

DIAMOND JOHNSON
PRESENTS

The
**Comfort
OF A THUG**

A Turned Out By His Hood Mentality Spin Off

Divorce Decree

VI
THOU SHALT NOT KILL

VII
THOU SHALT NOT
COMMIT ADULTERY

XIII
THOU SHALT NOT STEAL

NATIONAL BEST SELLING AUTHOR

DIAMOND D. JOHNSON

Diamond Johnson Presents

The
Comfort
OF A
THUG

DIAMOND D. JOHNSON

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CONTENTS

Author's Note:

1. Naomi Edwards
2. Liam Edwards
3. Markell 'Glizzy' West
4. Naomi Edwards
5. Twinkle Harris
6. Markell 'Glizzy' West
7. Denim McCloud
8. Twinkle Harris
9. Naomi Edwards
10. Markell 'Glizzy' West
11. Billionaire 'Billion' Knox
12. Liam Edwards
13. Denim McCloud
14. Naomi Edwards
15. Markell 'Glizzy' West
16. Melody Mitchell (Naomi & Normani's mom)
17. Twinkle Harris
18. Markell 'Glizzy' West
19. Shamauria 'Mauri' Davis
20. Normani Knox
21. La'Quinn Freeman
22. Naomi Edwards
23. Tischina Young

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Wait! Before you flip the page, ask yourself did you read Turned Out by His Hood Mentality and Marrying My First Love? If you haven't, you may want to read that first and then return to this.

Chapter One

NAOMI EDWARDS

“*A*right, Mommy, I’m pulling up to Normani’s house now. I’ll just call you later. Please, Ma, when you lay LJ down tonight, put on his headscarf. I just did his hair last night, and I don’t need his braids frizzing up already,” I said to my mother as I pulled up to my sister and brother-in-law’s home.

Each and every time I came over, I fell absolutely in love with their home. I loved to see black people winning, and with Normani being my sister, it just made me feel good to know that she and her husband were living like this. I wasn’t even mad at all the cars that were parked in their driveway. Five of them belonged to Billionaire, and three belonged to my sister. I wasn’t mad about the giant waterfall that they had in the middle of their grass, which looked like something that you would see in front of a fancy, five-star hotel. Normani and Billionaire were both hard workers, so they deserved this lifestyle.

“Naomi, please! Girl, I raised two kids. I know what I have to do to LJ’s hair at night,” my mom snapped, making me laugh.

I had dropped my son off to her this afternoon, and I had to have told her three or four times to wrap my baby’s hair up tonight, and there I was again, reminding her. I knew she was

tired of me. My baby boy was three years old now, and he was my world. LJ was the best thing that could have possibly come from my marriage to his father. As much as I loved LJ, I'll admit that running behind a toddler could be a bit stressful, so I was happy when my mom reached out to me this morning, asking if she could keep LJ for the weekend.

During the week, I taught third grade at my husband's church/school called Temple of God. I believe that people were put on this Earth with some kind of purpose and talent. And I truly believe that my purpose is to inspire young minds, fill them with knowledge, and have them take my lessons out into the real world. I loved kids. I've always had a passion for kids. Back when I was a little girl, I remember lining up all my dolls, and I would stand in the front of the room, pretending to teach all kinds of lessons.

By the time I was five, I knew that I would grow up to become a teacher and work with younger kids. Those were the ones who were going to keep you on your toes, plus keep you young, and that was what I had been doing for the past eight years. It was also a dream of mine to open my own private Christian school, but marriage kind of pushed that dream back. We'll get into all of that later, though.

After graduating high school, my husband and I attended Harvard University together. There, I received my degree in education, minoring in child development. Went right back in for my master's and later received my Ph.D. I did all the things I set out to do. Well, 90% of the things because I still didn't have my school.

I'm sure you all know a lot about Normani, so you know that my sister and I were pretty much geniuses growing up. Child prodigies is how everyone labeled us. I've won all kinds of honor roll awards, spelling bees, and received so much scholarship money that my parents didn't have to reach into their pockets for anything. Plus, I made history my senior year for being the first ever black kid to graduate as valedictorian.

I did all those things in life, and I just remember being happy doing them. Of course, my husband, Liam, who was my boyfriend at the time, has always been there, supporting me,

motivating me, and just all-around loving me. But these days, I promise you, he was nowhere near the handsome, caramel-colored boy with the beautiful hazel eyes that I'd met when we were in the second grade.

From second grade, all the way until eighth, Liam and I were just best friends. My parents, well, mainly my dad, who didn't want my sister and me having any male friends, actually didn't mind Liam and me being close. Liam's father was a pastor, just like mine, so that had to be why my father didn't mind the friendship. Liam and I didn't take our friendship further until our freshmen year of high school.

Although we were in a relationship, I felt like nothing really changed. We weren't sneaking to have sex because both of us were abstaining from having sex until marriage. Kissing was the most that we would do, and I was fine with that. After graduating high school together, we attended college, like I mentioned. When I graduated with my master's, Liam asked me to be his wife. We had a beautiful wedding. It wasn't too pricy and over the top, like many weddings are these days; it was just enough for us.

We lost our virginity to each other on our wedding night, and like I told Normani, it was just okay. I didn't go through all that euphoria, the biting on the lip, the screaming so loud that I had to bite into a pillow, the not being able to get up and walk around the next morning. There was pain, but by the time the pain subsided, and I'd begun to somewhat enjoy it, things had pretty much ended. I never told my husband that the sex wasn't enjoyable because he was my husband, and I loved him. I didn't want to hurt his pride.

It had been eight years of me not saying anything. Although I have tried to spice things up a little bit, nothing has worked. Finally, I let Normani get in my ear and tell me to purchase some lingerie, so I did it. One night I put it on for Liam, and you would have thought I was a hooker on the street when I walked into the bedroom with the skimpy outfit on. In his words, I looked like a slut. I was a pastor's wife, and sometimes I thought my husband took his profession everywhere he went, even to the bedroom.

I just wanted Liam to make love to me so good one night that it would help with my stress. Our marriage was lacking so many things, like sex, passion, communication, and time was the biggest one. I was fighting for my marriage because I had just watched my parents go through a nasty divorce, and I didn't want that for us. We needed to work our problems out. It just felt like I was the only one worried about working out our issues because Liam didn't believe we had any problems.

"Hug Normani for me and kiss her. Get her out of that bed. I talked to Billionaire this morning, and he said he can't get her to leave that room. Call me later. I love you," she told me.

"I love you too, Ma," I said and hung up.

I released a sigh.

My sister had lost her baby three days ago. She suffered a terrible miscarriage while at work. I happened to be at the office that day in the waiting room because Normani was my son's pediatrician. I couldn't get my sister's cries out of my head, and it had been three days. All I could remember was hearing the gut-wrenching scream she let out. As soon as I heard my sister scream, I grabbed LJ and went to find Normani. When I found her, she was on the floor with blood rushing out of her like it was urine.

She just kept screaming, "I'm losing my baby!"

Three months ago, Normani told me that she and Billionaire were expecting again. The day Billionaire held that party at his house, welcoming his friend Markell back home, was when my sister told me about the pregnancy. Normani wasn't happy about it initially because she thought the timing was off, but once she accepted it, meeting her new baby was all she talked about. She often spoke about how much she wanted to give her husband a son, and almost four months into her pregnancy, it was over that fast.

No one knew this except my husband, of course, but I've suffered three miscarriages in the last five years. Before having my son, I was pregnant, but at my first prenatal appointment, I started passing big blood clots and ended up losing my baby. I remember needing my mom at that moment,

but my husband insisted that we didn't get others in our business. It's almost like he was embarrassed to let people know that his wife had lost his child. I knew it was wrong; I knew I should have gone to my mother and talked to her, but I remained silent.

Almost two months later, I was pregnant again with LJ, and God had blessed me with a healthy pregnancy. This time around, I went full term and brought a beautiful, healthy baby boy into this world. When LJ was around eight months, I was pregnant again, and I lost that baby in the same manner that I lost the first one. I really believed that stress caused that miscarriage. I was caring for LJ on my own, not getting enough help from my husband, and I had stressed myself to the point that my body just couldn't carry another child at the time.

On LJ's second birthday, I found out that I was pregnant. Not even a month later, there I was again, lying in a hospital bed, looking into the eyes of my doctor as she told me that my baby didn't make it. This time, my husband was in the room, but he wasn't holding my hand like he'd done during the last two miscarriages. I pay attention to the little things.

Sometimes I think Liam doesn't love me the way he used to because I couldn't carry his kids full term. I couldn't do that one thing for him that all women were put into this world to do. Although Liam never said anything to make me think that way, he hasn't helped either. My husband doesn't reassure me that he still loves me the same, whether I can carry his babies or not. I didn't know if I was causing myself to stress out, but at times, I felt that my husband chose not to make love to me anymore because he already had it made up in his mind the way the pregnancy would end.

Liam wanted a big family because growing up, it was just him, his parents, and his little brother, Lionel. Liam always said he wanted about six kids, and I hadn't even completed half that number. I was so hard on myself about that. I grew up in the church. My parents raised me, but the church was there to raise me too. I say all of this to say that I know God. I know

Him for myself, and we have a very close and personal relationship.

I know not to question Him, but at times, I just want to know, why me? Hadn't I honored Him the way I'm supposed to? Hadn't I taught His word to the next generation, teaching them about Him and sharing His stories with them? My son knows God, and I've been fully committed to Him since I was old enough to know who He was and have an understanding of Him. But He's still allowing my body to go through these things that were causing my husband to hate me just a little more each time my uterus was back empty, and he was robbed of the daughter he so desperately wanted.

This conversation tends to make me overly emotional, so I sucked it up and prepared myself to support my little sister. She could use all the love and prayers that I could give her. I stepped out of the car with my purse and some flowers for Normani since she was a sucker for flowers. I also brought her some food from her favorite Jamaican restaurant because Billionaire had told me that she wasn't eating much of anything.

I made it to the huge double doors, and before I could even knock, Billionaire opened the door for me. He had a look of sadness on his face, but he smiled through it when he saw me.

"What's up, sis?" he asked, taking the food from my hands since I was trying to carry everything.

"How are you today?" I asked.

He looked at me and sighed. I could see the bags under his eyes that showed he wasn't getting much sleep, but it didn't take away from how handsome he was.

"I ain't alright because my wife not alright. It breaks my heart that we lost our baby, but Ima be good," he said, keeping it short.

I heard the pain in his voice as he talked, and I could just look at him and tell he needed a hug. So, I set the flowers on the table, opened my arms, and hugged him. I prayed for him and my sister, and then I let him go.

“Where is she?” I asked, referring to Normani.

“Upstairs in the room. You can go ahead and talk to her. Ima ride around for a little bit,” he said.

I watched Billionaire as he grabbed his keys off the rack and then left the house. After he locked the door, I set my purse on the table, then grabbed the flowers and the food. When I reached the stairs, I removed my sandals before I went up. The house was super quiet. I assumed that Khari and Lil Bill were with their moms, and Prosper was more than likely with Billionaire’s mom. Since it was the weekend, I figured she had stepped in to give the two a break.

I made it to the double doors at the end of the hallway, which was my sister and Billionaire’s bedroom, and knocked. I didn’t get an answer, so I just walked in. The room was dark, but because I’d opened the door and the light had shone in from the hallway, I could see. I heard sniffing, and I looked over at the king-sized bed in the middle of the room, where my sister was lying on her side, wrapped in a throw blanket as she softly cried.

“Close the door, Naomi,” she said.

Her voice was hoarse, not really even sounding like herself. I knew she was telling me to close the door, so I could get rid of the light that I’d brought into the room by opening it. When I closed the door, it made the room pitch dark to the point that I could hardly see, and I almost tripped over something. I felt around the room with my hands, and once I got to my sister’s nightstand, I turned the lamp on because I was going to break my neck in that dark room.

Normani groaned and looked at me like she wanted to kill me. She didn’t say anything, though.

After I set the flowers and her food on the nightstand, I sat next to her in the bed. Putting my hands on her leg, I rubbed it up and down. I wouldn’t ask Normani how she felt because looking at her told the whole story.

My sister was so beautiful. Even through the hurt and pain she was going through, I could always look at her and

appreciate her beauty. Her curly hair was pulled up into a bun that probably hadn't been done in days, and I couldn't see much of what she was wearing because the blanket covered her entire body. Those beautiful gray eyes that matched mine were looking straight ahead, and she was using a tissue every few seconds to wipe the tears that were steadily falling.

I did the only thing I knew to do at that moment, and that was, scoot a little closer and put my hands on her eyes to close them both. Then I placed my hand on her forehead and started praying for Normani.

I prayed to God, asking Him to help my sister and her husband get through this tough time in their marriage and bless their minds, hearts, and souls. My sister silently cried as I prayed for her. Once I finished, she had a moment for about five minutes, and then she eventually calmed down.

“Thank you,” she said in that hoarse voice.

“I pray for you all the time, Normani. Don't thank me for that,” I told her, and then I stood up from the bed, so I could go over to the window and open the curtains. She was killing me, sitting in the dark like that. Evil lurked that way, so I had to show some sunlight into that room and show it fast.

When I turned around to look at my sister, she was pulling the blanket off her and sitting up in the bed. She scratched at her hair and looked at me. “Where's my nephew?”

“With Mommy. She called me this morning, asking for him. I almost broke my neck trying to pack him a bag, so I could take him over there,” I told her as I walked back over to the bed and flopped down, lying on my back right next to her.

Normani looked down at me and laughed. I hadn't heard her laugh in a few days, so that made me happy.

“You should be home, getting your back broke by your husband. I don't know why you're here. I'm going through a little something right now, but Naomi, I'm going to be okay. You know me,” she said.

I let out a grunt at the first part of her statement and rolled my eyes, knowing that Liam breaking my back would never

happen.

“Billionaire called me yesterday, saying he was worried about you, so I came to spend time with you. You know this is my first time paying attention to these mirrors that you have on this ceiling? Can you help me understand why this is even necessary?” I asked, oblivious to why that would even be needed in the bedroom.

Baby, I’m boring, and my husband is too, so if this was supposed to be something kinky, I just wouldn’t know.

Normani laughed again while shaking her head. “That was Billionaire’s idea, not mine. I’m not going to explain it to you because you’ll still be confused. Who treated your hair for you? It looks so good and healthy. I need to eventually go out and do something to myself. I feel like I look crazy.”

“You know I only let Kim touch my hair. She did it for me yesterday,” I told her, and she nodded.

“I’m going to say something to you, but hear me out first and don’t judge me. I don’t know if I’m just being too hard on myself, but damn, why do I feel like I let my husband down with this miscarriage? He wanted this baby so bad. After we found out that I was pregnant, I told him not to say anything until we went to the doctor, and they confirmed it. He still went out and told all his family and his homeboys. He was talking so much about wanting another son. I don’t know why my body couldn’t go through with the pregnancy this time. I carried Prosper like it was nothing,” Normani vented.

Hearing her talk, she sounded so much like me, but I couldn’t confess that I knew exactly how she felt because I didn’t want to talk about my miscarriages. The truth would have to be revealed, and I just didn’t want to do that. At least right now, I didn’t.

“Normani, I’m going to be honest with you and say that I don’t think I’ve ever in my life seen a man love a woman the way your husband loves you. He adores you, and I love Billionaire for you. I just asked that man how he was doing, and his response was that he wasn’t alright because you weren’t alright. He puts himself in a position to feel what you

feel, and not many men do that. I just don't think there is anything you will ever be able to do that would make him love you any less. He's so obsessed that it's sickening," I joked, making the both of us laugh.

I was just glad that I could sit up with my sister and talk to her because I came over two days ago, and she probably said two words to me.

Normani eventually got out of bed and went into the bathroom to take a shower. While she did that, I made up the bed and brought the food with me downstairs to warm it up for her because she needed to eat.

When she joined me in the kitchen almost twenty minutes later, my sister looked much better. She'd washed her hair, and with it pulled up, I could tell that it was still a little wet. She'd changed into a simple tank top and some tights. I was glad when she sat in front of the food and ate, even if she didn't eat much of it. I stayed with Normani for another hour before I needed to make my way home to my husband.

It worked out fine for Normani not to be alone because as I was walking out, Billionaire was walking in. When I made it to the car, I pulled my phone out of my purse, which had been downstairs on the table in the foyer this entire time. There were five missed calls from my husband. I quickly called him back, knowing he would be upset that I had let this much time go by without calling him back, and I'd missed this many phone calls.

Normani didn't live too far from Liam and me, so I could be home in about ten minutes. I called Liam back-to-back, and he didn't answer any of my calls. I even sent him a text message to call me, but nothing. Feeling defeated, I just threw my phone in the passenger seat and drove a little faster than usual to make it home. When I eventually pulled up to our house, Liam was walking out the front door, heading for his car like he was getting ready to leave.

He was dressed up, so naturally, I wanted to know where he was going. For one, it was Saturday evening, and I'd been with my husband long enough to know that his Saturdays were

usually spent in his office all day, preparing for his sermon. My husband pastored one of the most popular churches in Miami with over a thousand guests each Sunday. Honestly, that number was really on a light day. Not only would the church be packed, but Sunday morning service was live-streamed, so there were many eyes on him. Because my husband is such a perfectionist, everything had to be done in a certain way. I'd be lucky if I saw him come out of his office on a Saturday.

I pulled my car into our driveway, parked on my side, and quickly got out.

"Baby, where are you going? I tried calling you back. I was at my sister's house, and I left my phone downstairs in my purse," I said.

Liam was handsome; he'd always been handsome. He was tall, which was a good thing because I was tall myself, standing a good 5'8". Liam was a little over 6'2" and had a medium build. He kept a clean face, short haircut, and he had beautiful, hazel eyes that I had been in love with since we were kids. He was dressed in a light blue long sleeved turtleneck with a pair of gray slacks. He smelled good and looked even better, so again, I wondered where he was going, all dressed up, and why he hadn't told me about it.

"Because leaving your phone unattended is a smart idea when you don't have my son with you? Excuse me, Naomi. I'm going to dinner with Lionel. I'll see you when I get back. I was calling to let you know that I was going out," he said.

He tried to walk past me and get in his car, but I didn't move. Lionel was his little brother, and the two of them were like night and day. You know there's always that one sibling who is a little different from everyone else. Lionel was a stockbroker, and that came with a lot of disappointment from their father, who wanted both of his boys to follow in his footsteps and become pastors.

That isn't why I said that he was different, though. In the past five or six years, Lionel had been arrested for DUIs, domestic violence, and I'd lost track of his other charges. Liam

wasn't close with his brother because they were so different, but they did hang out from time to time.

"I've been begging you for months to take me on a date. You always tell me that you're busy, and I always accept that. LJ is with my mom, and if you're free tonight, why wouldn't you have asked your wife if she wanted to do something? I haven't been able to spend a Saturday with my own husband in months. Baby, I can just jump in the shower and put on something nice really fast, and you and I can do something." I walked up to him and put my hands on the lower part of his back as I looked him in his eyes.

"My brother is going through something right now, Naomi, which is why he called and asked if I could meet him. He wants to sit down and talk. I'll do something with you another time," he said, crushing my feelings.

I removed my arms from his waist and stepped back.

"You always put everyone and everything before me. Always, Liam!" I said, my voice cracking a little bit because I was getting so sick of this.

"Here we go again with this. Naomi, as if you didn't just put your sister before me. That's where you say you've been this whole time, right? Well, you pretty much showed me that your sister is more important than me because I had to call your phone five times to get your attention before you finally called me back," he snapped.

"Liam, my sister just lost a baby. She needed me. I was just being there for her," I told him, kind of annoyed that we were even having this crazy conversation.

"You lose babies all the time. Why is she never over here to console you?" he asked, stinging me with those words.

My mouth fell open after that comment because of the hateful way he said it. I already said that I felt like my husband loved me less and less with each child I lost, so for him to make that comment and for hate to drip from his words as he said it, that hurt. Now, I felt that there may be some truth in my feelings.

“That’s because you make me keep all my miscarriages a secret like you’re too embarrassed for the world will find out that your wife has a hard time carrying your children. Enjoy your evening, Liam,” I said.

