing you here tonight!" She beams. "Are you taking off?"

“Yeah, I have a lot of homework to do so I need to head out.” I wash my hands.

Rosa nods and plays with her hair some more. She’s a woman who’s in love with her hair. I wonder how she’ll feel if I just happened to produce a pair of scissors? “What do you think of Savior?” She asks.

The question takes me by surprise. Earlier she warned me to stay away from a very married Marc (like I would’ve approached him, anyway) and now she’s asking me about Savior? Is this bitch sizing me up? “I have no opinion. I don’t know him.”

“Didn’t you two go out to lunch the other day?” She continues to play with her hair. “I thought I saw the two of you come back in his Audi.”

Rosa already had a scope on me and she’s itching to pull the trigger. “It was a business meeting.” I answer.

Rosa nods and plays with her hair even more. It’s clear her hair is her selling point and she’s probably wondering how my baldheaded scallywag ass got her grand prize. Magic is owned and can’t be taught, sweetheart. “I’ve done my research on the Ellison family. They’re very particular and quite private about who associates with them. They don’t just let anyone in their circle.”

I can deal with blatant racism. It’s in your face and you don’t have to wonder what someone means when they call you a *fucking nigger*. But the thinly veiled, below the belt type? That one cuts to your soul.

I’ve had it with Passive-Aggressive Conchita and she’s about to learn the real meaning of ghetto-ass bitch. “I’m sure they also don’t let ass-kissing suck-ups in their circle as well, but that won’t stop you from trying, huh?”

Rosa finally stopped playing with her hair and she slowly turns her head towards me. “What did you say?”

“Bitch, I didn’t motherfucking stutter. You worry about you and I’ll worry about me. But if you ever want to talk slick

about me on some supposed behavior you have witnessed, please keep this in mind – this is an internship that neither one of us are getting paid for, therefore it would not make a fucking difference who I’m blowing and who you wish you could. And while you’re at it, keep your micro aggressions about my race and class, before you and your relatives get a surprise visit from ICE and our deportation-happy orange president. Good evening.”



I’m three hours into studying when I finally take a break. Alexander Hamilton is one wordy motherfucker. God bless the dude who created a play off his name. I don’t know how he could’ve done it. He deserves all the rewards and blessings for sloughing through 400 years of bullshit to get a three-hour show.

I walk out of my bedroom and hear the familiar muffled sounds of Tasha and Junie getting it in and I don’t even give them a second thought. Hell, at least someone in this house is getting some action. With the way I reacted tonight and I’m sure Rosa’s ass ratted me to Savior and everyone else, our arrangement is over before it could begin.

Oh well. I have a sweet Beemer out of it. And I didn’t even have to suck his dick. I say that’s a win.

Just when I was about make some messed-up cocktail that would guarantee me not to remember anything tomorrow, I get a phone call on my cellular. It’s not the person I want to hear from but if he wants to break me off, I won’t fight it. “Hello?”

“I didn’t think you were going to answer,” Jalen replies. “I thought you would be sleeping now.”

“Nah, I have to study. I have a test tomorrow so I don’t have too many options. I’ll be up all night.” I reply.

“That sounds tempting,” he purrs, “could you use some company?”

“I don’t know,” I tease him, “it’s already ten o’clock now so by the time you come over, it’ll be midnight.”



“You said you were going to be up all night?”

“I did say that,” I reply, “studying.”

“I got something you can study.” Jalen laughs.

“I bet you do.” A knock on the door interrupts me. “Hold on. Someone’s knocking.”

“You expecting company?” He asks.

No one ever really comes to visit me this late at night unless they’re asking to get put into a body bag. That’s the nature of the neighborhood. “No, but I need to see who it is.”

“Just don’t open the door,” he advises, “and where’s that strap your dad gave you?”

“I got it,” I retrieve my Hello Kitty 35 mm, and hold it behind me. I told my daddy if he was insistent to get me a gun, it should at least look cute and match my pink Jordans. I look through the peephole and my special guest visitor takes me aback.

I slowly open the door and see Savior Ellison in his dressed-down finest. Even when he’s not wearing a business suit, he still looks like the best Bel-Air has to offer. The sultry look in his eyes, however, suggest he doesn’t want to talk to me about what happened earlier.

He wants to fuck all of the micro aggressions out and you know what? I’m about to let white boy get this work. “Jalen, let me call you back. My cousin’s here.”

## Six

Savior raises an eyebrow and gives me a smile full of sexy wickedness. Desire courses through my body like a maze and arousal appears, strumming along my skin. “Cousin?”

I shake my head and toss the phone on the sofa. “Long story not important enough to tell. Did you want to come in?”

“Sure,” he steps inside and glances around. I once again inhale his delicious cologne and my knees weaken. His blondish-brown locks are loose and wet; the result of perspiration than a shower. His hair color reminds me of wheat fields. The amber within them is almost so perfect and glossy.

His chiseled face is relaxed and I smell the faintest sniff of bourbon mixed with that intoxicating cologne he’s wearing. I felt an uncontrollable urge to touch him, possess him like he’s mine, and never letting him go.

“Your gun,” he motions and I hide it behind me. “Can I see it?”

I wasn’t embarrassed by my Hello Kitty glock so I don’t know why I am now. I slowly produce it from behind and Savior grins when he sees the safety on. “Nice. It’s pretty.” He grins as he holds it. “You know how to use it?”

“Unfortunately,” I reply. When you live in the ‘hood, you learn how to use a gun before you know how to drive. “My daddy takes me out to the gun range once a year to brush up on my skills. He wants to make sure I’m protected at all times.”

“Smart man.” He nods as he admires the gun before he hands it back to me. “I want to go out to a gun range with you. It’ll be fun.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever put gun range and fun in the same sentence but if you say so,” I grin. “Did you want anything to drink? To eat? I can fix something up.” I have no damn food in my house.

“No, I’m fine. I won’t be long.” He sits down on the sofa and I remain standing. Just as he sits, he emanates power that I haven’t felt since my father. He easily controls a room without saying a word. His stance, his look, his nonverbals say it all.

Awareness wraps around my body, feeling his sexual magnetism that could bring me down to my knees. Primitive instincts come out of me and I force myself to control my feral urges. My nipples tighten and my skin becomes heated to the touch. Zig-zag breathing almost chokes me into a stuttering and bumbling fool.

I inhale his scent that’s lingering in the room, and stare at him with a longing I never knew I had. My heart rate is out of control and goose bumps form along my arms. I picture him naked and on top of me, wondering if he would be a hard or gentle lover. My skin heats up thinking about it and desire coats my panties.

Who is Savior Ellison and what is he doing to me?

Savior looks up at me and his lips curve into a delicious, sultry smile. I can’t tell if he’s completely oblivious or he knows the affect he has on me and is playing it low-key. He’s over there looking all sexy and good, and I’m just like, damn.

“Is everything okay, Keisha?” His voice is smoky and deep, with a lazy drawl.

“Oh yeah,” I feel like a plum fool just staring at him like a groupie. I sit on the other sofa and I bide my time with Savior. I’m not sure if he’s here for sex or because he wants to let me go in person after my confrontation with Rosa.

He’s slightly inebriated and it didn’t occur to me how he arrived here. It doesn’t really matter nor does it matter if he’ll be here all night or a short while. Funny how I didn’t want Jalen to come over to stay all night but I’m sad Savior won’t.

“So, what are you studying?” His eyes are closed and his head is resting on the back of the sofa.

“The Federalist Papers,” I yawn. Just thinking about them makes me bored. “I have to summarize what they are and how

they could apply to today's current political climate.”

“How long is your paper?” He asks.

“It's not a paper. It's an essay final. I already have notecards and the like. I just have to really study them. The final is tomorrow.” I tuck my feet underneath me. “So I have a lot to do between now and then.”

There's a small silence between us and I'm wondering what to say next. It's not like I can make conversation about the Lakers and how I hope the Dodgers win the World Series. Despite how intimate we were just a few days ago, I still don't know who Savior Ellison is. Google alerts do nothing but satisfy my nose, gossiping cravings.

Who is the real Savior Ellison? What are his fears? What was really going on between him and his father earlier? Why did he show up on my doorstep drunk when he could've entertained Rosa?

Just when I was about to do some bullshit conversation, Savior breaks the ice again. “The Federalist Papers are still viewed as the original interpretation of the Constitution today. If your argument is how literal or figurative the Constitution could be interpreted in terms of the Federalist Papers, you could also argue no one foresaw the numerous changes the world has gone through and that the Founding Fathers only cared about how the government should be run and the citizens governed. You need to keep in mind the Constitution was meant to be amended to reflect current times. Did the Founding Fathers write the Constitution knowing there was going to be social media? Did they write it thinking slavery was going to be around forever? You need to have these things in mind.”

Smart WASPy bae said it so eloquently. I spent the last three hours trying to decipher the damn book and Savior did it in just five minutes. “Thank you. But what about the government and the governed?”

“James Madison wrote that if we had an effective government, we wouldn't have the need for factions. There was a need for a

centralized government that could govern the states, despite how people felt about it. Factions nowadays are much different from factions back then. Factions could be special-interest groups such as Super-PACs or even hate groups that fall under the conservative shield. The papers suggested that if we didn't have a centralized government, each republic could do whatever the hell they wanted, no matter how it would impact the others. The government was, and still is, that parent telling you to come home at curfew and why you can't have too much sugar or watch too much TV."

"But wouldn't that put more stress on the states?" I counter. "That even though they had their own way of doing things, they still had to run it by the government?"

"It still happens," he shrugged, "why do you think so many states are suing the current administration? He wanted the states to govern their own and when they attempted to do so, he said, 'Nah, bruh' and intervened on his own accordance."

"But if the states had their own thing going on, why would want to depend on Big Brother for assistance?"

"The problem was the states had their own thing going on, but they were doing a piss-poor job of it. Big Brother, for all of his faults and trust, he has plenty, sold them on things they didn't have. He said, 'Look, I got a place you can pay your taxes. I have another place you handle all of your commerce. I have a place you can handle all of your interstate travel. I have a place you can talk to another state about unifying. I got you, boo. Now you just need to trust me.'"

A man who stimulates the mind with the same intensity he stimulates my yoni. I don't know if I want to thank him or fuck him. "Thank you so much!"

"You're welcome. The Federalist Papers gave me a lot of headache back in college so I know more about them than I should." He chuckles. His laughter is full and throaty and I feel a rush of warmth coat my body. It's the first time I've seen Savior truly comfortable and outside of his professional element.

When he came over a few days ago, Savior was so clinical about the arrangement; even more so after he pleased me. This time, it's different. He's a bit more at peace. A brief silence follows. "Did you have fun at happy hour tonight?"

I thought it was fun until Savior and Rosa showed up together. And then I couldn't wait to get the hell out of there. "It was fun. I loved meeting and talking with the other lawyers. They gave me a lot of solid advice."

"That's great. They're a great group of people and you'll be hard-pressed to find better lawyers anywhere." Savior yawns and stretches his arms over his body. I see a bit of his washboard abs, covered with a small mound of hair. The feeling of possessiveness grew stronger within me. I instantly thought how Savior would feel underneath me as I rode his cock.

"Rosa is threatened by you."

The name jars me out of my fantasy. Color me shocked. Who'd think a girl from the hood actually has brains? "Savior, that bitch couldn't take my place even if I handed it over to her."

A lazy smile curves Savior's delicious lips. "That's my girl." He lets out a deep breath. "Come here, please."

I get off the sofa and sit closer to him. His eyes are firmly closed but his face looks tormented. "Better?"

"Not really." He quietly replies. I take the cue to sit right next to him and I do so. I rest my head on his chest and he wraps his arm around my body. "Much better."

His body is warm and comforting. I feel his washboard abs beneath my fingertips and his soft heartbeat under my left ear. There's a quiet sensuality Savior has and only a few have ever seen it. He's the type of man that could only say a few words before a woman wants to spread her legs and give him everything.

Happy hour was several hours ago and Savior is still a bit drunk. I wonder if he just needed to unwind or if the blowout

with his father played a role in it. He's troubled about something but I'm not sure if it's in my place to ask him about it. Savior wants to lead the relationship and have me play catch up when the mood suits him. I have to remember it's an arrangement, not a relationship.

"It doesn't matter how old you become...it doesn't matter what you achieve in life...you'll always want your parents approval. You'll always want them to say, 'Hey, I'm proud of what you did. Good job!' You'll always seek it." His head softly moves from side to side. "That was the thing that kept me going in college and law school. It what keeps me motivated now to some degree. Always trying to get that final approval. I can never seem to get it no matter how much I try."

There is pain in Savior's voice and I know he's referring to his father. He speaks highly of his parents but I'm not sure if that's genuine or because he didn't want to bring drama to the family name.

It reminds me of my relationship with Andrea. I still yearn for her approval, though I know I'll never get it. She's too busy doing things for Instagram and trying to get the most retweets and likes, than having any relationship with her only daughter. I'll always mourn what could've been.

"Doing the right thing is never popular, Keisha." Savior rubs my arm, "it's never the thing that'll get you famous and rich. But it's always the thing that'll make you sleep at night."

My mind goes a mile a minute on what he's referring to. He's troubled about something and my heart is burning with more questions than answers. What is going on in his life where he's confessing to me in an almost-drunken stupor?

As Al Green's "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart" softly plays in the background, I make a decision that could either backfire in my face or set some rules with Savior. I look up at him and my heart winces at how beautiful he is.

I straddle him and Savior's eyes softly open. His eyes narrow at mine and they soften to a chocolate brown. I slid my lips

across his jaw and nibbled on it, causing a low moan from him. Our lips met and he made love to my mouth; playing with my tongue and drinking from me.

His lips trailed down to my neck but I quickly stopped him, causing confusion from him. “Shhh...” I promised. “Let me take care of you.” I sink to my knees on the carpeted floor and unbuckled his jeans. Reaching into his boxer briefs, I pull out his magnificent cock that was already hardened.

He’s long and thick, just as I knew he would be. He smells musky and my pussy contracted in delicious response. Every touch I gave him, Savior gave a throaty moan and I’d barely touched him.

It was neither of ours first rodeo, yet it was so intimate doing this together. His knees began to tremble upon the anticipation of it, while the need to feel Savior inside of me increasingly grew. I realized at that moment, I needed to have Savior deep inside me this week. He knew I would beg for it and he was so right.

I licked the underside of his cock and felt him shiver in response. Gripping it with the other hand, I played with his balls; cupping and massaging them as Savior’s hand roamed my bald head.

I kissed the mushroom tip and licked the precum that came out before I took him into my hot mouth. The smooth hardness of his cock, coupled with how he hissed and gripped the sofa cushions, has made me unbelievably aroused.

I would take care of my needs later. It was all about pleasing Savior, taking away his pain. He didn’t come here to talk about my final nor would I want to right now. I want to please him, make him feel like the king he is, and worry about everything else the next day.

Saliva formed at the back of my throat, coating his thick length. My head slowly bobbed to a steady rhythm, releasing him with a noticeable pop, before I went back down. I felt Savior’s thighs tremble and soft coos escaped his lips.



Both of his hands gripped my head, rubbing it. His cock grew thicker and longer and I felt his eyes on me. But I didn't pay him any mind. I wanted to enjoy myself, listening to him moan as the lust within him became greedier and out of control.

I took him deeper, causing me to slightly gag. Savior's reaction, was much different. His body lifted off the back of the sofa and he hissed my name out. I knew he was close and he was trying to hold on as long as he could.

As the song neared the crescendo, we both lost control. I sucked him harder and faster, working my hands around his cock, while Savior fucked my face. He plundered his cock in and out of my hungry mouth. My eyes watered, and at times, I couldn't breathe. Yet, I couldn't get enough.

"I'm going to come, Keisha," he moaned, "I'm going to come."

I pull back when hot streams of come shot up and landed on my face and chest. I quickly went back down on him, sucking the soul of his cock and swallowing more of his hot come. His body jerked and shuddered beneath me.

The sounds coming out of his mouth made me so fucking hot. I didn't care his essence was all over me. I wanted to taste all of him. I wanted more of him. I licked him clean and was surprised he was still hard. I wonder if his dick ever goes soft.

"I need to go wipe my face," I promise him. I rise up and head to the kitchen where I grabbed a wetted paper towel. I wiped my face and chest, cleaning all of Savior off me. When I returned to the sofa, Savior had fallen asleep.

I smile at how peaceful he looks, which is much better than how he looked when he'd arrived. I gather a few blankets to cover him up. I move my study area to the living room as I watch him sleep and I listen to classical music.

The set-up somehow feels real, even though I'm not sure if it is. I didn't feel used nor did I feel like Savior came over just to get his dick sucked and be done with it. He definitely would've left shortly after he came if that's what he was after.

It strangely felt like Savior came over because he was lonely.

I gather a couple of snacks and bottled water before I text Jalen back. *Sorry you can't come over tonight. My cousin is going to help me study.*

## Seven

Junie's hip-hop music wakes me up the next morning. A crazy mix of piano, staccato drums, and synthesizers make up this song he coined, "Yellow." He named it that because it was the first color that came to his mind at the time. It just also happens to be the time he peed and looked down at the toilet.

It's not bad song but it's not something that anyone will hear on the radio anytime soon. I'm not saying that to be shady, but I think he made better beats before he hooked up with Tasha. Now all he does is get high and make beats that only one has to be high to like. I guess he and Tasha have something in common.

After studying a bit more, I ended up falling asleep on the other couch along with Savior. It's not the most comfortable couch in the world and it's definitely has showed its age, but I didn't want to leave him alone in the living room. Sure, he would've been fine but I wanted to stay with him in case he needed anything.

In case, he needed me.

He barely stirred for the rest of the night and only fell into a horizontal position when I was already asleep. He either decided to just stay where he was or he was too tired to go home. It doesn't ultimately matter. I'm just glad he was the first thing I saw in the morning.

There I go again, getting feelings.

It's barely a week into our arrangement and I feel like he's my boyfriend, though he's made it very clear he wasn't. And honestly, if Savior was my boyfriend, he would've acknowledged that already. He damn sure wouldn't have let Rosa hang all over him at happy hour.

Or maybe he would have, I'm not entirely sure about this fool yet.

All I know when Savior's cock was in my mouth, hearing him moan my name, feeling his hands all over my dome, it was an indescribable feeling. Something shifted between us and I know he had to have felt it. Each time we do anything sexual, the connection becomes closer and more intricate.

90 days. We're on day five.

I get up to use the bathroom and pass Savior on the way when his hand suddenly grabs my leg. I'm startled and look down at him. He slowly opens his eyes and he lazily smiles at me.

"Where are you going, gorgeous?"

It's the second time he's called me that. "Bathroom. Emergency."

He nods. "Come back here when you're done." He caresses my leg and lets me go.

I immediately feel the loss of his touch and I hurry to the bathroom like I'm Flo-Jo in the Olympics. After I come out, I rejoin Savior on the sofa. I sit across from him and he shakes his head. He lifts up the blanket and I notice his cock is tucked away into his pants. I was really hoping it was still out and hard so we could finish what we started last night. "Come here, gorgeous."

He's not my boyfriend but he's acting like it. I'm torn between complaining about his attitude and wanting to get Savior snuggles. Snuggles, FTW. I walk over and lay down beside him. My back is pressed against his body and we're facing the TV.

Savior's body feels amazing against mine. It doesn't matter if he's beside me, behind me, or underneath me. I just want to feel him on me all day, every day.

"How did studying go last night?" He asks. His nose nuzzles my neck and he wraps his arms around my body.

It feels like we've always done this. It feels like an old friend. He feels like, everything. "It went very well. I have my final at ten so I'll leave here in a little while. Next week, I have an appointment at the clinic to get everything checked and refill

my birth control.” I yawn. “After that, I’m done until mid-February.”

Savior nods and kisses the nape of my neck. Ooh, that boy doesn’t know that’s my spot. “And then what?”

“Just the internship and I’ll get a job somewhere. I don’t really need one but I like to make my own money instead of relying on my daddy for some.”

His tongue plays with my earlobe and if this boy don’t quit... “What does your dad do for a living?”

I was wondering when that question was going to come up. I’d rehearsed my canned answers to Savior for a while and they all didn’t make any sense.

*My daddy is a pharmaceutical rep. He reps Inglewood, Watts, and some parts of Compton. Westsiiiiiiiiide!*

*My daddy make it do what it do.*

*My daddy is a hustla, baby! (In my Pharrell voice)*

I want to tell Savior the truth about my family but I don’t want to push him away. What guy will be okay that the woman he’s banging has a father who keeps goons on retainer? On the same token, I also want to realize who he’s getting himself involved with. He’s not dealing with Karen from Malibu or Christy from Palm Springs. He’s dealing with ghetto-ass Keisha from Inglewood.

“My daddy runs his own business from home. He does a lot of accounting.” Not quite a lie, but sounds a lot better than the truth.

Savior nods and kisses my neck again. This time I feel his hardened cock press into my cheeks. I want to turn around, straddle him, and ride that motherfucker until the sun goes down. Last night, Savior let me take control. I don’t think he’ll let me do it again this morning.

“What are your plans today?” I ask.

“Legal schmegal stuff,” his voice is smooth like maple syrup on a stack of pancakes, “and then gym time. I have a business dinner I need to attend but hopefully it won’t take too long.” He kisses my neck again. Arousal slowly hums like a gospel hymn between us. “Can I spend the night tonight?”

Hell, you can spend the night any night. My legs are wide open for you, boy. “Sure, that’ll be great.”

“I never did thank you for last night.” He kisses my earlobe. My body tingles each time I feel his lips on me. “I really appreciate you being there for me.”

My body is attuned to every touch of him. I feel the soft thickness of his cock nudging against my cheeks and I try to steady my breathing. “You’re welcome.”

“I need to thank you.” He rolls on top of me and I open my legs wide to accommodate him.

It’s the first time we’ve been in this position, and yet, it feels so natural. Savior is significantly taller than me, yet his frame fits perfectly between my thighs. There’s nothing awkward between us. Instead, his eyes burned with desire. His chest is heavy, like he’s trying to restrain himself.

“Gorgeous.” His voice dripped with lust and experience. His hardened cock is pressed against the vee of my sex. All he has to do is move a little to the right and he’ll be so warm inside of me.

My sofa is small. It can roll out into a futon but it’s really small fit for just two people in this position. Somehow, I think that’s perfect for Savior. “You don’t have to thank me.”

“Oh, but I do.” He kisses my neck and I gasp in ecstasy. He quickly moves down my body and pulls my panties aside. A couple of fingers brush against my wet slit and he approvingly smiles. “Your cunt is so ready and wet for me.”

“You bring it out of me,” I breathe. I’m starting to feel delirious with lust and I just need him inside of me.

“I hope I always will,” Savior hooks one of my legs before he covers my wet slit with his mouth.

My back arches off the sofa and I lose my hands in his hair. His tongue is perfect, flicking my clit so fast before slowing down to gently suck on it. He pressed his tongue into me harder, almost spearing me as I struggled not to scream.

I felt the flutters of climax in my tummy and it traveled down to my toes, curling them. With each lick, my body involuntarily shook as it tried to stave off the orgasm. I panted and cried; my legs began to shake. A few more flicks of Savior’s tongue and I lost control.

“Savior!” I gasped as the climax hit every nerve of my body, stilling it before I collapsed back onto the sofa.

I couldn’t even describe the state of euphoria I was in. My body felt like jelly. My head was in a different zone. My heart, though, was on a different plane.

Savior yawns and checks his Apple watch. “Shit, I need to go.” I move out of his way and he rubs a hand over his face. “Bathroom?”

“Down the hallway to your right.” I watch him get up and he winks at me, slapping my ass before he leaves.

My body once again craves him. He felt so warm, and just so right. My mind travels to thought of when we’ll have sex for the first time. I mean, technically speaking we’ve already hooked up but I’m thinking the actual body-rocking, lamp-breaking, continuous orgasm sex.

I wonder if I’ll be able to handle him.

The toilet flushes and Savior appears a few minutes later, already in mid-transformation of his appearance. The sultry look is still there, but more of professional Savior has appeared. He wears his appearance as a mask, putting it on depending the situation and persons, and only carefully removing it when he’s completely comfortable. I wonder if I’ll ever see all of him.

He rushes over and kisses me, not caring about my stank morning breath. His lips sweep over mine and I hold onto his muscular arms to keep from falling. Every time he kisses me, it blows me away. I wonder if it'll always be like this.

Then I remind myself – 90 days.

He pulls back and I softly moan at the loss of him. “Good luck.” He gives my ass a couple of pats and heads out. I watch him walk to a parked Bentley with the driver, waiting for him at the back passenger door. Savior must've known he was going to stay with me because I can't imagine the driver staying there all night waiting for him.

Did he know he was going to spend the night here? I can't recall seeing the driver when I let him in.

As I close the front door, I have more questions than answers about Savior and our arrangement. He said he couldn't do romance. He stressed he didn't want to be my boyfriend and a relationship wasn't something he wanted. If he wanted sex, he most certainly would've had it last night.

It seemed Savior just wanted me to hold him.



I arrive at Los Angeles City College thirty minutes early for my final. I study some quick notes about the Federalist papers and hope to God I pass. I had to suffer going through political theory for the best semester and I do not want to return. There are many things I would rather be doing and sitting through another repeat of how old white slavemasters stole land from brown people, enslaved and raped black people, and declared how everyone was equal.

My mind travels back to Savior and how he helped me with my essay. He only gave me a small talk but it was all I needed. He summarized everything within a few minutes and it took me literally all week just to come up with a single page.

It's not even a surprise. Savior graduated summa cum laude from USC's undergrad and law school. He was offered



positions at law firms all over the country, but chose to join his father at the family's firm.

He built a steady reputation from the time he graduated from law school until now. Another Google alert revealed how ruthless Savior could be in his lawsuits and defending clients from scrupulous owners. He was once quoted as saying, 'I don't care about their feelings; I care about the law.'

Is it bad I felt a tingle as I thought about how relentless Savior might be in bed?

I sigh and shake my head. Not my boyfriend. Not my boyfriend. Not my boyfriend.

I check my phone and realize it's time to head to my final. I go to the room and see fellow classmates looking over their notecards and studying a bit from the book. I look over my notes one last time and just hope for the best.

"All right, class," the professor comes in and we all put away our notes and take out our blue books, "put away everything except for a pen, pencil, and your blue books. You have the full two hours to complete." He passes around the sheet with the examine questions. "Good luck."

I get the sheet and I just smile at the first question: HOW WOULD THE FEDERALIST PAPERS APPLY IN TODAY'S POLITICAL CLIMATE? CITE EXAMPLES.

Thank the good Lord for Savior.

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I arrive early at the clinic appointment. It was time for my annual checkup and I need to re-up my birth control. I know Savior and I's little arrangement is only for T-90 days and counting but the Pill has been a sista's life saver. My periods are no damn joke.

Walking into the student clinic on campus, it feels very much like a doctor's office. There are a few bored students scrolling through their phones. The typical elevator music fare is playing and I think it's Kelly Clarkson. I actually like her.

White girl got some vocals on her. She needs to release an R&B album.

I take my seat and fill out the questionnaire, answering all of the standard questions. I check off I'm getting my annual physical, but also a HIV test and any other STD testing they want to do. I figured I might as well get everything done so there are no questions for Savior.

I give my questionnaire to the nurse and wait back in my seat. I received a text from Tasha and the contents of it stun me a little.

*Your neighbors sold the house. They're moving at the end of the month.*

It's been going on a lot lately in Inglewood. My block alone had five families leave within the past six months. Los Angeles is becoming increasingly more expensive to live in. Not to mention, I'm sure my neighbors were tired of hearing gunshots every so often played another role in their leaving.

I receive another text from Tasha: *She said they had an offer they couldn't pass up and left ASAP. She asked if you were going to sell and I told her you weren't. That's true, isn't it? You're not going to sell?*

Truth is, I'm not sure yet. There is no point of me having that house if I'm about to take up Savior's offer of sending me to any four-year university. I'll be too happy living it up at college to worry about maintenance and all that crap back in Inglewood.

Then again, if my auntie and Tasha doesn't have another place to stay, I can't stand the thought of them possibly being out on the streets or struggling because I wasn't home.

Damned if I do, damned if I don't.

"Keisha Jones?" The nurse in the cute Noah's Ark scrubs calls for me. We greet each other with smiles and I follow her back to the smaller rooms. After the basic questionnaire and checks, she instructs me to undress and put on a sexy paper robe for the doctor, who'll examine me with her in the room.

I quickly undress and look down at my cute emoji socks and wonder why in the hell is Savior even entertaining my childish ass. He's a good seven years my senior and I'm sure there are other women he could be entertaining and parading around instead of me. My thoughts travel to the gala tomorrow and I wonder why did he ask me to accompany him if he was set I wasn't his girlfriend and we weren't dating?

I'm starting to think Savior is lonelier than he wants to admit.

There's a knock on the door and I tell the person to come in. A white doctor is front of the nurse and he smiles a warm smile at me. He's tall, with blue eyes and a seemingly five o'clock shadow. His brown hair is closely cropped and he has a whiff of high-society, despite being on a community college campus. He has a familiar face about him, but I can't place it.

"Keisha Jones?" He greets me. "I'm Dr. Ocean Ellison. I'll be performing your exam on you today."

That name sounds even more familiar. It's starting to come to me slowly. "Ellison?" I ask. "Are you related to that family?"

Ocean chuckles and I immediately knew the answer before he said a word. "Why yes, I am. My dad and brother are lawyers. My other brother is the co-owner of Fresh Nectar, a clothing line. I'm the only doctor in the bunch."

Savior's brother is about to get a face full of my snatch and have me ready for his brother to fuck my brains out. I couldn't have written a better script.

## Eight

“Wait a minute!” My other best friend, Nikki, stops me as we lunch at Shake Shack. She was born and raised in Anaheim, yet the way she acts, you would think she was born and raised in Bel-Air along with Savior and Ocean.

She’s the typical black Barbie, down to the perfect weave, perfect lip shade, and perfect car (a new Honda Accord). She’s a girl who’s never dated a black guy and her parents really don’t mind (I lowkey think they encourage her not to but that’s a different conversation).

We met at a hood party where she was the then-girlfriend of another guy. We struck up a conversation and have been close ever since. I like how different she is because she doesn’t try to be “white” nor does she play down her blackness. Take her or leave her as she is.

If Tasha is a hood booger, Nikki is the Hilary Banks of Anaheim. “He saw your snatch and he’s Savior’s brother!”

“Girl, did you just announce my business to all of L.A.?” I look around and I hope people are just oblivious to us. I do not need that shit on World Star.

“Oh, who cares about that!” She dismisses my humiliation. Thanks, bitch. “I can’t believe Savior didn’t tell you he had a brother!”

“Brothers, plural. I knew he did but I never seen any pictures of Ocean. Trust me, I’ve looked.” I defended my actions, though I don’t understand why I had to. I didn’t do anything wrong other than spreading wide for Ocean. Okay, that just sounds weird.

Nikki takes a bite of her cheeseburger and shakes her head. “Savior is going to kick your ass.”

“Why?” I defend myself. “Why would he kick my ass? I would think he would trust his brother on seeing my lovely of lovelies than some other doctor.”

“Keisha, Keisha...” Nikki shakes her head. She’s not quite a golddigger, but in the word’s of Kanye, she won’t date a broke nigga. “...you have so much to learn about men, sweetheart.”

I slowly chew a French fry and stare her down. Nikki has dated her fair share of basketball players, CEOs, and other executive types. I think she’s low-key happy and jealous I’m with Savior but she’s insistent on giving me advice on how to handle him when I still don’t know if he likes coffee or tea.

“Why would Savior be upset that Ocean saw my pum-pum?” And he gave me a breast exam. And he signed off on my birth control. And I just might see him on Saturday. Oh shit.

“You don’t get it. You belong to Savior. That’s it. It doesn’t matter if it’s “90 days” or not.” It seems Nikki isn’t buying the 90 days bullshit, neither. “You are his. You’re his woman.”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” I clarify.

“Oh whatever,” Nikki rolls her eyes. “The moment he ate you out, you became his woman. He marked you and you both know it. He stuck his face down there – do you know how many men don’t want to do that and Savior willingly did it? He volunteered to eat you! That’s huge! He should buy you a better car for the privilege!” I gotta admire Nikki’s gold-digging hustle. If she thinks a girl is not getting the most buck for her bang, she’ll set them straight. She would make a great madam. “You showing your punani to Ocean is a no-no.”

“Well, technically speaking I didn’t just spread eagle and tell him, ‘Hey, you wanna see some brown sugar?’” I wiggle my eyebrows and Nikki busts up laughing. “I mean, how was I supposed to know Savior’s brother was going to be my gynecologist? Shit, I didn’t know! Had I known that, I would’ve scheduled with someone else!”

“Are you going to tell Savior?” She sips her chocolate shake. “He has to know about this.”

“For why?” I ask. ““Hey, Savior. I got on birth control like you asked. By the way, your brother got a bird’s eye view of my

yum-yum. Are you ready to fuck?” I roll my eyes. “That’s not going to go over very well.”

“He has to know, Keisha. He’s not going to like you kept that from him. Imagine if his brother tells him first before you do?” Nikki mentions. “You don’t want that humiliation.”

The sad part is that Nikki’s right. But how do I tell him about this? I mean I’m not his girlfriend. Is it really going to make a difference that his brother saw my bald spot as he gave me a medical exam?

“Anyway, I’m here for an order. She takes out a folded piece of paper and slides it over to me. “It’s for my clientele.”

Nikki is a high-class drug dealer. Maybe she was inspired my daddy, I don’t know. She’s not the type of girl that looks like she could be a drug dealer, which why she’s able to get away with it as much as she does. And with Nikki’s high-maintenance ass, selling drugs might be the only way she can afford herself.

I grab the paper and open it. Nikki’s smart about her hustle and only uses street names for the drugs – White Girl, Beans, Bananas, and Bicycle Handle Bars. That, ladies and gentlemen, is code for cocaine, Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, and Xanax. And trust me, there are a lot more code words for those the DEA doesn’t even know about.

I slide the list back to Nikki. “The last three my daddy can give to you. The first one, you have to go through Jalen. My daddy doesn’t do that one.”

“Got it.” Nikki writes down a small note and tucks the note away. “So, what’s going on with you and Jalen? Assuming he’s no longer in the picture because of Savior?”

“Like he was firmly in the picture to begin with.” I roll my eyes. Lately, however, Jalen has been extra emotional as in he’s been texting me and calling me at random times. I went from being a convenient piece of ass to suddenly I’m top bitch? Not sure how I should feel about that. “Savior wants him gone.”

“Well, duh.” Nikki blinked. “Have you told Jalen about Savior?”

“And tell him what exactly?” I ask. “I’m seeing someone who won’t refer to me as his girlfriend but wants me to stop sleeping with Jalen because he doesn’t like to share?”

“It’s not like Jalen was going to propose marriage or make you a baby mama. Thank God neither took place.” Nikk does another eye roll. “He never appreciated you and only got with you because of who your dad is. If Prince wasn’t your daddy, Jalen would’ve never stepped to you. He’s wasting your time and worse yet, you both know he is. Drop him.”

“It’s coming, trust, it’s coming. It’ll probably happen tonight. Savior’s coming over to spend the night.”

“Awe sookie sookie now!” Nikki’s black side comes firmly out when she’s around me. My white girl voice is pretty good but Nikki should be awarded an Oscar for her acting. “Break out the champagne glasses and condoms!”

“Ooh, somebody’s been listening to ‘Pac and Snoop,” I sip on my soda, “good for you. Good for you.”

“I want a full-length dick report tomorrow. Do not spare. I need to know how those Bel-Air white boys get down.” She smiles like she just won an award.

“You’ve had pink dick. A lot of it, actually.” I point out. I don’t think Nikki’s ever had a black boyfriend and if she has, she kept him a secret she’ll take to the grave. “I’m sure it’s all the same.”

“No, it isn’t.” She insists. “Some guys can whip it out and send you to meet the Holy Ghost and some guys whip it out and you’re instantly singing the lyrics to ‘Short Dick Man.’” I bust up laughing and she follows. “Girl, you ain’t even know.”

“And I don’t want to! Trust me, I don’t want to!” I laugh. I get a buzz on my cell phone and my heart smiles to see it’s a message from Savior. Already I’m looking forward to his calls and texts like a lovesick groupie who just realized the lead

singer of her favorite band is single: I'll be running late tonight so I'll be over around 10, if that's okay?

I reply: *Yeah, that's fine.*

How did the final go? Did you nail it?

*I sure did! Thanks to you!*

Nah, you did it. I might have helped some but you did all of the hard work.

It was a compliment I didn't know I needed. *Thank you.*

Btw, my brother told me you passed the exam.

I sink down into my seat. "Remember when you just said I needed to tell Savior before his brother did?" I ask Nikki, who nods. "Yeah, scratch that."

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After lunch, I head back home and clean up for Savior's arrival. He's not expected until way late, which is fine. It gives me time to scrub the house down and scrub my body down while I'm at it.

As I pull up the driveway, I see two people in business suits talking to my auntie. Gloria Jones is her name and well, she looks like the type that would be named that. She's thin, with a voice that sounds like nails on a chalkboard, and bug eyes that reminds me of those Avatar people.

My auntie, when she wants to be, is a lovely woman who spends her days teaching L.A.'s worst at Compton high school. She has a Master's degree and likes to mention it in every conversation she can.

She's one of those women that probably would've gotten married and stayed married had her priorities not have been so messed up. She's the type of woman who would stay with a dude who she has no future with but because he dicks her down just right, she bypasses a lot of his shit (gee, I wonder where I picked that up from).



It's no surprise when my daddy gave me my late Granny's home, Gloria had five or six bitch fits about it. She doesn't hesitate to tell everyone she's going to leave the 'hood, but when the opportunity is presented, she suddenly doesn't want to. My auntie, when she's bored and that's often, loves to start shit and pick fights that got nothing to do with her.

You would think I'm talking about the typical middle-age black female who spends her days gossiping online with other don't-have-a-man-but-have-cobwebs-in-their-punani- hens just like her, but no. My auntie is not even 40.

I have a lot to do today and my auntie isn't gon' fuck up my mood. I park the Beemer and get out, boasting the brightest smile that Colgate would be proud of as the gentlemen approach me.

"Hello." A man with a deep voice smiles at me. He's portly and has slick back hair that's full of grease. He smells like he's about to sell me some bullshit. "You must be Keisha." He holds out his hand for me to shake and I just glance down at it and back at him.

"Let's cut to the chase – who the hell are you?" I recognize a scammer when I see one.

"Keisha!" Gloria scolds me as she accompanies the men. "Where are your manners? I'm sorry, gentlemen, this is my niece, Keisha. She's the owner of the duplex." She glares at me. "She's the one that's responsible for all of the decisions around here."

"I'm also the one that is responsible for letting you pay cheap rent and I don't see you mouthing off about that." I smartly reply and Gloria straightens her posture.

"My name is Edward Georgian and this my brother, Lance." The man produces a business card and I recognize his last name being Armenian. Now my thoughts of him being a snake-oil salesman are correct. I should ask him how the rest of the Kardashians are doing. "We were wondering if you were interested in selling your property."

“No.” I shake my head. “Is there anything else I can help you with?”

“Keisha, listen to what the men have to say. They’ve made a very good first offer.” Gloria nods.

“An offer of money you won’t receive?” I reply. “I’m not selling the duplex.”

“What if we offer you right now, three hundred thousand?” Lance offers. He’s a bit taller than Mr. Kardashian and slimmer. I guess I was talking to Kim, and this one is Khloe. I wonder where Kourtney is. “What do you say?”

“I say you’re lowballing me from the jump and you hope my naiveté and age will prove I’m stupid enough to take you on that offer.” I produce a business card of my own. “If you’re serious about this home, you’ll call and speak with Prince Jones. He’s my father and my aunt’s brother. Good day, gentlemen.”

I make my way towards the house as I overhear my auntie apologize to the men for my rudeness and she assures them I’ll change my mind. I’m not even a few feet into my home when Gloria comes barging in. “You are so damn rude!”

“Why in the hell were you entertaining those men?” I ask. “This is not your home. You have no right to tell anyone what I plan to do with it.”

“Do you want to stay here in the ‘hood, Keisha? People are shot for no reason here! Didn’t a few of your friends die within the past few years because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time? Do you like being inside when it’s only six o’clock at night because if you step foot outside you might get shot? Do you like hearing helicopters and seeing police chases up and down our street? I don’t! I don’t want to stay here! I want to get the fuck out of Inglewood!”

“Then go!” I shout. “I’m not forcing you to stay here. If you want to leave, ain’t nobody stopping you from doing so. But what you not gon’ do, is talk to some scammers about me selling this home. You keep talking about black-owned this,

black-owned that. How we need to have pride in our community. And then you gon' get mad at me because I refuse to sell to some Kardashians? Woman, have you lost your damn mind?"

"You're not going to get a better offer than that, Keisha!" Gloria shouts back. "You think any black realtors are going to offer 300 grand for this home? You think any Latino realtors are going to look out for you? They don't care about you, Keisha. They don't care about anyone than themselves. They ain't trying to learn English, but you have to learn Spanish. How does that feel?"

"It feels like you voted for the wrong candidate this last election," I smart back, "listen, I'm not selling the home until I'm ready and I don't know when that'll be. If you don't want to stay here, don't. But please, don't worry about what I'm going to do when my decisions will not affect your life. Now please excuse me, I need to clean up my home." I turn around to leave when Gloria stops me again.

"For that white boy that comes over?" She says. "That guy who only comes over for a few hours and leaves? You think I don't know what's going on? It's obvious he's using you and you're letting him. I have to say he's an upgrade from that Jalen fella, but not much. You think that white boy wants to come over here with the possibility he's going to get shot every time he steps foot inside your home? You need to think about how your actions are affecting other people."

I turn around and shake my head. If my auntie wanted to hurt me, she did a splendid job. "I sell this home and you're not getting a dime. You think you'll be able to stay here while Becky and Timmy gentrify the hell out of it? Rents are going up all over L.A. and everyone is being pushed out. You think it won't apply to you? I can leave anytime and not look back, but you cannot say the same. I'm keeping this home because if I don't, it'll be *you* on the streets, not me. Now if you have anything else smart you want to say, save it. I have a guest coming over tonight and I need to smudge the hell out of this house to cleanse it from your negative bullshit. Good day!"

## Nine

I must've showered and scrubbed every crevice on my body.

Savior is supposed to come over at any time and I'm not sure what his protocol is. Would he want to talk first? Watch a little TV? Or will he get straight to business with no foreplay?

Will this last all night or will I wonder if I could've had a V8 like Robin in *Waiting to Exhale*? A sista has questions.

"Looking for Mr. Do Right" is softly playing and a few candles are lit. Even though I know it's just sex and nothing but, I felt the need to make it as romantic as possible. It's for my sanity and not his.

I decide to wear just boy shorts and a tank top. I figured if I'm going to be butt-ass naked, there was no point of removing a lot of clothing. It was easier for everyone involved that I'm close to naked as possible.

I keep telling myself it's just sex and that's all there's to it. He gets off and I get to go to college free. I'll have a shiny BMW to boot and I won't have to worry about Savior for the rest of my time at the local community college until I transfer.

I need to look at this the way it supposed to be – it's business between us and that's it. All of Savior's compliments are just nice things he's saying so I can remember them when he spreads my thighs open.

He's clinical, mechanical, and very unromantic about this whole ordeal. Who knows how many women he's approached this with and how many women out there right now are going to college on Savior Ellison's dime. I'm probably one of out several. Why am I doing this?

I want to drink to calm my nerves but the way I'm feeling, I would down the entire wine bottle. Savior would want me sober and be as coherent as possible. I don't want anything to cloud my judgment tonight.

The doorbell rings and my heart leaps out of my chest. He's here. My throat swallows the bile that threatens to come out and my body shivers with nervousness and anticipation. I'm half-excited, half-scared, but interestingly enough, I'm not even aroused.

I walk to the front door and peep through the hole. Savior is standing behind it and immediately, my nervousness goes away. I open the door and smell his wonderful, masculine scent before we meet eyes.

He's still dressed in the attire from earlier and he brought a small gift for me, a dozen roses. "For you," he smiles.

I grab the long-stemmed roses and sniff them. For someone who claimed he didn't want to do romance, he could've fooled me. "Thank you. Come in."

Savior walks to my bedroom and I put the flowers in a vase with water. I meet Savior in the bedroom and close the door behind me. He's staring at an old photo of me and my father when I was two. I honestly don't remember that photo but it's one of my favorites. It tells me my Daddy always had my back.

Savior turns his attention to another photo of me, from my high school days when I was at a house party. I had a red cup in my hand and laughing at the camera with the rest of my girls. My hair was shoulder-length and I had the typical style every black girl in L.A. wore in the early 2000's. High school wasn't even that long ago but I still have great memories.

"Why did you cut off your hair?"

Only the crackle of the candles and Keith Sweat's voice fills the room. The question surprises me and I didn't think it was something he would care about. "Something different," I reply. "My hair grows pretty quickly so I can always grow it out."

Savior puts down the photo and slowly shakes his head. "No, I like it like that. I get to see more of your beautiful face."

I'm glad the candles are lit so he couldn't see the embarrassment my face had. If he's trying to get into my

panties with all of these compliments, I'm not stopping him.  
"Thank you."

"You're welcome." He looks around at other photos. Despite him being here before, it's clear the first visit was proving a point to me. This visit, however, is more personable. Professional and clinical Savior is gone. Authentic and down-to-earth Savior has appeared.

He sits down on the bed and takes in more of the bedroom. It's rather simple – a four-poster bed, a dresser with mirror, and a standard closet. I have a desk over at the corner that holds all of my clutter and I keep a vibrator tucked away in my naughty drawer.

Savior's eyes are quizzical and studious. It seems he's trying to figure me out without actually asking questions. I'm not sure if I like that or I want him out before he can get me off.

"Come here, Keisha."

I walk over to Savior and he pulls me on top of his lap before I had a chance to sit beside him. He wraps his arms around me and his body feels amazing. My heart is no longer pounding out of my chest and I feel strange warmth between us, like if this was a regular thing.

He looks up at me and we lock eyes. His brown eyes softened and I see flickers of joy within them. "Whenever you feel uncomfortable, let me know and I'll stop. Your happiness is my top priority."

I nod. "Okay."

"Are there things you don't want to do?" He asks.

"No anal," I reply, "that's a hard limit for me."

Savior nods. "Okay. Anything else?"

"That's it for now. I'll let you know if it's too much." At least I hope I'll let him know.

"Good." His response is above a whisper. Before I can ask him about condoms, Savior falls back onto the bed and pulls me

with him. His mouth claims mine and his hands explore my body.

The way this man kisses me...it's indescribable. He takes a part of my soul and gently holds it as his mouth makes love to mine. He gives me the right amount of tongue and passion, drinking me in with each kiss. He tastes like mint, a bit of bourbon, and his own flavor.

His hands wander all over my body before landing on my ass. He squeezes it and I moan into his mouth. "Savior..." I whisper.

"Shhh..." He kisses my neck and I lose all restraint. His lips gently suck on my skin and only moans come out of my mouth. "...the only sounds I want you to make is when I'm pleasuring you."

Our clothes fall onto the floor. The music switched to Kut Kloze's "I Like" and all I think it's the perfect soundtrack to what's going on. Yes, it is just sex but it somehow feels deeper than that. Maybe it's my mind justifying what I'm doing.

Savior hovers over me and looks into my eyes. He just stares at me for a moment and his brown eyes flicker with lust and excitement. He doesn't dare to say anything else as he moves his body down mine.

He squeezes my breasts, sucking each one before he moved down to my waist. He softly kissed my navel and circles my belly button with a finger. His eyes are studious, as his hands explore my body, wondering where to go next.

"Your body, Keisha..." Savior purrs. His voice is dripping with pleasure and need. "...your body is incredible."

It was a compliment I didn't know I needed. Savior isn't shy with words and only prefers to speak unless he has something to say. I try not to take it to heart but within the candlelight and sexy music in the room, I wonder how much of what Savior is saying is true.

"Keisha..." His voice whispers as hand brushes over my wet slit. "...you're so wet for me." He slides down and lifts one of

my legs on his shoulder. I feel his stubble on my inner thigh and I tense up. He's pleased me before but this time, it's different.

There's no conversation coaxing me to give into him. There are no clinical feelings about what's going to transpire. It feels like romance, even if Savior told me that wasn't what he wanted.

Savior's tongue swipes over my swollen clit and I arch off the bed. He holds me down on the bed and his tongue flattens. His mouth claims my sex, sucking on me while his tongue rapidly flicks my clit.

One of his free hands explored my body while the other hand firmly grasped my thigh. I moaned and gasped, feeling the loss of control I so tightly held. Savior had an unpredictable rhythm that drove me wild, and I was already addicted to him. His tongue is diabolical, his mouth is skilled, and I am in heaven.

"Savior..." My fingers were lost in his hair.

He responded by increasing his tongue flicks and I felt the heat billowed down to my core. My orgasm was approaching and the harder I fought it, the harder Savior sucked on my clit. I was close to the edge and he didn't want me carefully tread along it. He wanted me to fall right off.

My legs begin to shake. My moans became soft mewls. I panted and moved my hips in the direction of his tongue. The way his tongue fucked me, stroking me just right and lifting me off the bed, was beyond any fantasy I've ever had.

The orgasm came hard and fast, seizing my body into a vise and tumbling out of my mouth in a primal scream. "Oooh fuck!" I slammed back into bed, completely delirious and wondering what in the hell just happened.

I barely open my eyes and locked eyes with Savior. He has a warm smile on his face and he's stroking his impressive cock. His entire body is beautiful – not too muscular and not too



scrawny. He has a tawny complexion and his brown hair casually falls over his eyes.

His eyes are full of desire and despite his massive erection, he's very much in control. It's not a control for his benefit. He wants to see that I'm satisfied first and then he'll take care of himself.

He grabs a nearby condom and tears open the foil. Savior shifts off the bed and stands before me. He grabs my ankles, pulls me down to him, and spreads my thighs apart. His cock is hard, thick, and I wonder if I would be able to take all of it.

The head of Savior's cock swipes around my opening before he pushes inside. I gasped and tighten around him as he moans. "Keisha..." His voice echoes in the bedroom. "... damn, baby."

"Savior..." I cry out.

He glides in and out of me so smoothly, like if he'd studied my body. I felt every wonderful inch of his glorious, thick cock as my pussy suckled the length of it. Savior felt higher than any drug, and I didn't want to come down.

His thrusts were diabolical, maddening, and so deep. My body responded like never before, embracing his thickness. My pussy quivered around his cock, wanting more. Savior holds onto my hips when he increased the pace, and his words...his words promised me everything.

"You're so beautiful, Keisha," he groans as a free hand reaches up and squeezes my breasts. "You're mine. I won't let you go."

I tighten around him, pulling him in deeper. The pressure was beginning to become too much and I moaned and cried. My hands gripped his arms as my head slammed back into the pillow. I felt so full, yet I couldn't get enough. I wanted more of this.

I wanted more of Savior.

He reaches up and grabs my hands, interlocking our fingers together. He claims my mouth once again, plundering his tongue inside mine. He's claiming me. He's branding me. I'm his and he drives the point home.

The orgasm slammed into me like a Mack truck. My body rolled as delicious pinpoints of pleasure seized my body, creating aftershocks as Savior was still inside me. I cried and keened, vibrating against his mouth.

He thrusts a few more times before he finally pulls out of me, disposing the condom and coming all over my body. "Fuck!" He growls and trembles, shooting his hot seed all over me.

Carnal desires take over me and my mouth is hungry for his taste. I swipe some come from my chest and swallow it as I stare back at him. I'm daring him to fuck me again, to give me all of him, and silently asking him if this is still just sex.

Savior collapses on top of me. His cock is still hard and he's still coming. He presses his forehead against mine and sweetly kisses me. "Keisha..." he moans, cupping my face and kissing me again. "...Keisha."

There are no fancy lunches. No Armani suits. No expensive cars. No false pretenses. We're stripped. Bare. Raw. Beyond naked. We're both in a daze and don't want to come down.

It's a side of Savior no one has seen before. He's a man who separates sex from love and has done a great job of doing so. What happened between us just now was beyond that. Savior was vulnerable and he let his guard down.

"Where are your towels?" He asks.

"In the hallway." I whisper.

He gets up and opens the door, briefly checking to see if Junie and Tasha are home. He walks out of the bedroom, and grabs a towel, stopping by the bathroom to moisten it. He returns to the bedroom and begins to clean my love, being gentle with it.

He wipes himself off and tosses the towel aside before he climbs back into bed with me. I roll over and cuddle with him

as Savior kisses my forehead.

I don't want to spoil this moment but I have to know what's going on. I'm already attached to this man and if it's just a physical thing, we need to end it before the 90 days. "Is it still just sex?" I ask.

Savior turns to me and cups my face. "Was it ever?"

## Ten

“This reminds me of my undergrad days.”

I stand underneath the hot water raining down on me as Savior joins me in the shower. I have nothing but class all day but Savior has all work. It’s nice we’re spending this bit of time together for I don’t know how much I’ll see him outside of the internship.

He spent the night with me, though it was neither of our intentions that he stayed. Throughout the night, we made love a few more times until we were too exhausted to continue. I found out a favorite position of his is when I’m on top. While I was a bit nervous at first, he guided me just right to ride that magnificent cock of his.

Now we’re taking a shower, doing things that only couples in love do. Though I’m not sure what was the purpose of him bringing up his thot days. Another reminder that I’m a thot in his thoughts? “Dare I ask why this reminds you of your undergrad days?”

“The water pressure.” His voice is sexy as all get out and I’m trying to keep my punani at bay. I’m not sure if he’s being honest or if it’s a smooth save. He wets his hair and face, before shaking off the excess. “I remember the water pressure in college was weak as shit, too.”

“Oh, thank you for dissing my home,” I blink at him, “how kind of you.”

“My delivery may not have been the greatest, but consider it a gift for you. I’m buying you a new showerhead.” He grabbed a bar of soap and briefly sniffed it before he lathered it up.

“Peppermint?”

“Peppermint, ginger, and charcoal.” I clarify. “It’s supposed to cleanse your skin and make it more supple.”

“Ooh,” He purrs. His voice is heavy with lust. “Kinda like yours?”

And there goes my punani sounding like a 90's R&B love song. "I'll help bathe you."

I bathe him in a small silence, only sounds from the pouring shower beating against the tub. My soapy fingers trail his muscular arms and legs, washboard abs, and chiseled face. I paid special attention to his cock, stroking it as I cleaned it. It didn't take much for Savior to get hard again. I honestly wondered if he never was soft.

I was about to rinse him off when Savior grabbed the soap from me and returned the favor. Just like I took care of his body, he took care of mine. He caresses my breasts, slid both of his hands down my legs, and even washed my head.

There was something so intimate about feeling Savior's hands on my bald head. Okay, I'm not completely bald but I'm pretty close. Think Amber Rose without the thotass part and you got my fade.

Never mind about the groupie tales of Kanye's booty finger, Savior took care of me in a way I'd never experienced before. Granted I didn't have much hair to begin with, but it didn't seem to make a difference to him.

He caresses my head like he was taking special care of it. It was a precious jewel, a rare stone to him it felt like. He massaged my scalp with his fingertips, relaxing me and putting any worries I had at ease. It felt natural to him, as if he did this all the time with me.

"I need to take care of the most important part," he whispers. He nudges my thighs apart and brush a finger over my slit. My body stills and I pant at the sudden invasion. He'd touched me several times throughout the night but every time was a new experience. I was already addicted to him and I barely knew if he liked coffee or tea.

"Shh...I'll take care of you." He promises. His lips crawl across my neck, leading up to my lips where he swept them against mine. "Do you trust me?"

I've never trusted anyone. I was taught that early in my life by Andrea, my mother. Once she decided chasing dick was more important than being a mother, I was always ready for someone to suddenly leave me hanging. I mean, if you can't trust your mama, who can you trust?

Savior was forcing me to deal with my demons and I'm not sure how my black ass feels about that. "I don't know." I honestly answer him. I trusted him enough to dick me down properly but I don't know if I trust him enough to hold the one thing that means the most to me – my heart.

"I won't proceed unless you trust me," he removes his hand from my sex and I softly groan at the sudden loss. Savior stares deep into my eyes and it's clear he's not playing. He's not a man that takes no for an answer but he's also not the type who will play a game knowing he's going to lose.

Either I give him my full trust or we stop right now.

With a heavy heart coupled with the undeniable urge to get off, I make a decision I'll later regret. "I do trust you."

Savior sweeps his lips across mine, pushing his tongue again inside. His mouth drinks from mine and our tongues dance. He backs up against the wall, and pushes my thighs apart once again with his hand. He cups my sex and gently massages it, making me slicker and hotter against him.

"Hold onto me," he instructs and I do as he says. He brushes a finger against my sex again before he enters inside. The sudden intrusion catches me off guard and I gasp into his mouth. He buried his finger deep inside my love, while his thumb circled my clit.

My body uncontrollably moved along the rhythm he'd set. I wanted the release; my body craved it. As I moaned more into Savior's mouth, I felt the heat of my body climbing to an undeniable high. I was writhing, crying out his name, and holding onto his body so tightly, I might have scratched him.

"I got you," Savior whispers into my ear, "I got you, Keisha."

I could only nod as I panted and cried. I've been fingered before by fuckboys who didn't what the fuck they were doing. They thought fingering a girl was like stuffing a turkey, instead of summoning a genie, but I digress.

Savior plays my body like a seasoned violinist, strumming me along, figuring out what could make me sing the highest and loudest. Sex wasn't just an emotion for him but another power move. He wanted to make sure we both knew he owned this, he would worship it, and he would pleasure me at his bidding anytime he wanted.

And I would gladly let him. Yes, Lord.

The orgasm was hungrily lapping at my skin. My nipples tightened, my body twisted and turned, and Savior...had this wicked control over me. The question he'd asked had nothing to do with trust in the sexual sense, but overall.

Even though our arrangement is beyond friends with benefits and I'm hesitant to call him my boyfriend, he wanted me to place one hundred percent trust with him. As a result, I gave him power over me and we both knew it.

He wanted me to play his game, whatever it was, and I would be rewarded with tuition and a car. So why did this overall arrangement sound so twisted?

Before I could do any hard thinking, Savior flicks his thumb over my clit and my dignity shot out of the window. The orgasm crashes through me, leaving me screaming and breathless at the same time, before I came back down.

I left welts in Savior's back as my heart pounded out of my chest. My body had small aftershocks and I didn't let go of my death grip on Savior. I was too afraid of falling.

Not falling on the floor, but falling in love.

"I got you," he kissed my temple and swayed me, "I got you, baby."

I didn't respond. I laid my head against his chest as the water pounded on us. I wanted to cherish the moment with him

forever, even if it was a fleeting one.



“What are you doing later?” He asks.

After our shower, we got dressed in my bedroom. I put on new clothing and Savior put on a fresh suit for the firm. “School and that’s it,” I shrug as I tried to figure out which sneakers I wanted to wear that day. Do I go with the classic red Jordans or the Adidas? A sista has decisions.

“I want to stop by later,” he adjusts his tie, “I’ll bring dinner.”

Now, do FWBs bring over dinner? The last time I checked, not even Jalen’s headass did that. “What kind?”

“Well, what do you want?” He asks. “Whatever your heart desires, I’ll get.”

I really want some fried catfish with a side of Louisiana hot sauce but I have a feeling Savior won’t set foot inside any soul food restaurant here. That means I’m picking up the dinner.

“Fried catfish.”

Savior is silent and focusing more on his appearance than what I said. He’s doing intricate maneuvering with his tie and I just know he’s going to suggest something else instead. “The lady wants fried catfish so fried catfish is what she’ll get. Any particular place?”

Honestly, my daddy makes the best fried catfish known to man but I don’t think an uppity lawyer from Bel-Air and drug dealer from Inglewood are going to have too much in common right now so it’ll be a looooooong while before the introductions happen. “I know the place. I can pick it up so it’ll be one last thing you have to worry about.”