I quickly walked into the house and closed the door behind me. As soon as the door closed, I dropped to the floor with my back against the door and broke down. I was so sick of this. I was sick of just existing in this marriage and Liam not treating me like his wife... like someone he was supposed to be deeply in love with. I didn’t want to go through what my parents had gone through in the last days of their marriage. But how long was I supposed to keep being treated like this? I was strong. Trust me, I was strong. With the father I had growing up, I had no choice but to be strong. But I just didn’t think I was strong enough to continue being mishandled by my husband when I knew I deserved so much more.

Chapter Two

LIAM EDWARDS

Contrary to what I had just told my wife, I wasn't meeting with my brother this evening for dinner. My brother was a disgrace to the Edwards name and ruining our reputation with his crazy shenanigans and his ability to stay in constant trouble with the law. Using my brother as an alibi to my wife was the only thing that made the slightest bit of sense. I couldn't tell her that I was going to my parents because, these days, I just didn't know who Naomi was anymore. She would more than likely call my mother to make sure I was there. That's the kind of insecure being that my wife had become. She always had to go out of her way to make sure that two and two equaled four.

I couldn't use the church as an excuse either because that would probably backfire on me tomorrow, so saying that I was going out with Lionel was my smartest move. I'll just go ahead and admit that I am no longer in love with Naomi. I never in my life thought that those words would leave my mouth because I had been absolutely smitten with her ever since the two of us were six years old. I prayed to God, asking Him to rid my mind of these ill feelings for my wife and somehow allow those deep feelings and love to come back for Naomi as it had been in the past, but nothing.

I'll probably get a lot of hate for saying this, but I didn't want a woman who couldn't properly carry my children.

Naomi and I were supposed to have four children by now, but she just kept losing them. As a man who wanted a big, loving family, I just couldn't stick around to watch her continue to lose baby after baby. We went to doctors to find out why Naomi kept having these miscarriages. Every doctor we went to didn't find a single thing wrong with Naomi. At thirty-two years old, they all raved over how healthy she was, so I just didn't understand why it wasn't working out.

I will forever love Naomi dearly, but I wasn't in love with her. The truth is, I wanted out of this marriage, but I didn't know how to say it without crushing her. The fact that I didn't know how to say that I wanted out is why I had been so stressed out lately. I thought that by neglecting my wife and showing her in every possible way that I didn't want to be with her anymore, she would finally reach her breaking point and just leave, but it didn't happen.

I wouldn't say that my wife was with me for the money, but I did feel like she stayed because I had her sign a prenup eight years ago before we got married. It basically stated that if we ever divorced, she wouldn't get anything. Naomi worked for me as a teacher at my church. I didn't know if she would keep the job if we divorced or if I would even allow her to, so she would pretty much be jobless. Therefore, I knew why she stuck around because most women would have left long ago. Naomi needed me in order to have an income.

I pulled up to the home that I often frequented and parked my car in the driveway. Once I stepped out, I went around the car to open the trunk and pull out the birthday balloons and the gift bags that I had there. A smile covered my face because whenever I went over there, it just felt like home. This felt like where I was supposed to be.

I made it to the porch and used my keys to let myself in. By the time I made it inside, she was rounding the corner from the back, wearing a beautiful smile on her caramel-colored face. Her name was Tischina, and she had been the administrative assistant at my church for the past four years.

I knew this wasn't right, but I was in love with this woman. I was a child of God, and I had thousands of people

that I preached to on Wednesdays and Sundays. My name was popular because of my excellent skills in delivering God's message and getting people to turn their lives over to Christ. I was a leader for so many people, and what I was doing with Tischina was so wrong, but I couldn't help who I fell in love with.

When Tischina was hired four years ago, it was strictly business between the two of us. Of course, I picked up on her beauty, but it was nothing for me to act on. At the time, Naomi and I were in somewhat of a good place in our marriage, so I had no reason to find interest in the next woman. It wasn't until the problems started in my marriage that I started looking at Tischina a little differently. She reminded me of Naomi in so many ways, although the two of them didn't look anything alike. Both were highly educated women. They were beautiful and had great personalities, among so many other things.

One night, instead of going home and working on my sermon, like I would usually do, I stayed in my office at the church. Tischina came in to let me know that she was leaving for the night. Before she left, I had her come into the office because I wanted to run a few things by her regarding the church. One thing led to another. I kissed her, she kissed me back, and I made love to her right in my church office. Now, I had been sneaking around with Tischina for a year, and I had reached the point where I no longer wanted to sneak. She was the woman I wanted to be my first lady. The one I wanted by my side. I wanted her to be the stepmother to my baby boy, L.J.

Naomi was the woman I used to want those things with, but not anymore. I just had to be careful how I went about this. I could lose a lot of members, especially women because they would naturally take Naomi's side. They would see her as the victim and me as the villain who'd nastily destroyed my marriage. So, it would take some time before I made a move as far as coming out to the public about my dealings with Tischina.

"Aww, baby. Thank you," Tischina said in her beautiful voice as she rushed over to me.

Tischina was a beautiful, full-figured woman. I was used to being with a slender woman who had long legs and, honestly, a model's body type. Tischina was the total opposite of Naomi, but I loved it. You know a woman doesn't really like to share her weight, but if I had to guess Tischina's weight, I would say she was about 225 pounds. The weight was perfect on her.

Tischina frequently complained about her weight, saying she wanted to lose a few pounds, but I was always there to build her up and let her know that she was perfect. She had short hair that she often wore in her signature jet black bob. Beautiful teeth with a small gap in between. She always smelled good, dressed nicely, and her make-up always looked as if a professional had done it for her.

"Anything for you, beautiful. Happy birthday again," I told her and leaned down to kiss her on the lips.

I eventually pulled away when someone knocked on the door. That had to have been the food I ordered. With my status and many people knowing who I was, it wasn't wise for me to be out in the open with Tischina. So, we had to stay in tonight and order take-out to celebrate her birthday. I knew Tischina would have preferred to get all dressed up and go to a nice 5-star restaurant tonight, but we couldn't do those things just yet.

My fear was that Tischina would get tired of me keeping her a secret, and she would move on to a man who could be out in the open with her. That's why, if I was going to divorce Naomi, I would have to do it now because I couldn't lose Tischina. I loved her with all my heart.

"I'll set the table while you get the food," she told me and kissed me one last time before going into the kitchen.

Tischina loved Chinese food, so that's what I had delivered. I took the food from the driver, gave him a nice tip, thanked him, and then closed the door behind me. My phone vibrated in my pockets as I walked back to the dining room. Holding the food with one hand, I dug in my pocket to see who was calling me, and it was Naomi. I declined the call because she knew better than to call me right now, especially

since I'd already told her that I was going out with my "brother."

I set the food on the kitchen counter and washed my hands at the sink. My phone was still going off in my pocket with a call from Naomi again. The house was quiet, so I knew Tischina heard my phone vibrating, and she could vividly see that I was ignoring the calls.

"Is that her?" she questioned as she sat down at the kitchen table.

"Yes," I said, keeping it simple.

I watched as Tischina released a sigh and looked straight ahead. That's what scared me. I feared that she would get fed up with this situation and leave me.

"Baby, I don't know why she's calling. I told her that I was going out with my brother," I said and took the empty chair right next to her at the table. I grabbed her hand in mine while looking into her eyes.

"Liam, what we're doing isn't right. When I see her calling, I suddenly begin to feel guilty. I'm messing around with a married man. On top of that, Naomi is someone who I consider to be like a friend. We've been in each other's lives for the past four years since I started working at the church. It would crush me if the shoe was on the other foot, and I was married to you, and you were living a double life with another woman," she told me, speaking her truth.

This was a conversation that Tischina and I had at least once a month. I hated having to talk about it because I was forced to acknowledge what I was doing behind my wife's back, and it just didn't make me feel like a good person.

"Baby, it's your day today, and I don't want to see you upset over this. So, can we just please eat dinner together and have some dessert? Then, I'll give you a bath and massage your body. I know that talking about my marriage is sensitive for you, and I really don't want to see you crying on your birthday. But, before I end this conversation, I will say that

baby, I need you to believe me when I say a divorce will happen soon.

“I know that what I’m doing is wrong. It isn’t in me to be a cheater like this. I have been with the same woman for years and never once stepped out on Naomi, even when we were just dating. You came around, and I just fell in love. I won’t string you along, I won’t waste your time, and I won’t keep you a secret forever. I promise you that, okay?” I said, moving my hands from hers to place them under her chin and have her look me in the eyes.

Her eyes did get a little misty, but she didn’t cry. Instead, she nodded and let me know she understood.

“I kind of want to tell you something, though. I was planning to wait until after dinner, but I feel like the mood has shifted, and I need to say something to you that I think can make both of us feel a little better,” she told me.

I was already smiling, and I didn’t even know what the news was yet. Letting go of her chin, I sat back in my chair and prepared to hear whatever she was about to say to me. Tischina stood up from her chair and went to the back. She came back a few seconds later with was something in her hands. It was a rectangular box, and she was smiling big as she walked with it. Finally, she set it on the table right in front of me.

“It’s your birthday. Why did you get me something?” I asked, a little confused.

“Open it, Liam,” she said.

I grabbed the box from the table and untied the pink ribbon. Once I had the ribbon off, I opened the box and froze for a moment when I saw what was inside. I froze, and then I smiled. I could feel my eyes getting a little watery, and the second I blinked, a couple of tears fell. There were two pregnancy tests, and both were positive. I looked at Tischina, and she had tears falling down her face as well. I pulled her to me, making her sit on my lap, and wrapped my arms around her.

“Baby, I’m happy. I’m so happy. I promise I’m going to make it right. Please believe me and don’t leave me. Do you trust me?” I asked.

“I trust you, baby.”

“Good, I love you. I love you more than anything or anyone,” I told her and meant it.

“I love you too, baby,” she assured me.

After celebrating the news that Tischina was pregnant with my baby, we finally ate dinner together. After dinner, I straightened the dining room table, the kitchen, and from there, I did everything to Tischina that I promised I was going to do. First, I ran her bath, where I washed her body, and after that, I gave her the massage I promised, and then we made sweet, sweet love.

I wanted to stay with her. Lord knows I did, but I knew I had to make it back home, especially since it was already after midnight. I had to stand up in front of the church tomorrow and deliver God’s word, so really, I had to get my mind and my body prepared. Tischina had already dozed off, so I kissed her a couple of times and walked out the door.

The drive home was quiet, although the voices in my head were loud and having a field day. They argued amongst each other; one side said that what I was doing was wrong, and the other side justified my actions. Tischina telling me that she was pregnant lit the fire under me and got the ball rolling for me to move forward and let Naomi know I wanted a divorce. I really didn’t know how to bring this to her attention, but it would happen sooner than later.

I pulled up to the house, and Naomi’s car was there. It was crazy how I hated coming home. I especially hated coming home, knowing that my son wouldn’t be there. My wife acted as if motherhood was so exhausting for her, and she cried every chance she could for a break. So, there I was, coming home, and I wouldn’t even be able to kiss my son while he slept since he was with Naomi’s mother. My mother raised my little brother and me while my father worked long hours at the

church. My parents let me know that my mother never complained, but my wife complained every second she got.

I made it into the house and went right to the kitchen, needing something to drink. After I grabbed a bottle of water, I noticed the food that Naomi had cooked and put to the side for me, but I didn't have an appetite since I'd already eaten. Not even sure why she would cook for me, knowing that I was going out for dinner. I finished the water and headed upstairs. Deciding to try my luck, I looked inside LJ's room to see if she'd found her common sense and had her mother bring our son back home, but his bedroom was empty. Shaking my head, I just closed the door behind me and went to our bedroom.

The television was on in our room, but it was muted because my wife was afraid to sleep in the dark unless I was with her. I gazed over at her on the bed, and she was lying on her side, sleeping peacefully. My shoes that I held in my hands, I neatly put them in my walk-in closet and went to our bathroom to take a quick shower. I had to get the sex smell off my body before I climbed into bed with Naomi.

The feel of the water beating down on my back was every bit of amazing, to the point that I didn't even want to get out. Once my shower ended, I went over to the sink, where I brushed my teeth and rinsed my mouth. Then, I threw on some briefs with my pajama pants and made my way to our bedroom. I took a seat on the edge of the bed with my back facing Naomi as I grabbed the lotion from my nightstand and applied a little bit of it to my skin.

There was movement on the bed, and I hoped that she would stay asleep, but I could feel her inching closer to me. Suddenly, I felt her arms wrap around me from behind, and she started to place light kisses on my back. Naturally, it was in me to just push her off me, but I didn't do that. Instead, I just stiffly sat there, making it known that I didn't want to be touched.

“How was dinner with your brother? I wasn't calling you to intrude, but you know I've been telling you for a couple of weeks that it's been hard lately to get the oven to come on. Usually, you are the one to fix it whenever it goes out, so I was

just calling to ask what you do to get it to work, but I eventually figured it out,” she told me.

Naomi had a soft voice. Her voice was one of the many things that I loved about her. It definitely fit her.

“Dinner with my brother was cool, and that’s good. I’m glad you figured it out,” I said, keeping it short.

She stopped placing kisses on my neck and back then climbed in my lap. If anyone were to see my wife, I think a lot of people would feel my temple, just to make sure I was okay. Most people would view Naomi as the most beautiful woman in the world. She had dark brown skin, and it wasn’t too often that you saw someone her color with gray eyes. That was something she and her sister inherited from their father.

I’ve already said that she was tall, with a slim build. Naomi had pretty, straight white teeth and deep dimples in her cheeks that she didn’t even have to be smiling to show. The perfect facial structure, high cheekbones, small forehead that housed so much of her baby hair, which she took seriously, and just all-around a naturally beautiful face. Naomi has always had long hair that seemed to grow by the year. It’s always been curly, but every once in a while, she’d flat iron it. I didn’t too much care for her to do that because it would be almost to her behind, and it just wasn’t a good look.

She was sitting on me, wearing a polka dot pajama set, and smiling as her arms went around my neck.

“Make love to me, Liam,” she said.

“Naomi, I only have about four hours to get some sleep. Can you please go back to your side of the bed? I’ve had a long day.”

“Okay, then don’t make love to me. Fuck me. Liam, please! I’m begging you,” she said.

I could hear the desperation in her voice, but I was still shocked to hear her curse. My wife never cursed.

“Watch your mouth, Naomi. Don’t talk like that around me. This is what happens when you hang around Normani and her thugged out husband and his thugged out friends. You

want me to fuck you? What kind of wife even asks that of her man?" I lifted her and tossed her on the bed, so I could stand up.

"One who hasn't had any kind of penetration in months! Liam, you're acting like I'm asking you to perform surgery right now. I'm asking you to touch me, to kiss me, to explore my body. Why can't you do that?" she asked, voice rising and cracking because she was getting emotional.

I promise you; my wife was more emotional than our three-year-old son, and I hated that about her. She cried about every single thing, and it was such a turn-off. I never answered her question. Instead, I just put the lotion back on the nightstand and climbed in bed, this time lying on my back.

"Is it someone else? Baby, please be honest with me," she said.

This would have been the perfect time for me to tell her the truth about Tischina, but I couldn't. Truth is, I feared going out like Pastor Davidson. My wife's mom, Normani, and her husband had painted a bad image of Pastor Davidson, and I felt like he was never able to recover from that. The second my wife found out about the affair, she would broadcast what I had done to her to the church. I would lose many members, not to mention the offering would decrease, and that just wasn't what I wanted. This was something that I had to be super strategic about, and I couldn't just do this on impulse because there was a lot at stake.

"Because I'm not in the mood to make love to you, it's someone else? Naomi, you sound crazy," I said, knowing good and well that it was someone else.

"Then, Liam, what is it? You won't kiss me, hug me, and you tense up every time I touch you. I compliment you every chance I get. I call you handsome every day. I rave about how well you deliver your sermons on Sundays and everything else that I can do to motivate my husband. You never do or say anything to lift me up. You never tell me that I look beautiful anymore or that you like my hair, my outfit, anything. What is

it? Can you please just tell me something? Do I lack anything?" she asked.

I looked at her long and hard, then released a deep breath.

"I just haven't been attracted to you that much lately. Naomi, I don't know what it is. Maybe it's just a phase I'm going through, but I don't know. I'm just not attracted," I told her.

She burst into tears when I said that, and honestly, I felt bad. But I just said anything to get her to leave me alone. There was some truth in what I said, though. I could tell that I'd crushed Naomi with my words because she eventually got out of bed and went into the next room. I could literally hear her crying from the room next door.

Sadly, my wife running out of the room crying and sleeping in a different bed wasn't anything new. She did that maybe twice a week. So, instead of going after her and comforting her like any good husband should have, I just turned off the TV, closed my eyes, and went to sleep. I would just deal with my wife in the morning.

Chapter Three

MARKELL 'GLIZZY' WEST

I had two thick, chocolate bitches on their knees, eating up this dick as I smoked a fat ass joint. Another pretty bitch stood behind me with her titties on my back as she gave me a deep massage. I was in Heaven right now, looking down at those melanin queens damn near fighting with their mouths, each trying to hog up this big ass black dick. I've always loved sex, but shit, I spent the last eight years of my life locked up like an animal, so I didn't have the luxury of crawling into some pussy as easy as I used to. Beating my dick at night had become my norm. Now that I was free, I'd be damned if I ever had to beat my dick again when all these women out here knew that daddy was home. I had hoes in line, waiting to be fucked because it was no secret that Glizzy had good dick.

I got the name Glizzy from my pops. My pops was a hustler, just like damn near any nigga out of Miami. My pops loved guns. Man, he used to have so many fuckin' guns in the crib that you would have thought he sold that shit for a living, but that's just how he was. He taught me how to shoot by the time I was five, and my favorite gun had quickly become a Glock. On the streets, we called that shit a Glizzy, and that's just the nickname my pops gave me. My mama hated that shit, though. She was the only person alive who called me Markell.

By the time I was ten, my pops had been murdered. Ima be real with you and admit that I never fully got over that shit. My dad wasn't one of these niggas out here who didn't do their part as a parent because one thing about that nigga, he'd always been there for me when I needed him.

I'm not even trying to get on some deep shit, but I felt like many black people didn't know the proper way to grieve. No lie, we start doing the wrong shit. I knew motha fuckas who done started shooting that white shit up their nose, getting in trouble with the law, and taking their own lives. I don't know what it is, but it's like many of my people are afraid to get therapy. We hear that word and automatically assume that we must be fuckin' crazy to need that shit. I'm talking from experience because when my pops died, that's when I started getting in trouble and shit. Man, I done got kicked out of so many schools that I lost fuckin' count.

By the time I was twelve, I was in and out of juvie. I got my first big boy charge the day after my eighteenth birthday on some robbery shit, and I had to do about eighteen months. The older I got, the worse the crimes got, and this eight-year charge that I just finished doing was enough for me to know that a nigga had to change. I knew I had to change when my mama looked me in my eyes one day at visitation and told me that I'd broken her heart with the shit I was doing with my life. That shit fucked me up to know that I was breaking her heart because my mama told me the only heartbreak she ever experienced was when my pops died.

In prison, I received my GED since I never finished high school. I wanted to be in the streets, so I dropped out of school the second I was legal to do so. While I was in prison, I got into my bible and took some one-on-one therapy because that shit was needed. At ten years old, I got off the bus and came from school like I usually did, only to find my pops in our living room with his head blown off his shoulders. You tell me how the fuck a nigga is supposed to get over some shit like that? What kind of fuckin' sanity I'm supposed to have left after witnessing some gruesome shit like that?

Since I've been home, which was only three months, I kid you not, I have busted at least three nuts a day from fuckin' on different women. I had eight years' worth of dick that I had to pass out, and that's what I've been doing lately. That and getting my catering/chef business, Glizzy Eats off the ground. I planned to open my own restaurant because people were fuckin' with my food big time.

I told myself that I couldn't come back home and do the same shit. Back then, I was into a bunch of illegal shit like selling dirty guns, selling drugs, and breaking into people's houses and cars. Shit, wherever I felt a nigga had some money, I was there to take that shit. The feds busted down the door on a nigga, and I was knee-deep in some pussy when they got my ass too. Thank God I knew how to save my money and put some shit to the side for a rainy day. If I didn't have my lawyer, a nigga would still be locked up and fantasizing about the day I would get out.