“Okay,” Savior pulls out his wallet and gives me a hundred dollar bill. “For dinner and whatever else you think we might need. Any change, you keep it.”

I want to ask him if this is part of the arrangement – he takes care of me in various ways without saying so. I’m ashamed to admit I’ve had numerous boyfriends in my lifetime and it



takes a friends-with-benefits arrangement with Savior to realize I was wasting my time with all of them niggas. I guess better now at 21 than at 51.

“Keisha?” Savior calls my name and it occurs to me he’d been doing so for the past minute. “Is everything okay?”

“Um, yeah,” I finally decide to go with the baby blue Jordans. I’m feeling fly and cocky fresh. I quickly put my shoes on and I’m done. “I just have a lot to do today.”

“I hope you have a great one.” He walks over to me and holds my waist. He looks deep into my eyes and I feel that magnetism that attracted me to Savior on the first day. “I know I’ll be thinking about you all day.”

“After you fucked my brains out, I don’t know if I can think about you.” I tease.

Savior’s hands crawl down to my ass and he gives it a firm squeeze. He presses his body against mine. His mouth claims mine once again and I feel delirious. “Here’s something to think about.”

A knocking on my door interrupts our make out session and I know it’s Tasha, with her nosy ass. I’m sure she listened in to us having sex all night and possibly again in the shower. Something tells me she would’ve pulled up a chair to watch if the invite was extended.

I open my door and see a surprising worried look on Tasha’s face. You know that feeling you thought you had enough money to get a bite to eat until you realized you spent it all at Sephora instead? That’s the look Tasha’s giving me. “What’s up?”

“You have a visitor,” she begins, “it’s Jalen.”

*Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck!*

## Eleven

“Is there a problem?” Savior asks as he approaches me from behind.

“Um...” It occurs to me I haven’t properly introduced my best friend and my pseudo-boyfriend to each other. “...Tasha, this is Savior. Savior, this is my best friend, Tasha.”

“We’ve met before.” He winks at her. I remember Savior sent Junie and Tasha out for breakfast while he ate me out. I guess he knew I might be a screamer. “Did you and Junie have fun the other day?”

“Oh yeah!” Tasha leans on the doorway. “We went to the mall and I picked up some clothes and Junie picked up something for his hair because oh my gosh, that boy and his hair can never get it right. And then he spent some money on a drum machine and I was like, ‘Why do you need that?’ And he was like, ‘Well, yeah because I make beats, you know?’ And I was like, ‘Why can you just download some apps for that?’ And he was like, ‘Well, the apps aren’t the same!’ And I’m like, ‘But it’s cheaper and I can use that money to redo my hair!’ And he was like, ‘Why do you always gotta start shit?’ And then I was like, ‘Nigga, why do you always gotta start shit?’ And then he was like...”

“He gets the point, Tash.” I interrupt her. This is why I can’t have nice things.

Savior smiles. “Is there a situation?”

“No, there’s no situation,” I’m trying to think of a good lie to stall Savior but it’s escaping me. I guess telling him to climb out the window is a no-go. “Somebody came by to see me, that’s all.”

“Oh?” Savior asks. His lips are in a straight line and just as flat. “Who?”

“Um...” I’m really wishing I pushed Savior out of the window now. I feel time is running out for a good lie. “...no one you

need to concern yourself with.”

“Keisha? Yo, are you here, baby? I got something for you!”

Savior’s eyebrows rise up in amusement. His eyes are dancing with delight and why do I feel like it’s one of those quirky scenes on Gilmore Girls or some CW bullshit show? “Oh?” He quickly leaves the bedroom and ah, hell.

Me and Tasha (of course she’ll be following us because her ass doesn’t want to miss a bit of tea) quickly follow Savior as he meets Jalen for the first and I hope, only time. Jalen has a bag of donuts and a black plastic bag of something I’m sure I do not want Savior to know about.

“You must be one of Keisha’s close friends,” Savior holds out his hand, “I’m Savior Ellison, Keisha’s boyfriend.”

Tasha looks over at me and I just swallow my response.

Jalen looks over at me as he slowly shakes Savior’s hand. He’s eyeballing him like if he’s on Punk’d and he’s waiting to see when we’ll actually yell, ‘April Fool’s!’ even though it’s December.

Jalen looks like the typical fuckboy I have grown to loathe. Muscular with silky dreads, and a penchant for wearing white tees and jeans, he’s the type of nigga that’ll make a grown-ass woman end up on an episode of Snapped because he dicked her down just right.

It’s a reason why I’m a bird in his harem. Or I should say was a bird until Savior showed me how my pussy works. Every girl has that one guy she regrets sucking his dick. Jalen is that guy.

“Hi, I’m...” Jalen is stuck. He knows he can’t introduce himself as my boyfriend because he’s never claimed my ass. With rich, white boy in front of him, he’s not entirely sure how to play this card. He does know that Savior isn’t a typical white boy based on how he’s dressed.

Savior looks like he stepped straight out of Neiman Marcus and a closet full of Armani, Hugo Boss, and Calvin Klein. In

fact, the sweater he's wearing right now is Burberry and his shoes are Gucci. The cologne he just put on is Creed and it's my new favorite.

He also looks like the type of guy who doesn't step foot inside the 'hood unless he's there to serve eviction notices. He looks, smells, and exemplifies white privilege and he wears it proudly.

It's clear Savior's presence bothers Jalen. He's stone-faced, but his stance shows signs he's uncomfortable. He shakes Savior's hand, tightening his grip. "I'm Jalen, Keisha's best friend."

"Pleasure to meet you," Savior seemingly tightens his grip as well but unlike what Jalen did to him, it's obvious Jalen's uncomfortable by the grip and also the power Savior has. This is gonna be fun to watch. "I have a law firm to run so maybe we can meet another time?" *The shaaaaaade*. "Keisha, baby, let me know what day is good for you so we can all go out."

I swallow again. "Um, sure."

Savior walks back to me and claims my mouth in a bruising kiss. "Be good." He slaps my ass and heads out the door. He walks up to a parked Bentley with a driver awaiting him. They soon take off.

I'm barely recovering from the incredible sex of the night before and now I'm officially swooning over Savior's declaration of me in front of my friends. Am I dreaming? Is this really happening? I think I need to pinch myself.

"Who. In. The. Fuck. Was. That?"

Ah, yes. Leave it to Jalen to kill any buzz I had going on this bright and sunny Tuesday morning. My thighs are still sore and my voice is parched from the way Savior put it down on me last night. That white boy could fuck as if his life depended on it.

Of course, Jalen doesn't need to know that. "My boyfriend. I thought he told you."

“Boyfriend?” Jalen follows me inside the kitchen. “I didn’t know you had a boyfriend.”

“Does it matter?” I start the Keurig and look through my selection. Hmm...do they have a coffee specifically for recovering from spread-eagle thighs and screaming until the sun came up?

“Keisha,” Jalen is right behind me and if this nigga doesn’t give me room...”Keisha! I thought we were cool, you know?”

“We are cool,” I finally choose a Keurig. “I have a boyfriend now. Nothing’s changed between us other than I won’t sleep with you anymore.”

“Keisha,” he whines and if this nigga doesn’t stop crowding me, “you know you’re my favorite, right?”

“Favorite?” Tasha opens up the bag full of donuts Jalen brought over, “a real man would’ve said something like, ‘you know you’re my only, right?’”

“Bitch, did I ask for your motherfucking opinion?” Jalen yells.

“Nigga, you didn’t have to ask for my motherfucking opinion because I gave it to you any goddamn way!” Tasha mouths right back.

“And see this is why no one wants your fat, broke-ass because you always gotta stick your nose into some business that ain’t got shit to do with you!” Jalen points at her.

“When it comes to my best friend, nigga, I’ll do whatever the fuck I wanna do and what the fuck you gon’ do about it?” She gets right in his face. “I dare you to do some shit to me and let’s see how fast Prince and his boys fuck you up!”

Even though I’m annoyed as shit with Tasha being all up in my business, she did say the magic phrase. Everyone knows if something happens to me or someone close to me, that’s a guaranteed death from my Daddy.

For the record, my Daddy has never killed anyone – directly. Now if the question was *indirectly*...

“Tasha,” I calmly speak, “go back into your room. This is between me and Jalen.”

“You heard her,” Jalen’s nostrils flare, “step.”

“Nigga, this is my house.” Tasha flips him off and she retreats to her bedroom.

Jalen waits for the door to shut before he speaks. “I don’t know why you even fuck with her ass! She’s always in somebody’s business talking that ol’ bullshit she loves to sprout. Man, fuck her!” He then turns his attention towards me. “And what’s this boyfriend you got?”

Jalen has numerous girlfriends and we all know about each other. Three of his girlfriends are currently battling each other on Instagram for the title of ‘World’s Dumbest Bird’ and taking shots at each other. Supposedly, one of them is pregnant and yeah, that’s the real reason why I’m on birth control. I’ll be damned if Jalen will make me a permanent member of his harem.

“Jalen, there’s a reason why you’re here,” I get straight to the point, no chaser. “So tell me why it is.”

“I just wanted to surprise you with breakfast and thinking maybe we could kick it for a bit before you go to school.” Jalen damn well knows he’s never shown up this early at my house since the BMW made a grand appearance. Now he’s a regular visitor. Kids, can you say *shook*? “I just wanted to spend some time with my number one right now.”

Oh yay. I’m number one. Most girls would love that title. Except in my case, I’m number one with numbers two, three, four, and five in the background. “What’s in the bag?”

“Bag?” He asks and I motion to the ominous black bag that’s collecting dust in the corner. “Oh yeah, that. I need you to hold something for me for a few days.”

“I can’t do that,” I pour some creamer and sugar in my cup. “Whatever’s in that bag, it goes with you when you leave.”

“Keisha, it’s only for a few days, baby.” Jalen approaches me, “after that, you won’t have to worry about it at all.”

“I won’t have to worry about it because it won’t be here, nigga.” I take a sip of my coffee. “Take it with you when you leave.”

“You unfollowed me, Keisha.” Jalen complains. “I checked my IG and Twitter and you weren’t listed, anymore. I thought we were cool.”

And yes, ladies and gents, this is how dating is nowadays. Forget the fact Jalen has numerous other girlfriends or the fact he has absolutely no ambition whatsoever. He is more concerned that I unfollowed his simple ass on insert social media app here.

“I unfollowed you on there, yes.” I reply, and honestly, I’m trying not to laugh at his stupid ass. “And I’m unfollowing you in real life.”

“Why are you being wack and shit?” Amazing how a guy doesn’t mind a girl when she’s sucking his dick but when that’s no longer an option, she’s suddenly wack. “Keisha, why you acting like this?”

“You have several other birds who can hold it, go to them.” I quietly reply. “Goodbye, Jalen.”

Jalen chews his mouth before he grabs the donuts and bag. He turns to me one last time and I don’t even bother to look up at him. “White boys like him try on black pussy to get their kinks out. He won’t marry you, you won’t meet his parents or friends, and he damn sure ain’t gon’ have no mixed babies with curly hair with you. He wants white, he’ll marry white, and you’re just passing the time for him until he does. Enjoy your BMW.” He leaves.

I quickly finish my coffee and map out my plans for the day. I wish I could say I ignored Jalen’s hurtful words and thought he was just being a salty-ass Negro, but I can’t. His words affected me more than I would like to admit.

It's a reason why it's an arrangement. It's a reason why Savior mentioned every place he wanted to fuck me but his home was never on the list. It's a reason why he's willing to come here to ghetto and get his kinks off, and keep everything quiet at work like shit never happened.

I beat my face and head out to class, driving that sweet BMW with the new car smell. I think about what Jalen said and I try to shrug it off but I can't. Deep down, I have a feeling he's right and I'm just humoring Savior until he finds a nice Becky to bring home to his parents.

I just hope I don't get caught up.



## Twelve

“So, he’s coming back over tonight, huh?” Tasha begins as I drive her and Junie to the Crenshaw Mall.

“Yes, he is.” My stomach cinches in nervousness. I should be happy that boo-thang is swinging over again, though I’m a bit nervous about introducing soul food to him. I’m sure if I introduced black caviar and capers with some truffles, it would be right up his alley.

This white boy really wants to eat fried catfish, huh? Oh dear.

I’m not saying white people can’t enjoy soul food. I’ve seen more white people in Roscoe’s than I can count. I’ve seen the occasional executive at that ribs joint just around the corner from my daddy’s home.

I just don’t see Savior risky getting his Gucci loafers sticky because the mom and pop’s joint didn’t clean the floor just right.

“Yo, I like Jesus Piece,” Junie the SoundCloud phenomenon comments from the back seat, “He’s cool peeps, Eggs and Cheese. You should keep him around.”

Junie calls me Eggs and Cheese because it’s another word for quiche. Kiesh = quiche. He’s a witty no-name broke rapper. I call him SoundCloud because that’s that only place his shit is known because you damn sure won’t hear him on the radio anytime soon or ever. Tasha should be proud.

“I heard you and your auntie got into it. She was on the phone talking to your dad about it and I listened it on the conversation.” Gotta appreciate Tasha’s messy ass every so often. “It seemed your dad was taking your side on it.”

“Well, if he took my auntie’s side, I would’ve heard about it now.” I navigate down the street. “Everyone knew when he inherited the home, I was going to get it. My Granny’s been dead for three years now and Gloria’s acting like her death just happened three days ago.”

“Your auntie is freaking out because of all of the gentrification going around here.” Tasha twists her long, purple braids.

“More white people have moved in and all of the black families are moving out. That’s why she’s scared.”

“Funny how she wasn’t scared when the Mexicans had no problem targeting black families and running them out of the neighborhood but Becky and Timmy are a threat?” I counter.

“White people move in, people want to cry gentrification. When Mexicans were killing us for sport, it’s ‘Oh, poor little Negroes.’ And then people wonder why we have a racist, bigoted, misogynistic, and xenophobic asshole in the White House.”

“Your auntie does have a strong point, Kiesh.” Tasha interrupts. “Several homes on your block have been sold and you said it yourself that you’ve had many offers on the home that you’ve turned down. What’s the magic number for you to finally say yes?”

Truthfully, there isn’t a magic number. I never intend to sell it. I secretly get the home appraised every year unbeknownst to my auntie and Tasha so I know exactly what the duplex is worth. And trust me when I say, the 300K the Kardashians were offering was a lowball offer and they knew it.

I haven’t figured out what I’m going to do with the home quite yet. A part of me wants to keep it in case things between me and Savior don’t pan out. A part of me wonders if I do ever get out of L.A., what would be the point of having it?

I can’t worry about that now. I’m about to go blow some money on stuff I don’t need to impress people I don’t even like. That’s my priority.



Too much money and crap later, we’re all eating at the food court. I’m digging into a collard green wrap filled with fried chicken and macaroni and cheese, while SoundCloud and Tasha are sharing a big bowl of jambalaya.

I wanted to start purchasing things for this weekend's gala but Savior was insistent that he went shopping with me. Maybe he wanted me to look like something straight outta Saks Fifth and not Charlotte Russe. Can't blame the dude.

"What's this benefit?" Tasha asks she tries to find only the chicken parts of jambalaya. Why she couldn't just ask for a bowl of straight chicken defeats me.

"It's benefitting homeless and low-income programs across Los Angeles." I answer. Doing more Google-stalking, I learned it's a benefit his family has actively attended throughout the years. It'll also be the first time I'll meet Mama Ellison and just seeing her pulled-back Stepford Wife face, I know she will not approve of Savior dating me.

She looks like the type that has one black friend, who's usually both male- and white-identified, and the kind that will dole out 'How to Get a Man' advice once she becomes engaged and then married.

"What kind of music will they have there?" SoundCloud asks. I know he's low-key hoping for a gig.

"The typical white and wealthy fare," I shrug. "I'm sure I'll hear a lot of Coldplay. Maybe some Miley Cyrus and Justin Timberlake if they want to get edgy." This is what I was talking about moving into a different income tax bracket. My daddy is a certified millionaire with hidden money in offshore accounts yet he'll still bump Nas' Illmatic LP like if it just came out. He could've moved to Brentwood with the OJs and LeBrons but he chose to stay in Ladera Heights. There's something really amazing about that.

"Do you know what type of music Savior likes?" Tasha asks after finding some chicken. "He seems like the type to be all into Ed Sheeran."

"I have no clue," I shake my head, "I'm sure he has U2 on repeat somewhere."

"He likes R&B music," SoundCloud chimes in as he sips his orange soda. "He has a pretty impressive collection, if you ask

me.”

Tasha and I lock eyes with each other before slowly turning both of our heads towards Junie. “What?” I spat out.

“Homebody has some very impressive taste in music. Very impressive.” Junie nods. “I recited a lyric from Outkast and he already knew what song it was. He didn’t even have to ask what artist is that or any of that.”

“Well, everyone knows Outkast!” Tasha laments. “It’s not hard.”

“Okay, but the homie recited a lyric from Big L.” Junie replies. Big L – God rest his soul – is one of the premier rappers who was the paramount for many of the 90’s rappers back then. He wasn’t well known on a global level, but if you’re a true hip-hop head, you knew who he was. “How many white boys can recite Big L?”

“Who’s Big L?” Tasha asks.

“My point exactly.” SoundCloud replies. “Only true hip-hop heads know. I would think Savior would be more inclined considering who his brother is and who he’s best friends with.”

I’m stunned in silence at what SoundCloud suggests. “What about his brother and his best friend?”

“Okay, how do I know more about the dude and I’m not the one screwing him?” SoundCloud glares at me and I flip him off. “His brother, Soul, is one of the co-creators of the FuckBoy Logic sneaker line with that Chamo dude. He also owns a large stake in Fresh Nectar.”

Fresh Nectar is one of the hottest clothing lines around with bragging rights from dignitaries to the hip-hop elite. They made gross revenue of \$500 million last year. That’s a lot of hypebeasts wearing their clothing.

“Soul?” Tasha asks.

“Soul.” SoundCloud nods.

“Like soles on the bottom of my shoes?” I ask.

“Like Seoul, South Korea?” Tasha asks.

“More like Soul Train.” SoundCloud explains. “Mama Ellison was on the weird celebrity name trip before it became popular.”

“That explains about one brother but what about his best friend?” I ask. “I don’t see what that has to do with him.”

“Get out your phone and go to Caleb Kelly’s IG.” SoundCloud suggests. I look at him for a brief moment and he nods. Caleb Kelly is a NFL football player who notoriously kneeled in front of the American flag, making him both a saint and a sinner.

I just think it’s funny how no one cared about a biracial football player until he became blackity black black. And then people couldn’t wait to call him the *nigger* he is, but I’m asleep, tho. I pull out my phone and bring up Caleb’s IG page. “Okay, I’m here, and what?”

“Scroll to the post where he talks about Happy Founder’s Day.” SoundCloud chews more food. “What do you see?”

I find the post in question and scroll left. My heart stops upon seeing Caleb and Savior in their red bowtie finest throwing up the *yo*. They’re standing right next to each other and have the sexiest damn smirks on their faces as if they’re saying, ‘Yeah, we know we’re the shit.’

It’s a recent picture of them together, probably taken within the past year. The comments, of course, are full of thirsty bitches lusting after both of them. I knew Savior was a Nupe but to know he’s best friends with America’s Pariah, puts him on a different level of Peak White Boy Wokeness.

It also might explain the tension between him and his father, if what Junie told me about elder Ellison has any truth to it. Daddy Ellison has made it very clear he didn’t support that protest at all, which is interesting considering he’s well-known as one of the earliest and most vocal supporters of the Civil Rights Movement.

My mind travels back to that fateful day when I heard Savior and Thomas arguing. And then again that night when Savior came over and just wanted to be held. He didn't say exactly what was going on, other than cryptically hinting he was still seeking his father's approval. Yet, I wonder if there was something else troubling him.

"Well, well, well..." Tasha interrupts my train of thought and I briefly look up. "Look who's here." She nods behind me.

I turn around and sigh at the visual. One of Jalen's birds and her friends are also at the mall. I think that one is named Chermica. I think. You see one bird, and it seems they all look alike after a while.

Chermica is the girl in high school who had potential to do great and somewhere between being a straight-A student and graduating, she became a bird for life. It's like that lyric – some girls turn into ladies, some become hoes.

She's the type of girl who always looks like she's a can of busted biscuits, but always have enough money to get her hair laid. Kinda makes me wonder why she can't be nappy and get a gym membership, but they don't hear me, tho.

It seems they have been watching me for a while and talking shit like the flock of birds they are. I roll my eyes and turn back around. The last thing I need is to go to jail for tearing out a bitch's weave. "Lovely."

"She's jealous of you, you know that?" Tasha asks. "It's so obvious."

"She can have Jalen for all I care." I shrug. "I don't want that nigga anymore and it wasn't like we were going to get married and have babies."

"It's a good thing that didn't happen." Tasha adds. "Can you imagine the type of husband and father Jalen would've been?"

"Oh trust, I know." It was a realization I made when I was late on my period one time. I made the fateful mistake of telling Jalen and he spent a good hour trying to convince me why I

should have an abortion and that we should go dutch on it.  
How sweet of him.

It's not like I'm using abortion as a form of birth control; I ain't that dumb. But I also knew if Jalen knocked me up, I was bound to be a single mother. There was no way in hell Jalen would've put on a ring on it.

"Everything happened in the way it was supposed to," I reply. "Jalen has about three other girls he can waste his time with. He doesn't need me."

"Jalen wants you now because he can't have you." Tasha points out. "He knows he can't compete with a Beemer SUV."

"It's not just that," SoundCloud points out, "Jalen can't compete with Savior. If it was just a car, he would've gone out and got baby girl a better one. Jalen cannot compete with *wealth and opportunity*. Savior can give Keisha things he can't. I'm sure he's kicking himself for suggesting you take the internship when you were doubtful about it."

Tasha's mouth gaps open and I nod. "That explains his sudden attitude lately." She says.

"When he wants you to do well, but he also wants to keep you on a leash." Isn't that the fuckboy logic? He can have several women as long you're only sleeping with him? You can do nice things and play wifey as long as he doesn't return the favor and you're okay with it?

Truth is, Jalen didn't want me to succeed if it meant cutting him off. He wanted me to be successful just enough but not *too much*. It has nothing to do with having a flock of women, not really caring about any of them, and one of them decides she wants to do better.

It has to do with the one he wanted, decided she wanted better for herself. The male's ego is just so fragile.

"Oh well," I take another bite of my wrap, "not my circus, not my monkeys."



We hit a few more spots before we head back to the car. Junie picked up a purple beanie he's had his eye on for a minute and Tasha picked up some braid accessories. I made a pit stop inside Vickie Secrets for a little sexy number for Savior. He's made it clear he likes me butt-ass naked but there's nothing wrong with enticing a dude.

As we made our way to the car, I overheard snickering behind me that became increasingly louder with each step. I didn't have to turn around to know who it was. I've felt Chermica and her bird crew follow us from store to store, even stepping inside to just to see we were really there before they followed us to another store.

Sensing what was going on, I place a text to my daddy I was having problems at the mall. He assured me it was going to be handled and that was that.

"Do you want to confront them?" Tasha whispers to me.

"And for why? Given them even more ammo? The last thing I need is that." I reply. "It's being handled right now."

"Oh word?" Junie asks. "How?"

Just as we approach my Beemer, we see three black SUVs parked around it. Chermica and the Birds immediately stopped talking and stalking once they realized who the fuck they were dealing with.

"Angel face," Ashley gets out of one of the SUVs, greets me with kisses, and hugs. "How's my baby girl?"

"I'm doing great, Mom." I give her a small package from Macy's, "got you something."

"Oh, you didn't have to, baby." She smiles. "Junie, Tasha, lovely to see you." Ashley's face looks behind me. "Hi Chermica! I hope you're doing well, sweetheart! Did you mother get her chlamydia cleared up yet? I heard she got the clap by messing with that parolee a while back?"

Chermica's friends start laughing at her and Chermica is stunned in silence.



“Honey, please be sure to give my love to your mother. I know she has to be recovering from all that itching and scratching. Tell her that wearing those tight-ass jeans won’t help with the fish smell she also has been slinging around. You don’t want to pick up your mama’s dirty habits now, baby?” Ashley winks. Ashley is a classy clapback queen. Every term of endearment is always dripping in condescension.

Chermica turns around and runs back to her car with her friends following her. Ashley examines my bald head and shakes her head. “You need a trim, angel face. Let me get you an appointment with Charlene. Let’s see if she can get you in tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow morning?” I ask. “I have that gala I’m attending over the weekend.”

“That’s even more perfect! You’ll look nice and fresh for it!” Ashley smiles. “All right, it’s time for me to head back to your dad’s. Call me if there are any more problems, ‘face.” She heads back inside the SUV and they all quickly take off.

I know what transpired between me and Chermica won’t be the last occurrence. Chermica’s mother is besties with my womb-holder, Andrea. And Andrea hates Ashley with a passion. I expect a nasty phone call from Andrea within the next 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Tasha and Junie stare at what just transpired and look at me with shocked faces. “When you’re a gangsta like my daddy, you need to be with a woman who’s just as – or even more so gangsta as you.”

## Thirteen

We head back home and are greeted with a Bentley SUV again. It's only six p.m. and I wasn't expecting Savior to come over for another two hours or so. I quickly park the SUV and go to the Bentley where Savior's driver, James, is standing outside. He's a young black man who wears the standard black and white uniform.

Despite being a chauffeur, James isn't giving me Driving Miss Daisy tease. He has a small goatee and always seems to have a smile on his face. He genuinely likes Savior and they have a good friendship with each other. "Mr. Ellison has requested your presence, Miss Jones. Your friends can attend if they so wish."

"Hells yeah, we're going. Hold on for a minute. Let me go bake real quick and I'll be right out." Tasha instructs.

"Tasha..." Why do I take her ass anywhere? I turn to James. "Where are we going?"

"Mr. Ellison doesn't want you to pick up dinner since he's not sure if he'll like the choice." James nervously explains.

Oh, so white boy had a second doubt about eating soul food? Color me shocked. "Oh really?"

"So, he decided upon a restaurant of his choosing." James opens the passenger door. "After you, Miss Jones."

I stare down at the brother for a minute and then back at my clothing. I'm wearing a hoodie and blue jeans with my Jordan Spikizes. Clearly Savior doesn't want to take me to a high-dining restaurant but I'm wonder how casual he wants me to be? "Like this?"

"Mr. Ellison wouldn't want it any other way." James smiles. "After you."

I hop into the backseat with Junie and Tasha (who didn't get a chance to bake so she's a little salty. I'm like, bitch, try not

being high for once and see how productive you are, but I ain't one to gossip so you didn't hear it from me).

James drives us to Sweet Potato, a new soul food restaurant that'd just opened up not too long ago in far Studio City. There's always a long line and huge waiting list. It's supposed to be a classy version of soul food. I don't know about all that. I don't mind eating on chipped, wooden tables, drinking out of plastic cups that are also chipped, and listening to someone sing "Leaning on Everlasting Arms" as other people join in.

Now I'm about to go to a fancy soul food restaurant...those actually exist?

James pulls up to the curb and two valets greet us. James also joins us and escorts us past the line of patrons and directly inside. Once we're in, we hear Donell Jones's voice crooning about how a woman knows he loves her and the mood is totally chill.

It's bit more upscale but it doesn't feel any less *black*. If anything, it feels more black, if that makes any sense. The walls are covered in a slick, dark purple with pictures of old Black Hollywood decorating them. I see Lena Horne, Dorothy Dandridge, Harry Belafonte, Sammy Davis, Jr. and jazz greats like Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Duke Ellington.

As we walk through the long hallway, I notice the theme has progressed from the Harlem Renaissance era to the Motown era to the Black Power movement of the 60's and 70's, and finally the BLM movement of today. A lot of history on those walls.

We finally arrive at the main dining room and it seems more like a juke joint than a restaurant. People are in the middle of the dance floor bumping and grinding to some blues. A few tables to my left, a few men are playing Dominoes. Another table has a small crowd of men watching a chess game.

A couple on a date is snuggling up to each other in their private booth. Another party is celebrating someone's birthday

at another booth. The waitresses are fully dressed with Afros and braids like an Outkast song.

It feels like home.

“What is this?” I ask to no one in particular.

“You wanted fried catfish,” Savior appears suddenly next to me. “I know this place has the best fried catfish in town.”

I turn towards him and smile. “You own this place?”

“I’m a quiet and private investor,” his smile is warm, “I come here once a week to see how it’s being run but I normally stay out of it.”

Savior the executive. I don’t know why I’m surprised he owns a restaurant, let alone a soul food one. Almost all of the employees are black, with a sprinkle of Latino here and there. I later learn another rich investor by the name of Scott Reed also owns the restaurant.

Woke white boy has proven he’s about that life and not just retweeting hashtags on Twitter. “You know you could’ve had fried catfish in my neck of the woods?” I reply.

“I know, but I think you and your friends would like this.” He holds out his hand. “Shall we?”

I glance down at his hand and back up at him. Professional Savior is still a little present, but the sensual and intimate side of him has started to come through. Here he feels at home, and it seems everyone knows who he is and gives him respect.

Still, holding hands in public? FWBs actually do this? Now’s not the time to wonder about what Savior’s intentions are. I take his hand and Savior guides us to our private booth.

We’re immediately greeted by a server, who promptly serves us the best libations probably in all of California. Appetizers shortly follow and it’s a thigh-fattening selection of wings, oysters Rockefeller, clawfish dip, and fried okra.

Savior and Junie talk about music and whatever else in life while me and Tasha take in the atmosphere. Savior may have

been a quiet and private investor but it's clear this restaurant has his touch. Little bits of Savior are evident by the classiness of it and the respectfulness of black history.

It's clear his family's history has shaped his life and why he went into law alongside his father. A part of me does wonder if he does all of this because he truly wants to be a changing force in the black community or if liberal white guilt is playing a role.

"You're quiet," he whispers in my ear and my heart stumbles a little, "what's on your mind, gorgeous?"

I haven't gotten used to the nickname Savior has given me. I finally conceded it's something he means and he's not just saying it for shits and giggles. "I'm just taking in the scene, that's all. It's a lot to discover here and I'm just amazed by it all."

"Is that all?" He stares into my eyes and I lightly sigh. "You seem troubled, gorgeous. I don't like it when my girlfriend is bothered by something."

Girlfriend. Second time he's referred to me as such.

"Girlfriend, huh?"

"You're not?" He replies. "If it bothers you, I'll stop."

"No, it's not that. It's just..." I let out a small sigh. "...I don't even know if you like coffee or tea?"

Savior chuckles and once again I feel his rumble in my loins.

"Both. Espresso in the mornings to wake me up and tea at night to soothe me. Chamomile."

I have neither in my home. I guess I'll be making a trip to the store soon. "Got it."

"Anything else?" He wraps his arm around my shoulder and caresses it.

"I don't know anything about you. I don't know your fears, your hopes and dreams...I know none of that." I reply. "I don't know if you want me to know."

“Why?” He hastily adds. “Have I said I didn’t want you to know anything about me?”

“You said you didn’t want romance, and you didn’t want a relationship but you’re calling me your girlfriend.” It’s not lost on me the overhead speakers are now playing “Adore” by Prince. “So, I’m not sure what to believe.”

Savior sweeps his lips over mine and my worries dissipate into the air. His lips claim me, branding me again, telling me I belong to him and daring anyone to say anything about it. His other arm snakes around my waist and he softly pinches the tight fabric of my shirt, anxious to get it off me but patient to wait until we’re home.

He pulls away from me and my body wants more. “Keisha...” he lightly touches my lips with an index finger. “...I’m a complicated man. My career comes first and it always has. But I’m more than willing to make you a priority.”

He said with such a declaration, I felt a chill. It felt too right. It felt too perfect. Our date on Saturday will be our official debut in front of the world. Every society page will have us pictured. Every black IG gossip blogger will have me shown.

I thought of Andrea and how she was getting desperate for a storyline. She went on a rant calling me ungrateful and how I should’ve been thankful to have a mother like her, though everyone knows she never did anything for me.

She’s low-key salty I haven’t appeared on a single episode of her reality show and I never will. She wants the fame and popularity, and will do anything to achieve it. I’m content staying at home and eating my Fruit Loops and watching Netflix.

A guy like Savior doesn’t date a girl from the ‘hood. And a man like Savior damn sure wouldn’t date a woman who has a drug dealer father. I don’t doubt for a second, all of that will come in within a few days of our picture being posted.

“Savior, before we can continue with this arrangement we have...”

“It’s still an arrangement?” His eyes dance. “I could’ve sworn I called you my girlfriend and you didn’t argue.”

I’m not sure how to respond to that. He’s right I didn’t argue but I’m also slow to accept whatever is going on between us. I finally decide now is the time to tell Savior everything and be completely raw with him. He has to know the truth about my daddy. And then he can slowly break my heart.

“Savior, I have something to tell you. It’s about my daddy. He’s a...”

“Well, well, well!” The world’s most horrible womb-holder alive, Andrea, aka my birth mother aka Satan’s Spawn aka Lucifer’s Mistress, is right before our eyes. In tow is her paper bag-passing, broke-ass boyfriend, King J. Also attached to Andrea, is Chermica’s mother, Charmaine. “Look who we have here?”

My night had the potential to end badly. Now it’s a guarantee.

## Fourteen

Andrea, Charmaine, and King J. force themselves into the booth and I scoot closer to Savior. Immediately, the air changes from laidback and lovey-dovey, to a tension thicker than a video vixen's booty.

Junie and Tasha decide this was going to be a good time to stress eat and not say anything. Their M.O. is to act like everything is normal when it really isn't. I can't blame them. They already know what might happen.

Savior's reaction is different. His eyes became dark and brooding, and his jaw tightened. His body stiffened and went on high alert. He calmly sipped his cognac and his eyes bounced from Charmaine sitting with Tasha and Junie, to Andrea and King J right next to me.

Savior is waiting for the right moment, the perfect opportunity, and he'll make his move. I'm half hoping he won't have to. I'm fully expecting he's going to.

"So, who's this white boy here?" Andrea asks as King J and Charmaine help themselves to the food. Andrea is dressed in a dress that's too tight and I can tell it's uncomfortable because she had to adjust her position three times already. Her ebony hair is in curly ringlets and bouncing off her shoulders. Her lips are painted with a deep burgundy that matches her eyes.

Charmaine is also dressed nicely going with slacks and a dress tank. King J decided Michelin Man was the look he was going for and he's decked out in all white. Who wears all white to go out to eat?

It's clear they were here in hopes to get spotted by whatever paparazzi was desperate enough to Z-list black reality stars that only the EBT crowd cares about. Savior's restaurant doesn't look like the typical mom and pop soul food joint and I'm sure the prices reflect that.



It's about to be a long night for me and a short night for everyone else not named Keisha. "He's paying for this?" Andrea smiles a rich, gold-digging smile. "He looks rich."

"Savior, this is my..." I pause on the word mother. Andrea hasn't raised me since I was four. She couldn't even tell anyone when I graduated from high school because she didn't attend the graduation. She was too busy attending the NBA Finals, trying to score a baller's attention that year.

The Bible says honor thy mother and father but what happens when the mother acts like the child never existed? Then what?

"Hi, I'm Andrea!" She reaches over, with her hand half-bent expecting Savior to kiss it. He doesn't even bother to shake it. "I'm Keisha's mother."

"Andrea." He repeats the name without any emotion. He's clearly annoyed. Oh dear.

Andrea clears her throat and shrugs off the embarrassment. "And this is my best friend, Charmaine, and my boyfriend, James. He's a well-known rapper also known as King J. They did a famous song together, "Bottoms Up (And You Know This!)." My mother looks at any type of recognition or acknowledgment from Savior and is still met with an ice cold reception from him.

"Hey Tasha!" Charmaine greets her and Tasha responds with a nod. "Hey Junie!" She loses the smile as she meets eyes with me. "Keisha."

Word travels fast about what went down in the DM's. I'm sure Chermica told Charmaine a story that made her skank ass look like a saint and me the perfect sinner. I hate to break it to both of those birds, but Jalen isn't a dude a girl with half a brain would go to jail for.

"Yo, Savior, how you know about this place?" King J asks as he checks out the décor. He's constantly sniffing and I already know he's on that shit. This night is going to be disastrous. "I wouldn't have guessed you would be in this place."

“I own it.” Savior’s voice is rife with irritation, yet he’s still calm.

King J’s eyebrows raise up and he looks around the restaurant a bit more. I just see his eyes try to do the mental math on how much Savior is making every week from this place and how he can get it in on the action.

“Girl, this reminds me of that joint back in Riverside!” Charmaine talks with her mouth half-full. “Not as classy, though!” She hastily adds and winks at Savior, who doesn’t acknowledge her.

“Oh, remember how we used to tear it up at the club!” Andrea cackles like a hen and Charmaine feverishly nods. “Man, we were the baddest bitches in the club!”

“Still are,” King J blows a kiss at Andrea, and she giggles. Puke.

“So Savior,” Andrea eats some dip, “what do you do for a living besides own this restaurant?”

“I’m a lawyer.” He states and nurses his bourbon. “What is your occupation?”

“Well, I don’t just have one thing I specialize at,” Andrea brushes her brown yaki off her collarbone, “I do a little bit of everything.”

“Yo,” King J snuffles again. Every time he snuffles, I become that much more embarrassed, “where’s the bathroom at, yo? I need to handle some business.”

“It’s down the hallway to your right.” Savior replies and King leaves a short while later. Savior glances down at his Apple watch and types something into it. Probably something along the lines of, ‘Why am I wasting my time with these Negroes?’

“So Tasha,” Andrea prepares her venom at my best friend. “Have you found a steady gig?”

“Well,” Tasha swallows, “I just applied for a city job so I’m waiting to hear back. Other than that, I’m still driving Lyft.” She smiles.

Andrea busts out laughing and Charmaine follows.

“Everyone’s a Lyft driver! You ain’t special, girl!”

“I know that’s right!” Charmaine nods and looks at Tasha.

“Girl, you need to get out more.” Andrea’s eyes wander all over Tasha’s body. “Maybe stop dressing all in black. Maybe lose some weight. And stop it with the Afrocentric shit! You ain’t from Africa! You ain’t out there in the jungle! We’re in Amer-ree-kah, girlfriend! Stop with that jungle shit!”

“Oooh-ah-ah-ah!” Charmaine whoops like a monkey.

I press my hand over Savior’s thigh and I felt the tension emanating from him. I quickly remove my hand but he forces it back. “No,” he quietly says.

I glance over at Savior. The storm is brewing in his eyes. “It’s not about how you start, but how you finish. Tasha may be driving Lyft now but she also has dreams and inspirations bigger than that. She should be applauded for pursuing other things.” He defends her.

Tasha looks like she’s about to cry and I might join her if she doesn’t dry it up. “Savior, thank you.”

“I started out as a busboy. No one cared about my family name when I did grunt work. I’m sure if you were ask any of my friends from high school, they wouldn’t think I would turn out how I did.” He nurses his bourbon. “Everyone starts out small. No one starts out big and stays there.”

“Tonno about alladat.” Andrea snickers. “I started out big and I’m still big.”

“Word!” Charmaine adds.

“Okay,” Savior challenges, “what do you do?”

“Well,” Andrea swallows and chews slowly. It’s clear she’s never had anyone actually ask her what her occupation was and expected an answer. Reality-show main bitch isn’t a legit occupation. Sure, she might get a big check now but I’m pretty damn sure she’s not going to be nominated for a SAG award or walk the Oscars red carpet. “I’m a brand.”

Savior nods. “What’s your brand?”

Andrea pauses and blinks a few times. I can tell she’s becoming irritated because now she’s being interrogated like she’s on a witness stand. You see, around black folk, if you say you have a brand, no one really asks what is and what you do. You say you’re a brand and give them your IG profile, call it a day.

A white person, however, they’ll want to know details. They want to know how much you’ve made, if you have a website they can purchase from, a YouTube channel they can stream content; T-shirts, hoodies, sweaters, and the like. They want to know everything about your brand so they can possibly steal from it and make it better.

I’m being unfair. Savior doesn’t have to steal ideas from anybody. Savior’s questioning, however, isn’t because he’s genuinely interested in my birth mother. He wants to know what the hell is she doing with her life because she damn sure ain’t giving me any attention.

“I manage King’s career,” Andrea says, almost rather defiantly. King J returns and his eyes are more alert than ever. I recognize cocaine pupils when I see them. “I’m constantly traveling, booking gigs for him, and scoring interviews. I’m constantly on the road and busy. We also have a side business of creating swimwear.”

That’s the go-to hustle for black reality stars since the waist trimmers and diet teas markets are saturated, now they’re creating swimwear. You would think they would go into the hair care and makeup markets and make a killing there but nah.

“Is your line out?” Savior asks.

“It’s being handled,” Andrea proudly says, “it should debut next year. Just in time for summer.”

“Good to know,” he nods, “I expect you’ll be around for Keisha’s graduation from community college.”

I swallow more of my drink while Junie and Tasha stop eating. Oh boy.

“She’s graduating?” Andrea’s attention goes from Savior to me. “I didn’t know that.”

“Well, with your several businesses and reality TV, I imagine it might be hard to keep up the activities of your only daughter.” Savior replies and it’s suddenly cold due to all of the shade he just threw.

Andrea’s eyes turn icy as they lock with Savior’s. He’s not daunted and embraces the challenge. “How do you know my daughter besides fucking her?”

“She works at the law firm I own,” He calmly replies.

“Ohhhh...” Andrea sucks her teeth like she’s getting out a popcorn kernel and turns towards me. “....sweet, innocent Angel Face here is fucking her way to the top, huh? No wonder she’s acting all brand new and shit. She thinks because she got some of that pink dick, she’s better than us now, huh? I wonder how your daddy will feel about Savior here once you bring him home. You think your daddy is going to accept Savior with open arms knowing what he does?”

“Oh, oh, oh!” Charmaine whoops like a dog.

My cheeks are burning with embarrassment and tears threaten my eyes. No, Andrea can’t tell Savior about my daddy. I was about to reveal it all and if she tells him before I get a chance to, it’ll be all over. Savior would want nothing to do with me.

Andrea bypasses me and stares down at Savior. “Tell me, Savior. How do you feel knowing Keisha’s daddy here is the biggest drug dealer on the west side? How does it feel knowing that he slangs from here to Newport Beach to probably your neighbors? Huh? How does it feel knowing that he might be dealing to your potential clients? You really want to go out in public knowing your girlfriend’s daddy could be arrested at any moment and your name might be connected because of her? Do you want to ruin your reputation because of her? Do you want to throw everything down the drain

because of her daddy?" Andrea's lips curve into a smarmy smile. "Tell me...how does it feel?"

Hard, angry tears fall down my face. "I fucking hate you right now." I grit through my teeth. I start to remove my hand again from Savior's thigh and he forces it back there. I don't dare to look at him because I feel the anger emanating from his body.

"Don't hate me, 'Angel Face. You should blame your drug-dealing daddy for ruining your life. You see, you and your friends love to blame me for all of your problems but forgetting I'm just on reality TV, sweetheart. I'm not doing anything illegal." Andrea sucks her teeth in again. "It would be a damn shame what would happen if I just made a quick phone call to the DEA." Andrea meets eyes with Savior again. "What's wrong, white boy? You think because you got a fancy club here, and you like black pussy, you're about that life?" She shakes her head. "You're just like the rest of them. You love black culture, you might even like hood culture, but you ain't trying to get shot with Pookie and 'em."

"I heard that!" King J barks and wipes his nose.

"Tell 'em, sis!" Charmaine agrees. "She shole was actin' all brand new today! Had the audacity to get light and bright Ashy involved today!"

"Seriously," Andrea's eyes turn back to me and she forcibly grabbed my chin. "Don't forget, 'Face. You may be sucking that pink dick until he comes, but you're still a hood bitch and you'll always be one. You're just hot black pussy to keep him warm until he finds a nice Becky to marry and have children with."

I must've had an out of body experience. I can't explain it. All I knew is an angry sound, almost like a scream, a screech poured out of my body and my fist connected with Andrea's face. It wasn't just one punch, but several.

We tumble out of the booth, rolling around on the floor until I was on top of her, pummeling away. My hands were hurting and becoming increasingly bloody with each punch. The anger

inside of me took over and it was like an evil beast, breaking to be free.

I feel several arms and hands trying to grab me, but I couldn't stop. I didn't just want to hurt Andrea. I wanted to kill her. I would gladly go to prison for the rest of my life if it meant I would never see her face ever again.

Someone finally pulls me off her and restrains me. Andrea's face is still intact but her outfit is filled with her blood and my sweat. She's lounging at me, calling me every name in the book while Charmaine tries to hold her back. All I hear is noise, but I can't make out the words coming out of her mouth. The room is a blur and I see people crowd around us, wondering what's going on.

Andrea suddenly stops attacking me when something else catches her attention. King J is being arrested and he's putting up a fight with the officers. They force him outside and Andrea and Charmaine follow. Some of the crowd follows to watch the action, while others return to their games and dinner.

My heart is still beating out of my chest. My internship is done. My relationship is done. Savior will inevitably break up with me. He's not going to be around all of this drama and he damn sure ain't gon' want to be around me knowing what my daddy does for a living.

With nothing else to give, I finally black out.

## Fifteen

I wake up the next morning feeling like shit on a brick. My eyes are puffy and I'm sure, red like I just smoked the dankest weed. My head is pounding and the little bit of light from that big screen door is blinding me.

Screen door? I shoot up in bed and my head is angry at me for making such a hasty move. Where am I?

I look around my surroundings and I must be in a hotel somewhere. The bedroom is very modern and quite expensive. In fact, the bed is the softest bed I've ever laid on. The sheets feel like silk, but they're cotton.

The biggest flat-screen TV is hanging on an art easel in a corner. There are several doors and I'm assuming they're closets and maybe, a bathroom? One door is cracked open, leading to the hallway.

The room is decorated in colorful, deep hues like purple, grey, and black. It smells clean, and fresh, not clinical and disinfected like a hospital. There's warmth here that's unexplained. Like an old spirit blessing the place with each step.

There are pictures on the walls but I can't really make out who it is. Nothing about this room is familiar and I'm starting to get freaked out when I have the realization I'm in someone's home. I don't know how I got here or who stripped me down and put me in bed.

I can't call Savior because I'm sure he wants nothing to do with me now. I don't know where I am to give Tasha and Junie instructions. I'm stuck. I'm lost. I don't know what to do and I'm about to freak the fuck out if I don't get any answers soon.

Before I open my mouth, the question is answered before I asked it. "You must be Keisha."

I rub my eyes and turn to where the voice is going from. Appearing in a long, black sweater with flared jeans topped



with pink Gucci heels was Mama Ellison herself – Starr Ellison.

She was a pioneer in the women’s rights movement, dating back to the 60’s. There is rich history of her meeting with congressmen, present for bill signings, and leading protests with a megaphone in her hand. She, along with Daddy Ellison, was also an integral part of the civil rights movement, declaring affordable housing for black residents in Los Angeles.

She’s a woman who always has a look on her face that signals she could call your bullshit before you even open your mouth. She’s had plastic surgery but it seems she’s gracefully aging by the appearance of a few smile lines. She has deep blue eyes, blonde hair that looks like corn silk and is probably just as soft. She’s a healthy thin for her age. There’s nothing frail about her.

“Did you sleep well?” Her voice is soothing and warm like tea.

“Um,” I’m totally confused about what’s going on here, “yeah, I did. Thank you.”

Starr stirs her porcelain cup and walks more into the bedroom. She puts the saucer down on an end table and pulls up a nearby chair. She picks up the saucer again and carefully sips her cup. “Too hot.” She blows on it a little and puts it back down. Her gaze turns to me and she smiles. “Rough night?”

I don’t even have to wonder if she knows what happened last night. I’m sure the messages and notifications are blowing up my phone left and right. It’s not like the last time Andrea and I got into it, where it was clearly her fault. This was all me. I let her push my buttons. I let her bully me. I lost my cool and as a result, I lost my relationship.

Tomorrow, I was supposed to be Savior’s date to the gala. We were supposed to pick out a gown and accessories today. I’m pretty sure he wants nothing to do with me now.

I look away from her and stare out the windows. “If you’re here to tell me why I shouldn’t be with your son and how he won’t be seen with me, you can save it. I’ll get dressed and call an Uber to find my way home.”

“I think you’re wonderful for my Savior.” Starr replies and my heart stutters. I turn towards her and she’s still smiling at me. “You’re a sweet, bright woman. And you’re a firecracker. Savior needs that in his life.”

The admission stuns me and it almost feels like a test. “I appreciate the compliment but you’re saying this; your son isn’t.” I carefully reply.

Starr nods. “Savior had to go to work today. He wanted to stay with you and work from home, but he had to do final preparations for a potential arbitration he might get involved in. He’ll be home early, though, and you two can talk more when he gets back.”

I pull my knees to my chest and rest my head on it. “I’m sure Savior told you the truth about what my daddy does for a living. I know that makes him uncomfortable.”

“Savior already knew,” Starr picks up her saucer again and takes a sip from the cup. “It’s something he’s known for a while.”

I sit straight up now like if I was zapped with a lightning rod. Savior knew? How did he find out? Furthermore, how long had he known? Why did he ask me what my daddy did for a living unless he wanted me to say it myself?

And he still wanted me? That makes no sense. “I don’t understand.”

“I’m not saying Savior was tickled pink when he found out. He was quite concerned. Your safety was his top priority. He knew your father could take care of himself.” Starr took another sip. “But he also saw the bigger picture.”

“Which is?”

“You.” She calmly states. She sets the saucer down again and looks at me. Her eyes softened to an ocean blue and I see bits of Savior within Starr. “My son loves you, regardless of how long you two have been together. I won’t speak for him, but I will say this – there’s a freedom within Savior that hadn’t been present before he met you. He’s smiling a lot more and he seems a bit more...oh, what’s the word I’m looking for... *free.*”

“Why wouldn’t he be free before?” I ask. “He’s rich. He lives in Bel-Air. He has the money to buy the freedom he wants.”

“When you’re the son of two well-established people, there’s an incredible amount of pressure on you to live up to it. All three of my sons were compared to their father in various times of their lives, but Savior, I feel, had it worse than any of them combined. Once it was known he was going into law, the comparisons only increased. He felt pressure from the jump to do well.” Starr pauses for a brief moment and stares straight ahead. “He never stood a fighting chance.”

My mind drifts back to that fateful day when I saw the argument between Savior and Thomas. Savior looked exhausted while Thomas didn’t flinch. I still wonder what that was about. “But he succeeded, though. He’s one of the most successful lawyers in the country.”

“Because failure wasn’t an option. If he didn’t do well, the consequences were too great. Soul never cared and to an extent, neither did Ocean.” Starr looks straight ahead. Sadness and regret appear within her eyes. “But Savior...all he ever wanted was his father’s approval.”

I’m tempted to ask what Savior’s childhood was like but I’m afraid I’m stepping over a boundary. I already feel like I’m on thin ice. Before I could even think about the answer, Starr answers my question for me.

“Keisha, there is something you should understand about Savior. The law is something he is very passionate about. He loves researching cases and studying torts. He’s the type to read Supreme Court decisions just for fun. He lives, breathes

the law, and hates injustice no matter the form. My son, however, knows when to walk away from something if it no longer benefits him.” Starr finishes her cup and stands up. “That day might be coming soon.”

I wonder if the intense fight I saw the other day had something to do with it.

“My ex wasn’t a good husband, and he was barely there as a father, but to the world, he was everything and I would never take that away from him.” Starr answers. “However, there’s something to be said when a father would rather spend time with a mistress than go to his son’s Little League game.”

I feel my eyes water and my lips tremble. I’ve heard of Thomas’s past mistakes but I didn’t think how they would’ve impacted Savior’s life the way they did. “Oh my gosh.”

“My ex-husband was a champion for civil rights to an extent. He felt everyone should be equal under the law and nothing should be just *good enough*. He fought against sundown towns, Jim Crow laws, and the like. My ex-husband, also had his personal dealings. He was called every name under the sun because of what he did. He never wanted our sons to go through that. He wanted to protect them as much as he could.” Starr gives a sad grimace. “You’re the first black girl Savior has brought home in a long while.”

Long while. That means I’m not the first. While I appreciate that tidbit, there seems to be a lot more to that story. “Why the gap?”

“Thomas felt if he told the men who they couldn’t bring home, that would encourage them to date within or others.” Starr chuckles. “I think the only thing that did was encourage the boys to date more black women just to piss my ex off. It’s the forbidden fruit aspect. Now that you know you can’t have it, you want it even more.”

“So, I’m just here to pass the time and piss off your ex-husband until Savior finds someone more suitable?” Now I’m not feeling so bad about last night.

Starr briefly glances down at her manicure and plays with the nails. “My son has never purchased a car for any woman.” She softly blinks at me. “Does that answer how he feels about you?”

I swallow what is left of my pride and wish I could crawl back underneath the covers. My cheeks are burning with embarrassment and I’m really wishing this was just a horrible dream I haven’t woken up from. “I don’t know what to say to that.”

Starr picks up the chair and puts it back. “You, Ms. Lady, have some work to do. You have a benefit to attend with my son tomorrow and you need to be presentable. Let’s get you fed and dressed so when Savior comes home in a couple of hours, you two can spend time talking about important things.”



There really aren’t too many words to describe Savior’s home other than it’s incredible. Five bedrooms, five bathrooms and it is a dream. Every room has its own theme – the living room is Old Hollywood with a picture of the Rat Pack holding front and center. The bathrooms have different colors with a spa theme. Hardwood floors lead to different rooms and plush carpeting matches the décor of every room.

A long, stone walkway leads from the backyard to the pool. The kitchen has the longest island I had ever seen and a refrigerator with see-through doors! I thought I only saw those on MTV Cribs!

Starr had the chef whip up lunch and it was so amazing. It was a grass-fed cheeseburger with sweet potato fries and OMG. I don’t know why I wasted my time on them cheap dollar shits by my house.

Every room boasts of a lot of light and the city view is just absolutely spectacular. All I saw were hills upon hills. I didn’t hear any police chases. I didn’t hear any overhead helicopters. No neighbors were arguing and fighting about random stuff. No one was crying because their relative just got shot.

It was peaceful. It was everything. It was what I'd always wanted.

Starr had to leave to have dinner with her girlfriends but she promised to see me tomorrow evening at the gala. I spent a good half-hour just staring out into the world and wonder about my life. I'm still not sure what's going on between me and Savior and I wonder what's really going to happen within the next 90 days. I hope it's a case that the first week started rocky and things were smooth sailing from this moment on.

I can only hope. Starr suggests that Savior won't leave me but I need to hear that from him. I need him to tell me we'll be together or he's done with me. I don't know what type of black girls he's dated in the past but I'm pretty sure none of them had reality show womb-holders and drug dealers for parents.

I never considered myself to be ghetto but let's face it, in comparison to some of the girls Savior had dated, I'm about as ghetto as they come. I didn't come from a two-parent home. I came from a place where hearing random gun shots meant you instantly ran and hid for cover.

I can put on my white voice and longhaired caramel wig when I have to turn on the charm, but that's not me everyday. Hell, that's not even me on any day. I would rather sit down on the couch with my grape Kool-Aid and Flamin' Hot Cheetos than attend some stuffy \$500 a plate dinner.

I'm not sure if that's something Savior wants.

"Gorgeous."

My body stilled as I recognize Savior's voice. I slowly turn around and offer an equally slow smile to him. He's dressed in his Armani finest and is looking like the snack that he is. He has a beautiful smile across his lips and I hope it's sincere.

"Hey you. You're right, it is a gorgeous view."

"The view is spectacular. That's why I purchased the home."

He walks over to me and snakes his arms around my waist.

"But when I say gorgeous, it's only you I'm referring to."

My smile is a bit saddened. I don't know if Savior is being nice to me before he finally drops the hammer or if he truly feels a certain way. Last night was a huge lie he found out and I don't know if he would be able to trust me from this moment on. I know I would have issues.

He tips my chin up and places a soft kiss on my lips. His free hand rubs over my head and he places another kiss there. He lifts my head back up and examines my face. He winces a little when he sees a few cuts. "How are you feeling, gorgeous?"

"Waiting for the shoe to inevitably drop," I honestly reply. "You might as well get it over with it now so I can be on my way."

Savior softly shakes his head. "I'm not letting you go, Keisha."

Tears threaten my eyes and I look away to concentrate on something else. "I'll ruin your reputation."

"I doubt that." His voice sounds like it was laced with maple syrup. "Last night was a horrible experience for everyone involved, especially you, Junie, and Tasha. I made sure they got home safely and I had James drop off you and me back here. I wanted to stay and take care of you today but work wouldn't allow me so I asked my mother to come by." He caresses my face again. "Your safety is my top priority, Keisha."

I swallow my emotions. I'm waiting to wake up from this dream but it's my reality. Savior is my saint. "Last night, with all of those horrible things Andrea said about me, you can't expect me to show up there anymore with you. Everyone knows what happened. Everyone knows when I go there, it's going to be like, 'There's Savior's hoodrat girlfriend!'" The thought just humiliates me on a deeper level. "It's too embarrassing."

A small pause passes between us before Savior speaks again. "I fully expected Andrea and her boyfriend to show up. They were trying to get inside the club for a long while and

couldn't. I knew what was going to happen." He explains. "I also knew King J was on drugs and was doing them in the bathroom. I have an anti-drug policy in the club and everyone knows it. He was arrested on that."

Everything just worsened. I know Savior felt he was trying to do the right thing but if King J goes down, he won't hesitate to take other people with him. "J is going to rat out my daddy," I reply, "he does that and it's over for him. My daddy will be ruthless. My daddy might kill him. My daddy...." I lock eyes with Savior and there's an knowing within them as if he knew that was a possibility. "You wanted this to happen?"

"I wanted Andrea and James to stop harassing you and leave you alone." Savior caresses my face. "They're the ones that chose the path."

It's a side of Savior I haven't seen before. It's not the professional one who's methodical about his cases and clients. There's ruthlessness within him and he's not one to be played with. It explains his reputation in the legal world and why he has no problem shutting people down before a case had a chance to build legs.

I should be scared. I should run for the nearest exit and not return. Instead, I'm aroused like never before. My nipples tightened and my sex suddenly craves him. My body yearns for him now and the feeling is only getting stronger.

"I want to meet your father."

The proverbial record scratches and any romantic feelings dissipate into the L.A. air. My father made it clear to me he didn't care who I dated as long as I didn't bring home anyone who could be mistaken as a member of a boy band.

I have fantasies of how easily the Fresh Prince blended in Bel-Air, but I'm not sure how easily Savior is going to blend in Ladera Heights. My daddy keeps a strap on him at all times and his best friends act as his underground security. "He's not going to stop dealing because it's you. In fact, he'll do it even more because it's you."



“I don’t want to meet your father because I want him to stop nor do I plan to narc on him to the authorities.” Savior presses his body close to mine. “I want to meet the father of the woman I’m going to marry.”

## Sixteen

I swallow. Twice. “Marry? You barely know me. We’ve only known each other for a week, Savior! I don’t even know what your middle name is!”

“Thomas,” his eyes twinkle, “what’s yours?”

“Erin.” I’m a bit unnerved at how casual all of this is, like this is just a regular part of conversation. So, hey, your dad’s a drug dealer? Oh cool. Wanna get married?

“We don’t have to get married now, gorgeous.” There he goes again with that pet name and I feel my resolve dissipate. “I want you to have the full college experience before you settle down. I’m willing to wait.”

I’m sure Savior wants me to go to frat parties and get not-chocolate wasted as I play beer pong for the third time in a week. I’m pretty sure he doesn’t want me spreading eagle for forgettable bad lays. “You’re saying you’re going to wait and you’ll be okay with me doing other random guys?”

“Do you want to sleep with other randoms?” He corners me against the balcony, locking me as both arms hold the wall.

“Maybe I’m not fucking you right.”

*Yes, Savior. You’re not fucking me right. You need to bend me over this balcony right now and have your neighbors wonder if you’re committing a felony by the way my screams are.* I shake the nasty thoughts out of my head. “I told you 90 days, Savior. It’s only been four days.”

“Do you really need 90 days to know how you feel about me? I already knew how I felt about you within the first few.”