I did eight years, and yeah, that was still a lot of time, but shit, at first a nigga was looking at damn near twenty years. My record was so fuckin' dirty, and the charges they hit me with were major. I couldn't do twenty years, man.

A nigga who was supposed to be my fuckin' brother had turned on me and put the blame for everything on me. That's how I got hit with so much time too. I won't even acknowledge that nigga, though, so let's move on.

Knowing I had dodged that kind of sentence, I told myself that I couldn't come out and be on the same shit that I was on before. Billion, my fuckin' brother, knew all about the business side of shit. I told that nigga straight up that I didn't need him giving me no handouts when I came home because I wanted it to feel like I did this shit all on my own. He respected my wishes, but he did help me by putting me in a nice studio. But as far as the business went, I was doing this shit on my own with the leftover money that I had stashed in my mama's attic before the feds came and got me.

Speaking of Billion, I was supposed to meet with that nigga in a few hours, so he could show me a couple of buildings for my business. Right now, I really was just posting

up in different areas with my truck, selling dinners. I was making good money off that shit, but a nigga wanted his own restaurant.

I've always known how to cook. I had a black mother who raised me on her own once my pops was no longer in the picture. Back then, I only used to be in the kitchen with my mama because I wanted to sample everything she cooked. She could cook any kind of dish, but I felt like her specialty was desserts. I was so fuckin' bad and wanted to hang with my niggas all day, doing shit that I didn't have no business doing. Niggas didn't even know I knew how to cook until I was in middle school. I used to bring some of the food that I cooked at home to school. Of course, greedy ass niggas always had their hands out, wanting some of my food, because school lunch was nasty as hell.

Niggas started saying how my mama's food was good, and I had to let them niggas know that I cooked that shit! I'm telling you, I was in middle school, and I already knew how to throw down on a whole Thanksgiving meal. My mama always used to say, "You need to learn how to cook for yourself, so when you grow up, you ain't gotta depend on a bitch to feed you."

My mama's name is Tierra, but everybody called her Pumpkin. She got that nickname because she was born on Halloween. Swear, my mama and I have a strong ass bond, and she was realer than a bunch of niggas I knew. We were so close because she was a young mother; only forty-six years old since her hot pussy ass had me at thirteen. I fuck with her about that shit any chance I get. At thirteen, even I knew to strap my dick up twice, but obviously, her and my pops just didn't give a damn. That was my girl, though, and I loved the fuck out of her.

She's been so happy since I've been home. I don't think I've ever in my life seen my mama smile the way she'd been doing since she came to the prison and picked me up. I vowed to her that morning to never leave her ass again, and I meant that shit.

“Can I ride that dick, Glizzy?” the prettiest bitch of the three asked after she pulled my dick out of her mouth.

Her name was Asia. I knew Asia from high school. We used to fuck around back then, but it was never on no exclusive shit. Asia was a freak, just like me, so she and I had engaged in plenty of threesomes in the past. Asia had always been beautiful, with her chocolate skin and slim/thick frame that I used to be obsessed with, but when I came home from prison, she'd had hella work done. Her ass was damn near three times the size it used to be. She had bigger titties now, which I had been rubbing since she came out of her shirt.

I'll never speak on a woman getting her body done because women could do whatever the fuck they wanted with their body, but damn, I was a sucker for some natural shit. Asia looked good, don't get me wrong, but I just hated when a woman felt like she had to be perfect. I don't mind if yo' titties sag, bae; Ima stick, suck and lick all over them bitches. I blame the world, though. The world was fuckin' with these women's heads and making them think they had to be perfect.

“Hop on this shit,” I demanded.

After putting the blunt out, I reached behind me, grabbed the pack of condoms, and pulled out two. I secured both of them bitches on my dick, and Asia crawled into my lap. Bracing herself by putting both of her hands on my chest, she slid that tight ass pussy down on my dick, making me bite my lip in the process. I held onto her small ankles as I appreciated the fuck faces she made as she rode me.

“Glizzy, yo' dick so fuckin' goooooddd,” she cried.

Asia was a quick buster, so I knew she would only bounce on this dick for a few moments before that pussy started to cum. The woman massaging me from behind, I tapped her hand, basically telling her to stop. I then walked with Asia in my arms over to the bed. I threw her down on all fours, so I could beat that pussy up from behind.

“Come here, Tay,” I said with my hands on Asia's hips, fuckin' her deep and slow. I didn't even know why I hit her with my deep and slow move because that shit would have her

ass falling in love with a nigga. Tay was the other stallion who had been on her knees with Asia, suckin' dick.

“Let her eat your pussy,” I told Tay once she came over.

I needed to see some freaky shit while I was fuckin'. So, as I long stroked her pussy, I leaned over a little bit and watched Asia lick and suck on Tay's pussy like she was a nigga.

“Glizzyyyyyyy,” Asia moaned, moving her head up from eating Tay.

“What's up, beautiful?” I asked, speeding up my strokes and crawling in deeper.

“You about to make me cummmmmm,” she cried. Asia turned her head around to look back at me as I murdered that pussy from behind.

I put my hand on the back of her head, so she could finish eating Tay. She shook and moaned the whole time as her pussy started cumming. I moved Asia out of the way and grabbed Nia, who had been massaging me, and put her ass in the position that Asia was just in. Her pussy wasn't as tight as Asia's, but it was still good. I got her to cum, moved her out of the way, then grabbed Tay's thick ass up. I made her ride this dick, and she came too.

At that point, I had held out on my nut long enough, so I removed the condom, stood up, and made the three of them feast on this dick. I finally nutted and watched them fight to get my seeds in their mouths. You had to know what the fuck you were doing to stand tall in not one but three pussies, and get all three of them bitches to cum. Not every nigga could do that. Shit, from what these bitches be telling me, niggas ain't even getting their girl to bust one nut, and I'm fuckin' around and giving three women a nut at one time.

I swear I needed to start charging bitches for this kind of treatment. Can you imagine the way I'd be busting my woman down if I ever got one? Mannnn, it just wouldn't be fair to other women the way my lady would be getting her pussy handled by me on the regular.

I had never been on no exclusive shit with a woman. The closest woman that I had vibed with was named Quinn, with her fuckin' crazy ass. Right when she and I were about to get on some exclusive shit, they hit me with those charges. At the time, Quinn was only twenty-two, and I ain't want her waiting for me like that. I wanted her to live her life, although she was ready to hold a nigga down. I didn't mind coming home and maybe trying to pick up where we left off, but that bitch did some flaw ass shit and ruined any chance of me ever taking her seriously again.

After the fuckin' ended, I stood up and went to the bathroom. We were all at Asia's crib, and I was about to wash up, so I could head home. I would take a shower at home, put on some clean clothes, and pull up on Billion, so we could discuss business. I was in the bathroom now, so I used that time to look at the man in the mirror.

I was thirty-three, but I swear I still looked twenty. My hair was long, down to my back, and let my mama tell it, I came out of the womb with a straight blowout. I never wanted to dread my hair up, so for the most part, I just kept my shit pulled up in a ponytail or my signature French braid hairstyle. It was a good thing that I knew how to put my hair in French braids because I was able to do it myself when I was in prison. Now that I was home, I was back to letting my mama braid it for me because she braided my hair the best. I had a thick mustache and a full beard that the women went crazy over. Skinny nigga, but shit, I'll slap the fuck out of any nigga, not giving a damn if he was twice my size.

I was tall, standing a good 6'7", and I had a big ass dick that I loved to get fuck with and get it sucked. Golds adorned the bottom row of my teeth, and because I hadn't put my clothes back on yet, all the ink that covered my skin was on display. I had a portrait sleeve of my father on my right arm and just different shit on my body that represented me. My father had an Indian mother and a black father, which helped explain my heritage. That was a question I was often asked, especially by women. I had light brown eyes that I inherited from my mother. Looking back at myself in the mirror, I saw a man destined for greatness and a man who could be my

biggest enemy if I made it that way. But, I was getting my shit together, and I was gon' make my mama proud.

Right now, my mama was comfortable in her nice, three-bedroom, two-bathroom home, even though it was just her. My mom worked as a personal trainer, and she was able to take care of herself, but my plan was to take even better care of her. If I wasn't going to do this shit for nobody else, I had to do it for her. I had put her through too much shit.

A couple hours later

“Ooooh, let me get on there, Uncle Glizzy. This bike is niceeeeeee,” Lil Bill brought his lil’ ass outside and said to me as he ran down the porch in just his basketball shorts and no shoes.

He was talking about my custom yellow and black Yoshimura Suzuki, which was a welcome home gift from my mama. I grew up in Miami, and we took bike life seriously. Dirt bikes, four-wheelers, all that shit I knew how to do and ride. I’d had an obsession with riding them ever since I was about Lil Bill’s age.

“This is a big boy toy. This ain’t for the lil’ niggas. Where yo’ damn shoes at?” I asked as I got off the bike.

He laughed at me and then reached his fist in and gave me a pound. Lil Bill was twelve, about to be thirteen soon, and I could tell he would take after his cocky ass daddy from the muscles he already had in his arms.

As we were pounding each other up, the front door opened, and Billion came out, holding his adorable daughter, Prosper, in his arms. I was happy to see my nigga well off. Billion had always been a solid nigga and always knew how to make a buck. To see that he’d gone legit, was killing shit with his business, and he had this beautiful ass family, I couldn’t help but be happy for my man.

“Bill, get in the house without no shoes on, man. Ain’t I get on you yesterday about that shit?” he asked his son.

I laughed as I followed Bill onto the porch. I made it to Billion, shook it up with him, and tried to take Prosper, but her mean ass screamed and clung to her daddy.

“I ain’t want yo’ lil’ ass anyway. That’s why I got candy,” I said before reaching in my pocket and pulling out a lollypop.

Prosper was two years old and mean as a motha fucka, with her spoiled ass. The last time I was over there, she didn’t let me hold her, so this time, I came prepared.

“Lollypop,” she said and pointed to the candy in my hand.

“Nah. Nah. Keep that same energy. You didn’t want me to hold you, remember?” I told her. Now she was trying to be my friend and reaching for me.

It’s like she knew I was talking shit because she started fussing. I grabbed her and started unwrapping the lollypop.

“Normani gon’ fuckin’ kill you for giving her that shit,” Billion told me.

I waved Billion off and then followed him into the house. Whatever the hell they were in there cooking, that shit smelled good.

“Where Khari at?” I asked as we walked to the kitchen.

“With Denim. Ima get her this weekend,” he told me.

We made it into the kitchen, where Normani was throwing down. She was bent over, putting something in the oven but quickly turned around when she saw us. She smiled, but that smile was wiped clean off her face once she saw Prosper fuckin’ up that lollypop.

“Billionaire, why? Just why would you give her that?” she asked.

I laughed because Billion had already called this shit and said she would trip about the candy.

“Girl, I ain’t give that to her. Glizzy did. You be ready to start bitching,” he said, but that nigga made sure to laugh because it was obvious that Normani was the one running shit over there.

A few nights ago, I went to the strip club, and I hit Billion, telling him to slide with me. That nigga gon’ tell me, “Aight, Ima leave after Normani goes to sleep.”

That shit was funny to me because anybody who knew Billion knew that there was once a time that he and I were running neck and neck when it came to fuckin’ these bitches. We had fucked a lot of the same bitches and really used to be out here wilding, but that shit was gangsta to see him on his family shit. I didn’t think it was a woman alive who could

have me wide the fuck open like that, but I thought that shit was dope for my nigga to be all in love and shit. Even my nigga Monterius was in love with his baby mama, and they were expecting their second child together.

Normani didn't even respond to Billion. She just gave his ass a look and went back to what she was doing in the kitchen. I followed him into the living room area with Prosper in my arms and sat her on my lap. I couldn't believe her little ass was fuckin' that lollypop up the way she was. I could tell her mean ass mama didn't give her candy on a regular basis because she was in Heaven right now.

"Where you coming from?" Billion asked.

"I was with Asia and two more of dem fine stallions," I told him, and he laughed.

Billion looked behind him as if he was checking to see if Normani was paying attention, but she had the phone to her ear and was talking to someone.

"Mannnn, I already know that feeling, nigga. You come home and feel like you gotta play catch up. The night I had my welcome home party, I came back with two of them thangs—"

"Billionaire, I can hear you! Let a single Glizzy be the reason why your ass is sleeping on the couch tonight. Are you reminiscing about fuckin' old bitches?" she yelled, and then she told whoever she was on the phone with to hold on.

She walked over, and Billion was laughing. I was trying not to laugh because Normani was little as fuck, but she looked like she would slap the fuck out of someone.

"Bae, I'm just fuckin' around. I only said that shit because I knew yo' nosey ass was listening to my conversation. I ain't reminiscing about shit. All I think about is you," Billion said, trying to clean his shit up.

I was trying my hardest not to laugh at this smitten ass nigga.

"Whatever. Let me get my baby because I don't need her listening to whatever conversation y'all are about to have. I'm

going upstairs, and Billionaire, turn that rice down in about ten minutes,” she said before taking Prosper from my lap.

She tried to walk out of the living room, but Billion pulled her his way, kissed her a few times, and then she left. We heard her get back on the phone as she walked up the stairs.

“Lil sis don’t fuck around,” I commented.

“Not at all. I need that shit, though. She keeps a nigga grounded. I wasn’t even about to sit up here and boast about them bitches that I was fuckin’ when I came home. I was just going to say that shit got old quick as hell. I fell in love with Normani within just a few months of me being home. I know you feel like you gotta hit every bitch in the world because you had to sit down for so long, but nigga, I’m telling you, it ain’t a better feeling than coming home every day to your wife and kids. These hoes can’t give you that comfort. I find comfort in walking through the door, and my wife and my kids start jumping on me. Yo’ ass got to fall in love to understand what I’m talking about because if not, you just won’t see where I’m coming from,” he told me, and I laughed.

“Yeah, because nigga, I’m definitely not feeling shit you saying right now. I don’t even know what the fuck it would even feel like to be in love,” I honestly told him.

“Trust me, you gon’ know when it hits you,” he said.

After that, I talked to him a little bit more about my business, telling him the plans that I had in mind for *Glizzy Eats*, the kind of building I was looking for, and things of that nature. I ran down my whole game plan to him for about thirty minutes. Once we finished talking, we stood up and prepared to walk out the door. I decided to just ride with him because he was going to take me around and show me some potential buildings.

“Yo, I meant to ask you, what’s the deal with her? Normani’s sister,” I said and pointed to a picture of Normani, her sister, and Prosper that was in a small frame on a table in the foyer.

I only saw her one time, which was the day Billion threw me that welcome home party in his backyard. She was pretty as fuck. We were introduced by Billion, but that was pretty much it. About thirty minutes into the party, she was gone, and that was the last time I saw her.

“Shit, she married. Why?” he asked as we walked out the door, and he locked it.

“Shit, she pretty. That’s why, nigga,” I said.

“Pretty and married. Even if she wasn’t, no offense, my nigga, but Naomi wouldn’t fuck with you. Hood ass nigga, she wouldn’t know what the fuck to do with you,” he told me.

I laughed while shaking my head, but then I got serious.

“It ain’t a woman I can’t have, nigga. Even you know that,” I told him, and he nodded.

“Yeah, well, Naomi ain’t most women. Let’s go before Normani hears us on the camera and call me, asking me why the fuck you checking for her sister,” he said.

I laughed and left it at that. I ain’t saying I wanted to ask Naomi for her hand in marriage. Shit, I just thought her ass was pretty. That’s all.

Chapter Four
NAOMI EDWARDS

One month later

“*I* think we have everything pretty much settled for the picnic. The main thing that we’re missing is a caterer. I don’t want any church staff to worry about working, being in the kitchen, or anything. I want everyone to be able to come out, kick their feet up, and enjoy themselves. Anyone have any ideas about a catering company?” my husband asked. He sat at the head of the table amongst me and about thirty other church staff members as we discussed the annual church picnic that was coming up in less than two months.

We had to get a head start because this was a big event, and my husband was so anal about how he liked things ran. We’d been in this meeting for almost an hour, just giving our input on different things and coming up with a plan. Well, everyone else had been giving their input. I’ll be honest and say that physically, I was there, but mentally, my mind was elsewhere.

To tell you the truth, I’ve just been going through it with Liam lately. Things had been bad for some time now, but I felt like it crumbled after the night he looked me in my eyes and told me that he wasn’t attracted to me anymore. That comment broke me down so bad. It ruined my self-esteem because the one man who used to look at me with nothing but love in his eyes was suddenly turned off by me, and I just didn’t know what to do. I wondered if I was turning him off with my nagging, so I stopped asking him to spend time with me like I used to. My hair had been the same for years, so I did something a little different a few weeks ago and added streaks of brown, thinking he would like the change. Unfortunately, he had yet to acknowledge it.

It couldn’t possibly be that he wanted me to lose weight because I felt like I needed to be gaining. I got on the scale the other day, and my weight was 118. I hadn’t been this weight since before giving birth to LJ. I was usually a good 125-127, but I was letting this marriage stress me out to the point that I

barely had an appetite these days, and I hadn't been eating much of anything. My mom spoke up on my weight loss a few days ago when she saw me. Like I do with everything else, I had to just shrug it off, lie about just being stressed from work, and leave it like that.

My job was the only thing that wasn't currently stressing me out. I loved my babies. My students brought me joy, and each time I saw their little faces, it reminded me of why I joined the education field in the first place. Without God, LJ, and my students, I really feel that I would have folded a long time ago.

I was scared to ask Liam if he wanted to get a divorce out of fear that he might say yes. But, on the other hand, part of me felt like he was ready to go his separate way from me. We no longer shared a bed. I'd grown accustomed to sleeping in one of the guest bedrooms, and he either slept in our bedroom without me, or he would fall asleep sometimes in his office. I knew it had gotten bad once we started riding in separate cars to church. It was like he didn't have any problem showing the church that the two of us were going through marital issues.

Every Sunday, he used to incorporate something about me into his sermon. It would usually just be a sweet compliment or a cute story about us. The congregation would always "aww," and my husband would get me to blush, but he hadn't done that in months either. Nothing in life ever really scared me, but this situation was fearful because this was how my parents started out, and they ended so terrible. I didn't want that to be us, but I knew that if I had a daughter, this wasn't the way I would want a man to treat her. This wasn't the way I would want my son to treat someone else's daughter either.

"I think I may know someone who can do the catering. I can be in charge of that," I said, finally speaking up for the first time since the meeting started an hour ago.

Normani always called me, ranting and raving about how good Markell, or as everyone likes to call him, Glizzy's food was. She had just called me two days ago, moaning into the phone as she ate a barbeque chicken wing dinner with macaroni, seafood rice, and vegetable sides. For my sister to

hype up the food the way she did, plus her husband, and even Lil Bill, then I knew the food had to have been good for real. She told me that he was in the process of opening his own restaurant, and he'd been getting a lot of catering gigs. If his food was as good as she was making it out to be, then I wouldn't mind her reaching out to him for me to see if he and his team would be available to cater our church picnic.

"Nice of you to finally open your mouth and join us. I was beginning to think that there was another place you would rather be right now," Liam called out to me.

It was one thing for him to talk to me crazy while we were in the privacy of our home, but for him to do it in front of everyone else really pissed me off. What pissed me off a little more was that Tischina, the administrative assistant and someone I genuinely considered a church friend, laughed a little bit. As I bit my lip to restrain myself from saying anything back to Liam, I looked over in Tischina's direction, giving her the nastiest look that I could muster up. That smirk was quickly knocked right off her face. No one else laughed at the comment Liam made. If anything, people just had looks of shock on their faces because none of them had ever witnessed Liam use that tone with me.

"So, that's settled. Naomi will handle the catering. That's all for now. We can go ahead and wrap this meeting up," Liam said.

To some, Liam calling me by my name was no big deal, but to me, it was deeper. Whenever Liam referred to me, it's always *my wife*. I promise you, Liam would use those two words to death. He didn't say that, and it just had me looking at him funny.