I’m not the falling in love at first sight type. However, I can admit the feelings I have towards Savior are reminiscent of a Disney princess movie. Then again, Tiana didn’t even like homeboy until they were both frogs, and only then, she barely tolerated his ass. “Savior, this is all happening too soon, too fast.” My head is spinning with the information. “I don’t know

what you expect me to do. I never had a guy tell me he wants to marry me and I don't know how to react. I know it's not a proposal but it's just...it's just too fast. We need to...we need to slow down."

"I didn't say I want to marry you, Keisha. I said *I'm going to.*" Savior's jaw tightens and he steps back. "But if you want us to slow down, I can do that."

Maybe my definition of slowing down is different from Savior's. I wanted us to slow down on the whole proposal and 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' remix. I don't need to slow down on him laying the pipe. "Can we slow down everywhere else but the sex?"

His lips curve into a sexy smile and he rushes over to me again. His lips hungrily devour mine like it's the first time he's kissed me in ages and he doesn't know when it'll happen again. He tasted like mint and coffee, with a mixture that was all him.

His tongue played with mine, and he savored my lips. He moved down to my neck and lightly sucked on it while his hands roamed my body. He lifted up my shirt and softly pinched my nipples. I moaned his name, quietly begging him to not stop.

I felt his hands work my pants and he slid another hand inside, cupping my sex. "I love it how you keep it hot and wet for me, gorgeous." He moaned.

I couldn't respond. We were outside on his balcony, where neighbors could see us. I didn't feel embarrassed nor ashamed. I felt overwhelming aroused as another breathy moan slipped out of my throat. He met my moan with another one of his, before he took over my mouth again.

My legs were now bare and so was my sex. My back was against the balcony wall and Savior's fingers were relentless. His thumb caressed my clit, while a finger played inside me. His soft, wet lips kissed with such tenderness in direct contrast of what his hand was doing.

My body writhed as I whimpered. The orgasm was rapidly approaching as I felt that pressure wind up like a tight coil. His finger moved deep into my tight channel while his thumb circled my clit in the same antagonizing fashion.

Growls and moans sputtered out of my throat. It wasn't me. I sounded primal, sex-starved; a completely different being. He wanted me to come now, in his backyard, and he didn't care who heard me.

His mouth was hungry for mine. His lips kissed me with a gentleness I never had before. I was about to lose all control and give in. My fingernails dug into his arms and my legs began to shake with volition on their own. "Fuck!" I breathed out. I had no control of what sounds and words my mouth made.

"Is my girl going to come for me?" He taunted me. His thumb flicked my throbbing clit while he kept fingering me. "I want to hear you scream my name."

It was too much and I couldn't stave off the climax any longer. Little more flicks with his fingers, and I came hard, fast, and so loud. The orgasm shook my body like an earthquake, splitting me apart. I screamed his name at the top of my lungs and my body stilled.

He kissed me so softly as I slowly came down from my incredible high. I felt his fingers withdraw from me before I heard the sound of a pulled-down zipper. "Turn around and bend over." He instructed.

I opened my eyes and saw Savior with his cock out as he stroked it with my essence. His eyes were heated, dark, and just so sexy. I turned around and bent over, arching my back to give him enough access.

He gripped one hand on my ass while the other eased his cock inside of me. I gasped as I felt a burning, stretching sensation. We'd never had sex without a condom and the feeling is completely different. There's no barrier between us and I feel more connected to him than before.

He bent over me and kissed my back. His thick cock filled me to aching fullness and I still wanted more. He slowly glides in and out of me, hitting my spot with each thrust. He pierced through me, stretching me beyond my comfort level. Groans formed in the pit of my stomach and flew out of my mouth, my eyes watered, and my head spun.

“Keisha...” He moaned. My pussy suckled along his thick length, clenching tight around him. “Ooh...straighten up a little, baby. Yeah, like that.” He drove his hips against mine, building a steady pace.

He fucked me with no abandon. His balls wildly slapped against my pussy as one of his hands tightly gripped my waist. His other hand was around my neck and he softly squeezed it. I’d never been choked during sex before and honestly, it wasn’t on my list to-do. Yet, Savior did it so erotically and with care. It was another level of eroticism.

He sucked in a breath and fucked me harder. Every thrust ripped a scream, a gasp from me as he went faster. My body coated with sweat as I felt Savior’s glorious cock thrust in and out of me. I submitted complete control over to him. I no longer wanted to fight. I no longer wanted to be worried about the future.

I wanted to be free. We both did.

My body began to experience mini-firework explosions and I knew the climax was close. I felt his body tremble as well and I knew he couldn’t stave off the orgasm much longer. We moved together as one, in the open L.A. air, with the hot sun beating down on us. It was raw fucking, yet somehow, it felt like we were making love.

I couldn’t properly get the words out, letting him know I was about to come. Instead, I screamed his name as my body shook. Savior continued to thrust inside until he pulled out, shooting his hot come all over my ass and smearing it with his cock.

He collapsed against my sweaty back, kissing it and breathing hard. His arms were tight around my waist. We panted for a short while, not saying a word, and letting all of the emotions take over.

I felt Savior's lips on my neck and I turned to meet his again. We kissed in a frenzied passion, almost sloppily, as we exchanged energy between us. He took away my pain while I gave him more freedom to be himself.

"Shower?" He kissed me again. "And dinner after your fitting?"

I nod. "Sounds good."



There is something very B.A.P.S- like about driving down Rodeo Drive and Savior is about to treat me to whatever my heart desires.

As I relax in the passenger seat of his Aston Martin, I try not to pinch myself in amazement about what is happening in my life. A week ago, I started an internship at a law firm, hoping to get some info about a potential law career. A week later, I'm in the passenger ride of my boyfriend's car as he treats me.

I feel like Cinderella. I just hope Savior's car doesn't turn into a pumpkin.

I turn my attention to Savior's whip, and I'm stunned at the extravagance of it. My Beemer is pretty sweet, but this Aston Martin screams, 'I'm wealthy and you will deal.' The panel has all of these intricate buttons that I'm afraid of pressing for I'm afraid one of them will parachute my seat and nah, bruh.

Maybe I might have watched too many James Bond movies.

Savior slides his hand between my thighs and slightly pinches the left one. It's a small gesture but it's a big one. He's once again claiming ownership of me, my body, and letting me know I'm his. He glances over to me and I smile back at him, blowing him a kiss and he blows one back.

He surprised me with his music selection and honestly, I didn't know too many white guys knew who Gerald Levert, but apparently Savior had his entire catalogue. As Gerald croons about a lost love, I wonder what other secrets is Savior keeping from me? He doesn't seem like the type who would love soul food and listen to Gerald Levert. If I catch this white boy with a pack of Newports and Colt 45, I'll be too through.

"What's on your mind, gorgeous?" Savior asks as he navigates through traffic.

"Just thinking random things," I reply after a short silence.

"That's all."

"Oh?" Savior's lips curve into a delicious smile. "What random things?"

"Why nobody stopped for gas at any time in the Fast & Furious movies?" I slightly nod. "That bugs me."

Savior chuckles and I feel that deep rumble down to my yoni. Damn, when am I not horny around him? "You got a point. They never stopped for gas. They also defied physics. Cars don't generally fly the way they do in the movies."

"I figured that much but the gas part, though. Not all of them were driving electric cars." I shrug. "So yeah, random things."

"Well, no, that's a random thing. You said things, plural." He shifted gears. "What else is in that crazy and brilliant mind of yours?"

A ton of things are going through my head. Am I going to be formally introduced to the rest of his family as his girlfriend? Will Savior ever meet my daddy? How will *that* meeting go?

My mind travels back to the home issue. I'm getting pressure to sell it and surprisingly, it's not from the realtors but from friends and family. Honestly, I have no reason to hold onto it but until I'm actually away from college and living my life, there's no reason to let it go.

Instead of telling Savior any of that, I go with the most logical question. "Gerald Levert?"

“College days. Marc listened to a lot of R&B music. I liked some of it before but he liked the quiet storm and deeper R&B. He schooled me on a lot and I liked it. I can’t listen to any of the new stuff because there’s no romance in it. R&B is suppose to wine and dine a woman, court her, and then bed her. Nowadays, you hear R&B singers talking about penetration before they even say anything about foreplay and you’re like, ‘How is this supposed to set the mood?’”

It reminded me each time we made love, Savior had his own rhythm, tailored to my needs and perfected with each thrust. His tongue took me home to the King like a Tamela Mann song and the way he guided my hips as I rode his cock, makes me bite my lip in anticipation now.

My nipples tightened and I feel a small thump inside my panties. I hope my arousal isn’t too obvious and there’s nothing I can really do about it since we’re out in public. But the moment we get back home to my place, I’m going to be on that ass like a parolee out of jail.

“So who are your favorite bands?” I ask to change the mood from horny to conversational.

“Gosh, so many.” Savior shakes his head. “Marvin Gaye, O’Jays, Commodores, Temptations, and Chaka Khan and Rufus. Those are in my 70’s playlist. Then I have bands in the 80’s like New Edition and the Force MD’s. And then we move onto the 90’s where I have Jodeci, Boyz II Men, Keith Sweat, and many others.” He rattles off a few more bands and I have to say, I’m quite impressed by his tastes. His collection is a lot more expansive than mine. I have mostly trap music in my collection with a few oldies courtesy of my daddy. A lot of these bands Savior is naming, I can honestly say I have faintly heard of.

“What about you?” He asks me. “What do you like? I know you like Chris Brown and Dave East. Any others?”

“I’ve heard a few of the bands you’ve mentioned but I listen to a lot of current stuff.” Though, my current stuff is pretty wack compared to what Savior listens to. No wonder everyone



complains about mumble rappers and trap music. You could actually understand what someone talked about back in the day. “Migos, Future, Cardi B., to name a few.”

Savior nods. “They’re pretty good. Not my cup of tea but I don’t knock anyone’s tastes in music. I listen to some crazy stuff myself.”

“What’s crazy about LSG?” I chuckle. “Other than you listen to it.”

“Well, that’s not all. I love Hozier and John Mayer. I can dig some Ed Sheeran.” He smiles. “They’re great to research cases to.”

“There you go,” I chuckle.

Savior grabs my hand and places a soft kiss on it. “Have you heard anything from Andrea about last night?”

“I haven’t heard from her nor do I expect to. I did find out I’m all over the blogs.” Which is not a surprise. Witnesses from last night’s kerfuffle gossiped about what they saw. Everyone said the same thing – Andrea mouthed off to me, I was crying, she forcibly grabbed my face, and I gladly punched hers in.

It’s not something I’m proud of. If anything, I’m quite ashamed of what transpired last night. I never thought Andrea and I would get into a physical fight nor did I think she would say those horrible things to me.

Our relationship is irrevocably broken and I doubt I would ever hear from her again. I took the liberty of deleting all of my social media pages so nobody has to wonder what I’m doing or why I’m acting brand-new. If there’s not a reason to gossip, people won’t pay attention.

That wasn’t the only reason why I deleted all of my pages. When people found out where the fight took place, Savior’s name naturally came up. No one made the connection he was my boyfriend but the whispers already started. Eyewitnesses confirmed they saw us together.

Savior and his family may not care about what black gossip blogs say about them, but I'm pretty sure they care about what the society pages think of them. It's one thing to be black famous; it's an entirely different ball game when you're legit famous.

"Do you really want to risk your reputation just to be with me?" I ask. "People have started to make the connection between us."

"So." he replies.

I incredulously look at him. "So? Savior, you may not care about how it looks but I do. I know how people gossip in high society. Sure, they act like they don't care but then they won't give you any clients. They won't send any cleaning ladies to your home."

Savior chuckles and I feel that deep rumble down to my punani again. We just had sex and I want him again.

"Gorgeous, if any of that was true, no one would have clean homes and no one would be rich."

"But you have to care about your family's reputation?" I push.

"Everyone knows the contribution your parents made to the Civil Rights Movement. Gossip bloggers already said how your family went from classy to ashy based on that fight."

Savior's face looks amused. I don't know why he's so amused by any of this. I'm horrified and he's acting like it's another day in his life. What in the Caucasian hell?

"Keisha..." he turns a corner, "what did my mother tell you about her marriage to my father?"

The mistresses. The Little League game. The constant reference to Thomas as her ex, though there was no record of a divorce. "He wasn't a good husband and not really a good father."

Savior confirms his mother's report. "It's an open secret about my father's affairs. He was on the road a lot, traveling and fighting for equality and freedom for everyone. When people hear about the Civil Rights Movement, they naturally think of

the 1960s. What they don't think about how it's still active today. Redlining, not being hired because of your ethnic name, being paid less simply because of your race and gender, loan sharks in the form of payday and online loan scammers that specifically target minorities. We may not be singing We Shall Overcome, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done. That's where my father comes in.

“Whenever there's a police shooting, he gets the call first. Whenever there's discrimination, he's the first one that knows about it. My father will find all of this out before there's even a press conference, before there's a viral video. He doesn't seek it. People tell him what's going on and he uses his discretion on whether it's something he wants to pursue.

“While my father was everyone's champion, he was never home. He used to be gone for days at a time. Then it became weeks. Soon, it was months. Then, we only saw him on major holidays. A marriage can't survive on that. My mother was also gone a lot fighting for women's rights and she still travels quite a bit. The difference between the two was my mother was never gone more than a weekend.

“My mother isn't innocent, neither. She's had her fair share of lovers and I've met quite a few of them. Some even helped me with homework and took me out for ice cream.” He gives a sad smile. “That's when I knew how dysfunctional their relationship was and how I would never want to have one like it.

“My parents never officially divorced but they've been separated for quite some time. They announced the separation about 10 years ago and neither of them have actually filed for divorce, nor do I think they ever will. They still live on the same property, just in different wings of the home. Their home is big enough where they can be there every day of the year and still not bother each other at any given time.”

He pulls into a parking garage and parks the car. He unbuckles his seat belt and turns to me. “So, while you're concerned

about my association with you, trust me, with my family history, you're actually small potatoes.”

## Seventeen

After a day of shopping with Savior, I finally make my way back to Inglewood. He wanted me to spend the night with him, and the offer was tempting, but I told him I need to go home and check on everything. While Junie and Tasha went home by themselves, they also had to potentially fend off any nosy whispers and gossip.

I know Junie wouldn't indulge but Tasha...I never can tell. I don't think she'll sell me out to the highest bidder but I also know if she needs some new hair, she wouldn't hesitate to let the Shade Room know what my sleeping position is at night.

I park my car and head inside. I left all of my purchases at Savior's home because I couldn't see the point of bringing an expensive gown with me, only to transport it back to Bel-Air.

Arriving in Inglewood, it's already a noticeable difference. Bel-Air is quiet, like no neighbor wants to disturb the other. Everyone is so closed in, you could barely hear the cars going down the shared streets. There's no snooping or peeping into someone's home, because everyone's home is gated with ten-foot tall walls.

In Inglewood, one can hear loud music, loud talking, and laughter almost on every other corner. Of course, the opposite is also true – loud fighting, the gunshots, and screeching tires.

It's a weird, indescribable feeling – I felt free in Bel-Air but I felt at home in Inglewood. But I know I can't have both, nor would I want both. I have to make a choice. Savior might come to spend the night with me occasionally in Inglewood, but he's made it clear he won't live here when he has his own home.

I'm dying to leave Inglewood, but I'm afraid of showing up as a regular resident of Bel-Air. How long will it be before someone mistakes me for someone or something else, and the police are called on me? How long will it be before I'm followed until they realize I live there?

How long will it be before I'm quietly forced out because they do not want me there no matter who my boyfriend is?

I can't worry about any of that. I'm exhausted and I need a nap. As I make my way back to my room, I dream of Savior and crave his touch on me again. It'll be a long 24 hours not seeing him, but I know it'll be worth it. I miss him already.



It's already nighttime when I finally wake up. I slept until eight and I'm wide awake now. I stretch my arms and try to gather my bearings as I figure out what I'm going to eat for dinner and maybe check out a Netflix movie to kill the time.

As I make my way out of the bedroom, I see the living room lights are on. Clearly, Tasha and Junie are home. I head to the bathroom and once I'm finished with my business, I go out into the living room. I'm floored to see dozens upon dozens of roses everywhere. My heart warms because Savior is unbelievably romantic. Each time I think he'll do one thing, he tops it again.

I love me some him.

Love? Okay. Maybe not love. It's too soon for love. I can admit I like ol' dude. I can admit I'm falling for him. But love him? Nah. You don't fall in love with someone after a week. It just doesn't happen.

"Hey," Tasha blows out a plume of smoke and offers me a hit. I respectfully decline. I don't know how this girl stays high and functioning all of the time. Getting high must be an Olympic sport. "Those came in for you."

"Really?" I look around for a card and don't see one. "Was there a card?"

"Oh yeah," Tasha grabs it from the couch where she's sitting, "here you go."

I snatch the card away from her and shake my head. Leave it to Tasha to get herself involved in some shit that really has

nothing to do with her. I need to get that bitch a hobby or something. “You’re so damn messy.”

“You love me anyway.” She blows a kiss.

“Sometimes.” I open the card and my eyes are trying so hard not to roll back. Savior didn’t send me any of these roses; Jalen did.

A fuckboy who told me he wasn’t going to settle down, and that I’m in his Top Five (of women, not music or anything else important), and how he said some pretty awful things about my association with Savior, just sent me about four dozen roses. *I miss you, baby*, the card reads.

I would call up Jalen and tell him how I really feel but I conveniently erased his phone number. Whoopsie. “Why did this Negro do this?”

“He heard about the fight with Andrea.” Junie chimes in. “The whole neighborhood has been talking about it for the past day. People wish there was video.”

I’m so confused and Tasha’s explanation doesn’t help. “So, he sent me flowers because...?”

“Word around the street was Jalen is the one who sold King J the drugs. King J is still locked up but word is he’s singing like a canary. If he rats out Jalen, it’s game over for him.”

“So, he’s hoping if he starts showing me affection again, I’ll somehow protect him because of my daddy?” Men are so damn transparent, it’s ridiculous. “No, thank you. He has a harem of women he can go to.”

“But you got that juice,” SoundCloud nods. “You’re the one that can help him.”

“Which is the reason why he got with me to begin with.” The sad realization has always been there. Nothing like the feeling of discovering a nigga used me because of who my father is. Jalen never has and never will care about me the same way I did for him. I wonder if Savior felt the same with his dates.

The anger is starting to bubble a little and I blow out a harsh breath. Things can only get worse before they get better.

“What else is new?”

“You’re the trending topic. Andrea’s been on a roll, calling you every name she can on social media. I think you inadvertently gave her a storyline for next season.” Tasha reveals with a frown. “A lot of people have been defending you, though. Many people said Andrea deserved to get her ass whapped.”

“Well, I’m not proud of that.” I shake my head. I never thought in a million years I would get into a fight with my mother and here I am, trending topic amongst the Love and Hip-Hop crowd. Some people would love to be in my position and I actually loathe it.

“Gloria’s been asking about your whereabouts. We told her we didn’t know where you were. She wants to speak to you as well.” Tasha replies.

There’s another reason why Gloria and I don’t have a good relationship. She’s always liked Andrea and they’re still close to this day. Whatever ill feelings Gloria has, I don’t doubt have come indirectly from Andrea. “Of course she does. She likes Andrea.” I shrug. I’m starting to feel a little heat on me and I know this weekend will not turn out as I planned if I stay here. “I’m going to head out. Just get away for a few days.”

“Going to Savior’s?” SoundCloud asks.

“I don’t know yet. Not sure how badly he wants me there as an overnight guest for several days.” I take out my Android with the cracked screen and text Savior, asking him if the offer to spend the night with him was still on the table.

I get an instant reply: *You can stay anytime you want, gorgeous. See you soon.*



After Savior texted me his address and gate code, I headed towards his way. I packed an overnight bag full of clothing and a toothbrush. I also packed a razor and shaving cream



because I doubt I would have time to see Charlene to get my head shaved so I'll have to do it myself and hope I don't cut my head.

As Chloe and Halle serenaded me, I wonder if everything going on is a sign that maybe it's time for me to move out of Inglewood. It seems there's more drama each time I go back home and if I'm trying to do better for myself, I'm going have to leave some people behind.

Not that I'm anxious to go live with Savior. For one, it's too soon for us to be living together and even I'm side-eyeing us spending the night so often so soon. It's not that I feel uncomfortable in Bel-Air but I'm not quite sure if I feel right on home, neither. I do know wherever I end up, there won't be a question as to if I fit in.

The thought of leaving L.A. has become louder with each passing day. There's still a lot I can do here but I want to explore the world and see what happens. Maybe I might find my home in Italy or maybe even Atlanta. Maybe I'll realize L.A. was always where I was supposed to be.

I can only find out.

As I pull up to the cobblestone driveway, Savior walks out to greet me. I park the SUV and he opens the driver's door. "There's my gorgeous," he greets me with a sensual kiss. "How was the drive, baby?"

"Better now that I'm here." I unbuckle and Savior takes out my overnight bag before he leads me inside. "I brought over enough clothing for the weekend, if that's okay?"

"That's perfect," he leads us upstairs to his bedroom and sets the bag down on a chaise lounge. Savior's bedroom looks so amazing at night. The dulce de leche walls illuminate with sconces and I see the illuminated indigo pool right outside the sliding door. The four-poster California King bed is prominent.

"Are you hungry, baby?" He asks.

“Yeah, didn’t eat much.” I reply. The drama back in Inglewood forced me not to eat. At least I know Andrea would be happy. The thought of having a daughter who was heavier than her is the worse thing.

“Follow me,” he leads me out of the bedroom and we walk down to the kitchen. Savior’s kitchen is roughly the size of my living room, dining room, and kitchen. All of the cabinetry is white and custom-made, with an added refrigerator just for wines.

All of the gadgets look expensive and state of the art, and I’m sure a few of them are in the four figures. There’s a massive skylight in the ceiling that shines down on Savior in the kitchen, giving him a sent by God feel.

There are two ovens in addition to the two islands. The leather seats have an adjustable height so I don’t feel so short looking at him as he prepares dinner. He seems a bit of an expert in the kitchen, opening and closing various cabinets with such ease, as if he knows where everything is. I’ve heard of some rich people having so much excess, they didn’t know how their refrigerator operated.

“Vegan fajitas?” He asks. “We’ll probably have steak for dinner tomorrow at the gala.”

“Sure.” I’ve had a little vegan food and it was pretty good, I have to admit. Whenever I got sick, Tasha made sure all I ate was vegan and vegetarian so I didn’t clog up my system with even more crap. I have to give her high ass some credit; I felt better within days.

Savior whips up the dish in record time and we’re eating vegan fajitas in quiet calmness. We don’t talk about anything; we just enjoy our food. Afterward, Savior takes our plates and cleans up, while I go out into the balcony and look up at the stars.

I think about everything that has transpired within the last week and I wonder about many things. Andrea. My daddy. My home. Savior. Over a week ago, I never dreamed I would be at

some rich dude's home and looking up at the stars. Now I'm standing in a home worth millions, with the same rich dude who's now my boyfriend, and my life can only go up from here.

I need to start looking at colleges and applying. Hopefully, the late admission fee won't kick my ass too much. As much as I would love to say I wanted to get the hell out of L.A., every university I'm looking at is here: USC, Loyola Marymount, and UC Riverside.

A weird sadness placates across my chest as I think about the future. Savior probably won't be in it. For one, I don't see him waiting for me like he promised. Two, after I graduate from college and maybe go to law school, we won't see each other. I'll be too busy studying and he'll be too busy with cases to care. It just wouldn't work.

I just need to enjoy this as much as I can and for as long as I can.

"May I join you?" Savior leans against the balcony wall and looks back at me. "Hey there."

"Hey." I smile. "What's up?"

"Nothing much. Just wondering why my girlfriend is preferring to come out here instead being back inside with me where it's nice and warm?" He looks into my eyes. His eyes smile back with an invitation I'll soon accept.

I let out a heavy sigh and feel the tension release from my shoulders. "Just thinking about the future."

"Oh?" He glances up at the stars. "It doesn't sound like you're looking forward to it."

"I don't know what it is first. I hope it's a good one but it's always the fear of the unknown, you know..." I leave the words hanging.

"Fear of what's going to happen between us?" He finishes and looks over at me.

I meet his gaze. His eyes have turned into a chocolate brown. “I remember the look you gave me when you were at my home for the first time. How mortified you were when you heard sirens. You see, all that rap music you like may talk about the hood life but once you’re actually there, it’s a different ball game.”

“You’re not dying to stay there, neither, Keisha.” He retorts. “You’ve made it pretty obvious you don’t want to live there anymore.”

I rub my head and feel the small curls pop up. I really need a touch-up. “You ever wonder why people stay in bad relationships knowing there won’t be a good outcome? It’s because they’re used to the drama of it. It’s like a warm blanket. You know it’s coming, you know it’ll eventually blow over, and then things will be back to normal. That’s how my neighborhood is. It occasionally has its problems, but I’m used to it.” I look back up at the stars. “You can take the girl out of the ‘hood, but you can’t take the ‘hood out of the girl.”

“You really think I want to change you.” Savior gives a half-chuckle and half-smirk. “That’s rich.”

“Well, don’t you?” I press. “Isn’t that the whole goal behind what you’re doing here?”

“What am I doing here, Keisha?” Savior’s voice is calm but there’s a bite of anger behind the words. “I thought I was loving and spoiling you.”

“It feels too good to be true and I’m right to question it.” I defend. “I’m sorry if I never had a rich guy who gave me a car within a week of knowing him.”

There’s a small silence between us and I hear Savior take a deep breath. “Would it have been better if Jalen gave you the car?” He asks.

It was like a gunshot to the heart. Savior went straight for the jugular and didn’t even hesitate. It’s a question I had silently wondered but never dared to ask because I knew if Jalen gave me the car, it would’ve been worse in many ways.

Yet, it doesn't seem that much better that Savior gave it to me. "There's a song lyric I like that applies to you. It's from Teddy Pendergrass." I slowly begin. "I'm going to let it go."

Savior grins and nods. "I have another Teddy Pendergrass lyric I like," he turns towards me and his eyes glitter with eroticism and desire, "close the door and let me blow your mind."

I swallow and blow out a small breath. His gaze was smoldering and my body became aware of who Savior Ellison was and his impact on me. He was provoking me, testing me to see how far I would let him go, and move in for the attack once he had me where he wanted me.

The throbbing between my thighs increased at a fever pitch and I become disoriented. Just looking at how heated his eyes had become, I feel small pings of desire take over my body. Savior had an insatiable appetite for sex and he loves to prove it to me at every chance. My sex silently demanded his cock while my brain wanted out. "I was trying to break up with you."

"And I'm trying to blow your back out." Savior slowly blinks at me and his lips curve into that delicious, taunting smile. "Seems like we're at an impasse."

There's a small ache and thump in my panties. My body naturally craves Savior's cock and himself. Each time I'm around him, there's a yearning that bubbles underneath the surface I can't explain. All I know is I'm constantly on alert when I'm around him, and I never had. I ignore the feeling for now and focus on our conversation. "You're seriously going to wait for me while I'm up at college for two years?"

"It's not like I won't be able to see you during the weekends, and you won't be down during the holidays. Whatever happens, happens. But I can't quit you nor can I drink you out of my memory. Trust, I've already tried. I would rather fail miserably knowing that I gave it my all than to give up so soon and wonder what could've been." He rubs my bald head. "Need a trim?"

My heart is spinning and my head is just as dizzy. Savior has that affect on women. If he's not willing to give up so soon, neither should I. "I do," I softly reply.

"Let me line you up real quick." He suggests and I shoot him a disbelieving look. I know better than let white hands near a black woman's head. "If I mess up, you can wear a head wrap."

I begin to walk back inside the home. "If you mess up, I'm whupping your ass all the way back to Inglewood." I warn him.

Savior gives my ass a smack. "Ooh, I love it when you talk dirty to me."



"To support myself in college, I did hair cuts." Savior massages my head before he applies some shaving cream on it. He didn't just apply any kind but rather, Magic. Yeah. He's getting all the dick sucking he can handle tonight. "Grades paid for grants and tuition, but anything else, my dad wanted me to earn my way. He didn't want me to lean on him at any time during school or after."

Despite my feelings towards Thomas, I respect his parenting style. My daddy is the same way. I know he has money stashed away for me in other accounts but he wants me to earn my own. While I appreciate the lesson, it's a hard one. I've never been poor but I've never been balling. Broke is a level I'm all too familiar with.

"I perfected my style without having to step foot inside a barbershop." Savior explains. "Learned from my fellow Brothers how to cut, trim, fade, all of that."

We're in his monstrous master bathroom where he has a barber chair in front of a mirror. He has the biggest tub I've ever seen in my natural born life along with a just as equally huge shower that rains overhead. There are two toilets with their own room and ventilation and two sinks. He clearly designed

this home with a future wife in mind. “You know how to do fades?” I question. I’m rather impressed.

“I know how to do everything,” He answers as he dips a razor inside a plastic container of hot water and stares at me.

“Including Brazilian waxes.”

I wonder how it would look if Savior stripped both of my heads completely bald. I’m almost tempted to ask him. “Oh.”

“Oh.” He winks at me. He holds my head and glides the razor over it, going against the grain. “It took me months to learn how to do it just right.”

“The Brazilian?” I ask.

“That too,” he chuckles as he continues shaving. He holds my head just right as he moves the razor over it. “I had to prove myself. Not many people will trust a non-black person with their head. It was a lot of blood, sweat, and tears.” He pauses with a laugh. “Mostly tears.”

I can only imagine the pressure that was on Savior to prove himself in a mostly-black fraternity. He might have it harder not because of his race, but also who his father was. It’s not like the Brothers would’ve taken it easy on him. If anything, they might have tried to break Savior.

It makes me love....erm...*respect* him just a bit more.

“Butta Love” plays overhead and I’m in heaven. Savior’s hands are so amazing as he takes intricate care of my head. He goes back over certain places to make sure it’s nice and smooth. Afterward, Savior puts a warm towel on my head and adjusts the chair so I’m laying back.

After a few minutes, Savior removes the towel and massages my scalp with oil. His fingertips gently knead around my dome with such delicate care. It’s not just him being professional or careful. There’s added love with his movements.

A small shudder raced up my spine as I felt Savior’s lips on my head, then his tongue. His lips were so tender, but his

tongue was completely sensual. No man had ever kissed my head, but Savior...he worshipped it. His lips were soft and warm, and so delicate.

I felt that familiar ache in my panties once again and it grew stronger by the moment. Small moans escaped my mouth and my nipples grew harder with each kiss. I felt a throbbing, intense need but my fingers or a toy wouldn't do.

I needed Savior. I needed to feel his hard cock pulsating inside of me. I needed to feel him underneath me as he grabbed my ass and encouraged me to take it all. I needed to feel all of him.

I finally open my eyes and found Savior staring down at me. "Let's go to bed," I tell him.

A delicious smile curved his lips. "Your wish is my command."



## Eighteen

“I can see why you made the comment about my showerhead,” I begin as I let the water rain on me. “Yours is definitely better.”

Savior chuckles behind me as he wrapped his muscular arms around my waist. He kisses my neck and nibbles on my ear. I already had earth-shattering, milly-rocking sex with him and yet, I want some more. “When I’m right, I’m right.”

We never made it to the bedroom. Savior took me down on the living floor and showed me how flexible I was. He held up one leg to my ear as he pounded into me. I screamed and cried out his name as I clawed at his skin, tasting the sweat that dropped from his brow on my lips.

When I opened my eyes, Savior stared at me with such intensity, I visibly shivered. He once again branded me as his. His gaze was hot, and his brown eyes pierced into my soul with each thrust and dirty command he gave me. I just know I’m going to have killer rug burn tomorrow.

I came with a loud cry and Savior followed a short time later, collapsing on top of me. He kissed me deeply, licking the inside of my mouth, and he whispered the most incredible thing to me:

*“I know it’s too soon for you to say it and I respect that, but I want to let you know I love you, Keisha.” He murmurs to me. “Whenever you’re ready to say it, I’ll welcome it.”*

I was stunned. I couldn’t say it back to him, nor did he expect it. So, like a wimp, I said the next plausible thing on my mind.

*“Let’s go shower. I would love to try your showerhead.”*

How To Ruin An Incredibly Romantic Moment 101 by Keisha Jones, ladies and gentlemen.

I have never said I love you to any man other than those related to me. I know the power in those words. If I say I love

you, I mean so much with that. I can't just say I love you and then we break up a week later and it'll be like, 'Boy, bye!'

I just...I don't know...it's so hard for me to say those words. Honestly, I'm not sure if I truly feel the same. I don't know if what I'm feeling is just lust mixed in with infatuation. If I'm willing to leave Savior to go to a four-year university in a few months, do I really love him?

Love doesn't leave nor does it run. It stays and fights.

I turn around and wrap my arms around Savior's neck as he holds my waist. "What else is on the menu this weekend?"

"Well, the gala is the big thing." Just from his voice, I can tell it's something he's not looking forward to but it does out of familial obligation. "After that, we'll just take it easy and see what happens."

"It's Christmas time," I mention, "you have no décor or a tree. You need both."

Savior nods. His home is marvelous to say the least. It is definitely worth every penny of the million and so dollars he's put in it, aside from the expensive price tag he purchased it. "I can do that. Where do you suggest we go?"

"Target." His eyebrows rise. "Or is Geary's more your speed?"

"I can do Target." He turns off the shower and hands me a towel. "I've never decorated here before it'll be different."

"You've never decorated here?" I don't know why the news surprises me. Savior doesn't seem like he spends a lot of time in his own home. "Not one holiday?"

"I've always spent it with my brothers or parents. Never had to." He dries himself off. "I was always gone around Christmas time."

"Oh?" I shouldn't ask but I'm curious. "Where to?"

"Big Bear." He wraps the towel around his waist and wipes down my back. "Just go skiing for a few days and come back refreshed."

I can definitely see Savior looking all cozy and sexy by the fireplace as he sips hot cocoa with marshmallows. I can also see him with a blonde bimbo servicing him as he does just that.

I blink the nasty thought out of my head. We haven't talked Christmas plans because I'm not sure if that's a conversation I should bring up or maybe he should. What's the protocol of dating a rich guy who's never decorated his home?

"That sounds like fun." I pause for a moment. "I hope you enjoy yourself."

"I hope so, too." He brushes his hair. "Because you'll be with me."

My heartbeat rises to an ear-splitting loudness. I've been around snow. It's just not something a girl from the 'hood does. Every advertisement for resorts never have a brotha or a sista in them and everyone knows what that means without actually saying it.

I don't even own a snow suit. Why would I? It's not like I ever left Inglewood. Every place I've traveled to was definitely inland and not near any snow. "Oh?"

"You said 90 days, Keisha." Savior sets the brush down and turns to me. His eyes are clear and serious. "I plan to use all those 90 days to my advantage."

"What do you plan to do?" My stomach cinches with an unexplained nervousness.

"Show you what you want in life and how you shouldn't be afraid to go after it." His eyes glitter with a bit of mischief and sensuality. "That where you come from shouldn't make a difference on how you end up."

"I probably won't easily fit in some of those places you're talking about." I warn him. "It's okay that I know my lane and I want to stay in it."

"It's also okay to draw outside of the lines sometimes," Savior's voice purred with lust and affection.

I swallow my emotions. Twice. “You want me on those slopes, huh?”

Savior picks me up and carries me to bed. “I want you however I can take you.”



“I didn’t know Target stays open all night,” Savior rides the shopping cart down the aisle as I push him.

“Only during the holiday hours. People want to shop when they won’t be disturbed and the lines aren’t too long.” I explain like the Target expert I am. I’m also a Wal-Mart expert but I tend to stay away from that store if I can help it. The combination of white trash and ghetto folks is too ratchet for my taste and this is coming from someone who’s from the ‘hood.

“Lead the way, gorgeous.” Savior orders and we immediately go to the Christmas section. Aisles upon aisles of everything Christmas and a sista is at ease. I immediately begin picking up random items. Some of it would look great in Savior’s home and some of will make absolutely no sense but that’s the point of it. Christmas is the time to be nonsensical.

I grabbed a ton of baubles along with some garland that could be twisted around the staircase. I saw funky ornaments such as a wine glass, golf clubs, and even a scooter. Savior loathes golf, is not much of a wine drinker despite having a refrigerator just for it (he says it’s for his guests), and a scooter is the last thing on Earth he would drive.

Of course, they had absolutely nothing to do with Savior so I had to grab them.

We stopped by the candy section, grabbed all of the candy canes and Christmas candy I know health-nut Savior will not eat. And finally, there are at least fifteen gaudy-looking Christmas decorations in the form of snowmen, Santa Clauses of all shapes, colors, and sizes, and all the awful-looking wreaths Savior and his AMEX black card can handle.

Finally, we choose Elf on the Shelf. I had to explain to Savior what it is because again, he doesn't really do Christmas at his home. I also picked up Home Alone, Elf, and other silly Christmas movies.

I'll show that boy how to do Christmas one way or the other.



“Well...” I stand back and fold my arms across my chest. “... what do you think?”

Savior stands with me as he looks at all of the Christmas décor. Gaudy yet classy at the same time. Every room is filled with something Christmas and that's only the first floor. Just wait until I get started on the second floor and all of those damn bedrooms. “I'm impressed.” He gives a warm smile. “It feels like Christmas.”

“See?” I grin and wink at him. “There's nothing wrong with celebrating Christmas here.”

“I never had a reason to.” He explains. “I'm a single man. I don't do the whole Christmas thing if I don't have to.”

I would argue with Savior but he has a point. I don't know too many single men who go all out for Christmas. Hell, my daddy never did the extreme when it came to decorating. It was always me and Ashley who helped turn his house into a home.

The thoughts of little Keishas and little Saviors appear and I shake my head to relieve them. I'm still getting an iffy feeling about what's going between us but I'm willing to put it all aside for now. “How about some hot cocoa?” I wrap my arms around his waist.

“That sounds perfect.”



It's three o'clock Saturday afternoon and the clock is rapidly ticking away.

Tonight's the big gala.

Tonight is me and Savior's debut as an official couple.

I called up my old girlfriend, Dominique Kimbrough (now she's a Ferguson because she married up and got the hell out of Baldwin Hills as soon as she could), and she let me borrow her glam squad for the night to get ready.

When I went shopping with Savior the other day, he picked out a black sleeveless cocktail dress with matching Gucci heels. I don't wear heels often and I told Savior unless he was comfortable I was going to fall on my ass and show everyone why he really likes me, we need to invest into some Dr. Scholl's. He agreed.

He then purchased the largest diamond stud earrings that I'm too embarrassed to note the price tag, but trust, it was around five figures. I'm not ashamed to admit how much I'm in love with the earrings.

We stopped by La Perla for underwear to wear with the gown, and Savior encouraged me to pick up some extra stuff to keep at his home. I felt a little silly picking up three-hundred dollar draws that he might end up tearing off, but hey, it was his money and who am I to argue when a man wants to blow his money on me?

Now it's the day of the gala and my nerves have been sky high all morning. I haven't been to a gala in ages so I'm beyond nervous. I'll be mingling with other doctors, lawyers, and executives. I'll be making conversation about what's going in and not talk about the Migos' newest album I just downloaded.

I'm going to get a taste of the life I've always wanted.

It's not that I'm scared of success but I don't ever want to be so high up the food chain, I forget where I've come from. I've seen it happen firsthand when someone moves out of the 'hood and they never come back to visit. I've heard stories of it with celebrities and athletes who don't even bother to give back to the community that built them up.

Ashley is one of the most respected accountants in Los Angeles, yet she always gives back to the community. She makes it a point to buy from black-owned businesses, and she

supports black fashion designers whenever she can. She's the true example of making it out of the 'hood, but never forgetting about it.

Andrea, however, is a completely different story. She constantly boasts about the designer labels and expensive cars she owns. She'll post about a news story involving police brutality here and there, and she might even participate in a march. But don't think for a moment, she's going to open her wallet and offer to send black men to college. Don't think you're going to catch her at a mom and pop's restaurant and brag about them, increasing their profile and potential business.

She's a perfect example of us and them.

I can't worry about any of that now. I have a few hours to get ready and make my debut as Savior's girlfriend in front of a potential international audience. I just hope I walk straight and there's no food in my teeth.

And whatever I do, I hope I do not embarrass myself.



Leaving the bedroom, I walk into the living room and see Savior glance out of the large windows facing the indigo pool. I noticed his face in the reflection and he was in a contemplative state, with a small smile forming on his lips. My heart stilled as I see Savior in a tuxedo, looking like a delicious snack.

The formal mask is slightly on, yet there's still a bit of the sensual Savior that is out. It's a transformation I'm still getting used to – how quickly he can change his mood given the circumstances like an actor on cue.

Savior pivots his feet and stares at me. He swallows and blows out a small breath. His eyes drink me in from my painted pink toes to my equally painted lips. He touches his chest as his eyes burn into me. There's a sexiness undercurrent with Savior, and he doesn't bother to hide it.

“I never wonder why I call you gorgeous,” he walks up to me and looks into my eyes. His hands cup my face and I feel the familiar yearning between my thighs. “Because you embody it every second.”

I let out the breath I didn't know I was holding and grasp his wrists. Savior is just so gorgeous and I feel like Cinderella at the ball. “Savior...”

“Shh...” He kisses my head. “...you'll be the best looking woman tonight, I'm sure of it. Shall we?”

I interlock arms with him and we make our way to the awaiting Rolls Royce. I slip inside and Savior follows behind me. Once we're inside, the sensuality flows between us like a soft current as I felt the energy of the man beside me.

I breathe in his cologne and the feelings of arousal wash over me. My body is always on whenever I'm around Savior. I become so aware of what's going on between us in the now, with thoughts of the future floating in the background.

“Gorgeous...” His voice is husky and full of want. He curls my fingers around his and pulls me closer to him. He kisses my neck, devouring it with his lips and tongue as his hands wander all over my dress.

Soft moans escape my mouth as my thighs part to allow entrance of his fingers. He brushes a finger against my wet slit and plays with the budding clit that poked out between the cleft.

“Your cunt is so greedy for me,” he moans as he continues to suck on my neck, “what should I do about that greedy pussy of yours?”

I gasp and pant. I become slick with desire and my body starts to ride Savior's fingers. Is he really doing this on our way to the gala? What if the driver hears us? What if other people see us?

“I won't put my cock in you because I want you to beg for it later,” he nibbles on my ear, “so my fingers are going have to suffice.”



“Oh shit,” I sob as his thumb circled my clit. He pulled back from me and I studied his face. His lips were slightly pursed, his eyes had that sultry look to them, yet he was collected and calm. He was more focused on getting me off than anything else.

My breath contracts in my chest. The coils of orgasm began to unravel and my legs shook from pleasure. My nails dug into the plush leather seats as our gazes locked on each other.

He had heated eyes and his lips...my god, his lips were curved into that sinful, delicious smile. He knew he had me where he wanted me, anytime at his bidding, and I would gratefully oblige any requests.

“I want to feel you come all over my fingers,” Savior circled my clit faster, “can you do that, baby? Can you come for me when I tell you to?”

I cried and moaned, losing all of my dignity. I was afraid of disappointing him; climaxing when he told me not yet. I was so aroused when he ordered me to wait for him. It was a clusterfuck of emotions and I didn't know what to do first.

“Now.” Savior ordered. “Come now.”

The orgasm hit my body like an ocean wave, violently shaking me. I collapsed against the seat and cried out Savior's name, feeling weak and helpless. He withdrew his fingers and wrapped his arms around me, kissing my head as the orgasm coursed through my body.

My body finally stopped shuddering and I lay satiated in the backseat with Savior. He wiped his fingers with a moistened cloth and discarded it before he softly rocked me to a small sleep. Only the sounds of Shalamar and Savior's heartbeat filled the small space.

I felt complete. I felt at home.

## Nineteen

The Beverly Wilshire is one of those hotels one always hears about but never imagined a stay would occur.

I've been to fancy hotels, if one could call the DoubleTree a fancy hotel. There's fancy – anyone can afford it if you hustle hard enough. And then there's white people fancy when you enter the premises, they are legit surprised to see your black ass because to them, seeing a black person is like seeing an unicorn.

I'm in the latter.

I immediately feel all eyes on me as Savior and I exit the Rolls Royce and make our way inside. I see guests of both sexes turn to look at us as we walk past them. I don't know if they're more astounded by the bald head or the black skin. I already know some women are looking at me and wonder how in the hell was I able to pull off that look while they're still paying for that three hundred dollar blowout.

Magic, bitches.

Savior and I stop at a small waiting area where he checks his expensive watch. "My family should be arriving at any time now. My parents first, then my brothers." He explains. "My brothers tend to arrive a little on their own style."

I don't like how cryptic that sounds. "Oh?"

"You'll see. Ocean tends to be a bit more reserved, but Soul..." A waiter comes by with a tray of champagne and Savior takes two glasses, giving one to me. "...Soul really doesn't give a damn."

My eyebrows rise. Seeing how prim and proper Savior and Starr are, I'm legit curious to see how Ocean and Soul will act. "Oh?"

Savior clinks glasses with me and takes a sip. "Case in point," he nods behind me, and I see Ocean with his date. "Look at

Ocean's shoes.”

Ocean is wearing a tuxedo but his shoes are sneakers. As he approaches us, I recognize the sneakers being FBLs. It's endearing to see the brothers low-key support each other in different ways.

“Baby brother,” Ocean greets Savior with a bro hug. “Keisha, you're looking lovely as ever.”

It's hard to make eye contact with your boyfriend's brother, who performed your gynecological exam. Talk about awkward. “Thank you, Ocean.”

“This is my date for tonight, Bailey.” He introduces a young, slender biracial woman. She's wearing a black slip dress with heels that put her on par with Ocean's height. She could be Jourdan Dunn's twin. “Bailey, this is my younger brother, Savior, and his girlfriend, Keisha.”

Once Bailey realized I was Savior's girlfriend and not competition, it seems the alleged animosity evaporated. Her stone face suddenly has the brightest smile on it. What? She honestly thought I wanted Ocean? Is competition between women always a thing?

“Pleasure to meet you, Keisha.” Bailey speaks with an accent that I can't quite place. To be honest, I'm not entirely sure it's a real one.

“Likewise,” I smile back. I feel Savior stiffen and the energy shifts yet again. The sensual side of him immediately dissipates while the professional and straight-laced one appears. I turn towards him and I see his eyes are lock on Starr and Thomas. They arrived together and it seems like the red sea parted for them.

They walk down the red carpet looking like royalty personified. Thomas is tall, slender, with a head full of white hair. Just like Savior, he commands attention the moment he enters a room and won't let it go until he leaves.

There's an air of mystery combined with a no tolerance for bullshit Thomas has. He wants it straight, no chaser, and will

probably curse you out six ways to Sunday if you lead him to believe otherwise.

He's in sharp contrast to Starr, who has her hair rolled up in a French bun and wore a sparkly blue gown. She's warm and inviting, with eyes that dazzle with each smile – contrived or real.

“Ocean, Savior,” Thomas greets his sons with an approving smile. His tone is not like a father to sons, but rather an older colleague talking to his younger counterparts. There is no signs of affection and love anywhere. “I see you two have brought dates.”

“Father, this is my date, Bailey.” Ocean introduces her to Thomas. “Bailey, these are my parents, Thomas and Starr Ellison.”

“It is so lovely to meet you. I've heard so much about you. It is such an honor to finally meet you.” Bailey lays it on thicker than honey. I think she just might be worst than Rosa.

“Thank you, my dear.” Thomas loves the compliment and is seemingly used to it. He turns to me and his eyes crinkle upon seeing my bald head. “And you are?”

“This is my date, Keisha.” Savior introduces me to his parents. Date?

“Lovely to meet you, Keisha.” Thomas grins. “I hope you enjoy your evening here.”

There's a slightly noticeable difference between how Thomas greeted Bailey and how he greeted me. He sounded mechanical with both of us, but there was more of an edge with me, at least it appeared to be. Maybe I'm just feeling a bit self-conscience since my boyfriend introduced me to his father as his date, and not his girlfriend.

Thomas takes two glasses of champagne and hands one over to Starr. “Where's Soul? I don't see him anywhere. Unless he's busy with his shoes.” He glances down at Ocean's feet. “Really, Ocean? A black-tie affair and you're wearing sneakers?”

“The dress code didn’t say Tom Fords or Gucci slippers so yes.” Ocean blinks a few times and tightens his smile. “I wanted to be comfortable and I am. You should be happy since I am promoting my brother and your son’s very successful sneaker line.”

There is tension between the men and it becomes more apparent with each biting remark. “I’m proud of all of my sons regardless of what they might think otherwise.” Thomas grins.

“Now is not the time for your bullshit.” Starr politely reminds everyone. “I have bigger issues to worry about such as that one.” Starr rolls her eyes and we all turn to see what she’s talking about. “I don’t even believe this mess.”

Audible gasps appear amongst the crowd as the youngest member of the Ellison family strolls in. Wearing the freshest FBLs to compliment his tuxedo, Soul Ellison has arrived. He’s over six feet tall, with his brown hair closely-cropped and a budding goatee. Just like his brothers, he’s also gorgeous and he knows it.

He’s muscular in stature and quite uncomfortable he has to wear a tuxedo. His appearance isn’t what’s causing all of the commotion, though I think the family wish it were.

Paying homage to Snoop Dogg, Soul appears with two blonde women on leashes. The women are wearing designer gowns with studded diamond collars around their necks as Soul carries two leashes in his hands. He’s serving Malibu’s Most Wanted tease.

“Father, mother, brothers,” Soul walks up to the family with a knowing smirk on his hands. He knows if his family really wants to have a word with him, it’ll give him motivation to leave and he’s itching for someone to pull the trigger. “Lovely to see you all here. Here are my dates – to my left is hashtag. To my right is me too.”

My mouth gapes open before Savior whispers in my ear. “He was recently accused of sexual harassment. The allegations

were proven false. He's doing this as a *fuck you* to the movement."

I shake my head. "I'm not sure if this is the—"

"Soul does whatever Soul wants and that's final." Savior purrs.

"I'm Alexis," Blonde #1 aka hashtag smiles.

"I'm Carly," Blonde #2 aka me too grins.

"Pleasure to meet you both." Thomas seemingly beams. Okay, so I wasn't thinking I was overly sensitive. Thomas loves the blondes, and he didn't mind Jourdan-light. But he definitely has an issue with my dark-skinned ass. Got it.

"Soul, this is my date, Keisha." Savior introduces me. Second time I'm his date this evening and not his girlfriend. I'm starting to see a distinct pattern here.

"Hey Keisha," Soul approaches me with a wicked smile, "has Savior showed you his singing chops?"

"He sings?" I blink.

"He sounds like that Bieber dude," Soul chuckles as Ocean hides a smile. "He can sing, no doubt. But he was the original white boy on soul patrol." Soul nudges me. "Hey you wanna hear a funny joke?"

I briefly question if this is a trick question. "Um, sure."

"Please, don't." Savior sighs.

"Whatever happened to Jon B.?" Soul's eyes dance.

I shrug. "I don't know."

"Justin Timberlake and Robin Thicke!" Soul cracks up at his own joke. As corny as it is, he has a point.

"Yo, Keisha," Soul is authentic about his behavior. He doesn't wear a mask like Savior or bite his tongue like Ocean. What you see is what you get. "You like sneakers?"

"I love sneakers!" I smile. "My Jordan collection is quite impressive if you ask me."

“Yo,” Soul pulls out a business card and gives it to me, “hit me up next week, aight? I wanna do something for you.” He winks at me.

“Do what?” Savior interjects.

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe give your *date* here some sneakers?” Soul meets his brother’s challenge. It seems both of Savior’s brothers are seeing through his crap and I’m, for one, am so glad. I should really thank Soul.

Savior’s mouth twitches and it’s clear he’s annoyed. “Fine.”

I’m starting to feel claustrophobic with all of the shade and tension. The fact Savior hasn’t corrected anyone who has referred to me as his date is very unsettling. I grab another glass of champagne and excuse myself.

I quickly down the champagne and blink back tears. I’m about to get white girl wasted and I really don’t even care. I’m not sure what game Savior is playing but I do know I don’t want to participate in it any longer.

I find a small corner where no one can bother me and pull out my cell phone. I’m tempted to call Tasha but I have a feeling she might be too high to make it to Beverly Hills to pick me up.

Nikki is my next choice. I hope she’s available. I quickly place a text to her asking her if she’s able to pick me up from the disaster of disasters. She replies she’s on a date and can’t but she’ll send for an Uber to get me. I text her thanks and I make my way outside to wait for the Uber.

I wait outside for a few minutes when I feel his presence beside me. I don’t even bother to turn around. He wants me to be insignificant and unimportant amongst the most important people in his life, I can play that game. I can also take my ass home and have fun with my vibrator. At least I know he wouldn’t give me problems or be fake.

“Keisha,” Savior calls and I shake my head. “You ran away from me,” Savior grabs my elbow and joins me. “You’re my date, Keisha. I need to know where you are at all times.”

“I’m your date, but I’m not your girlfriend.” I reply through gritted teeth. “It’s okay, Savior. I understand you’re black lives matter in the sheets, but all lives matter in the streets.”

“And what the hell?” He steps in front of me. His eyes are serious and his mouth ticks with annoyance. He’s pissed. Good. He can join the club. “What is that about?”

“Your father has had plenty of mistresses but he came with your mother and he introduced her as his wife in front of everyone.” Tears threaten my eyes but I keep them at bay. “You introduced me as your date. Not girlfriend, but date.”

Savior runs a hand through his hair and looks around. He’s hoping no one is noticing our conversation. He’s also hoping I don’t become ghetto all up in this bitch. “I introduced you as my date because you are.”

“You introduced yourself to Jalen as my boyfriend and you made damn sure he understood it. You introduced yourself as my boyfriend to Andrea, and you *especially* made sure she understood it. Now you’re telling me you’re introducing me as your date because it’s the proper thing to do?” My eyes burn with anger as a couple of tears fall down my cheeks. “Gee, why did you act one way around certain people but in another way, you want to be prim and proper?”

“Keisha, don’t do this, please.” His voice is low and is slightly begging. “I promise I wasn’t disrespecting you nor was I implying anything else.” He thumbs away my tears. I’m so pissed at him, but my body betrays me. I immediately become more attune to what is going on between us and what’s the real issue here. “Every time I came here, I always had a date with me. It was never a girlfriend and I think I was just so used to saying date, I just went with it.” He moves closer and kisses my forehead. “I will never disrespect you no matter who our audience is and where we are.”

“Okay,” I sniffle. I see my Uber has pulled up. “My ride is here. I need to go.”



“Keisha.” Savior’s grip tightens on my elbow. “I need you. If you leave, I’ll leave, too. I brought you here and I’ll leave with you.”

“You’re here with your family.” I charge back. “You need to be with them.”

Savior briefly looked up at the starry sky. “I’m not going back inside unless you’re coming with me.” His gaze met mine again. “And that’s final. You’re not leaving here thinking I’m a jerk.”

My jaw tightens with anger. “So, you rather have me stay here and think you’re a jerk?”

“I deserve that.” Savior wasn’t deterred and I don’t know if I want to fuck him or fight him. He holds out a hand. “I’ll do anything for you, gorgeous. I promise I’ll make it up to you.”

I stare down at Savior’s hand before I meet his gaze again. “We’ll see.” I take his hand. “We’ll see.”



The dinner was uneventful. I made conversation with Soul about his shoe line and we talked about our favorite colorways. Savior and Ocean spoke about football and who they’d hoped to win on Sunday. The other ladies, aside from Starr, just stayed cute and mute. It was clear they were there to look good and not participate.

Soul and Ocean are in competition on who is the most woke brother and it’s endearing. They actually give back to the community instead of posturing with a bunch of black kids and how it goes viral on social media. I found out Ocean is part of a community organization that tries to curb gang violence while Soul constantly employs black models for his fashion line.

It makes me wonder...if the men are so woke and involved, why is Thomas so against them having black girlfriends?

I excuse myself to go to the restroom to freshen up. When I exited my stall, I found Bailey fixing her hair in the mirror.

She retouched her lipstick and gave her lips a small smack. She is truly a beautiful woman and I'm surprised she's only here as a date, not as someone's partner. She certainly fits the bill.

"Are you having fun?" I break the ice as I wash my hands.

Bailey stares at me through the mirror as if I suddenly grew a third head. "Fun?" The accent, which I knew was fake, is gone. Her voice is plain and unassuming.

I briefly question if I used the wrong word. "Are you having a good time tonight?" I rephrase.

Bailey puts her lipstick in the clutch. She turns towards me and I feel her sizing me up. "How do you know the Ellisons?"

"I don't." I dry my hands and place a tip in the attendant's plate.

"You came here with Savior," her voice is accusatory.

"I did." I'm not sure where her questioning is going. What I do know is about I snatch that dusty-ass wig off her alabaster ass if she don't quit.

Bailey puts a bigger tip into the attendant's plate. Clearly, it's a competition I didn't realize I was a part of. She fixes her obvious wig one more time and turns to me. "Are you and Savior dating?"

I carefully choose the words next. "Savior and I are very close."

"Ocean introduced you as Savior's girlfriend," Bailey continues, "unless he was wrong with that assumption?"

How did a question asking her if she had fun become an interrogation? This night is becoming increasingly worse by the hour. I'm about to drag the soul out of her anorexic body. "You're biracial, but you look light enough where no one will mistake you for being half-black unless you tell them. So, since you like to pass as white, I'll treat you as such." I clear my throat. "It must be tiring to be white. You spend every day hating, thinking of ways to hate, being mediocre, aging like an

avocado, while pretending to live a great life and not care. You're the first to turn Black Girls Rock to All Girls Rock. I bet you made racist jokes so your white sorority sisters didn't have to. You were probably taught all of your life that if you acted in a certain way, you'll get the man you wanted, even if you have to deny who you really are.

"So, when you see someone who has no care in the world, you get angry because your insecurities come out. You can't understand how my baldheaded and thick ass came with the grand prize of them all and you're curious about it. Not curious as in you're genuinely happy but curious as in, you want to see what I did so you can swoop right in and get him.

"To answer your question if I'm dating Savior, here's an unforgettable answer for you," I walk up to Bailey and smile. "It's none of your goddamn business."

Bailey's mouth curves into a frown and her eyes are hot with fire. She knows if she says or does anything, not only will she be kicked out of the gala but also out of the expensive ho job she calls escorting. "Thank you." She then leaves the bathroom.

I stare at the door and wonder what the hell that was about but I shrug it off. I touch up my lipstick and make my way out of the bathroom. As I approach the ballroom again, I see Bailey and the hashtag twins talking amongst themselves.

Now it all makes sense. The women are from the same escort agency and they're all working together to get in with the family. It explains Soul's attitude from earlier and how he doesn't take women seriously unless he's doing business with them.

Why did I think I was so naïve?

I walk back to the table and sit down, feeling dejected. I can't believe I was even a little excited about this gala until realizing how competitive and fake other women are. Even the sista who had a little bit of melanin within her thought I was her competition. So much for POC solidarity, huh?

I thought getting out of the ‘hood meant I would be around better quality people but I honestly think the people I’m around now are worst. If someone is fake in Inglewood, they get dealt with pretty quickly on the streets. If someone is fake here, it’s too obvious they want something from you.

I don’t know why I even entertained the idea I wanted something better. Maybe Andrea is right; I am a hood bitch, I was born a hood bitch, and I’ll always be a hood bitch. Maybe Jalen was right, Savior is only with me to get his rocks off until he rides into the sunset with Becky.

I’m just here to keep his dick wet until he proves otherwise.

“You don’t seem impressed to be here.”

I turn to Savior and gasp at his face. Savior Thomas Ellison is just a breathtakingly beautiful man with the deepest brown eyes I’d ever seen. His voice was calm and impassive, but that sultry look returned to his eyes.

My heart is delighted to see him, and my body is so attuned to his. He’s like a drug I refuse to go to rehab for and that’s so incredibly bad. He’s my heroin, my cocaine, my mushrooms, and I want more.

My brain, however, realizes how bad Savior is for me and wants me to quit cold turkey. It already seems like a dangerous love affair with no good ending in sight. Still, as angry I am with him, I just can’t quit him quite yet.