After the meeting was over, everyone started to spill out of the room. A few people stayed back and said a few things to Liam. Once I heard the door close, indicating that the last person had walked out, leaving just Liam and me, I stood up and walked over to him as he put some paperwork into a folder. It was a Saturday morning, a little after 11:00, so my husband was dressed down. Well, for Liam, he was dressed down because his attire was usually a suit and tie. He wore a

black long sleeved dress shirt, a pair of black slacks, and black Stacy Adams dress shoes. He'd gone to the barber yesterday afternoon, so he had a clean face, a nice lineup, and his waves were super nice this morning. Not sure how his feelings for me could just fade the way they had because when I looked at him, I still saw the man I fell in love with when I was just a kid.

“Why did you have to talk to me like that in front of everyone? You just gave everyone in this room a reason to have some gossip for the next few days. Even if you did feel that way, you could have pulled me to the side and said something to me in private. Instead, you chose to do it in front of everyone else and—”

“And embarrass you the same way that you sat there and embarrassed me for the past hour! Naomi, you're supposed to be my wife, the first lady of this church, and you sat there and didn't contribute any kind of feedback toward this picnic until literally the last two minutes. Your ability to physically be here but mentally be somewhere else is the reason I called you out the way I did. If there was someplace else you would have rather been, you could have excused yourself and left,” he spat at me.

I took a deep breath, ran my hand through my hair, and looked up at my husband.

“I'm getting ready to meet my mom and my sister for brunch. Can you join us, please? I asked you last night, and you never gave me an answer. Whenever there's some kind of dinner or something with my mom, only LJ and I show up. I'm running out of things to tell my mom about your absence,” I said.

Liam let out a sarcastic grunt as he picked up the folders that were on the table. “Tell her the truth, Naomi,” he said and headed toward the door.

I did a quick jog and got in front of him, blocking him from leaving. “What's the truth, Liam?” I inquired.

“You know the truth, Naomi. Excuse me. I have some things that I need to get handled. Also, when you come back

home today, I would like you to come back with my son and not drop him off with your sister or your mother. Having him spend the night with them every once in a while is fine, but the whole having your mom get LJ every weekend is a bit extreme, and it says a lot about your parenting skills,” he said and left.

This was the second time that Liam had made a comment regarding my son going with his grandmother. I hated that he made it seem like I was just dropping my son off with my mother any chance I got when that was the furthest thing from the truth. This church school started taking kids at the age of two. My baby boy was three, so he attended the same school where I taught. I was with my son from the moment he opened his eyes in the morning to the moment he closed them at night.

My baby was so spoiled that I would go into his classroom and rock him to sleep during my planning hour. School was over at 3:30, and I brought LJ to my classroom with me every day until about 5:00. He would stay with me while I went over lesson plans, graded classwork, etc. Then, when I got home, my second shift of mommy mode began. My husband was never there to help. My son probably went with my mom every other weekend, and whenever he went with her, it was because she asked. I never call her up and asked for a break. For him to imply that my parenting skills are slacking, it showed that he didn't respect any of the hard work, time, and effort that I put in with our son every single day.

I eventually left the meeting room to go down the hall to the nursery and get LJ. Sis. Greene, one of the older members of the church, was watching him for me while we were in the meeting. I adored Sis. Greene. She reminded me so much of a grandmother. She adored my son, and LJ was in love with her. There were windows outside the nursery that allowed parents to pull the curtains back and look inside, and I did just that. When I looked in, I saw Sis. Greene in the rocking chair with LJ in her lap. He had his arm protectively wrapped around her neck as he peacefully slept.

Smiling at the moment, I walked into the room, being quiet, so I wouldn't wake him up. Sis. Greene looked back at

me and smiled. She was a beautiful woman. Sis. Greene was in her late seventies, and she'd tell you with no hesitation that she was the oldest of ten children, so she had been watching kids since she was six years old. She had a love for kids, just as I did. I think all the kids loved her because they could see that her love was so pure.

I could look at her and tell she was a really beautiful lady when she was younger. She had salt and pepper gray hair that she had pulled up into a bun. On Sundays, sister Greene was easily the cleanest woman in the church. No woman rocked those church suits, dresses, and hats like her. She had style out of this world. She was a petite woman with beautiful dark brown skin and light brown eyes. Sis. Green had four children, who were all older than me, and she always had a story about each one of them.

Her husband, Bro. Greene, died four years ago. When he died, it broke every member of the church's heart because he was such a sweet, funny man. I knew Sis. Greene was strong for real when everyone was crying at his funeral, and she didn't shed a single tear. Instead, she gave a message to the church, telling us all that her husband was at peace now because he had battled with lupus for just about half his life.

I walked over to Sis. Greene and my son, feeling like I had the weight of the world on my shoulders. Slowly, I dropped to my knees and sat on the back of my legs as I let out a small sigh. Sis. Greene removed her hand from my son and put it on me, placing it on my back. I didn't mean to start crying, but when she began to hum, "Yes, Jesus loves me," I just had a moment. The tears started falling from my eyes, which I didn't bother to wipe away. I held my emotions so well. Even my own sister, who I told everything, didn't know that I was having problems in my marriage. For me to have a moment right in front of Sis. Greene, I had to be super vulnerable.

"1 Corinthians 7:15: But if the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases, the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace," Sis. Greene told me after five minutes of calming myself down.

She said that to me for a reason. A wise woman like Sis. Greene didn't even need me to tell her that I was dealing with marital issues. It was like she just knew. She kissed me on my cheek, looked me in my eyes, and told me to put it in God's hands, and she left it at that.

"You take this handsome baby with you and enjoy your weekend. You hear me, Naomi?" she said as I stood up from the floor.

She stood up as well and handed over LJ, who didn't even stir as I put him on my shoulder.

"I will, Sis. Greene. I'll see you tomorrow. I love you," I told her as I held LJ up with one arm and wrapped my other one around her.

She squeezed me and LJ and then let us go.

"I love you too, Naomi. Remember what I told you," she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

I walked out of the room and then out of the church without bothering to go into my husband's office to let him know I was leaving. Whenever I was around him, and he opened his mouth to speak to me, I felt like it was always something that would crush me. So, to save my pride and not let him ruin my mood even more as I headed to meet with my mom and sister, I just went ahead and left.

Almost fifteen minutes later, I pulled up to *Grand Lux*, running just a few minutes late. Normani had already texted me that she and my mom were inside. She relayed that they were seated toward the middle of the restaurant, which really didn't let me know a whole lot since the restaurant was so big. When I got inside, I would just scan the area and find them on my own.

My sister was now in better spirits after suffering the miscarriage. Because I could speak on this topic from experience, I knew it was something that she would never fully get over. She would always find herself saying things like, "My baby would have been two months today," and it

just sucked that those were the kinds of things that women had to go through. Normani was better, though, and that put me at ease because a month ago, I was super worried about her.

“French fries, Mommy,” LJ said as we walked into the restaurant.

He’d woken up about five minutes before I pulled the car into a parking spot. I laughed at him because every time we went to a restaurant, the only thing he wanted to eat was French fries.

“French fries and what, handsome?” I asked.

“French fries and ketchup,” he said.

I playfully tickled him before I put him down and held his hand in mine. As I scanned the restaurant, he cracked up laughing, and my eyes eventually landed on my sister, my mom, and Prosper. I let the hostess up front know that I was meeting my family, and the two of us walked to the table.

LJ saw his little cousin, Prosper, and he quickly let go of my hand and took off running. I made it to the table and hugged my mom and my sister. I kissed my niece too. They were sitting in a booth with Prosper in front of the table in her booster chair. Normani stood up, so I could squeeze inside and sit on the same side as her, while my mom sat on the other side with LJ. He was so obsessed with his grandmother that he had to sit right next to her.

“I thought Liam was coming,” my mom said, not even surprising me because I knew this would come from her.

“He said he had some things to take care of at the church. Did y’all order already? I’m starving,” I said.

I picked up a piece of bread from the middle of the table and put it on the small plate in front of me. After not really eating anything all week and just picking over food, it had finally caught up with me. I felt like I could eat a cow.

“Okay, Naomi, I’m going to stop beating around the bush, like I have been doing for the past couple of months, and just come right out and ask what is going on with you and Liam?”

Before you fix your mouth to lie to me, think about your answer,” my mom said.

She had a look on her face like she wasn't playing with me. My mom was a beautiful woman. I was the one who had a lot of her features because Normani was the spitting image of our father. She sat across from my sister and me with her long hair parted down the middle, wearing a light blue denim top along with some denim bottoms. Ever since she and my father divorced, she had been much happier. Now she looked much younger because she no longer had to carry the burden of stress from her marriage.

I turned to look at Normani, but she pretended to be so wrapped up in breaking off another piece of the bread for Prosper that she wouldn't make eye contact with me. She had called me yesterday morning and asked me to join her and Mommy for brunch. She knew this was going to be an interrogation. I thought about what I wanted to tell my mom. I mean, I didn't want to get too deep into detail with them, but I did want to reveal enough to get some advice or something.

“Mommy, I just don't even know. It's not the same anymore. Liam doesn't have to tell me that he isn't in love with me anymore because his actions already show it. I really think he woke up one day and just stopped loving me the way he used to. We don't sleep in the same bed anymore, and I can't get him to even take me down the street to *Dairy Queen* to have something as simple as an ice cream date. I can't remember the last time he told me he loved me, kissed me, told me that I was beautiful or anything. Don't even get me started on sex because I seriously can't remember the last time that happened either.

“I try to keep myself up. My hair is done, I keep my nails and toes done, I make sure I look nice when it comes to my clothes, but it still feels like he isn't seeing me. I just don't understand how he goes from loving me to just all of a sudden stopping,” I vented.

The whole time I spoke, I had my head down, and I was playing with my fingers. I was nervous about what my mom and sister would say. They didn't know any of this because I'd

kept it all to myself. I knew they wouldn't judge me because that's not how they were, but I also didn't want them to pity me because I didn't need that. I didn't need anyone feeling bad for me.

"Why did you think you couldn't come to us and say anything?" my mom asked.

The only answer I had for that question was a shrug of my shoulders.

"I'm going to have a talk with Liam tomorrow after church," she said.

I quickly raised my head and shook it. "Ma, I don't need you to talk to him for me regarding our marriage. I know that it will only make things worse. You're coming from a place of love and care for me, so you don't want to see anyone mistreating your daughter. But, Ma, seriously, allow us to work this out amongst ourselves. It was a lot for me to even break down and share this with you in the first place. Please, just leave it alone," I said, pretty much begging because I knew my mother. She was hardheaded.

My mother loved her children and wouldn't let anyone mistreat us or mishandle us, so I could see her wanting to have a word with Liam. But that wasn't what I wanted her to do in this situation. I felt like he would hate me more once I got my mother involved, and I didn't want that.

She glared at me across the table for a few seconds. It was like she was trying to pick over her words, and at the same time, being mindful of what she would say to me.

"Has he put his hands on you?" she asked.

When she asked me that, my sister swung her head around to look at me. Normani looked at me like if I said yes, she would leave Prosper with us, find Liam herself, and handle him on my behalf. Normani had always been much braver than I was. That came from my sister getting bullied when she was younger because of our dark skin and her tiny body. I'm not sure why kids thought it was cool to bully her because our father was a pastor, but hey, it happened. I got picked on too

for my dark skin and being a pastor's daughter, but it wasn't to the extent of Normani's bullying. She would come home crying, and my mom had to go to the school a few times.

"Mommy, no! No, he hasn't hit me. Our main problem right now is the neglect that I'm experiencing from him, but can we just pleaseeee change the subject? I didn't come down here to talk about Liam and me. I thought we were coming here to have girl time and enjoy the kids. You knew she was going to corner me with questions. That's why you were so desperate to get me out of the house today," I said to my sister, and she laughed.

After she finished laughing, Normani grew serious. "Seriously, though, Naomi, me and Mommy are here. If you need someone to talk to, you know you can call us any time. I'll answer the phone for you at any hour. You know that," she told me.

I nodded my head, indicating that I knew I could call them. I was glad when the waitress finally came over and started taking everyone's order. When she left, Prosper and LJ were playing with each other, and my mom had pulled out her phone. From the way her eyes were glued to the screen, whatever she was reading had her full attention. This was the perfect opportunity to ask Normani about Markell and using his catering services.

"We have the church picnic coming up, and we need someone to cater the event. Can you reach out to Markell for me? You and your husband talk about his food so much that I recommended this morning in the meeting that we use him. Well, that's if he's available," I said to my sister.

"I can have Billionaire ask him today. Let me show you his business page. Girl, the food is amazing, I'm telling you," Normani said as she went in her purse and pulled out her phone.

I watched as she unlocked her phone and went to a page called Glizzy Eats on Instagram. She handed me the phone, and the profile picture was of him with his business name on the shirt. I'll admit that I probably stared at that picture a little

bit longer than I should have, but I just couldn't get over how handsome he was. I could feel my sister's eyes on me, so to play it off, I started looking at the pictures of his food, which is what she had given me the phone for in the first place.

"How does he have over fifty thousand followers already?" I asked, unable to believe this.

"I guess it's because he was already well known in Miami before he went in. Plus, his food speaks for itself," Normani told me.

The food literally looked so mouthwatering. I hardly ate pork, though. I probably gave in to the temptation once or twice a year, but the ribs he showed on the video with that sauce being poured over them made me want it right now. Fried catfish, snapper, tilapia, collard greens, seafood rice, he was advertising so much food, and everything looked good. I went to a video of him in a kitchen with a net over his head because of his long hair. He was standing over a fryer, cooking some shrimp while wearing another one of his company shirts. He wore black adidas joggers that he was sagging just a little bit in, and the cameraman was cracking jokes, calling Markell a thug who cooks.

When Markell laughed, showing off those deep dimples with those beautiful, straight white teeth on top, and his gold teeth on the bottom, I nearly lost my mind.

I found myself gazing at him in the same way that I stared at him in my sister's backyard when I saw him for the first time. Clearly, I wasn't the only woman who felt that way because this video had over three thousand likes. Some people were in the comments, saying how good the shrimp looked, but there were way more women in the comments with heart eyes and other compliments for Markell to see.

I left the video and scrolled down, looking at more pictures and videos of food. Another photo came up of Markell, but this one was of him and Billionaire. Yes, everyone knew that Billionaire was handsome, and I mean that in the most respectful way since that is my sister's husband. My eyes weren't even on Billionaire, though. They were on Markell.

“Ima just go ahead and say it. This man is fine,” I blurted out, still looking at the picture.

My sister burst out laughing at my revelation.

“Yeah, you and every woman with a pair of eyes think that,” she told me.

“Does he have kids?” I asked out of curiosity.

“No. Naomi, girl, give me back my phone. Ima have Billionaire talk to him for you,” she said and took the phone from me.

I laughed at her just snatching the phone from me like that.

“Don’t have your husband give him my number. I’ll just communicate through y’all,” I said.

When I said that, my sister looked at me funny. “It’s business, Naomi. Why can’t you talk to him about needing his services?”

“Do you see him? Girl, I wouldn’t be able to think straight,” I told her.

She laughed at me, but I was for real.

“Naomi, watch yourself,” my mom jumped in, ending the fun.

Seriously, I just didn’t think I should be around Markell. He was too handsome, and when Billionaire introduced us, he had a way of piercing my soul with his eyes and trying to read through me. I just didn’t need that kind of energy in my life. That fine energy from a man wasn’t needed.

Chapter Five

TWINKLE HARRIS

“*W*hat you thinking about? I can see it in your eyes that something is going on inside that big ass head of yours,” I said to my big sister, Loyal, as I sat across from her at the table during my visit this morning.

Loyal laughed at my joke, but I could tell it was forced. She really wasn’t herself this morning. Usually, when I came to see Loyal, she would want the scoop on everything going on in the streets, but today, I felt like I was pulling teeth to get her to say anything.

I came alone today to see Loyal. Dream was with my mother. Lately, when I came to see Loyal, our conversations were deeper, dealing with her case. That was a conversation that neither she nor I wanted Dream around to hear. I was trying to bring my fuckin’ sister home. When Loyal was sentenced, the judge made it clear that she had to serve one third of her time in order to be eligible for parole. That time was coming up in about six more months.

My husband had found a really good lawyer by the name of Ariel. He talked a good talk, and his ass was expensive as fuck, but he had hope that he could bring my sister home to her family when it was time for her to go up for parole. I never brought up my sister being eligible for parole because that was

how I protected my feelings. It was the way I kept myself guarded and avoided being let down if Loyal went before a judge to convince them that she'd learned her lesson and should come home, and they didn't side with her. Then, she would have to complete her entire sentence.

Shit, my sister went in for some hefty ass charges, fraud being one of the biggest. I knew they didn't tend to sympathize with offenders because all they could see was that my sister was taking money from innocent people. I knew Loyal had changed. I wasn't just saying that because she was my sister, either. She wasn't the same Loyal that she was when she went in almost three years ago. This experience had definitely scared the shit out of her. She lost someone who meant the most to her in all of this, and that was her baby girl, Dream.

"I can't even lie to you, Twinkle. I'm scared as fuck. You know it's a possibility that this shit won't work in our favor. That's like the main reason why I don't want to tell Dream about none of this shit. I can't get my baby's hopes up and have her thinking that Mommy is coming home, only for them to tell me that I gotta finish this shit out. A part of me is scared to even entertain this shit because I can't say what Ima do if I gotta go the next seven years and change like this, being away from my baby," Loyal told me.

A lone tear fell from her eyes that she quickly wiped away. Loyal was so beautiful. I swear, I'm not trying to be funny, but I didn't know what was in this prison water that had her looking so youthful. My sister would be thirty this year, but she didn't look a day over twenty-one. Loyal had the same caramel skin tone as me, and you would really think that she was in prison using natural soaps and shit because her skin was flawless. There wasn't a bump or a zit in sight. We shared the same light brown eyes, and at this point, Loyal's hair was past the middle of her back, and she had it up in a ponytail. My sister was collard greens and cornbread thick. I mean, even in those prison sweatpants and shirt, her body looked like a Coca-Cola bottle.

“Loyal, how many times did I tell you that you need to stop thinking negative like that? When you get before that judge and everyone else that you’ll have to convince that you’ve changed, you just need to tell them the truth. Tell them how you got into the lifestyle that you were in. You and I both know that Chase played a big part in you being wrapped up in this fraud shit and that you took the rap for him. Tell them about your beautiful daughter that you have at home, who you want to raise. I think we have a shot at this, and damn, a bitch will feel a little better if you start thinking that too,” I said and playfully rolled my eyes.

That got her to smile, showing off her pretty teeth. “I hear you, Twink. So, what’s been going on? How’s married life treating you? I still can’t get over how fuckin’ beautiful that wedding was. When we had TV time, I had them put on the news, and they showed pieces of the wedding. You were beautiful. Everything was so beautiful,” my sister told me.

I smiled as I thought back to my wedding day and how it felt like something straight out of a romantic movie. Then, I just couldn’t get over how beautiful Belize was for our honeymoon. We were gone for two weeks, and it was the best two weeks of my life. I promised my husband that we could create a child on our honeymoon, but a part of me just wanted to enjoy our first year of marriage, and then we could enjoy having more children. On top of that, the season had started. If I was pregnant right now, a good portion of my pregnancy would be spent on the road with Truth because I didn’t like to miss his games, and I just didn’t think the timing was right. Luckily, I had a man who understood and wasn’t going to force me to have his children, so we were good when it came to that.

“Married life is amazing, Loyal. So amazing. I don’t want to jinx myself by saying this, but you know how they say that the first year of marriage is usually the hardest? Girl, it hasn’t been that way for us. It still feels like the damn honeymoon. I can’t wait for you to come home, and you and Truth be reunited. Y’all used to love each other. He swears you’re his sister. Before I drove down here this morning, he was like,

‘tell my sister that Ima put some money on her books today,’”
I told Loyal, and we both laughed.

Loyal and Truth have always had a good relationship. My husband was just as ready for her to come home as everyone else.

We had about ten minutes left in visitation, and we used that time to take a picture together because we really didn’t have any recent photos. I would add this picture to my stash of photos that I had been saving for the past two years and some change. The hardest part about visitation would always be when I had to hug my sister goodbye until next time. It was just a fucked up feeling to know that I would go back into the real world, surrounded by love, family, and friends, while my sister would have to line up against the wall with the rest of the inmates and be ushered back to a cell.