“It’s been an interesting night to say the least.” I don’t even bother to hide my scowl.

Savior leans closer to me and I get another inhale of his delicious cologne. My heart was pounding out of my chest and my mouth felt cottony. He buries his nose into my neck and softly kisses it, causing a hum of pleasure underneath my skin. “How can I make this better?”

The warmth of Savior’s touch instantly made this night better. He was on his p’s and q’s for most of the night and barely held my hand. Now he’s kissing my neck – touching one of my

spots – in public. If that’s not him claiming me, I don’t know what is.

“Gorgeous,” his lips curve against my earlobe, “I asked you a question. How can I make this better?”

Oh, I know a few ways he could make it better but I don’t believe I can say any of what I’m thinking. “I don’t know.” I breathe.

Savior suddenly pulls away and my body mourns the loss. He stands up and motions me to stand with him. He holds the small of my back as he leads me to the dance floor. A few heads begin to turn and I already feel the weight of the room upon my shoulders. This will not end well.

“This music is so unbelievably wack,” Savior motions over to the DJ, who quickly puts on another record.

I was expecting another WASPy tune like Coldplay, HAIM, or even Lana Del Rey. She’s safe enough, right? The music here has been a snooze fest but it’s supposed to be. Rich, white people and their fat pockets are paying to come here to listen to Cardi B.

I hear that familiar whispery voice of Total. Savior actually requested...LL Cool J?

“Loungin’” fills up the ballroom and I’m stuck on the dance floor with Savior. Considering the guest list, it’s not an appropriate venue to start twerking and freak dancing. Not sure what the protocol is here.

Did he just set me up?

“Follow my lead,” he whispers and he holds the small of my back. We walk along the rhythm of the song and I feel every set of eyes on us. Ooh, these white people ain’t gon’ like this...

Savior surprises me by doing ballroom dancing-like moves against a hip-hop beat. As the thumping bass line plays overhead, Savior twirls and spins me in perfect rhythm of the song. His hands roam all over my body, yet he was never

disrespectful. We dance alongside each other, against each other, and it's never obscene.

It's poetry.

Savior smiles at me and it's so genuine, so real. For a short moment, he forgets where he is and he's happy. His brown eyes are focused on mine, our bodies are aligned together, and it feels so beautiful.

I'm blessed my dance background came in handy and I was able to keep up with Savior. As I slightly grind and shake my hips, he holds onto them and approvingly smiles, as if he was encouraging me to let loose.

His body is filled with passion and his eyes are smiling along with his mouth. It felt like we'd always danced like this, so intimate yet so polite. It was never disrespectful and he never put his hands anywhere they shouldn't have been.

I'm so caught up in the moment, I don't notice the dance floor become crowded. The blue hair crowd is on here, grooving with their husbands and significant others, trying to imitate the same moves Savior just did to me.

He pulls me close to him and caresses my face, mouthing the lyrics, 'Who do you love? Are you for sure?'

My heart stuttered and my breath was caught in my throat. At that moment, it was only the two of us in the universe. There was no me, no him; it was just us. Savior looked so beautiful, so raw and real, and I wondered if this is how everything would be between us.

I know he's just lip-synching but the moment is so surreal and I wonder if there's meaning behind those words. I still don't know if Savior is being real or if he's trying to placate me from the earlier disaster.

Savior's eyes flicker with delight and mischief. Just when I'm about to question him, he suddenly dips me in the middle of the dance floor. His lips claim mine and the kiss steals my soul. His muscular arms hold me so I don't fall yet I never felt

I was in danger. For the first time tonight, I felt protected. I felt needed.

I felt loved.

Savior lifts me back up and caresses my face. His eyes are heated and I feel the energy shift between us again. “Who do you love?”

There’s not doubt in my voice when I answer him. “You, Savior. I love you.”

## Twenty

It's an unusually happy day in Inglewood. That only means there will be drama later tonight.

As I work on a paper on my new MacBook, I occasionally look outside my window. The L.A. sky is nice and bright. It may be winter in many other parts of the country, but in L.A., it already feels like spring.

Hip-hop music blasts with each passing car. The ice cream truck makes its way around the neighborhood and a small group of children chase after it. Neighbors talk to each other via yelling. There's no anger, but all love.

The last month has been such a whirlwind. Savior and I spent Christmas and New Year's together. A few days after the New Year, Savior went on vacation with his father and brothers. I wish I was able to go but I knew it was a family tradition and no girls allowed. It wasn't too bad. Every night, Savior and I made it a point to have FaceTime sex.

I've had phone sex before but it was nothing to write home about. It was during high school and there was nothing sexy or romantic about it. I can definitely say with all confidence I was drier than the Arizona desert.

But FaceTime sex with Savior is a completely different experience. He wanted to see everything as it happened from the time I tweaked my nipples to when I inserted a finger inside of me. He talked dirty, becoming more explicit with each stroke and making me climax in record speed.

*"You look so damn beautiful when you come," he licked his lips as he stroked his cock. "So damn beautiful."*

Savior's eyes were heated and his lips were flushed. I licked my lips with hot anticipation as I watched Savior stroke his cock faster and faster. The explosion of come that spurted out of him as his eyes rolled back was so hot, I was ready to go again even though I'd just climaxed.



That's when I knew I was dealing with a different beast.  
Savior was like no other.

It'd been almost two weeks since I'd seen Savior in person.  
He's scheduled to come back tonight and I hope he's ready for  
everything I'm going to throw at him because I'm horny AF.

It's more than just not physically seeing him. There's an  
emptiness in my bed at night that was never there prior to  
Savior. I miss the smell of his hair, the feel of his body, and the  
strength of him.

It was supposed to be a fling, an arrangement, a one-time last  
hurrah before I went off to college or somewhere far from  
L.A. Now all I wanted was to spend as much time with Savior  
as I could.

It wasn't that I was losing myself within him or our  
relationship. I respected his space and he respected mine. If I  
couldn't see him, I silently pouted but it was never an issue.  
Normally, my vibrator took care of my needs but I found  
myself waiting for Savior. I wanted him to take the edge off as  
he broke me off.

I take a break and stretch before I make my way outside.  
Sitting on the porch with a bottle of lemonade, I watch life  
unfold and think about everything. I have the love of my life,  
I'm about to graduate from community college in a few  
months, and hopefully, I'll be accepted at USC.

The goal was to get the hell out of L.A. and as far away from it  
as possible. I even started researching HBCUs and applying to  
them. The thought of being in a different state and time zone  
away from Savior was too much for me to bear.

I love that man. I'm in love with him.

"Hi Keisha!" Three-year-old Cedric waves to me. He has his  
hair in cornrows and is wearing the brightest Paw Patrol  
sneakers. He's also a sneakerhead just like me. He has a pretty  
impressive collection of Spiderman, Lightning McQueen, and  
Thomas the Train shoes.

“Hey Lil’ Cedric,” I wave towards him. I look up and see his father, Big Cedric aka Big C. Big C is a regular in the neighborhood, owning his BBQ restaurant just a few blocks down. He was the one that came up with Gumbolaya and subsequently, increased my waistline.

While his son is in his Paw Patrol finest, Big C is dressed out of the Nike store. His shirt, his fitted, his warm-up suit has that familiar swoosh. He looks good but I’m more interested in his colorways. “Whatchu wearing, Big C?”

“Girl, let me tell you about these Air Force Ones Foamposites.” Big C walks into my yard with Lil’ Cedric in tow. Big C sticks his foot out and my eyes widen at how slick and shiny the black leather is. “Whatchu think about that?”

They look hella good. The other thing that makes my mouth water other than Savior and food is a sweet grail sneaker. Some girls collect Barbies and do fun arts and crafts; I’m a diehard sneakerhead. “So sweet,” I shake my head, “jealous.”

“You should be,” Big C laughs. “How’s your dad and Ashley?”

“They’re good. They’re back together and they’re both talking marriage now.” I’m really happy for my daddy. Ashley is the perfect fit for him and they seem complete.

“And your moms?” Big C asks and I shake my head. “I should say congratulations if the rumor is true.”

Word is Andrea is pregnant with King J’s baby. That would make her his fourth baby mama and the baby will join the other five siblings. Another black child born to dysfunctional-ass parents. I feel sorry for the fetus already. “That mess is all them, not me.”

“Hopefully this’ll make your mother calm down and act maternal.” Big C is always so positive, despite the negative. He’s a true inspiration. He briefly looks around and leans in. “Let me holler at you for a minute, baby girl.”

“Oh?” I put down my lemonade. “What’s up?”

“You still messing with Jalen?” He asks and I shake my head. “Good, good. Word on the street is he has some heat on him. His mouth was quicker than it should’ve been and he’s pissed off some people he shouldn’t have.”

“I don’t even want to know.” Jalen always had a temper that sometimes got the best of him. If he followed my daddy’s lead, he wouldn’t have dealt with any of this. Now he’s hiding from people with bigger guns and more heat than him.

When we were together, no one bothered with him because out of respect and fear of my daddy. Now that Jalen and I are no longer together, the fear of my daddy’s wrath has also disappeared.

“Just keep safe.” Big C warns. “There is a lot of tension right now and it’s just a matter of time before it explodes. Niggas out here are being reckless and they don’t care who gets hurt. I want you and your kinfolk okay.” He winks at me.

“You got it.” I smile back.

I watch Big C and Lil’ Cedric leave and I go back to enjoying my morning. Jalen’s mouth wrote a check his ass couldn’t cash and I don’t know whether to laugh or roll my eyes at it. He actually warned me about Savior but really, Jalen was no better.

Despite how I’m feeling towards him, I hope his dumb-ass doesn’t get shot. He is someone’s child, after all, and no parent should go through the pain of burying their child.



“What do you think?” SoundCloud asks.

SoundCloud plays a beat for me and Tasha and I’m legit shocked at how good it sounds. I know I gave him grief about his style being all sorts of wack but this track I can easily hear on the radio. It sounds super dope and fresh. “I like it.” I nod my head to the beat. “Your growth shows a lot on this.”

“This is your best work, bae!” Tasha beams. “I’m feeling this dopeness.”

“It took me forever to work on it!” SoundCloud gets up and paces back and forth. “I think this song might be it. This might be the track that takes me to another level.”

For once, I believe him. Not that I was Debbie Downer before, but sometimes someone needs to work on themselves before you can be that cheerleader on the sidelines. “I think you have an excellent shot of making it onto the radio.”

“And work with Kanye, and Jay-Z and Migos and a bunch of other folks!” Tasha adds.

“Nah, fresh voices, fresh sounds.” SoundCloud interrupts. “Fresh ears need to hear this.”

I agree. Rap and hip-hop has always been a young man’s game, despite the legends can easily outtrap today’s mumble rappers. But SoundCloud is only 23, himself, so he has time to develop his craft and become legendary in the game. I think he’ll do well if he keeps it up.

“Is Jesus Piece coming over?” SoundCloud asks. “I would love to get his take on this.”

“I don’t know. His flight just arrived so I think he might want to stay at home and chill for the night.” It feels weird saying that, considering LAX is just down the street from my home. I thought about offering to pick him up but I didn’t want to sound too thirsty, if that makes sense? If Savior wants to see me, he can take the initiative.

I just hope he takes the initiative soon because a sista is hornier than a motherfucker. All I’m craving is Savior in my mouth and his thick cock inside me. I miss the way his body hovers over mine as he moves inside me and how he wipes the excess sex away afterwards.

I miss him.

“Is everything okay between you two?” Tasha blows out smoke. I’m starting to believe she can’t function without getting high. “He hasn’t been here in two weeks.”

“Everything’s fine, he’s just been on vacation with his dad and brothers. He wants to take me skiing at some point and I dunno.” I shake my head. “Black people tend not to ski.”

“We sure in the hell don’t.” Tasha nods. “You’ll never catch my black ass on the slopes.”

“Because your black ass will slide and fall down the slopes,” Junie adds.

“Nigga, you can kiss the blackest parts of my ass, ya dig?” Tasha huffs.

“If I did that, I’ll disappear for damn sure.” He nods.

“Stop.” I advise them. They always fight over the stupidest shit. These niggas once got into a fight on how Junie kept eating all of the marshmallows in the Rocky Road ice cream. I swear how in the hell are they an old married couple and they barely graduated out of high school a few years ago?

I hear a knock at my door and get up to check who’s behind door number one. My heart skips ten beats when I see who it is. I open the door and see the most beautiful man on planet earth standing before me. “Gorgeous...” Savior’s voice is above a whisper.

I jump on him and wrap my legs around his waist as he holds me and manages to walk inside. I grab his face and plant a string of kisses on him. It’s been two weeks and it was 14 days too long. My heart ached. My soul yearned. My body craved him.

A low growl forms in Savior’s throat. His tongue plays with mine, exploring my mouth, and savoring it. The warmth of his body, his spicy cologne, and the sheer strength of him enveloped my body.

Savior kisses me like he was never going to see me again, like if our kiss was everything on the line, and he had to prove it to me. It’s so raw and so real, with no barrier between us. He doesn’t care if we have an audience in the room; I understand what is being said:

I belong to him and he belongs to me.

He puts me down and finally acknowledges Junie and Tasha in the room. “Hey guys. How are you?”

“Seeing that kiss, I think I’m pregnant now.” Tasha clutches her chest.



My heart is racing. I feel small beads of sweat forming on my forehead. The clock is ticking and my throat feels parched.

All eyes are on me and the pressure is on me so hard, and so tight. It’s like someone put their foot on my neck and won’t let up. I feel like someone just delivered several blows to my chest and I can’t breathe.

“Well...” Savior glances at me. “...can you?”

I let out a deep sigh. This game really sucks. “Ol’ Dirty Bastard, Raekwon the Chef, Method Man, the RZA, the GZA, Ghostface Killah...” Ooh, there’s always two members of the Wu-Tang I always forget. I’m stuck. I can’t remember them. “I honestly don’t remember the other two.”

Junie and Tasha glance over at Savior. “Can you name all nine members of the Wu-Tang Clan?” Junie asks.

“Ol’ Dirty Bastard, Raekwon the Chef, Method Man, the RZA, the GZA, Ghostface Killah,” Savior turns to me, “Inspectah Deck, U-God, and the newest member, Cappadonna.”

“I hate you,” I laugh.

We ordered a pizza and wings, and just watched old hip-hop videos on the TV. Savior and Junie talked to each other about their hip-hop knowledge, while Tasha and I talked about random gossip we saw on IG. It felt normal, like we’d always done this and it’s just a regular night at the house.

“Has Andrea tried to contact you?” Tasha asks me and I shake my head. “She’s still mad, huh?”

“King J is still locked up.” I reply. Junie plays his beat for Savior, and Savior nods his head along to it. He’s telling Junie it reminds him of some producers named Teddy Riley and Chuckii Booker. “As long as he’s locked up, she’ll always be mad at me.”

“I heard he might be getting out soon, though. Word is he’s singing about who his supplier is.” Tasha’s eyebrows raise. “He’s not implicating your dad, though. Word is he’s saying it’s Jalen.”

That explains the flowers from before. It also explains why Jalen wanted me to hold something of his and was pissed that I refused. Out of curiosity one night, I looked up Jalen’s other birds and they all dedicated messages of love and protection to him. Pathetic. Jesus be some self-esteem and a feminist movement.

The problem with Jalen is, if what is being said about him is true, King J has boys who have deadlier heat than anything Jalen can provide. Not to mention I heard a rumor Jalen may have soured a deal he made with another gang and they’re looking for him as well.

I still don’t feel bad. I’m glad I was able to get away from that whole situation before I was the one caught up in some mess. But there’s an eerie feeling things aren’t well and it’s only a matter of time before someone gets killed.

“I’m going to turn in, guys,” Savior gets up and yawns, “I’m beat and I need to rest before that jet lag kicks in.” It’s already midnight and Savior’s been here for several hours.

“I’ll head in, too.” Seeing how exhausted Savior is, we probably won’t have sex but that’s fine. I just want to feel him snuggle up to me.

We head back to the bedroom and Savior immediately strips down to his boxer briefs and tank top. I undress down to my booty shorts and cami tank and slide into bed. Savior joins me a short time and snuggles against me.

His breath still faintly smells like the Blue Moons he'd consumed. His body is warm and soft and I can feel the outline of his washboard abs against my curves. He snuggles next to me, and kisses the back of my neck. The familiar hum of eroticism appears between us and I push my ass into his crotch more.

"Mmmm..." Savior purrs as he kisses my neck more. "...did you plan on sleeping a lot tonight?"

I wasn't planning on sleeping at all but I didn't know how bad Savior's jet lag was. Feeling how hard his cock had become, I have feeling he's not suffering at all. "What do you have in mind?"

"I plan on making you come hard and throughout the night." A free hand squeezes my small breast and travels down to my midsection. "I want the neighbors to know my name."

"Mmm, I'm sure they do already." I turn around and climb on top of Savior. He kisses me with heated passion and his hands explore my body. It always feels like it'll be last time he'll ever see me when he kisses me. His tongue plays with mine, and he gently sucks on my lips, savoring their fullness with each touch.

He cups and grabs my ass, claiming me with two forceful slaps. They hurt but it's a delicious pain. It's a pain that makes me want to do anything he asks me to. Eagerness and desire soars through my body, curling my toes, and slightly arching my back. We're only kissing and it feels like I'm on the cusp of orgasm.

I inhaled his scent, relishing it as his thick length teased my sex. It'd been two long weeks and I need to feel his soft thickness inside of me. I need Savior to once again claim me, own this body, and never let me go.

I'm hopelessly in love with this man and I'm too far deep to climb out of the abyss.

I sit up and straddle him long enough so I can pull off my shirt. Savior sits up with me and immediately dives into my



breasts, squeezing and licking them. My nipples tighten with pleasure as I feel Savior's pointy tongue play between them. His mouth covers one before he takes over the other. He sucks on them as if small titties are going out of style and he needs to hurry up and get them before they're gone.

"You got me so wet, baby," I purr to him. "My pussy is aching for your cock."

"You'll get it soon, I promise." His voice is throaty and full of desire. "Your body is absolutely perfect, gorgeous. I can't enough of your body."

Heat fills my body and I whimper my response. My underwear quickly comes off as Savior removes his clothing and we're skin-to-skin. We look into each other's eyes in the moonlight of my bedroom. No words need to be said.

I climb back on top of Savior and sink down on him. His cock completely fills me and a sharp gasp escapes my mouth. My body stills as the emotion runs through my body. I took more of him; feeling Savior stretching me as the pain burned a little.

This time, the lovemaking feels different. It feels we're more connected in a different way. I'd never known an intimacy like this before. No other man was concerned about my feelings, my future, and what I wanted from this life. I feel raw and open to Savior. I feel exposed but not embarrassed or ashamed of it.

"Keisha..." Savior's voice is a cross between pain and ecstasy. He sounds and feels so good underneath me. "Damn, baby..."

I slide more onto him as my pussy suckled along his length. My nails dig into his chest as I ease along his delicious thick and shaft. Ohmygod, Savior feels like heaven. He fills me completely and every thrust bring him deeper inside my love.

"I've been thinking about this pussy for the past two weeks," his voice is heavy, "I love it how you keep it tight just for me."

Savior's words encourage me to take more of him, ride him faster as he guides my hips and ass to a palpable rhythm. Small beads of sweat form on my body and drop onto his

chest. Savior sucks on my breasts as he grabs two handfuls of my ass, slamming me down on his cock.

“Savior...” My breath is helpless as the orgasm slowly approaches. My body is in a vise of pleasure. I feel stripped and bare on top of the man I love and want to be with forever. I’ve never felt so raw and so free.

The orgasm seizes my body and jerks it in every direction as I scream out his name. I’m uncontrollably shaking; I can’t stop climaxing. This is a pleasure I’ve never known before and I can’t even begin to accurately describe it other than intense and ferocious.

Savior thrusts harder into me, finally releasing his orgasm. I feel his dick pulsate as he comes. He grabs me by the nape of my neck and forces me down to his level. He wildly kisses me and wraps his arms around my back as he comforts me.

We laid there in a peaceful silence, only our heartbeats and the soft breeze from the cracked open window are the sounds in the bedroom. We’re completely satiated and happy for the time being. I know this is only round one. We still have a long night of lovemaking ahead of us.

“Keisha...”

Savior said my name so softly I almost didn’t hear him.

“Hmm?”

“I want us to live together.”

My eyes slowly open and I focus on the streetlight on the corner. I know Savior isn’t talking about moving in here with me but I’m not too sure if I feel comfortable in Bel-Air. I’m sure it’s a great neighborhood to live in and one doesn’t hear about any crimes occurring in the land of the Fresh Prince and Uncle Phil.

No matter what the low crime statistics say about wealthy and affluent places, I know better. There may not be gangbanging or petty crime, but you best believe some heavily-Botoxed bored housewife is getting berated, ignored, or beaten on a regular basis. Those crimes aren’t reported because money is a

powerful influencer and a bigger addiction than all the opiates in the world.

Furthermore, the racists become a bit cleverer with their hate. They won't outright call you a *nigger* but they'll passively-aggressively show other ways how you're simply tolerated. The terms *ghetto*, *those people*, *thugs*, and my all-time favorite, *the blacks*, usually come out of their mouths in various forms.

And the same ones are the first ones to proudly wave the All Lives Matter flag, wear so-called uterus hats at the Women's March, and will count the number of black friends *they think they have*, usually on one hand.

If LeBron James can have *nigger* spray-painted on his home and he's the world's best athlete, what would stop someone from harassing 'hood famous lil' ol' me?

"You won't live here," I begin with the obvious answer to the unspoken question, "and I'm not too sure if I feel comfortable at your home."

"I thought you liked being there?" He rubs my back. "You kept saying how peaceful and quiet it is."

"I do like your home," I pause for a beat, "I also like being here."

"You said you wanted better and I'm in the position to give you better," Savior whispers, "I don't know what the problem is."

The warmth and intimacy between us slowly dissipates as the anger took a foothold. "You keep saying you don't want to change me but you do."

"Keisha, I'm merely saying the same thing you've been saying forever – long before we even knew each other." Savior's voice is still soft but there's a bite of anger behind them now. "How is that it's wrong when I say it but it's not a big deal when you do?"

“It’s not your life, Savior.” I roll over and immediately mourn the loss of him. I gather the sheets up and cover myself. I suddenly feel too exposed to him. “You’re not the one who lives with what I go through on a regular basis. It’s different for you because you’re not exposed to any of that. I live with it. People will look at you, see me, and they’ll silently wonder how in the hell did *he* end up with *that*. Believe me, it’s already happened.”

Coldness is firmly in the room as Savior sat up. He turns towards me and his eyes – once glossy and full of the sex afterglow – were now full of rage and ice. “When?”

“You were there, Savior.” I mention to him. “Andrea? King J? Hello?”

“No, that was handled that night.” He presses. His voice is icy cold and his stance becomes even icier. “What happened at the gala? You were fine until something happened when you went to the restroom. What happened?”

I turn away and look at my blank white wall. I pull the blankets up higher so they’re tightly around my body. “The escorts wanted me out of the picture so they could get in. They wanted to see how serious we were.” I shake my head at the stupidity of it all. “Your father wanted you and your brothers to date a certain kind of woman, but the woman he would’ve preferred would’ve scammed out of the highest dollar amount possible.”

“I’m leaving my dad’s firm.” His voice is quiet and hard.

The sudden admission startles me. Savior was poised to take it over and everyone knew it, including Savior. Now something terrible went wrong. “What? What happened?”

“Keisha, there are things in life that are more important than constantly seeking your parents’ approval. I can discover the cure for cancer and my dad will be the type who would ask what took you so long?” A sadness flashes over Savior’s eyes. “And I just...I’m done. I’m tired of it. And...” Outside arguing interrupts his sentence. As par for the course, two

niggas are yelling at each other over some bullshit. Somebody owes somebody money. One of them oddly sounds a lot like Jalen and I hope to God it's not him. Hopefully, they'll be done soon so everyone can rest well.

“Does this always happen?” He asks.

“Sometimes,” I shrug, “it usually ends after a few minutes but you have to let them get it out.”

“People are trying to sleep here, Keisha.” Savior looks towards the window. “I'm going to ask them to keep quiet.”

“Savior.” The last thing I need is the guys' venom to turn on him. This is how I can tell Savior is in a different neighborhood. Where he's from, the neighbors either tell each other to keep it down or buy homes with big-enough fences and property that takes around 15 minutes to drive to the opening gate. Around here, none of that exists. “It's not that big of a deal. They'll be over and done in a few.”

“Okay, but they're arguing over bullshit,” he gets up and throws on his jeans and a shirt. “I'm going to go out and see if I can mediate this.”

“Savior!” I rush out of bed and hurriedly put on some clothing. “You need to let them speak their piece! Trust me, this happens all of the time here. They'll fight and then it'll be over and done with, okay? It's not worth going out there and disrupting ou—”

I never did finish my sentence. Just when I was about to argue my point, gunshots rang out and Savior tackled me onto the floor.

## Twenty-One

We're on the ground for a few minutes before it's all clear. Savior's body is covering mine and I can feel his pounding heartbeat on my chest. His breath is hot on my neck and a hand cradles my head.

"Are you okay?" He finally asks and I nod. "Stay down. I'm going to check on Junie and Tasha." He crawls out of the room and knocks on the bedroom door. I hear muffled voices and Savior returns a few minutes later. "They're fine. Also a little shaken up but fine."

I manage to stand up and Savior helps me. Now would be the perfect time to tell him that he's right and I do need to leave the 'hood for good. Random gunshots are commonplace and even I have to admit, my first thought was Savior's health and not mine.

I won't get all dramatic and say I saw my life flash before my eyes and shit. But I'm pretty sure Bel-Air doesn't have random niggas and equally more random gunshots rang out in the middle of the night. Even Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg knew when to get the hell on.

Just when I'm about to tell Savior he was absolutely right and I do need to get the hell out of Inglewood, the drama from outside continues. "My baby!" A woman screams. "My baby's been shot!"

Savior glances down at me. "Shit!" He races out of the bedroom and I'm hot on his heels.

We go outside and see Big C's baby mama/girlfriend, Patty, holding a hysterical Lil' C. There's already a crowd forming and everyone is just circling around the child. "Please!" Patty screams. "Somebody do something!"

Savior moves his way past the crowd and cups Lil' C's head. His pajamas are bloody and it appears he's been shot in the

upper torso where all the major organs are. He's coughing up blood and I feel sick to my stomach.

"Somebody call 911 now!" Savior shouts. He takes off his shirt and rips open Lil' C's Paw Patrol pajamas. The bullet wound is in his stomach. Savior bundles up his shirt and puts pressure onto the wound. "Hey there, big fella," he coos to Lil' C, "I'm Savior and I'm going to help you, okay? I need to focus on your mommy and stay still."

"My tummy hurts!" Lil' C cries. "It really hurts!"

"I know, I know." Savior holds the shirt on Lil' C's stomach. "You just need to be a big boy for your mommy right now, okay?"

I stand back in the cut to watch Savior and Patty interact. While everyone is just watching, Savior was the only one who took action. People talk amongst themselves and just as I suspected, it was Jalen's voice I heard.

Apparently, Jalen didn't pay back some of the gang members and they went looking for him. When Jalen had the money, the gang decided to add a ridiculous amount of interest and demanded Jalen pay up now before someone got hurt.

It's not clear who fired the first shot nor is it clear who's bullet hit Lil' C. What is clear, however, Big C is about to enact some street vengeance. A sickening feeling takes hold of me and I know this will not end well. "Where's Big C?" I finally ask one of my neighbors.

"He and his boys went to go look for Jalen." The neighbor replies. "They don't know where he is but they know where he might be headed next."

Jalen isn't stupid enough to hide out at one of the harem's homes, but he will go to his mom's if things got too bad. If I know Big C like I do, even Jalen's mama won't be able to protect him. "This is not good."

"No, it's not." The older lady looks over at me. "Weren't you his girlfriend?"

“Was.” I answer as I watch Savior. He’s still holding onto Lil’ C’s stomach with both hands. “I haven’t spoken to Jalen in a while.”

“Good for you.” She glances down at Savior. “You know this white boy?”

My eyes are focused on Savior. He’s shirtless and talking to both Lil’ C and Patty. “He’s my boyfriend.”

The neighbor’s arched eyebrows rise and slow smile forms on her face. “Great for you.”

The ambulance comes a short while later and Savior steps out of the way so the EMTs can work on Lil’ C. Patty gets in the ambulance with them after they load him on the stretcher. The neighbors are talking amongst themselves and some are opening thanking Savior for going into action.

Savior doesn’t say much and it appears he’s almost embarrassed by the attention. Holding his bloody shirt, Savior goes back to the house and sits on the porch. He makes a few phone calls and talks about Lil’ C, describing him and Patty.

“I want him to have the best treatment possible. I don’t care how much it costs. I will take care of it.” His voice is low and authoritative.

His hands are shaking and Savior’s eyes are ice. He swallows hard as he makes phone call after phone call, running a hand over his face at times as he explains the situation. He finally enters the home and Tasha offers him a hit of her joint, which Savior accepts. He moves towards the bathroom and closes the door behind him.

I gather Savior’s bloody clothing and put them in the hamper. I sit on the bed and gather my legs to my chest, waiting for Savior to reappear from the bathroom. So many emotions run through me and I feel the hair on my arms stand straight up.

I accused Savior of trying to change me and get into a situation I’m not completely comfortable with, only to be proven right. Lil’ C will recover but he’ll be one of the lucky



few. Every year, some kid is caught in the crosshairs of gunfire here because the adults don't know how to act.

When will it be enough?

Savior reappears a short time later with a towel wrapped around his waist. He walks into the bedroom and sits down on the bed. His body is still but there's still the bite of anger. He doesn't look at me, but stares straight ahead at the floor-length mirrors on closet doors. He's staring directly at me.

The aching pain in my chest reminds me of the guilt I'm feeling. I'm steeling myself for Savior to tell me how right he is and how wrong I was. I'm waiting for the lecture that will inevitably come. I'm waiting for him to tell me it's too much for him to handle being here and we have to break up like my previous boyfriends have stated. I'm waiting for it all.