I had hope that this would all end soon. So much so that I had already bought my sister a brand-new Mercedes G-Wagon that I was having wrapped in her favorite color, lavender. The G-Wagon was my sister’s dream car, and it would make her day to come home to one of her very own. Billionaire and I were working on something too, as far as getting my sister set up in a nice house, so she and Dream could have a place of their own. My sister had to come home, man. She just had to.

8:45 P.M.

After visiting my sister, I went to the house in Miami that Truth and I owned after running some errands. Around six this evening, I told myself that I was just going to take a quick nap, and looking at the clock on the wall in the living room, I saw that I'd slept a little over two hours. I had the throw blanket wrapped around my body, and Truth was sitting on the couch right in front of me with the controller in his hands, playing the game. When I moved, he turned around, looked at me, and laughed.

“Talked all that shit about you was going out tonight with your girls, and look where the fuck you at,” he said, making me laugh.

Truth and I were leaving in two days, and I needed to get some time in with Normani. We got to Miami the day before yesterday, and I went to the house to see her and my cousin, but I was only there for about thirty minutes. I knew about Normani suffering a miscarriage and how hard things had been for both of them. That right there was like a bullet to the chest because I personally knew how excited Normani was about the baby's arrival. What's so crazy is that just the night before, she and I had been on the phone for at least two hours, coming up with names. Billionaire was in the background, talking shit and not liking any of the names we came up with. I was just glad she was in better spirits and not as down as she had been a month ago.

“Hush. I'm about to call Normani now and see if she wants to go out,” I said and playfully mused him with my leg.

“Shit, did her parole officer Billion clear that? You know that nigga ain't about to let her out the house. To us, it ain't that late, but to that nigga, it's well after two in the morning,” Truth told me.

I cracked up laughing because I already knew that Billion would give me a hard time about getting Normani out of the

house to hang with me. His ass was so fuckin' obsessed and wanted to hog her up all to himself.

I picked my phone up from the small end table that wasn't too far from me and Facetimed Normani. She answered the phone on the last ring, and when her face popped up on the screen, she was smiling. My girl looked totally relaxed. From the way the blanket was wrapped around her, I could tell that she was naked and using the blanket to cover herself.

"Why every time I call you, you look like you just finished having sex?" I asked.

She laughed and then used her free hand to smooth down her hair because her messy curls were all over her head.

"Hmmm. That's because I did. I'm in love with your cousin. Thank you for introducing us," she told me.

I shook my head and faked like I was gagging as I listened to Normani talk about Billion.

"What you doing tonight?" I asked.

"Shit. She ain't doing shit, so don't go trying to plan something. These single women hours. Both of y'all married, so y'all don't need to be going nowhere." I could hear my cousin's deep voice in the background, but I couldn't see him.

Truth started laughing, and so did I.

"What I told you?" Truth said as he continued playing the game.

"Billion, hush! I'm talking to Normani, not you! Get up and get dressed. I want to go out tonight before I leave," I said to Normani.

"Where we going? I swear I don't even mind. I been in the house all day. These kids drove me crazy today," she said.

"Let's go to a club. Preferably one on the beach," I replied.

"Bruh, sit y'all ass the fuck down somewhere. Normani, yo' ass don't even like going to the clubs. See how you do a nigga? I thought we was supposed to lay up, watch movies and shit together tonight? You so fuckin' flaw," I heard him say.

Normani and I both laughed because his ass was really doing the most.

“Baby, you know I don’t get to spend time with Twinkle. It feels like I see her once every couple of months. Don’t make me feel bad about going out,” she told him.

“What club y’all trying to go to?” Billion asked.

I could see his face in the camera now. He came behind the couch, putting his face in the crook of Normani’s neck, so I could see them both.

“Story. It’s always a vibe there,” I responded.

“Aight. Ima call there and see if I can get y’all a section. Where my nigga Truth at?” Billion asked.

“I’m right here. What’s good, bruh?” Truth said, turning around so he could put his face in the camera.

He and Billionaire talked for a few minutes, and then Normani was back on the screen after Truth handed me my phone back. This time, she had a shirt on, and I could tell that she was walking up the stairs.

“I’m going to call Askiya and tell her to come too. I’m also about to do everything to drag Naomi’s ass out. Her husband is out of town because he’s supposed to be preaching at a church tomorrow in North Carolina, and Naomi is sleeping at our mother’s house. Girl, if anybody needs to get out of the house and have a girl’s night out, it’s my sister,” Normani told me.

“You know damn well Naomi not about to come with us to a club,” I said.

She snickered and then smiled at me. “I know she not. That’s why Ima lie and say we’re just going out to eat.”

I stayed on the phone with Normani for about ten minutes more, and when we hung up, I did a happy dance, knowing that I was about to get out and have some fun with the girls. Back in L.A., Mia was the only friend I had. I just couldn’t get into the rest of the basketball girlfriends and wives. Them bitches were just too fuckin’ bougie for me. Mia and I didn’t even spend as much time with each other as we used to

because she was wrapped up in her own life, and I had my own things going on. Don't get me wrong, we would talk on the phone just about every day, but we just weren't spending as much time as we used to.

I loved my husband to death, but he and Dream were the two people that I was around pretty much all the time. I wanted to be around some women tonight who I could relate to and just catch a nice ass vibe.

Chapter Six

MARKELL 'GLIZZY' WEST

“*A*ww, shit, nigga. There go your girl. She got that look in her eyes like she about to come over here and start some shit,” my big cousin Saint said to me.

We were at Club Story, and this shit was a nice little vibe tonight. I was surrounded by about twenty niggas, all of whom were strapped just in case some shit went down in this club tonight. After a long, successful week at work, I needed this vibe. This fat ass joint that I held in one hand and my plastic cup with a double shot of Hennessy that I had in the other were definitely well needed.

Glizzy Eats was taking off faster than I expected. My homies liked to clown a nigga and say that my business was taking off so fast because a lot of these bitches just wanted to suck my dick, so of course they were going to buy anything I was selling. That shit was true, but nobody could deny that my food tasted damn good.

I had a team that worked with me. The business was really small right now, but it was still enough for us to get the job done and for the customer service to be up to par. So far, we hadn't gotten anything but complimentary reviews. This week, we catered food to two businesses, and those jobs were the biggest the company has ever had since we opened. After

Billion showed me different buildings to run my business from, I finally found the one I wanted, put the money down, and Billion had his contractors jump on that shit quick. They were already constructing it the way I wanted.

I had been working hard since I'd been home from prison, and surprisingly, this was only my fourth time in the club since I'd been home. Business was taking up all my time, so I didn't have time to come to the club and stare at ass and titties all day.

"I should tell the security not to even let her ass in the section, but that's gon' only have her showing her ass, and a nigga ain't got time for all that shit right now," I told Saint as I stared down, watching Quinn walk up to the security guard who stood at the velvet rope to our section. She came with three of her homegirls in tow, looking like they were ready to jump a nigga.

I couldn't even lie; Quinn put the fuckin' B in bad! She was so motha fuckin' pretty, but she was the only bitch who could push a nigga to the point where I could see myself going back to prison. So, to avoid that shit, I left her the fuck alone, with her good pussy, toxic ass! I said before that I was a sucker for a chocolate woman, and Quinn was just that. She had beautiful chocolate skin and a body that was fuckin' sick. Her body reminded me of Asia, but Quinn's shit was natural. Trust me, it was natural. That ass jiggled too fuckin' much on my dick when I was fuckin' her from the back for it to have been store bought.

She stood up tall, like a stallion, with that slim waist, wide hips, big ass booty, and big, juicy ass lips. Tonight, she wore her hair in a long braided ponytail that went all the way down to her ass. It swayed with each step she took to make her way over to me. She was wearing some tight-ass leather pants that had holes starting from her hips and going all the way down to her ankles. A matching cropped shirt showed off her belly button ring. I just couldn't believe that a woman so fuckin' fine came with that much shit. I ain't trust Quinn no more, and that's why I stayed the fuck from around her these days.

“Glizzy, you want them coming up in here or no?” security asked.

“Just her, man. I don’t need all them bitches in my fuckin’ face,” I said.

“Nigga, don’t be calling me no bitch,” one of Quinn’s home girls screamed at me over the loud music.

They were literally right in front of us, and the only thing separating us was the velvet rope, so we could hear each other clearly. I laughed it off, not even saying anything back. I ain’t mean to call them bitches. That shit kind of just slipped out. Quinn walking over and me being able to see the energy that she was coming with just kind of had a nigga guarded.

The security let her through, and she walked over and got right in my face. Against my will, I inhaled the sweet scent of her perfume. Her ass always smelled good. I couldn’t even front and act like she didn’t. She had her black Chanel purse on her shoulder, and she stood in my face, looking like she wanted to slap the fuck out of me.

“You one dirty ass nigga, Glizzy,” she told me.

I took a pull from my blunt as I looked at some fine shit across the club. Four women walked into a section, but my eyes were on the one who looked like she didn’t belong. The one who looked like the ladies had dragged her out of the house tonight to come to the club. That was Normani’s sister, Naomi. I could spot them long legs and that perfect model body anywhere. They were in a section on the other side of the club, but my eyes worked, and I could see them clearly. Naomi sat down with her back facing me, so I couldn’t see her anymore. My eyes left their section and landed back on Quinn.

“If I’m such a dirty ass nigga, why you over here then? Go on back over there with your homegirls. A nigga not on that shit tonight. I’m chilling,” I told her.

“I just don’t fuckin’ understand you, Glizzy. You left for prison right when shit was getting serious with us, and we were finally going to put a title on what we were doing. I was willing to hold you down and wait eight years for you to do

your time, but you didn't want me to. You wanted me to live my life, but you told me that we could start back right where we left off if you came home and I was single. You only fucked me once since you've been home. You got me hunting you the fuck down like I'm one of these thirty ass bitches out here that's desperate just to get a little bit of your time. I don't like that shit—”

“And, shorty, I don't like you standing in the middle of the club, trying to check a nigga like you my bitch. I just spent the past eight years of my fuckin' life locked up like a motha fuckin' animal, yo. I'm trying to get my business off the ground, live a stress-free life, and just chill. I ain't trying to be in no relationship right now. Stop playing like you fuckin' stupid and don't know the real reason why I don't want to be with you! You got too much attitude for a nigga too. Ima been done broke your fuckin' neck. Please, go with your girls. I ain't trying to cause a scene in this bitch,” I said.

“Fuck you, Glizzy. You should have stayed your black ass in prison, nigga,” she told me.

I laughed, looking straight ahead because I saw Naomi stand up. She only stood up to switch her seat, and from that angle, I could see her side profile.

“You don't mean that, beautiful. I was in that pussy two weeks ago, and you nuttied on my dick twice in a matter of four minutes. You even told me that no other nigga ever gave you that much pleasure. You don't mean that shit. You just mad right now,” I retorted, not even letting her ass faze me.

There wasn't shit else for her to say after that. All she could do was nastily roll her eyes at me, and then she left.

“Her ass is fuckin' crazy. She's too fine to be crazy like that,” Saint commented.

“Shit, the fine bitches are the ones that be having a few screws loose,” I told him.

He agreed with me, and I just stood there with my arms crossed, looking at Naomi from across the club. My blunt and my drink were finished, so I found myself being a creep and

watching her. She looked pissed, and Normani was trying to tell her something, but she wasn't even paying her ass any attention.

"I know that's Normani, Twinkle, and Askiya. Who's the fourth one?" Saint asked.

"Naomi. That's Normani's older sister," I told him.

"I ain't even know her ass had a sister."

"She don't come out much. At least that's what Billion talking about."

"She's pretty. She don't look like your type, though."

I laughed and smirked at my cousin. "And what's my type, nigga?" I asked, just curious to know.

"Shit, that toxic, thick ass stallion who just left from over here," Saint told me, and then he took a seat.

I didn't respond to him. Hell, I loved all kinds of women, but Ima be honest and say that I love a ghetto bitch. I loved a woman who broke off her hot sausage, put it in her hot Cheetos, and ate it like that. That was straight Miami shit right there. I loved a woman who smoked a little weed, too. I ain't want a whole pothead out here, but I didn't mind hitting the blunt with a female that I was chilling with. Pretty and ghetto fabulous were usually the kind of women I went after. That's the case, but then a nigga gets mad when they start up that toxic shit, like what Quinn just came over and did. Naomi was farrrrrr different from any woman that I've ever dealt with in my life, but damn, her ass was beautiful.

A week ago, Billion hit me up on behalf of Naomi and asked me if I could cater an event at her church. I tried to be so slick, and I did every fuckin' thing in my power to get him to give me her number, but that nigga wasn't handing that shit out. Naomi and Normani had to have told him not to give me her number because Billion was my brother, and he was going to always look out, no matter what. I was able to do the event, though, and I had it marked in my calendar for next month.

I stopped looking at Naomi because I needed to go to the restroom and take a piss. After that, I would speak to the

ladies, and then I was out because I had to cater a birthday party tomorrow afternoon. I needed to be up by five in the morning to get started on the food, so I couldn't be at the club all night.

I swear it felt like I was walking for a good five minutes before I finally made it to the restroom. I went inside, handled my business, washed my hands at the sink, and then walked out. The second I came out, I heard a deep, male voice, and it sounded familiar.

“Damn, all a nigga asked you for was yo’ motha fuckin’ name! You ain’t have to ignore a nigga like that. That’s the problem with you hoes now. Y’all think y’all so much fuckin’ better than a nigga.”

The nigga’s name was Jalen. I wasn’t cool with the nigga like that, but I knew who he was. They say that nigga was a pimp, and he was known for slapping a bitch down. I didn’t think the nigga was running no prostitution ring or no shit like that, but he did have a lot of bitches, and they looked at that nigga like he was God. There was a viral picture of his ass online that showed him walking through the mall with a bitch on a leash like a fuckin’ dog. Nigga was just too fuckin’ disrespectful when it came to the way he treated women. The women are fuckin’ dumb, and they lacked self-esteem because they allowed his ass to treat them like that.

He was holding Naomi by her arm, and she was screaming for him to let her arm go. About five of his niggas just stood by, laughing as this grown ass man fucked with a woman. Shit was crazy because it made me think shit like, didn’t these niggas have daughters? Sisters? A fuckin’ mama? I bet if a nigga did some shit like this to they people, it wouldn’t have been cool then.

“Fuck is you doing, nigga? Let her the fuck go,” I said to Jalen once I was close enough.

“My bad, Glizzy. This you?” he asked as he let Naomi’s arm go.

Naomi looked like she was on the verge of tears. So naturally, I stepped in to protect her. I grabbed her and put her

behind me.

“Nah, this ain’t me, but you trippin. You don’t grab on no fuckin’ woman like that,” I told him.

“You sound like you want this to be you. What the fuck you so invested in her for, nigga? Ain’t I seen Quinn walking around this bitch? Worry about that one. All these fuckin’ hoes you got, and you worrying about the one I’m trying to get with,” he spat.

“Where you was going, shorty?” I turned around and asked Naomi.

“To the restroom,” she told me, voice shaking as she spoke.

“Gone head to the restroom. Ima wait out here for you,” I said.

She hesitated for a second, but I pretty much gave her a look with my eyes, telling her to just go ahead. As she walked off, I stared at her the whole time, not taking my eyes off her until I saw the bathroom door close.

“All y’all some lame ass niggas. The fuck kind of niggas is y’all? Gon’ just fuckin’ stand there while he tugging on a fuckin’ woman. Lame ass niggas,” I said and turned to walk away, so I could be waiting outside the bathroom door once Naomi came out.

“Glizzy, I got respect for you, my man, but watch yo’ motha fuckin’ mouth, nigga. You done experienced what it feels like to be put in a jail cell. Don’t let me put yo’ ass in a motha fuckin’ grave!” Jalen threatened.

“Fuck you, nigga! Don’t threaten me, motha fucka. That tough boy shit might scare these hoes out here, but that shit don’t scare me,” I let him know.

“It damn sure scared that bougie hoe right there—”

“Pow!”

I pulled my pants up and knocked his ass right in his fuckin’ mouth. He stumbled back, falling on his ass. That gave me the perfect opportunity to put my foot on his chest, pull my

strap out, and put it on his niggas because they made a move like they were about to touch me. But, seeing my gun, they backed their asses up. I felt a hand on my arm, and when I looked at the 305 tattoo on the person's fingers, I knew it was Saint.

"Come on. Don't do this shit here. You just got home, nigga. You don't need to go back," Saint told me.

I applied a bit more pressure on his chest with my foot, and then I eventually moved it. A few niggas were standing around, and they were all looking at Jalen, down on his ass. That nigga was so used to disrespecting bitches and having bitches scared of him that he didn't know when he was in the presence of a grown ass man and someone who would knock his ass clean the fuck out.

"I'll see you around, Glizzy," he told me.

"Get the fuck on, nigga. You and the rest of these fuckin' clowns. Tight ass fuckin' pants on. Dick ain't got no room to motha fuckin' breathe," I snapped because all those niggas were wearing tight ass jeans.

They left, and I put my strap back in my jeans. Me and my crew were cool with the bouncers at the door, which was the only reason we were able to get in the club packing. Of course, that shit came with having to cut a check, though.

"Fuck was that about?" Saint asked.

"Them niggas just too disrespectful. Gone 'head back. I'm waiting on somebody to come out the restroom, and then Ima dip," I told him.

Saint looked at me for a few seconds, and I could tell he was a little skeptical, but he shook it up with me and then dipped. I ain't really go into detail with him about the shit because a nigga like Jalen just wasn't worth all that shit. That motha fucka wasn't used to a nigga calling him out and telling him when he was moving wrong, so the fact that I had done that, he didn't know how to handle it. I wasn't worried about him and them weak ass niggas coming back and trying to

retaliate. If they did, it was whatever because they knew where to find me. Shit, I wouldn't be hiding.

I waited outside the bathroom for about two minutes before Naomi finally came out. She scanned the area a little bit, looking for me. Instead of walking over to me, she just stood there. I was posted up with my back against the other wall, but I removed myself and went over to her. This was only my second time being around Naomi, and she looked just as beautiful as she did the first time I saw her. She was in a spaghetti-strapped jumpsuit, and it wasn't too tight, but it wasn't too loose either. There were heels on her feet that had her standing up a little taller, making her already long legs more noticeable.

She carried a clutch under her arm, and her long, thick, curly hair was slicked back into a neat ponytail with those pretty ass baby hairs on her forehead. I checked out everything on her, from her nails to her earrings, and everything looked good. I wasn't too familiar with the scent she was wearing, but it was sweet and bold. It was fitting for her.

“You straight?” was the first thing I could think of to ask.

“Yeah, I'm fine. Thank you for helping me out,” she said, looking me in my eyes.

“You ain't gotta thank me for that. That nigga was wrong, and I just did what any real man is supposed to do,” I said.

She nodded and let out a sigh.

“Let me just get back over to where my sister and my friends are because I'm sure they're looking for me. They had all gone to the dance floor, and I was supposed to sit in the section. I promised them that I wouldn't walk off by myself and look what happened. Ugh. I'm just so annoyed and ready to go. I never even wanted to come here in the first place. I was under the impression that we were going out to dinner,” she vented.

It was no denying the annoyance that she had written all over her beautiful ass face.

“Come on, then. I’ll take you back to your girls,” I said and beckoned with my hand for her to go in front of me.

Not even trying to be slick or anything like that, but as we walked through the thick crowd of people, I found myself putting my hand on the small of her back. I really only did that to keep her in front of me.

We finally approached their section. When we walked up, Normani popped up out of nowhere and jumped in front of Naomi.

“Girl, where the hell were you? We done walked this club about two times, looking for your ass. We told you not to go anywhere by yourself. Are you okay?” Normani asked.

At the same time, Askiya and Twinkle walked up. The looks of relief on their faces let me know that they had been looking for her and were just glad that she had been found.

“I had to go to the bathroom. I didn’t think anything of it. Look, are y’all ready to go or what? If not, I can just take an Uber back to the house because this isn’t my vibe, Normani, and you know that. I thought we were going out to dinner,” Naomi said to her sister.

No lie, I felt awkward as fuck standing there. I probably should have walked away, but deep down, I just wanted to make sure Naomi was straight.

“Naomi, we just got hereee. At least give it thirty more minutes,” Twinkle’s ass pleaded.

“Look, I was about to dip up out of here myself. I can drop her off at the crib,” I voiced.

All four women looked at me, necks swinging and shit.

“Ummm, no. My sister is not getting in the car with you. I heard you telling Billionaire about all your little hoes. I don’t need you walking out of here with my sister, and one of your little flings gets the wrong impression and tries to put hands on her. Not happening,” Normani said.

She was a little firecracker, man. I laughed while pulling down on my beard.

“Yo’ sister going to be good with me, Normani. If she ain’t, I give all y’all the green light to beat my ass. She said she didn’t even want to come to this fuckin’ club anyway, so Ima just drop her at home. Naomi, you grown, shorty. You want to stay here, or you want me to drop you off at the crib? Either way, I’m ’bout to dip. I just want to make sure you straight,” I said, removing my focus from Normani and looking down at Naomi.

I assumed they all rode with Twinkle from the way the conversation had gone. Naomi gave it a little thought, and then she released a sigh.

“You can drop me back off at my mother’s house. Normani, I will text you when I get there,” she said.

“Be careful with my sister, Glizzy. I’m not playing with you,” Normani told me.

I reached in to give her a hug and let her know that her sister was in good hands, and then I went around to hug Twinkle and Askiya. I didn’t know Askiya personally, but I knew that Huncho was her husband, and I was cool with that nigga. She got with Huncho while I was locked up, but Billion kept me up to date on pretty much everything and everybody. In a way, it felt like I knew Askiya. I didn’t formally meet her until my welcome home party at Billion’s crib, and she was cool.

I let Naomi lead the way out of the club, and just like the last time, I walked behind her. It was a little bit after one in the morning, and no one was really standing outside the club anymore because, at this point, everyone was inside. Naomi walked next to me in silence as we went to my matte olive green Dodge Charger. The only sound was of her heels clicking as they hit the pavement with each step she took.

On my gentleman shit, I opened the door and let her get inside, and then I closed the door behind her and went on my side. I opened the door, pulled my gun out, and when I sat down, I put it in the cupholder. As I closed the door behind me, I could feel her eyes on me. I turned to look at her, and she was piercing a nigga’s soul.

“What?” I asked.

“I think I’ll go back inside and just leave with them,” she told me, already taking her seatbelt off, ready to leave.

“For what?”

“For one, your car reeks of weed. If we get pulled over, we’ll both go to jail. As desperate as I am to get home to my son, I don’t want to do it under these circumstances. Secondly, you have guns in your car—”

“I got a gun in my car, shorty. Ain’t shit gon’ happen to you. Why you so scary?” I questioned.

Being slick, I started the car and quickly backed out because I ain’t want to give her any room to leave. That really seemed like some psychopathic shit, but damn, I ain’t mind taking her home. I wasn’t used to being around a woman who would trip over the weed smell and seeing my strap in the car. I don’t know why, but many women are turned on by that shit. I had to remember that Naomi was not a lot of women, though.

“Having a brain and using it makes me scary? Going with my gut makes me scary?” she questioned as I pulled out of the club parking lot and shot out into the main road.

“What’s your gut telling you?” I asked while driving with one hand and keeping my eyes on the road.

“That I should have stayed inside the club with my sister and my friends,” she told me.

“Why you staying at yo’ mama house and you married?” I inquired, getting right to the point.

I was never the kind of man to beat around the bush. Shit, if I wanted to know something, I was going to ask. I’ve always been blunt like that.

“Umm, excuse you!” she snapped.

I laughed as I pulled up to a red light and turned to look at her. She was so fuckin’ uptight. I could tell by the way she was sitting up straight, with her clutch in her lap, looking like she was scared for her fuckin’ life, that she was on edge like a motha fucka.

“What? I’m not supposed to ask you questions like that?” I asked and stepped on the gas because the light had turned green.

“Not when you don’t know someone like that. That’s personal,” she informed me.

“You don’t know me like that, and you’re in the car with me,” I pointed out.

“Yeah, well, my sister knows you, and I was desperate to get out of that club,” she announced.

“You still didn’t answer my question, though.”

“And I don’t plan to. It’s none of your business.”

“So, why you had to go through your sister and Billion to reach out to me for handling business? You know you could have reached out to me on your own. You can’t talk to another nigga when you married? Like, not even on some business type shit?” I asked. Shit, I didn’t know. I wasn’t married, so I was curious.

“I just felt like it would have been much easier to have my sister and my brother-in-law reach out to you since they are the ones who know you. You can jump on the highway right here. This way is faster. I’m going to roll the window down. I’m not trying to offend you, but I hate the smell of weed, and it’s strong in here,” she told me before letting the window down.

I laughed because she was so different from any female that I had dealt with. If another female had gotten in my car and smelled that loud, they would have asked a nigga where the weed was because they wanted to smoke too.

“You ain’t offending me with that. Everybody got their preference. How long them niggas was fuckin’ with you before I walked up?” I asked.

We were now on the highway, and I was going about eighty. I usually drove faster, but I could see how tightly she was holding onto the door handle, so I knew her ass was scared. I didn’t want to open up the engine on this car and scare the fuck out of her even more.

“Not long. Normani had already warned me about how aggressive men could be at the club, which is why she told me not to walk off and go anywhere by myself in the first place. I just thought she was overreacting a little bit, but I guess not. Do you know him?” she questioned me.

“I know of him. He’s like a pimp. He be having bitches trick for him.”

“Wow. Well, thank you again for helping me out,” she said.

I nodded because it was nothing. If I had walked by and saw him pulling on any woman like that, I would have stopped the situation. Women went through enough shit from these niggas, so they didn’t deserve to be manhandled and shit in the middle of the damn club.

“Billion told me that you’re a teacher,” I said, just trying to make small conversation because her ass wasn’t talking about shit.

I was so used to being around a female and not being able to get their ass to shut the fuck up, but damn, I couldn’t get Naomi to say shit. Shit was lowkey a little hard because I never had to put in this kind of effort and do this much digging. Women would be around me and, just right off the bat, start volunteering information.

“Yeah, I teach third graders,” she told me.

“I ain’t even trying to be weird, but shit, I don’t remember the teachers looking shit like you when I was in school. I always had old ass teachers who acted like they hated they fucked job,” I said.

I was driving, but I looked over at her when I said that to see her reaction. Naomi fought like a motha fucka to keep her smile in. She really was going to make a nigga work.

“When is your restaurant supposed to be finished?” she asked, shocking me. She was now asking me a question, and I wasn’t pulling teeth to get her to talk.

“Two months at the latest. You know Billion is into the whole flipping houses and pretty much any kind of building

thing. He showed me this business that went into foreclosure a few months ago, and I was able to get it at a good price. It had some water damage and somewhat of a mold problem, but that's been fixed already. So now the contractors are fixing it up and shit. You tried some of my food before? Like from your sister or something?" I asked.

"No, but she speaks highly of it."

That made me feel good. Shit always made me feel good when someone complimented my cooking skills.

"You can take this exit right here," she said and pointed to the exit.

I got off, and Naomi directed me for the next five minutes until we pulled up to some nice ass townhomes. She handed me her keys, which had a fob on it that I needed to scan in order for us to get inside. About a minute later, she had me pull up to a townhouse, and I pulled my car behind one that was parked in the driveway.

I assumed that the moment I parked the car, she would quickly get out, close the door behind her, and run off on a nigga, but she didn't even move. She removed her seatbelt, looked straight ahead, and folded her arms across her chest. When she sighed, I knew she had a lot of shit on her mind. I wouldn't ask, though, because she had already made it seem like I was being nosy and all up in her fuckin' business when genuinely, I just wanted to know the deal with her. I felt like I didn't know much.

"He's in North Carolina for the weekend. He's preaching at a church tomorrow morning. My marriage hasn't exactly been anything out of a fairytale movie lately, so I decided to stay here with my mom and my son," she announced.

I turned to look at her, but she was still looking ahead, not matching my glare.

"How long y'all been together?" I asked.

"Since second grade," she said and then released a hurt laugh. "It feels like we've been together since second grade because that's how long I've known him and loved him. We

really didn't get serious until high school, though, when we were a little older and could somewhat understand how the whole relationship thing works. I hate to get anyone wrapped up in my business, especially my marriage, because it's so personal to me. But you're a guy, and I feel like I could use a male perspective to help me figure out what I'm going through. Have you ever been in love?" she asked.

"Hell naw."

That got her to stop looking ahead and look at me. When she did, she rolled her eyes. She had gray eyes, and that shit was so fuckin' pretty to me. It was sexy too. You didn't see a dark-skinned woman every day with those color eyes, so this was something that made her stand out from the rest.

"Then, never mind. You can't relate to what I'm about to say," she told me.

"Shit, you never know. Try me."

"Can you just wake up one day and fall out of love with your spouse?"

"If she suck another nigga's dick and gives my pussy away, shit, then yeah."

She rolled her eyes at me again, but shit, I was being real.

"I know the way I'm saying it may come off as vulgar to you. But that just basically means that if my woman ever stepped out on me and proved to me that she can't be loyal to a nigga, then yeah, that's enough to make me fall out of love. The thing with me is, I ain't ever been in love before. The only woman I ever loved was my mama, so if I do fall in love one day, I feel like it'll take a lot to make me fall out of it. You feel like your husband is not in love with you no more?" I asked.

"I know he isn't in love with me anymore. I can feel it," she voiced.

"That nigga gotta be fuckin' gay," I mumbled.

I ain't want to tell her how I really felt because she probably would think that a nigga was just trying to spit game, so I kept my thoughts to myself. Truth is, Naomi was beautiful

as fuck, and for a man to treat her any less than what her ass deserved, that nigga was either gay, or he was fuckin' around. She said it felt like the nigga just woke up one day and wasn't in love with her anymore. I wasn't no love doctor or no shit like that, but best believe that nigga was finding comfort in the next woman.

I have never been in no serious shit before with a woman, but I can say that I'll be entertaining a female, and when something new comes along, I entertain that a little more than the previous woman, and it just becomes a cycle. That had to be what that nigga was doing, but from how Naomi was talking, I could tell that she was genuinely hurt. I ain't want to drop that bomb on her, so I didn't say it.

“Hmmm, I doubt it. I heard my husband speak about gays and lesbians, and his perception of them is very ignorant. I feel like people should be able to live their lives and do whatever makes them happy,” she said.

I nodded my head in agreement with her. I never talked bad on gay men, lesbian women, none of that shit. As long as a nigga didn't try that shit with me, touch me, or none of that shit, I didn't give a damn. Live yo' fuckin' life is the way I saw it.

“Thank you for driving me home and listening to all my drama,” she said as she put her hand on the door to get out of the car.

I kept the car running, but I did get out with her and walk over to her side to close the door behind her. I followed her out of the driveway and up the two steps that led to the porch.

“You're worth way more than you're allowing that nigga to treat you. Never settle for less. I don't want to get all in your business, but shorty, you're settling. Your nigga in a whole other city right now. It ain't no excuse why I should be dropping you off to yo' mama's house at two in the morning when you got this shit on yo' finger,” I said and lifted her left hand for a second to emphasize her ring.

“Take care. If you ain't happy, leave that nigga,” I said and then backed up a little bit as she let herself into the house.

Before she went inside, she looked at me for a few seconds, more than likely thinking about what I had just said to her. She thanked me one more time for the ride home and the advice, and then she went on inside.

I didn't walk away from the porch until she closed the door, and I heard it lock. Naomi needed comforting. I ain't about to act like I could be that nigga in her life to comfort her because I wouldn't even know what the fuck to do with a woman like Naomi. She was classy, and she had this aura about her, which screamed that she was the kind of woman you made a wife. She was like an expensive glass or some shit that you had to handle with care. Shit, I ain't even about to cap and act like I would know how to properly care for her. I can't say that I would know how to be faithful either.

With the shit she was dealing with from her husband, if I were to ever get her, and I fucked around, she would probably kill my ass. Her and her fuckin' sister, with all that fuckin' mouth.

Chapter Seven

DENIM McCLOUD

“*B*aby, wait. Khari is in the back, and I don’t want her to catch us. When she leaves, I got you,” I said to my boyfriend, Mauri, which was short for Shamauria. I’m sure many of you might be a little confused about that, so I’ll explain it to you.

Never in my life did I think I would be dealing with a girl because I honestly hated bitches so fuckin’ bad, but Mauri really reminded me of a man. At times, it didn’t even feel like I was dealing with another female. If she even heard me refer to her as a female, I swear she would get mad at me and stop talking to me for days. The LGBTQ took their pronouns seriously, which I wasn’t educated on before I got with Mauri. I was still learning, and there were times when I slipped up and called her a *she*, but I swear I wasn’t intentionally doing it. Although she’d changed herself, and honestly, she did look like a dude, it’s just that I still knew deep down that she was born a girl. That’s why I make the mistake of referring to her as *she*, but I swear it wasn’t purposely done.

Mauri was what most people would ignorantly refer to as a dike. I’ve been attracted to men my entire life. Like, I loveddddd dick. Honestly, at one point, I considered myself to be a nympho because that’s just how much I loved to fuck. I mentioned before that I had taken my skills seriously, and I was now running my own business, caring for locked hair. I

specialized in starting men and women on their lock journey and re-twisting them. Mauri had long, beautiful dreads, and he came to me about five months ago to get his hair re-twisted. When I first saw him, I thought he was a man. His mannerisms, his appearance, shit... everything about him was masculine. He even had a deep ass voice like a nigga. Once we got closer, and he showed me his baby pictures, and I saw that he was really born a girl, I can honestly say that's when I started slipping up and referring to him as she. Because, damn, I just couldn't get those visuals out of my mind.

Anyway, when we met for the first time in the shop, I was sweating his ass so fuckin' hard when he came in to get his hair touched up, even though I didn't show it. That day, he came in with a white tee on, and it was clinging to his body, showing off the nice, washboard abs that were clearly defined under his clothing. Both of his arms had tattoo sleeves, and he had beautiful, brown skin. Mauri was tall, about six feet even, and above his right eyebrow was a piercing.

In the beginning, there wasn't much conversation between us because I didn't really get into my clients' business like that. I made them feel comfortable while getting serviced, but I never started off asking them personal shit. My mom called me while I was doing Mauri's hair and told me that she was getting ready to take my kids out for ice cream. When I ended the phone call, Mauri got comfortable and started asking me little questions about how many kids I had and shit like that. It wasn't until after I finished telling him a little bit about myself that he started sharing things. That's when I found out that he was transgender and how he had been born a girl. I learned so much from him, including the steroids he took, which explained his masculinity. I learned about the different surgeries he'd had; one was a bilateral mastectomy, which is when he had his breasts removed. That explained why I didn't think he was a woman in the first place.

Hearing him talk about getting his privates changed was a little cringing to hear, but I could tell it made him happy. From there, the conversation switched, and I learned from him that he owned his own computer repair company. He was fine as hell—put you in the mindset of a sexy ass thug, but he was

smart, so I was shocked when he basically explained that he was a geek when it came to computers. It was cute, though.

After I finished his hair, he asked me for my personal phone number to finish our conversation since he only had my business cell phone number. I was a little hesitant at first, but damn, I was glad I gave in because I could honestly say that a bitch was in love.

Mauri made me happy. He spoiled me in ways that I couldn't even explain. It took me a while to introduce my kids to him because all of this was new to me. Still, I knew that Mauri was someone I could see myself being with for the long term, so I let him meet my girls after about two months of dating. Rylo and Khari just tolerated Mauri. I don't know why, but they were standoffish with her. My baby Kelsey, she was too young to really understand, but she's the only one who really cared for Mauri.

"Where that nigga at anyway? He said he was going to be over here at three to pick Khari up. It's 3:30. Nigga thirty minutes late," Mauri said with frustration and aggravation written all over his face as he talked about my baby daddy.

Billion and Mauri were introduced, but they didn't have much of a relationship, which was understandable because Billion was so standoffish that I really didn't expect him to be cool with anyone I was fuckin'. I thought he would be an asshole about the situation once he found out that technically, I was in a relationship with a woman, but he didn't say anything about it. He just told me not to have Mauri putting his hands on our daughter, and that was that.

Billion and I were in an okay place. I didn't think he and I would ever have a perfect co-parenting relationship like he and Sidnesha had. Billion would always hate me for lying to him and making him believe that Khari was his when I knew she wasn't. And I would always hate him for coming home from prison and flipping the script on me when we had talked about getting into a relationship once he was out. I no longer wanted to be with Billion. His head was stuck too far up his wife's ass to even see me, and truthfully, I was just over the son of a

bitch. The more in love I became with Mauri, it kind of became a 'Billion who?' thing.

"Baby, calm down. Here he is right here," I said after I heard a couple of knocks on the door.

There was once a time when Billion would just waltz his ass into my house, but shit no longer went down like that. Knowing Mauri, he would have a fit if that nigga just waltzed in here, especially since he was the one paying the bills now in my townhouse.

I slipped on my house shoes and walked over to open the door for Billion. When I did, his head was down, and he was texting something on his phone. He finished his message, put his phone away, and then looked at me. He was dressed laid back this afternoon in a black and red Nike shirt that clung to his body, showing off his big, muscular chest. Black Nike gym shorts hung off his waist just a little bit, and a bitch was trying to be discreet and not look, but his big ass dick was right there, lying on his thigh, making it impossible not to see. He was chill in his black Nike socks and slides on his feet.

Billion would forever be in first place when it came to the sick ass waves in his hair. And that long, thick, full beard that looked like it was getting longer and fuller by the day was my favorite feature on him. He smelled so good too.

"What's good? Where my baby at?" he asked, stepping into the house after I moved out of the way and let him inside.

"In the back, on her iPad. I'll go and get her for you," I said and closed the door.

Billion stood there with his back against the door and his arms crossed. The front door wasn't far from the living room, and that's where Mauri was standing. He had the same posture as Billion, with his arms crossed, looking at him from across the room. I knew he was a bit annoyed because Billion was late, and he was dying to have sex with me, but I just hoped he didn't speak on that shit. He didn't know Billion the way I knew him, and this just wasn't the tree he wanted to bark up. Billion would crush him, and Lord knows I didn't need a part

two of what happened between Billion and Reggie a couple of years ago.

“You good, homie?” Billion asked Mauri.

“Shit, since Denim ain’t gon’ say it, Ima go ahead and speak up on it. I don’t want no issues with you, bruh, but you thirty minutes late picking up Khari. If you were going to be running late, you could have sent my girl a text or something,” Mauri said.

As he talked, I thought about the fact that my phone was in my room charging and that Billion could have very well texted me, and I just didn’t see it. I gave Mauri a look, telling him to chill, but his eyes left mine and went back on Billion, who laughed, showing his perfect dimples and perfect teeth.

“If you don’t want no issues with me, nigga, then shut the fuck up when it comes to business that involves my motha fuckin’ child. Fuck is you to check me about my motha fuckin’ daughter? I texted Denim that I was running a little bit behind because my daughter at home was fussing, only wanting me to lay her down for her nap. I had to make sure home was straight, and then I would come, not that I owe you a fuckin’ explanation, though. Your spot here ain’t even secured, so chill the fuck out, my man. Be lucky I even let you be around my daughter. Denim, go get Khari. This won’t be the first time I gotta turn yo’ house upside down when it comes to a nigga that you dealing with,” Billion told me.

I walked over to Mauri, grabbed his hand, and damn near pulled him to the back. I left him in my room while I went to get Khari. Khari was my only child at home because Rylo and Kelsey were with my mom for the weekend. When I made it into Khari’s room, she was lying on her bed, on her back, watching her iPad with her Trolls headphones over her ears.

“My daddy here?” she asked as she removed the headphones.

“Yes. Come on,” I told her.

I didn’t have to say it twice because she excitedly jumped down from the bed and damn near ran me over to get to her

father. Finally, I made it out front, where Khari was now in her father's arms with one of her arms securely wrapped around his neck as he kissed her on her cheek, making her laugh. When Billion's eyes landed on me, he stopped kissing Khari and suddenly got serious.