"When those gunshots rung out, my only concern was you. I didn't care about anyone else. I only wanted your safety. You might be used to hearing random gunshots but I'm not and I don't think I'll ever get used to it." He blinked. "I made some calls to ensure Cedric will get the best medical care in this country and I don't care what the price was. I'll take care of it all." He lets out a harsh sigh. "As far as Jalen is concerned, he won't hide for much longer. Whatever Cedric's father doesn't take care of, you best believe I will."

A shiver passes through me as I notice how hard Savior's eyes had become. They were angry and full of vengeance. We sat right next to each other, but there was a large wall now. Savior had already proven he would gladly take out any distractions in my life and Jalen was another item on his list to check off.

"What do you want me to do?" I finally ask.

"You said 90 days," he reminds me, "and we have sixty left."

Savior's voice said one thing but his tone and mannerisms mean something else. He's experienced quite a bit of drama from me within the past month and it's clear he's probably not going to wait around to the end of our arrangement.

I've never lived with any man who wasn't related to me and I'm not about to start. I also don't want to leave a home just to move into an apartment or rent another. I'm fine where I'm at.

I'm stuck between losing the man that I love and losing my identity in a world that isn't too kind to those with a darker skin tone. I feel like I'm being forced to choose and it's incredibly unfair and cruel. "I can't just leave because you feel uncomfortable."

Savior's eyes harden at me. "Funny you say that. I was willing to leave the gala with you because you felt uncomfortable. I'm leaving my dad's firm because I saw how he treated you at the gala and that made me uncomfortable. I'm uncomfortable knowing your dad is a drug dealer but I'm dating you, not him." He gets up and puts on the rest of his clothing. "But you would rather risk getting shot here and stay because you feel comfortable. You keep saying how much you want to move out of the hood but really, you don't."

"So, you're saying you're going to break up with me if I don't move in with you within the next two months?" I argue.

"You're threatening to break up with me because I won't cowl to your demands?"

"A three-year-old child just got shot here tonight, Keisha. What part of that don't you understand how fucking wrong that is?" Savior's nose flares up. "A stray bullet hit him. That stray bullet could've been yours. That could've been Junie's. That could've been Tasha's. You say you hate putting on your white voice and putting on an act whenever you have to venture out of here, but you honestly think living here is better?"

"You don't have to worry about any of that," I tell him. "You can come and go as you please and I'm sure you have. So, I move out and sell the home. Then what? Where is Tasha going to live? Where is my aunt going to stay? Neither of them make enough money to stay here, Savior. The people who grew up here cannot afford to stay here because they're being pushed out. You don't have that problem. You never have. You can

live anywhere in the world if you want. If Tasha is barely making 11 dollars an hour, she cannot afford to move to any place.”

“When you move up in the world, Keisha, you cannot take everyone with you. Some people you will have to leave behind.” He states. “I’ve been working with the city to get affordable housing in place so everyone could stay here and make it a safer area.”

*“I heard the city was trying to create condos and townhomes in the area and they want to buy up all the land to make room for it.” Tasha states. “I’m sure your Granny’s home is on that land they want to purchase.”*

The realization hits me like a ton of bricks. Now everything is starting to make sense and it’s perfectly clear. The pressure to get me out had nothing to do with seeing I go off to college but rather, for Savior to get my home. He had no intentions of marrying me or visiting me at college.

“You seduced me so you could get my home.” I make the hurtful realization. “You never cared about me at all. You wanted me as far from L.A. as possible so it would be easier to raze my neighborhood and sell it to the highest bidder.”

“Keisha, you know that’s not true!” Savior shot back. “You damn well know that’s not true!”

“Well, I don’t know what’s true anymore. You told me you loved me, and yet your father’s firm was working with the city to force out the residents at every possible corner. You know those Kardashians offered me three hundred thousand for my home? I’ve done the research on it, Savior, and guess what? This home is worth closer to a million. And they thought giving me three hundred thousand was a fair price. Every investor and scam artist sees I’m the owner and they think, ‘Oh, poor little hoodrat, she wouldn’t know we’re scamming her!’ and they move in for the kill. That’s why I’ve never entertained selling the home.

“And I knew something was off about your arrangement. I felt it from the very beginning that it was too good to be true.

That's why I gave back the Beemer. That's why I wanted to end things despite how I felt. I knew you were a scam artist and I was proven right."

"Keisha, please let me explain..."

"No," I shake my head, "you need to leave. Now. Do not contact me ever again. Go!" I turn around and wait for Savior to leave my bedroom. Moments later, I see him get into an awaiting Bentley and it drives off.

Then I fall apart.

## Twenty-Two

“Hey baby girl,” Nikki comes into my bedroom with Tasha in tow. She sits on my bed and caresses my forehead. “How are you feeling?”

I shake my head as Princess Nokia plays in the background. I remember Savior once said how she was his favorite rapper and how I would like her style. I never did listen to her while we were together and now I’ve been listening to her on repeat since our breakup. How messed up is that?

I’m on Day Three After Savior and it feels just as horrible as Day One. I’m unofficially on a liquid diet because solid food and my stomach don’t mix. I quit my internship and turned everything in. I purposely went after hours so there wasn’t a chance of running into anybody.

I tossed my phone and purposely changed the number so there was not a chance of Savior getting a hold of me. The last 72 hours, he didn’t attempt. No emails. No phone calls. No texts. It was if he disappeared back into the air.

I feel guilty about everything. Maybe I overreacted. Maybe Savior was telling the truth. The look in his eyes didn’t signal a liar and I can admit he was pretty honest with me about everything else. Maybe this whole “arrangement” was a big mistake from the start.

I’m on semester break for the next few weeks and have nothing but time on my hands. Every time I go to sleep, I see his face. Every time I take a shower, I feel his arms around me. The worst was when I turned on the radio in the Beemer, and I heard a Wu-Tang song.

It felt like my heart was taunting me, telling me how stupid I was to break up with him while my brain was keeping it mute and cute. Sure, I may have my Granny’s home, but what’s the point of having a home when there’s not the love of my life in it?

“Are you able to eat anything?” Nikki asks. “You need to get out and get some fresh air.”

“I don’t want to leave.” I mutter. My stomach is twisted in intricate knots and hurts just as much. “I’m fine where I’m at.”

“No, you’re not.” Nikki pulls the sheet off me and is briefly surprised to see I had clothing on. “You need to shower, get out of the house, and get on with your life. I’m sure Savior has moved on with his.”

If he has, I don’t know about it. The Google alerts on him didn’t mention any new girlfriend or even the move out of his dad’s firm. I’m not sure what’s the truth anymore.

“Look at it this way,” Tasha adds, “it wasn’t like you two were going to get married and have babies. Maybe he did you a favor by not taking over the home. You’re better than a liar and a schemer, anyway. I just know he was planning to kick me and Junie out!”

“If Savior wanted the home, he wouldn’t have gotten with Keisha to do so and he wouldn’t have subjected her to his bullshit family, neither. Another thing, does Junie actually live here?” Nikki asks. “Because I don’t recall hearing about him paying rent.”

“He pays when he can,” Tasha defends. “He’s an unofficial resident here.”

“Oh, so you both of you broke niggas are living off Keisha,” Nikki’s hood side comes out in full-force, “got it.”

“Excuse you!” Tasha comments.

“No, I won’t be.” Nikki replies. “You’re happy Savior’s out of the picture because it means you can stay here, rent- and bill-free longer. What if Keisha decides to sell the home, after all? Then what, Tasha? If you paid the same amount of attention to your life like you do always getting high and staying on IG, you’ll be so far ahead of the game right now.”

“I smoke weed because I want to and it makes me feel good.” Tasha brushes a braid over her shoulder. “Maybe your uptight

ass could use a toke and loosen up, shit!”

“If the shit you have will make me lazy, full of excuses, and lethargic, no thank you.” Nikki states.

“I don’t have excuses!” Tasha defends. “I have life inconveniences like everyone else.”

“Okay, what the hell does that mean?” Nikki turns to me and then back to Tasha. “I swear you woke niggas need to take naps.”

“Guys, guys, guys...” I play referee. Nikki and Tasha never liked each other and only tolerated each other because of me. They are always one insult away from pulled-out weaves and hair extensions on the floor. “It’s fine. I’m getting up.” I stand up and gather some fresh panties and a bra. “I’ll be ready in a few minutes, okay? Play nice until I get out and then I’ll be ready to go.”



The three of us spend the day – drama-free – at the Crenshaw Mall. We weave in and out of stores without a care in the world. Well, maybe Tasha and Nikki walked around without a care in the world. My mind was tormented with thoughts of Savior. I wonder what he was doing. Who was he with? Was he just as miserable as I was or was it another weekday at the firm for him?

After shopping, I went home, packed a few days of clothing, and headed to my daddy’s house. I was able to keep it together in public, but in private, I fall apart all over again. I walk inside my daddy’s home and go straight to his office. He looks up from his computer and his face is stoic. He sees my bloodshot eyes, the mascara running down my cheeks, and hears my nose full of snot.

My daddy is a simple man so he only asks the right questions. “What do you want me to do?”

“I need to disappear for a bit, just long enough to graduate and then I’ll be in college.” I sniffle.

“Appearance and location?” He asks and I nod. “Got it, ‘Face.” He motions me over to him and I don’t hesitate to run. I climb into my daddy’s lap and bury my head into his shoulder where I cry my eyes out.



I can always tell I’m in a different environment based on the type of restaurant that’s in the neighborhood.

As I hold the heavy leather-bound menu at Sentiment, I look over the dish selection and it feels like it’s a completely different world, despite it’s just directly across the street from USC. I wonder what the intention was with that.

“Have you decided what you want to order?” My girlfriend, Dominique Ferguson, asks me. She’s tall and thick, somewhere between a Rihanna and Beyoncé body type, and has her own dance studio on Wilshire. She just happens to be married into one of the world’s richest families.

“Oxtails, huh?” I stare down at the selection. Apparently, British men like oxtails? “Since when did this happen?”

“Since I introduced it to him when we were dating and well, that’s all she wrote.” Dominique cackles. The server comes by, takes our order, and quickly leaves. “How are you doing, Keisha?”

“I...” I shrug. The last several months have been a blur. I’m in the process of growing out my hair and I’m sporting a teeny-weeny Afro. I’m still staying with my daddy and Ashley has officially moved back in, along with my brothers. I have my own room and plenty of privacy in the palatial estate but I feel so empty.

I’m graduating in a few days and I’ll be off to USC just right across the street come this fall. Maybe being involved with college will distract me from anything Savior. “I guess I’m doing okay.”

“Has he tried contacting you?” Dominique asks and I shake my head. “Not even a single attempt?”



“I changed my number and closed my email. He hasn’t swung by the house.” It was like I never existed at all. I don’t know if I’m more devastated at the fact he didn’t even try to contact me or the fact he listened to me when I told him to leave me alone for good.

I wonder how I would’ve reacted if Savior at least attempted. Would I be happy? Would I be angry? How would I have reacted?

“I’m probably the last person you need to hear this from but I did some snooping around and Ian helped me,” Dominique begins, “well, I bribed him into helping me. It’s funny how quickly a man will change his mind when you suck his dick a few times.” She smiles. She pulls out a manila folder and slides it over to me. “Here’s something you need to look at.”

I glance down at the manila folder and back up at Dominique. “What’s this?”

“Savior’s truth.” She takes a sip of ice water.

My eyebrows rise and I open the folder. My heart is stunned when I read the contents of the envelope. There’s a high-definition picture of Thomas meeting with the city’s mayor about developing land in Inglewood, creating luxury condos and apartments. Most of the people Thomas is pictured with are Asian foreign investors.

The next page reveals Savior had his own project, creating low-income and affordable housing in the same block. Savior met with members of the city council, community leaders, and real estate developers. Savior was going against his father.

My memory jogs me to the fateful day when I witnessed Savior and Thomas fighting. I wonder if they were fighting over the development. I also wonder if Savior leaving his father’s firm played another part in the discord.

There’s still an unexplained question – how could someone who was such a champion for civil rights be so against everything he ever stood for?

The question is answered for me as I flip through more pages – money. Thomas saw the financial crisis of the people he was helping and profited off it. He’s an investor of several payday loans and on the board of directors of an international bank that caters to low-income folks.

The night of the gala becomes increasingly clear. All three sons seem almost disgusted with their father and rebelled in many ways that night. They were only there for show. My heart is broken upon receiving concrete evidence. I pushed Savior away and lost the best relationship of my life. There’s no way this can be made right.

After Dominique and I had lunch, I walk back to the Beemer and see a Mercedes pull up next to mine. Two men get out but I’m not paying any attention to them. I just need to go home and cry.

“Keisha?” Marc turns towards me and greets me with a hug. “Sista gal, where have you been? You were there and then you poof! Disappeared!”

I hug Marc back and give Paul a hug as well. “I’m doing well. Just busy. Trying to graduate, you know?”

“I hear that, I hear that.” Marc turns to Paul. “Yo, I need to holler at Keisha for a minute. Get us a nice table.”

“Not a problem.” Paul salutes me and I return the favor. “It’s great seeing you, Keisha. If you need a recommendation, holler at me!” He heads inside.

Marc waits for Paul to be out of earshot before he speaks to me. “So, what did you do to my boy?”

I shake my head. I’m sure Marc knows everything that went on between me and Savior. I’m tempted to ask him how he’s doing but I keep mute. “Things just didn’t work out.”

“They need to.” Marc states. “He’s a mess, you know? He’s all over the place. Professionally, he’s never been better. He’s finally had enough of his dad’s shit and is starting his own firm. Me and a few others are leaving to join him at the end of the month.”

“Good for you, Marc.” I’m happy to hear that. I think Savior and Marc will have a very successful firm. “I know it’ll be fantastic.”

“Fighting the good fight is never easy but it’s always worth it.” Marc grins. “Listen, Savior has a good heart and he’s not like his father. Maybe his approach was wrong, and maybe he needed to fine-tune his feelings a bit more. But lying and deceiving is not his M.O. He wouldn’t buy you a car if that was his end game.” Marc lets out a small sigh. I don’t know if he was speaking for Savior or if he just wanted to give his two cents in what was going on. I appreciate the message either way. “Listen, it’s not my business to say anything but I do know my boy was sprung over you and still is. If you two can find a way to make it, do it.”

It’s words I needed to hear but the timing might be off. “It’s too late.”

Marc begins walking towards the restaurant. He turns around and smiles again. “It’s never too late to do the right thing.”

## Twenty-Three

“Keisha Kei-shaaaaa,” my roommate, Symia, greets me as she enters our dorm room. A full-figured girl with dark chocolate skin and shoulder-length red hair, Symia always looks like a fashion plate. Seriously, her wardrobe is far better than mine and she’s even taken me on as a pet project.

A business major, Symia hopes to open her own salon one day. She does hair to support herself on the side. She’s the reason why my hair is grown out into curly ringlets. “Are you going to the party tonight?”

Since I’ve been at USC, there’s been a party every night. While I indulged for the first couple of weeks, it became old very quickly. How many times can one play beer pong in one week?

“I don’t know. I’m thinking I’m going to skip it and stay in.” Yeah, staying in on a Friday night is really unheard-of in college but I see no point of going out right now. Besides, I have a paper that could use my attention.

“There are going to be some hot men at the party tonight.” Symia pauses for a beat. “You, Daryl is checking for you.”

Daryl Barker, USC’s prime quarterback who is responsible for leading the team to one of its best starts in school history. He’s also Daryl Barker, the dog who has a new chick every week, with a ton more waiting in the harem. I think I’ll pass on the chlamydia. “I’m sure he is.”

“Well, let me know if you decide to go,” Symia collapses on her bed. “I can’t wait. You know, big girls are the new hot sauce now.”

Symia may be a big girl but her phone never stops ringing. A part of it is she’s just a naturally attractive woman, but another part is she can line a man’s fade just right. It seems everyone goes to her to get their hair did (yes, I said it right), and she’s

been collecting numbers and using up condoms at the same time. She's the real P.I.M.P. if you ask me.

"Well, we'll see how I'll feel later." I yawn and I have to drag myself to lecture. I honestly want to skip it but I know this will be info I can use later for the paper I'm working on. "I'll see you later, Mia."



Life has been so crazy these past few months. Once I graduated out of LACC, I officially moved out of my home and let Tasha and Junie rent there. I told Tasha I may have been cool to not her pay rent as her roommate but as her landlord, I'm getting a monthly check from her.

Tasha tried to bargain with me and I told her if there are any problems, she can always move out. Once she checked the surrounding area and saw how expensive Inglewood was becoming, her tune quickly changed. Needless to say, she started paying.

Tasha, is well, Tasha. She's stuck between wanting to grow up and wanting to stay the way things are. I told her she doesn't have much time to be straddling the fence before it makes the decision for her. I don't know if she's going to listen. Some people have to want to be great, to do great.

Junie has blown up and is now a highly sought-after producer. He recently worked with one of the hottest rappers in the game, Dolce Gabbana. His album should be dropping soon and everyone is already predicting it's going to do big numbers. If that happens, Junie's stock just skyrocketed.

He's still with Tasha, but things are kinda weird between them. He's not cheating on her or messing around, but I'm not sure how much longer he'll be in the picture if he's trying to spread his wings and she's content doing nothing.

My auntie is still in the other duplex and true to form, we're still not talking. Oh well. I've tried. I can't make her do anything she doesn't want to do. Older people love to lecture younger folks without realizing that they too, were once young

and stupid. They also don't like to realize they can also be a bit of an asshole themselves. Maybe one day we'll be cool but as of right now, she needs to stay where she is.

Of course, I still have my Granny's home, but the neighborhood has changed a lot now. There's a lot more development but there's also less black folks in Inglewood. There are a lot more white faces. I'm feeling iffy about the whole thing. I miss how cozy and welcoming my neighborhood was.

Everyone knew each other, their kids, their kids' kids. Seeing old men playing bones and chess at Leimert Park was not a thang. Going to the Saturday flea market was a thing to do and I always got the flyest gear for hella low prices.

However, with everything good, there's always the bad and Inglewood had a lot of that. I don't miss the gang activity, drug addiction, and senseless violence. Lil' C was lucky, but he's one of the few. Kids are often caught in the crossfire of dumb-ass adults. I guess you can say gentrification solves a lot of that.

Jalen was arrested for a host of charges, including attempted murder of Lil' C. Last time I heard, he was still in jail. He still has a harem of girls. Occasionally I get whispers from other people telling me he's been asking about me, but really, I don't care.

Daddy and Ashley are finally back together and Daddy recently proposed to Ashley with a huge diamond ring. Their wedding is set for next year. My daddy is no longer slanging stating he now has enough money for all of us and our kids to retire on. Truthfully, he's always had plenty of money but I guess there was a dollar amount my daddy wanted and he finally got it.

Daddy decided real estate was his calling, and he's already invested millions into the Inland Empire and the Lancaster and Palmdale areas, building it up for the black migration there. I guess all that drug dealing to the white folks paid off in some ways. Daddy's the real Robin Hood.

Andrea has been showcasing her baby bump for all of the world to see. King J is also still in jail but he'll be home in a couple of years. Andrea and I still don't have a relationship and well, not sure if we'll ever have one.

As far as me and Savior goes, no phone calls, no texts, nothing. The loss of him was more devastating than I thought it would be. The silence was beyond heartbreaking. The pain started in my heart and coursed through my body like a maze, grounding me to the cement. It was like we never knew each other at all.

When it came for my tuition bill, however, Savior did show up even if he wasn't physically present – my entire USC tuition for all four years is covered and that includes books.

I stayed at my daddy's home so I could recover, and Ashley took off a few days from work to help me. We went to a spa treatment and I tended to my Netflix addiction. I watched more black movies than anyone could handle during that time. I ended up getting a new phone number and just completely erased myself from anything Savior. I still kept the pictures of us for reasons I'm not entirely sure about.

The Google alerts I still had on Savior told me he left his father's law firm and started his own. The same alerts didn't tell me about a girlfriend or wife. I know I shouldn't care and I know he doesn't. Hell, he probably made the same offer to another stupid college student right now and I'm just playing myself.

Surprisingly enough, I'm still cool with one Ellison brother – Soul. He emails me all of the time and gives me first dibs on the latest FBLs before they hit the stores. He even said he didn't mind that I resold them on Ebay in case I needed the money. He's super cool like that.

I finally make my way over to the lecture hall and sit in the standard back row so I don't bother anyone. It's for my political science class and as much as I love my major, it can be boring AF at times. Hopefully, the lecture will be short and sweet and I can go back to the dorm and sleep.

“Good Morning, class.” The professor, Avery Johnson, enters the classroom. She’s an older black woman who gives Annalise Keating vibes. She often changes her wig and her makeup depending on what young stud she’s blowing that week. I don’t know if she’s ever killed someone but I really wouldn’t put it past her.

She hands a stack of papers to a student and we all get one. “We have a special guest today for the lecture. Please take as many notes as you can as some of this might be on the midterm but all of you can use for your life.”

A student gives me the stack of papers and my heart froze seeing the guest speaker’s name:

Savior.

I’m lowkey hoping there are a few Savior Ellisons in the world and I happen to see the one that isn’t my ex. That would make me so happy and heartbroken at same time and OMG, I think I’m annoyed by how my heart and brain are acting right now.

As if my body was turned on with a dial, I became acutely aware when Savior entered the lecture hall. He walked with confident strides, owning the room with each step, and I heard the collective gasps of many women in the audience. I finally looked up and saw Savior in his delicious Bel-Air finest, looking delicious.

He wore a red sweater vest with a long white shirt and brown khakis. The red bow tie signaled he was clearly on-campus for a Kappa event and dressed the part. The emotions within me are going haywire but my body is zinged with instant attraction to that man.

The familiar thump in my panties reappears and my breathing becomes zig-zag-like, almost choking me. I wring the back of my neck to relief the sudden tension and blow out a harsh breath. My lecture is usually an hour long and I doubt Savior will be talking for the full hour. I just hope I can get through it without completely losing myself.



“Thank you, everyone,” Savior writes his name on the whiteboard before he turns to the class. His eyes scan around the room and he smiles at the faces before him. “We have a big group of students here so I’ll make this short and sweet so you can get back to your avocado toasts and IG feeds.” There are laughter and chuckles.

Savior’s eyes connect with mine. The professional Savior briefly disappears as the sultry look I was too all-too familiar with reappeared. We hold eyes briefly before he goes to retrieve handouts to give to the class.

In typical Savior fashion, he retrieves the notes and passes them out individually to each student. There’s about fifty of us so it’s extra work he’s doing. He’s being intentional with this because I know he wants to see me up close and personal and wonder if it’s really me.

My hair is different and my face is a bit fuller than before. I have a few tattoos now in intricate parts of my body that can only be seen if I’m naked. I’m almost tempted to ask Savior if he wants to see my tats.

As he approaches my row, the nervousness cinches my stomach and the butterflies go a mile a minute. I smell his intoxicating cologne. I see how perfectly coiffed his bedhead is. I can’t tear my gaze away from him, no matter how much I want to. Savior is just simply breathtaking.

He walks in front of my table and passes the papers to everyone sitting there. He stands directly in front of me and small crackles of sexual electricity buzzes between us. He holds my gaze and curves his lips into that delightful, sexy smile that I love so much.

His brown eyes are full of wicked contemplativeness, as if he’s trying to figure out the right way to knock the wind out of me. Little does Savior know, he’s already succeeded in that.

“Gorgeous...” He mouths as he gives me the notes and moves onto another student.

My heart is pounding so loud, I can't hear myself think. A quiver stirred within me and my body tensed with every emotion possible. I hear girls behind me squealing amongst themselves as one girl thought Savior was referring to her.

I let them have their fantasy. It's the very least I can do.

Opening the pages and my eyes bulge out of the sockets upon reading the first line:

*I've should've been honest with you from the start.*

I flip the page and read the second line. *You have every right to be angry and refuse to speak to me for the rest of your life.*

Looking over at the third page, my eyes start to water. *But when I said I love you, there were no games with that. When I said I'm going to marry you, I still believe that.*

By the time the fourth page came, the tears were streaming down my face. *All I want is a second chance to do right. I love you, Keisha, and I want to make this work.*

Looking up at Savior, I notice his eyes are again locked on mine. He blows out a deep breath and releases his shoulders. He felt the same emotions I did and I can only imagine what was going through his head as he watched me read his letter. "Shall we begin?"



Savior was brilliant, of course. I've never seen him in action so it was nice to see how well he worked the room. He lectured on the Machiavellian theory and how even today's society, we all have a little Machiavellian within us. The hardcore hip-hop fan, Savior also drew comparisons to Tupac's Makaveli album with Kendrick Lamar's To Pimp a Butterfly.

After the lecture, students crowd around Savior to get more insight. His fan girls hang onto his every word and I can't honestly be mad at them. I know how he affects everyone around him. He's more than just a gorgeous face; Savior is a truly good guy.

And maybe his apology actually does mean something.

I slip out of the lecture hall as Savior stops and answers questions. He's so busy answering the questions, he doesn't notice me. During his lecture, we made eye contact a few times and each time it was like the first time all over again.

Realizing I was still in love with Savior is beyond heartbreaking. I see him in every man I interact with. Some of them had similar cologne as him but the scent was all uniquely Savior. A few Nupes tried to holler at me, but they were just another version of Savior.

I wanted him. I wanted the real thing.

I shrug my shoulders and keep walking out of the hall. I hadn't seen him in forever and I'm sure I'm just a blip on his radar now. There's no point of me reshaping a memory from long ago. Savior has moved on and so have I. I will always cherish the brief time we'd spent together and I can honestly say I loved him more than any other man.

And maybe one day, I will love another man just as much or even harder.

“Gorgeous...”

My feet stopped moving as a rush of emotions coated my body. His smoky, purring voice fills with an awareness I'd long forgotten about. I close my eyes, slowly inhale and exhale, and hope I can relieve some emotions.

Slowly turning around, I see Savior walking in long strides towards me. He's not in a hurry but he's not taking his time. He walks like a man on a mission, and doesn't want to waste time with small details. For the first time, I notice he's wearing FBLs and I have to say I'm savoring over that red colorway.

When he approaches me, all of the feelings I've ever had for that man come rushing back like an ocean current. My heart is pounding so hard and so loud, and my body once again becomes so aware of him.

His brown eyes are soft, warm, and inviting. His scent was a combination of earth, and wood, but all Savior. His brownish-blond hair had the right amount of bed head but still looked perfectly coiffed. I resisted the urge to touch the corn silk strands.

There are some people you can go weeks and months without seeing each other and it'll be like nothing ever happened when you see each other again. That's what's going on between me and Savior. It's almost as if we never broke up at all.

"You grew out your hair," his eyes peruse over my head, "I like it."

"Yeah," I shake the loose curls. No amount of YouTube tutorials could it just perfect but it would suffice. "Something different."

"It looks great." He lets out a subtle breath and briefly looks around to see if no one was listening. "I wanted to talk to you about everything."

My body stills upon knowing what Savior wants to talk to me about. The home. My neighborhood being gentrified and his father's firm was responsible for it. I clench my teeth and plant my feet on the ground. This might be a short reunion. "Yes?"

"My father was trying to build up Inglewood before you and I met. I had no idea what he was doing until after the fact. My offer to send you to college had nothing to do what he was doing. When I found out about it, we got into a huge blowout fight and well, me bringing you to the gala only made things worse.

"The ski trip was originally supposed to be for all of us. My mother backed out at the last minute, more than likely because my father pissed her off. My father decided he just wanted an all boys' trip with me, Soul, and Ocean. I knew what he was trying to do and I just went along with it because I didn't want to fight on vacation.

"I told my father I was leaving the firm because I had enough of his bullshit and he didn't take it well. He was actually quite

pissed off at me and I think he still is.” A flash of anger and sadness runs across Savior’s eyes. “I’m not going to have my father determine what to eat and how to shit for the rest of my life. It’s bad enough I had him do it for as long as he did.”

Savior locks eyes with me. There’s rawness and love within his eyes and my body is so fine-tuned to his emotions. “I’m telling you this, Keisha, because I want us to be together regardless. Our backgrounds are far from perfect, but you’re perfect for me. If you want me to move to Inglewood and live there with you, I will. If you don’t want to live in Bel-Air, we’ll find somewhere else to live. I don’t know what our future will hold but I do know I’m not leaving his campus today without you being mine forever.”

Tears threaten my eyes and I try to blink them back, but to no avail. They still fall down my cheeks. Savior cups my face and thumbs away the tears as a small smile curves his lips. He gave up everything for me and is willing to do more. It’s a selflessness I’ve never known before.

“Savior, I...” My voice is lodged in my throat and I can’t form the words to speak. Various feelings of emotion chokes my voice and I’m struggling to find the perfect words, and it’s all coming out in a jumbled mess.

I missed Savior terribly. I missed the way he held me, the way his body pressed into mine as we made love. I missed how he smelled, and how his scent lingered in the air long after he’d left a room.

I buried myself into a social life I wasn’t that comfortable with and gaining more girlfriends. I wanted a life that was different from what I was used to but I wasn’t sure if Savior’s world was where I fit in.

“Speak to me,” he encourages, “tell me how you feel.”

I nod and sniffle. “You know what bothers me about all of this?” I lock eyes with him. “That you cheated.”

“What?” Hurt etches across his face. “What are you talking about? I’ve never cheated on you.”

“You said Cappadonna was an original member of the Wu-Tang Clan and he wasn’t! He didn’t join until later.” I jab my finger into his muscular chest. “I should’ve won that night!”

Savior’s face relaxes and the delicious, sultry smile reappears. “You’re right. He wasn’t.”

I stood on my tiptoes to kiss him and Savior caught me by surprise. He wraps his arms around me and lifts me up into an intense kiss. His tongue plays with mine as he again makes love to my mouth.

Savior slowly sets me back down on the ground and we walk out of the hall, holding hands. “So, what now?” He asks.

“I have a date in a few hours,” I begin, “the rowdiest people at the convalescent home on Wilshire.” I turn to him. “You can be my plus one, if you want?”

“Will your boyfriend there mind if I show up?” Savior teases. “I don’t want to cause trouble.”

“Hmm...” I turn towards him and kiss my boyfriend one more time. “...I think you’re the good kind of trouble I need.”

The End

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all of your support! xoxoxo