“Denim—”

“Billion, I know,” I said, cutting him off because I already knew what he was going to say to me.

“Nah, you don't know, because if you knew, then that nigga would know that he can't check me when it comes to my daughter. I texted you, telling you that I was running behind. You been dealing with that clown for a few months, and that nigga already over here trying to call shots and shit. I ain't gon' have another nigga with too much of an opinion when it comes to mine. Talk to him. Talk to him before I have to break his motha fuckin' jaw,” he said.

It's like Billionaire knew he was about to talk reckless to me because he made sure to put Khari's headphones in and turn the volume up a little higher before he said what he had to say. After that, I got my kiss in with my daughter, and Billion left. I closed the door behind me, putting my back against it, and sighed. I prayed that God wasn't about to have some drama start creeping up around the corner. A bitch was finally fuckin' happy. I felt like I was in a place now in my life where it was drama-free. I didn't need Mauri and Billion beefing. That shit wouldn't end well because I already knew it would end with Billion saying that he didn't want Khari around Mauri.

Billion would take Khari from me in a quick second, and I didn't need that. I was in a position now to be the best mom to my kids than I'd ever been. I could provide for them independently, without having my hand out to a man, although my baby daddy gave me enough money each month to take care of all three of my kids. Shit was good, and I needed it to stay that way because when shit got bad with Billion and me, it can get baddddd. Y'all know that.

Chapter Eight

TWINKLE HARRIS

“*S*hitTTTTT, Truthhhhhhh,” I moaned.

I was on my hands and knees on the balcony of our California home, getting fucked before Truth left for practice. The view was so amazing, the weather was perfect, and my husband stood up inside my pussy from behind, straight smashing it. He’d already made me cum three times. It was only supposed to be a quickie to hold me off with something before he made it back home, but every time I came, I kept begging for another one, not wanting him to leave me so soon.

Truth pulled my body up a little bit, which was drenched in sweat, and his hands came around me from the front. He grabbed my titties, massaged my nipples, and started sucking on my neck.

“I was supposed to be out the door ten minutes ago, bae. But, I’m fucked up ’bout this pussy. Shit got me running late for practice,” Truth’s deep voice boomed in my ear, making my body shudder.

When he started moving his dick in me a little faster, and it felt like it was plunging deeper into me, I already knew he was finally about to bust his first nut. Because my body was spent, and he was running late, I knew this would be my last one. I heard those animalistic growls come from his mouth, and

within seconds, I felt that all too familiar sensation of his nut spilling inside of me, and I came along with him. Thank God for birth control because I didn't have to worry about coming to him in a few more weeks and telling him that my period was late and I might be pregnant.

"Damn. That pussy so fuckin' good," he said as he pulled out of me and then stood up from the chair.

We were fuckin' on a patio lounge. Once he stood up, I lay back and watched him. I used to think that Iman Shumpert had the best body, but whew, Truth was definitely giving him a run for his money. It was his height, his perfect, muscular, athletic body, the tattoos that filled just about every inch of him, the beautiful curly taper on top of his head, the big ass dick that hadn't entirely gone down and was dripping in my juices because of how wet he had my pussy, and his big ass feet. Truth was handsome in every sense of the word, and I was just glad we found each other again because I couldn't put this happiness into words.

"I need to jump in the shower. Bae, put me out some practice clothes. You got a nigga running late and shit," he told me.

I laughed at him as I stood and followed him inside, walking on noddle legs. Truth was already in the bathroom at this point, and I could hear the shower water running. I slipped on my robe, and before I got him some practice clothes out, I left the room and went down the hall to check on Taevion. His lazy butt was still in his crib, knocked out sleeping. Dream was in school, and I had about two hours left before it would be time to pick her up.

I took the day off from my store because my son was running a fever. Instead of taking him to daycare, I wanted to keep him home and monitor it, so we'd been home all day. That dick that I'd just gotten on the balcony was well needed because dealing with a sick, almost two-year-old baby was not the easiest job in the damn world.

After making sure that Taevion was good, I went back into the bedroom and started pulling Truth's clothes out of his

drawer. I set the clothes on the bed and went into the closet to pull him out some shoes. By the time I had all the items, he was walking out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist, which he quickly dropped to dry his body off and put his clothes on. I lay on my side of the bed, watching him like a creep the entire time.

“What you cooking tonight? I want some homemade shit when I get home,” he told me.

“I had chicken wings out, so I’m going to make barbeque chicken wings. I don’t know what sides I’m going to do yet. Did you get in touch already with the pilot? You know I’m flying home this weekend to meet with Loyal’s lawyer,” I reminded him.

Truth had so many things going on, and he would forget to do one little request that I would ask of him. Before I got with Truth, I never flew private. I rode on a regular plane like everyone else, but shit, the moment things got official with Truth and me, he switched up my lifestyle. It took me forever to get with the program because a bitch just wanted to be regular and do regular things, but when you’re married to one of the best players in the NBA, it wasn’t even a choice to switch up my lifestyle.

I quickly got with the program after I was in the airport with Dream, and the paparazzi was all in our faces, asking stupid ass questions and making silly ass assumptions about Dream’s mother being in jail for murder. They were saying all kinds of crazy shit, and I still wasn’t even sure where they got their information from. After seeing the way Dream broke down crying as they said crazy shit about her mother, that was the last time I had us flying commercial flights. Flying private just helped to keep my life a little bit more intimate, and that’s what I truly enjoyed about it.

“I did that shit already, bae. Ima drop y’all off Friday morning. Come walk with me to the door,” Truth said after he was dressed.

He grabbed his gym bag off the bed and placed his sneakers inside, keeping the slides on his feet. Before he went

to the front door, he walked into Taevion's room. I stood by the door, watching as his tall body leaned over the crib, and he kissed his son on the forehead. After that, he turned on his heels and left the room, closing the door behind him.

“When can I get another one?” he questioned me.

Although Truth said he was cool with having to wait for us to have another baby, I'll admit that he asked me about giving him another child at least twice a week. I looked up at him and smiled.

“When you win the championship,” I said, giving him something to have in the back of his mind once his team made it to the championship, which I was sure they would.

“That's too easy. We almost in the finals. You better not change your mind on a nigga either. You know I want a daughter,” he told me.

I laughed, pulled myself away from the wall that I was leaning against, and led the way to the front door.

“I mean, how can I forget? You tell me that almost every day,” I said, followed by a sarcastic laugh.

Truth came behind me, wrapped his arms around my waist from behind, and squeezed me just a little bit.

“Shit, I do that because I be hoping that you'll feel sorry for a nigga and stop taking them fuckin' pills. But I guess it ain't working because you be popping them fuckin' pills in front of me every morning. You don't even feel the least bit bad for doing it, either. Be swallowing them fuckin' pills quick as fuck,” Truth said, making me crack up laughing because he was such an asshole.

I swear, I took my pills first thing in the morning before I could even thank God for waking me up. I never admitted this out loud to anyone, but being married to a man like Truth, I just felt like I had to come with it. When I say that, I'm basically referring to the fact that Truth's career allowed him to be well off, and to be honest, our kids would be well off because of him. Right now, I owned two stores: one in Miami and another one in L.A. I pushed myself when it came to my

businesses because I wanted to make sure I had something too. I didn't want my kids to think that just Daddy had it. I wanted them to know that their mama was a hustler and that I had it too.

I'm not even going to act like I didn't get comfortable in life once I had Taevion. I felt like I put some of my dreams on hold for a little bit because I was so focused on having a safe and healthy pregnancy. I had my man in my ear, telling me to just take it easy, and he would handle everything. I didn't want to have another child right now and slow down on my dreams again. Plus, I wanted to enjoy this first year of marriage. The thing is, my husband and his team were some beasts this year, and I didn't have any worries that they wouldn't win the championship, so my big ass mouth was going to be the reason I owed him a baby.

"I'll see you when you get home tonight, baby. I love you," I said, turning around in his arms and kissing him.

"I love you too, baby. Kiss Taevion again for me when he wakes up and Dreamy too when you pick her up from school," he said.

I smiled at his words, and then he opened the door and left. Now that he was gone, I would use this time to take a quick shower and just lie down for a few minutes because Taevion would be waking up from his nap soon.

The meeting I was having this weekend with my sister's lawyer was basically to confirm a parole hearing date for my sister and discuss some of our options. I spoke on the phone with Loyal yesterday, and it made me happy to hear my sister sound a bit more confident about this situation. When I would talk to her about the possibility of her coming home, she never sounded as confident as I did.

I hated this for Loyal. I just knew Chance was supposed to have gone down for this shit with her, but for some reason, she was the only one to get punished. If that nigga wasn't already dirty for letting my sister go down for shit that they were doing together, I definitely didn't have no fuckin' respect for the nigga now, when it's been over two years since he'd seen

Dream. He saw an opportunity to walk away from his responsibilities, and he took it, but his ass will sit up and be a father to the kids he had on my sister. Shit was crazy. I think it was good that God hadn't allowed me to see that nigga because I knew if he was ever in my presence, I was bound to slap the shit out of him. Him and that bitch for even encouraging and accepting him not being a father to Dream.

Chapter Nine
NAOMI EDWARDS

A month and a half later

“*L*et me have a word with you,” my husband said, coming behind me as I was bent down, tying LJ’s shoes.

Today was the church picnic, and everyone was rolling in. So far, everything was going well. The DJ was there, playing gospel music. The younger kids were walking up to him every five minutes, asking if he could play some rap music, but neither my husband nor the older women at the church would let that go down. There were different vendors set up around the huge pavilion, giving out slushies, cotton candy, popcorn, you name it. There was even an artist doing face paint for the kids. LJ had already gotten Spiderman painted on his face. My only complaint is that it was so hot out this afternoon, but other than that, things were running smoothly.

“Okay. LJ, be careful in that bounce house,” I said to my son after I stood up.

LJ was a little daredevil, and at three years old, he would get inside the bounce house, doing all kinds of backflips, front flips, and cartwheels, which would have me cringing each time. I kissed his forehead, and he took off running, not paying my warning any attention.

I followed my husband, who looked very handsome today. He was in the same royal blue shirt that the rest of the church members and I wore, which advertised the church celebrating its eighth-anniversary picnic. With his shirt, he wore jeans with creases because Liam took ironing his clothes so seriously. He’d gotten a haircut yesterday, so he was looking extremely good this afternoon.

“What’s going on?” I asked once he had pulled me away from the pavilion, and we were standing a good distance from everyone else.

“What’s going on is, Naomi, I think you’ve lost your mind! You had one job, which was to be in charge of the

catering, and look what you hired to cater this event. You have these thugs out here in front of all my church members. I promise you, sometimes I think you purposely like going out of your way to embarrass me,” Liam spat.

I looked out at the parking lot, where there was a white Sprinter advertising Markell’s business. They were right on time and loading the food onto the tables where we would be serving today for the event. I hadn’t seen Markell yet, and I won’t even act like I wasn’t looking over at the truck every five minutes to see if he was there. This was apparently a job that he’d left for his workers because I didn’t think he was coming.

I hadn’t seen Markell since the night he brought me home from the club, but I thought about him often. I thought about the way he came to my rescue when that jerk was pulling on my arm and how he’d jumped in with no hesitation and handled the situation. Maybe my love life was just so nonexistent these days, but I even thought about him calling me shorty, and I found myself goofily smiling at that. Of course, he and I had different ways of expressing ourselves, but I loved the way he uplifted me up in the car and made me see my worth. He even told me that I shouldn’t be settling for less when it came to Liam, but I was still there, and sadly, nothing has changed. In fact, I felt like my marriage was only getting worse.

“I had one job, and Liam, I did well. You told me to have them here at 1:30. It’s 1:15. They are fifteen minutes early. Liam, I just don’t understand you. You don’t give me credit for anything these days. It’s like you go out of your way to make me your enemy. Yesterday, in church, at the last meeting we had before this picnic, I watched you thank everyone for doing their part these past couple of months preparing for this picnic, but somehow, you forgot to thank your wife! You’re looking at these men unload this truck with food, and you see thugs, but I see black men who are fulfilling a job, but hey, that’s just you. You pick a fight with me any chance you get, so nothing you do surprises me anymore,” I told him and then walked away.

I went toward the pavilion, trying not to wear my feelings on my shoulders, although Liam had just pissed me off.

“Yo! You Naomi?” a deep voice asked. It was a male, and he was wearing a *Glizzy eats* shirt. He was dark and very handsome.

“Yes,” I said.

“Aight. Glizzy told me to give you this card. He said to call him when the event is over because he wants your opinion of the food,” the man said and handed me a card.

I took it from him and stuffed it in my back pocket.

“Thank you. Where is he, by the way?” I questioned.

Lord knows I didn’t want to ask that question because I didn’t want to come off like I was thirsty, but a big part of me just really wanted to know. I laughed to myself because I actually did take a little longer this morning in the bathroom doing my hair and make-up. Since I was under the impression that I would see Markell this afternoon, I just wanted to look good. I felt like such an idiot because I used all my good products on my hair to make sure my curls were popping, only for this man to be a no-show.

“We had three events to cater this afternoon. He’s still at the restaurant, cooking. Y’all enjoy and call my nigga. He waiting to hear from you,” he told me and then walked away.

Three other men were standing by the van, waiting for him. Once he made it over, they all got inside, and just that fast, they peeled out of the parking lot.

I joined the party, and I had to admit that if my son wasn’t running over to keep me company every five minutes, for the most part, I would’ve been by myself. I talked to some of the members, but I still felt alone, even with so many people around. To Liam, I was pretty much nonexistent. Even when it was time to bless the food, and I went up front to hold his hand, he called LJ over to stand in the middle of his father and me, so he wouldn’t have to hold my hand. It was harsh, I won’t even lie, but I had become so used to him treating me this way that I didn’t even let it get to me.

“This is yummmmyyyy, Mommy,” my son said as he sat next to me.

He had macaroni and cheese with barbeque chicken on his plate, and he was tearing it up. I knew the food was good when I couldn't even respond to LJ. I had so many things on my plate, including lobster mac and cheese, honey barbeque chicken wings, collard greens, seafood rice, basically everything on the table. All I could think about was the fact that my sister and her husband were right about Markell's food as I ate like I hadn't eaten anything in years.

My mom would probably be so jealous if she heard me say this, but this was the best food I'd ever had in my life. This food tasted like an older black woman had cooked it. I just didn't expect this from Markell. I had no desire to call him when his friend handed me the card with his number on it, but after this food, I had to. I had to let him know how good the food was. Now, I understood why he had so many followers on his social media and why customers would be on his page, raving about the food.

“I have to use the bathroom, Mommy,” LJ told me five minutes after we'd both finished our food.

I stood up from the picnic table, then grabbed my plate and his to put in a nearby trash can. He ran over and grabbed my hand so I could take him to the bathroom. I had no idea where Liam was at this point. After we'd finished blessing the food was the last time I'd seen him, but this pavilion was so big, and I was sure he was around there somewhere.

“We going to have cake and ice cream, Mommy?” LJ asked as we neared the bathroom.

“Yes, baby. After everyone finishes their food,” I told him.

“They need to hurry up,” he said, making me laugh.

We eventually made it into the bathroom, and I heard what sounded like someone in a stall dry heaving, and then every once in a while, I could hear them crying. We ended up having to come to the restrooms in the back because the ones closest to us weren't the cleanest.

“Somebody is crying, Mommy,” LJ said.

I really didn't think anything of it, but my eyes happened to look down at the floor in the stall where the crying and everything else was coming from, and I spotted the shoes. The blue and black Nikes that I knew for a fact belonged to my husband because of the dirt mark on the side of them that he'd just gotten earlier today when he had been running behind LJ.

I don't know what came over me, but I could just feel it in my gut that my husband wasn't just being a good, caring pastor to one of his members and holding her hair up as she vomited. If that was the case, the door shouldn't have been locked. They were in the accessible bathroom, so I let my son's hand go, walked over to the stall, and as if I was the hulk, I raised my foot and kicked the door with so much strength that it swung open.

Down on her knees was Tischina, the administrative assistant for the church, and my husband was caught red-handed massaging her back as he stood over her while she threw up in the toilet. He stopped mid rub once his eyes landed on me. My son was crying at this point because he had no idea why I'd just kicked the door in.

“Liam, you have less than a second to explain to me what's going on. Please, just please tell me that the thoughts I have going on in my mind right now are the furthest from the truth. Why are you in this bathroom stall with Tischina? It isn't your job to be in here with the doors closed and rubbing her back as she empties out her guts into the toilet. You need to go ahead and tell me something,” I demanded.

Neither of them said anything. The crazy thing is, their silence spoke volumes. All I kept thinking about was if the two of them had been messing around. Tischina was pregnant. I found out a couple of weeks ago when she and I were getting the new Sunday School books prepared for the church. She told me that she wouldn't be able to bend down and pick up one of the big boxes because she was pregnant.

I guess I never really paid her that much attention because when I finally did look at her, the baby bump she had was

noticeable. I didn't know of Tischina having a husband or even a boyfriend for that matter, but hey, it wasn't my place to be in her business. I considered her a church friend. She wasn't someone I hung out with outside of church, so when I found out about the pregnancy, I congratulated her and kept it moving.

“ANSWER ME!” I screamed, hitting the bathroom stall door with my hand.

This was way out of character for me. I was always the woman who was seen and not heard. I've always been quiet. The only people who really knew about my talkative side were my mom and my sister. I was livid, so much so that I couldn't even console my own son, who was screaming and crying as he tugged on my leg. I knew my actions were scaring him.

“Naomi, you're acting like a complete fool right now. Is this the way a mother is supposed to carry on in front of her son?” Liam had the nerve to say.

“Liam, fuck the way I'm supposed to carry on in front of my son! Why are you avoiding the question? You need to answer me!” When I cursed, even I was taken aback because I hardly ever used profanity.

My husband knew that, which is why his eyes almost popped out of their sockets. He looked from me to Tischina. Tischina was still on her knees, trying her hardest not to make eye contact with me. She'd stopped throwing up, and the only thing coming from her now were soft whimpers. I watched as my husband bit his lip and stared at LJ, then his eyes went back to me.

“I'm a man of God, Naomi, and it isn't in me to go around lying, being manipulative and sneaky. All of those things are what I have been doing for a while now. I can't find happiness with you because this woman right here is who makes me happy. Tischina is pregnant, and she's carrying my baby. This isn't the way I wanted to tell you this, but—”

I lost my mind. Without even letting him finish his sentence, I moved my son and rushed over to Liam, punching him right in his mouth. I wanted to put my hands on Tischina,

but I just couldn't because she was pregnant, and I wasn't a hateful person who would do anything to harm her child. I didn't even know that I had this kind of strength to fight because I've never in my life been in any kind of physical altercation. Blows landed on every part of Liam's body that I could reach. I was crying, screaming, and just completely irate as the words he'd just told me played back-to-back in my head. Then, in the middle of hitting him, I felt two strong arms aggressively pull me back. That's when I saw that it was the police.

"I want her arrested right now for assault. I would like to press charges, too, right away. She has my son right here while she's carrying on like this. Get her out of here right now!" Liam barked out orders to the two cops restraining me since I was in rare form.

As he screamed, telling them what he wanted them to do with me, blood oozed out of his nose and his mouth from me punching him.

"Liam, how could you? How could you do this to me? This is me! We've known each other for over two decades, and this is how you do me?" I screamed with big teardrops falling down my face.

"Naomi, please! You know I haven't been in love with you for years! That was one miscarriage too many for me. I want a divorce, and I'm getting a lawyer, so I can get full custody of my son. I don't trust you. You don't know how to control your emotions. Come here, LJ," Liam barked.

"Noooo. I want my mommy. I want my mommy," my baby cried as he ran over to tug at my legs.

It broke my heart to see my baby like that. The officers had to tell Liam to get LJ. He put up such a fight, not wanting to go with his father. I was escorted out of the restroom, and they had me sit on the sidewalk with my hands behind me in cuffs. My head was down, and I was hysterically crying. One of the male officers stood next to me while the other officer was inside, more than likely getting the story from Liam.

The black male officer standing next to me looked at me with sympathy in his eyes, but he never said anything. Even with the bathroom door closed, I could hear my son crying at the top of his lungs, screaming about how he wanted to come with me. Hearing him crying had my emotions all over the place, knowing that I couldn't be there for him in the way he needed me. I thought about everything I was about to lose. My marriage was over. Liam was pretty much the breadwinner, so he just may get full custody of our son like he said he would. I worked for Liam, and because I knew he was going to play this dirty, my job was definitely gone. I just never thought he would do me like this.

"I'm going to help stand you up, Mrs. Edwards," the cop said. He had just come from inside with Liam, getting his story.

I could tell that both cops held sympathy for me, but it didn't really matter because they were still taking me to jail. Finally, he helped me stand up, and I looked him in his eyes with tears still flowing down my face. Although he wanted to know my side of the story, I didn't even care to talk.

"Whatever he told you happened, it happened," I mumbled.

"We have to arrest you for assault," he told me.

I nodded through my tears, accepting my fate. At that moment, I had to be numb because the idea of sitting in a jail cell should scare any woman, especially a woman like me who had never even received a traffic citation. The fact that I wasn't even frightened let me know that my body was too numb.

I was read my Miranda rights, and then the officer put his hand on the upper part of my arm as he walked me over to his patrol car.

As we were walking, I heard my son calling after me, still crying. I turned around to see Liam holding LJ in his arms, and Tischina was right there, walking beside him. I thought about a couple months ago in the meeting for the picnic and how my husband had gotten slick with me in front of

everyone. Tischina had been the only one in the room to laugh. She was messing around with Liam then, and I was sure it felt good at that moment to be the other woman and watch the man that we were sharing talk to his wife that way. Crazy how her laughter had gone right over my head, and I never would have put two and two together. Liam and I had problems in our marriage, but this wasn't something I expected from him.

I stared at the three of them together, and my heart just couldn't take it anymore, so I turned my head and stopped looking. Once they put me in the back of the police car, I just threw my head against the headrest in defeat. There were no more tears left for me to cry.

A couple of hours later

I didn't belong in jail. Never in my life had I committed any crime. Still, there I sat in the corner of a holding cell with my knees pulled up to my chest, waiting for someone to let me know that I could make my phone call. As I listened to the women talk about their charges, I heard everything from shoplifting to drug possession, and I even heard one woman brag about taking the cops on a high-speed chase for ten miles. I could tell most of the women had been in that situation before because none of them seemed as scared as I was. One would think that we were just there to chill by the way they were sitting around, just chilling and hanging out.

My bail was for \$5,000, and now I was just waiting to get on the phone with someone so they could post it, and I could get the hell out of there. I was going to call my sister, but she wouldn't be able to come and get me because she, her husband, and the kids were in New York. It was Lil Bill's thirteenth birthday, and they left last night. My mom wouldn't even be able to get me because her church was on a retreat in Orlando. Twinkle was back in California, so it wasn't like she was an option either. When I got so desperate and thought about just calling Markell, I remembered that everything had been emptied out of my pockets when I'd gotten there, so I couldn't call him either.

“Edwards.”

My name was finally called, and I wanted to jump into a praise break. There was a clock on the wall, and it was a little after three in the afternoon. I quickly stood up from the bench and rushed to the gate. The officer opened it, allowing me to come outside with him. He led me over to the phones, and I dialed my sister. I knew her number by heart since it was the same phone number that she's had since we were younger.

“Naomi...” I had to state my name when the operator asked, and Normani agreed to accept the charges.

“Naomi! Naomi, what the hell! What the hell did you do?” Normani screamed into the phone. I could hear the panic and fear in her voice.

I knew Normani would react this way because nobody expected me to be in this predicament. But lowkey, I think my sister might have thought that I’d killed Liam, and that’s why she was so irate.

“Normani, I need someone to get me out of here. I have a \$5,000 bond and—”

“WHAT DID YOU DO?” she screamed, cutting me off.

“Listen, it’s an assault charge. Normani, I don’t want to fuckin’ talk about it, okay! Can you just have someone come and get me? Please!” I didn’t mean to scream at my sister because I knew she was only asking questions out of fear and concern, but I just genuinely didn’t want to talk about it. This was too fresh.

“They gave her a bond? What the fuck is going on?” I could hear Billionaire in the background asking.

“You want me to have Askiya come and get you?” she asked.

“Not really. I know I don’t have many options, but Normani, this shit is embarrassing. I don’t want everybody in my business like that. Askiya is your friend, not mine,” I told her.

“Ask her if she wants me to have Glizzy come scoop her. What’s the bond? Ima send that shit right now to him and have him go pick her up,” I heard Billionaire say in the background.

There were so many conversations going on that I really couldn’t even think straight.

“Billionaire, the bond is set at \$5,000. Naomi, are you okay with Glizzy coming to get you? If not, I’m just going to have Askiya come. So what if that’s my friend and not yours? Askiya isn’t like that to be judging you. What you want me to do?” Normani asked.

“Fuck all that shit, Normani. Glizzy said that he can go get her,” Billionaire said.

I could hear him saying my bond amount, so I was sure he had to have been on the phone with Markell at that point, letting him know what was going on.

“I’m about to book a flight and fly back home tonight. Naomi—”

“Normani, you don’t have to do that. Enjoy your time with your family. That isn’t even necessary,” I told her.

My voice sounded so dead. There was no life, no emotion, nothing. Liam had literally drained me. The church picnic was over by then, and all I could seem to think about was what my son was doing. I wondered if he was still crying. I also wondered if he was disappointed in me since he had witnessed me in rare form this afternoon and watched me get carried away in handcuffs.

“He has a baby on the way, Normani, with Tischina from our church,” I broke down and told my sister.

There was a bench right behind me. I sat on it and just broke down all over again.

“He told me that he wants a divorce. After all these years of being together, then getting married, this man looked me in my eyes and told me that he wants a divorce. He says he can’t trust my emotions right now, and he’s going to seek full custody of LJ. I have money that I saved up in a different account because Mommy told me years ago to always have something on the side for a rainy day. I always prayed to God that I would never have to dip into it and look at me now. Either way it goes, Liam makes more money than me, and I’m sure I’m out of a job right now, so they’ll grant him full custody. I’m going to lose my son, Normani. You know LJ is my everything,” I said as best as I could. The whole time I was talking, I was steadily crying, so it was hard to get the words out.

“Naomi, your sister and your brother-in-law and own a whole school. I can have you working at a new school by next

week, with your pay doubled. Your life doesn't stop because Liam asked for a divorce. We're going to get you a good lawyer so he doesn't get full custody of LJ. Look, I don't want to keep talking about it because I don't want to get you all riled up, and I'm not even there to console you. Other than that, are you okay in there? I hear Billionaire on the phone right now, and Glizzy is about to go meet with a bail bondsman," Normani told me.

"I'm fine. I just want to get out of here. When I get out and get my phone back, I'll call and let you know I'm okay," I said.

"Naomi, don't go over to that house. I know you want to see LJ, but you gotta know that Liam is going to play this dirty. If you go over there, he will purposely antagonize you to get you all riled up so he can send you back to jail. He's going to do everything in his power to paint you as unfit when y'all go to court for custody of LJ. Just to go Mommy's, and I'll be there if not tonight, then tomorrow morning. Either way, I'm cutting this trip short and coming to be with my sister. I'm sure my husband and the kids will understand," my sister said.

There was literally no use in me telling her anymore that she didn't have to come because I could hear it in her voice that she was coming regardless.

"Okay. I love you," I murmured.

"I love you too, Naomi," and with that, she hung up.

God, I prayed that Markell got there soon because this just wasn't a place for me. I needed to get the hell out of there before I went crazy.

Chapter Ten

MARKELL 'GLIZZY' WEST

*I*n my lifetime, I've had to bail plenty of niggas out of jail, and I swear I didn't remember the shit taking this fuckin' long. Truth be told, when I was released from prison, I told myself that I didn't want to be anywhere near a fuckin' jail, prison, halfway house, none of that shit. So, if my niggas were out there fuckin' up, then them niggas were on their own because I was scarred for good. But the person I was picking up wasn't one of my niggas, so I was willing to break the code that I'd made up for her.

I was trying to be patient and not wild the fuck out because I didn't want to get ignorant and have them arrest my black ass. Naomi definitely wouldn't have anyone to bail her out, and she wouldn't be able to leave this jail tonight if I lost my cool. I'm not even going to lie; I was dog shit tired. The company had multiple catering gigs today, and I had been putting in work since about five o'clock this morning. I had a big team that helped me out a lot, but still, I didn't have it in me to just sit around and bark orders. I had to stand in the paint, too, and get work done, which is precisely what I had been doing for the past few months.

My restaurant would finally be complete and open to the public in less than three weeks, and I was happy as fuck about that. I dreamed about doing this shit for the eight years that I was locked up, and to be out here doing it, and my mama to be

telling me every chance that she got that she was happy for me, that really made a nigga feel good.

Billion called me a few hours ago and told me that Naomi had gotten arrested, and he needed me to go to a bail bondsman and then pick her up from jail. He was out of town with his family, so he couldn't do it himself. I swear I thought the nigga was bullshitting me when I got the call. Naomi looked like the kind of person who wouldn't even hit a lizard with a broom if one snuck into her house. She just ain't give me the impression that she would ever in her life do some shit that would land her ass in jail.

When Billion told me that she was in jail for assaulting her bitch ass husband, I swear I couldn't believe that shit either. I ain't ask many questions because the only thing that really mattered to me at that moment was hurrying the fuck up, so I could get Naomi because her ass wasn't built for jail.

When Billion called, I was on the way home after finally getting all my catering gigs done. The plan had been to go home, shower, and take my ass to sleep. I can't say that if it was anyone else, I would have come to the rescue because physically, my body was just so tired.

“Ay. You know how much longer this shit gon' be? I been down here for over an hour. It don't take all this to process somebody out,” I said to the officer at the desk as I stood up from the bench.

I had spent damn near two hours at the bail bondsman because so many people were in there that you would have thought they were giving out free shit. Now, there I was, at the jail, wasting more fuckin' time, and the sun had already gone down.

“She's coming now, sir. I appreciate your patience,” his white ass said to me.

“Who the fuck said I was being patient? Y'all need to hurry this shit up,” I said and walked away.

I took a seat on the bench again, and my phone vibrated in my hand. Billion's name popped up on the screen, but I knew

it wasn't him calling, and it was Normani instead. She had been calling me every ten damn minutes, asking if her sister had been released yet. I couldn't even fault her because she was in a different city, and I was sure the thought of her sister being locked up was enough to scare the fuck out of her ass.

"She ain't out yet, sis. The man at the front said she's coming now," was how I answered the phone. Like I said, I knew it was Normani.

I heard her release a sigh, and from that sigh, I could tell her ass was over there stressing.

"Is it supposed to take this long? I feel like I'm about to go crazy," she vented.

"What's important to us ain't important to them, so they going to take they slow ass fuckin' time. Hold on. I see a door opening now. This might be her," I said and squinted a bit. When I saw them long ass legs walking ahead of an officer, I knew then that it was Naomi, so I stood up from the bench.

"Here she goes right here," I told Normani.

"Thank you, Jesus. Please have her call me when she gets in the car. I want to make sure she's alright," Normani said.

"I got you," I told her and then hung up.

Naomi walked out, holding onto a clear plastic bag, which contained all her belongings. Her eyes were bloodshot red, and I really didn't know if that was from crying or exhaustion. Her curly hair was wrapped in a ball, and although she was going through some deep shit, she still looked beautiful as fuck to me. She was in her church picnic shirt, denim jeans, and Converse sneakers. The expression on her face lacked emotion. She tried to muster up a fake smile when she saw me, but she didn't even have the energy to do that. Slowly, she walked until she was finally standing in front of me.

"You straight?" I asked.

"I'm okay. Thank you for coming to get me," she said. Her voice was hoarse, which probably had a lot to do with the fact that she had been crying.

“Come on,” I told her as I led the way outside.

I opened the door, letting her walk out ahead of me, and then I walked us over to my car, where I helped her get in and then closed the door behind her. My mind went back to the night I dropped Naomi at her mother’s house from the club, and she complained about the weed smell in my car. I drove all the way to the station with the windows rolled down, just to get rid of the smell.

I got in the car and pulled out of the parking lot. I wouldn’t ask Naomi what happened because last time, she told a nigga to stay out of her business. Secondly, this shit was fresh on her, and I knew she wouldn’t willingly talk about it, so I wouldn’t force that shit.

“Can I use your phone charger?” she asked.

“Yeah. Your sister said to call her. Her ass was going fuckin’ crazy,” I said.

“I’m just going to text her,” she commented.

I just drove. I really didn’t even know where I was about to take her. She would eventually tell me, though. I had been driving for about five minutes when I heard her let out a sarcastic laugh. Out the corner of my eye, I could see that she was shaking her head.

“You good?”

“This bastard just went in and took out all the money in my checking account. I just... I just don’t understand this for the life of me. He cheats on me with someone from the church, gets her pregnant, and he gets to be the one to ask for a divorce and to take money out of my account. It’s like he’s punishing me for something that he did. This is crazy,” she said.

I heard all the hurt and pain in her voice when she spoke. That shit was fucked up. It was one thing to do that lame ass shit to a bitch that you just fuckin’ and don’t really give a fuck about, but to do this shit to your fuckin’ wife, who has your child, that shit was fucked up.

“That’s a fuckin’ lame ass nigga. I’ll go slap the shit out of that nigga right now. Where he at?” I asked Naomi, serious as

fuck because I ain't like shit like that. That nigga was moving too fuckin' dirty. You don't do no shit like that to a woman, especially to a woman that's the mother of your fuckin' child because now you taking food out of your fuckin' child's mouth.

"It's not even worth it. Whatever. What if I didn't have a totally separate account where I've been saving money for the past eight years? I would have been left high and dry with nothing. Be honest, when I was around you the last time, and I vented to you about my husband, did you suspect that he could have been cheating on me? I'm only asking you this because you're a man, and I would love to hear your insight," Naomi said.

"Yeah, but it wasn't my place to tell you that. Your emotions were already fucked up, so I didn't want to add what I thought about that nigga to your plate. Fuck him, though. I told you a month ago that the nigga didn't deserve you," I said.

Naomi didn't respond; she just locked her phone and stared out of the window. By this time, I had been on the highway for about twenty minutes. I remembered the way to her mom's house, so I would get off at the exit and take her there. I figured she didn't want to go home right now and be around that nigga.

"I don't want to go to my mom's. Just keep driving," she told me.

"Shorty, Ima be honest with you, a nigga tired as fuck right now. If you don't want to go to yo' mama's crib, then where you want me to take you? I ain't taking you home because, personally, I don't think it will be smart on your part. You're liable to be back in jail tonight. So, where you want to go?" I asked, glancing at her right quick as I drove.

She had tears falling down her face as she shrugged. "I just don't want to be alone right now."

I ain't say nothing else after that. I just headed in the direction of my studio. Aside from my mama, no other woman had been to my crib. Shit, that took too much of me letting my

guard down and giving a bitch a lot of power to set my ass up and have a nigga kicking my door in to rob and kill me. So, I just never invited bitches over. But I saw something in Naomi that I didn't see in most women, and I knew she wasn't scandalous like a lot of these bitches out here, so I didn't mind taking her home with me.

The whole ride home, I drove with the radio turned all the way down. The only sound in the car was the wind coming from outside since I had my window rolled down a little bit and Naomi sniffing every other second because she was still crying.

I pulled up to my home out in Hollywood about fifteen minutes later. After I parallel parked in my designated parking spot, I put the car in park and shut it off. I got out and came around to help Naomi out. She was silent the whole time that she walked on the side of me as I led the way to my front door. I used my key to let us inside, and my spot was squeaky clean like it always was. I was rarely home because I was always out working. If I was home, I was either sleeping or getting ready to leave again.

For my spot to be a studio, it was spacious as fuck. It wasn't like many traditional studios were designed, where everything was in just one big, open space. Everything had its own little section, and it was spacious enough for two people to live there, although it was just me. Billion hooked me up with this shit, and unless I ever got myself a shorty and settled down with some kids and shit, I couldn't see myself moving. It was lowkey nice as hell and brand new. With me being the first person to live there and shit, it had everything I needed. Top of the line appliances, and my bathroom was nice as fuck. After a long day of working, I be soaking in that fuckin' tub like I'm Rev. Run.

"Your home is nice," Naomi told me.

"I appreciate that. You hungry? I can whip you up something right quick in the kitchen," I offered, but she quickly shook her head no.

“I’m fine,” she let me know before going over to the living room area and taking a seat on the couch.

Naomi set the clear bag that she had been holding all this time on the side of her. She put both of her elbows in her lap as she placed her head in her hands and just stared straight ahead. Truth is, I felt so fuckin’ bad for Naomi. She was a good girl who didn’t deserve this shit. There wasn’t much that I could say to make her feel better because, at the end of the day, she would still be hurting. I felt like her ass needed a hug or some shit, so after I guzzled down a Powerade, I walked over and stood right in front of her.

“Come here,” I called out.

Naomi looked at me funny for a few seconds, but she eventually stood up. I pulled her into me and held her. I wrapped my arms around her like she was my lady, and she had come home from work, telling me she had a bad day today at the office. I thought she would feel a way about a nigga hugging on her and would push me back, but she didn’t do that. I held onto her for a good five minutes, and then I pulled away and let her go.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“You probably gon’ need a blunt too. Shit, I’m ’bout to roll up right now. You need to hit this shit more than me,” I told her, and she laughed.

I left her there and went to get the weed stash that I kept in my nightstand. Then, with the Kush in my hands and some wraps, I went in my closet, kicked off my sneakers, threw on some slides, and removed my shirt. That just left me in my briefs my joggers. I made it back to the living room, and Naomi was sitting in the same place that I’d left her. She did a double take when she saw me come out without a shirt on, but she didn’t say shit. I swear, I wasn’t even trying to be a thirst trap, but I could literally smell the fuckin’ food that I had been cooking all day on my clothes. I didn’t want to be around no pretty ass woman like Naomi, smelling like grease and shit.

I had a speaker system in my living room, so I went ahead and hooked my phone up to the speakers and let some Rod

Wave play. That nigga had a song to match every mood I had. Naomi probably didn't know who the fuck Rod Wave was, but I bet once I had her hit this blunt, and she listened to what this nigga had to say, she was liable to catch a good vibe.

Once the music started playing, I dimmed the lights a bit, turned on the LED lights that I had in the living room, and sat on the arm of the chair, right next to Naomi. I proceeded to roll a blunt right quick. I was going to have her ass smoke this shit with me because she was too uptight. Not that I was trying to pressure her into smoking, but damn, she needed this shit to calm her fuckin' nerves from worrying about that lame ass fuck nigga. Shit, he did her a favor when he fucked up. Now she had a good reason to leave his ass.

"You smoked before?" I asked.

"I think we both know the answer to that question. No, and I don't plan to."

"Shit, you need it. They was fuckin' with you in that holding cell?" I asked as I dumped the Kush in the wrap, moving fast because I hadn't hit a blunt since this morning, so shit, a nigga needed this right now.

"They just kept asking me what I was in there for. A few women recognized me because they know of Liam's church, so they know that we're married. I was called a bunch of names, from an uppity bitch to stuck up and everything else, since I wouldn't engage in conversation and let them know what I was in for. I was just trying to get out of there, and at the same time, wondering what was taking you so long to get me," she said.

I laughed at the shade in the last part of her statement.

"Shittttt, they said you were down there at the church picnic whopping ass, so they was holding you for a little while longer," I said, fuckin' with her.

I was able to get her to laugh, showing off her pretty teeth and deep dimples. Her gray eyes flashed a little bit, and that shit made me feel good that I could get a laugh out of her, especially because of the shit she was going through.

“Yeah, right. Something overcame me at that moment, and I just snapped. This is coming from someone who has never been in a fight before in her entire life. I’m not a violent person at all because I have a tendency to just pretend like certain things don’t bother me when they really do, so people will rarely get a reaction out of me. I knew Liam and I were having issues because this man hasn’t kissed me, hugged me, called me beautiful, or made love to me in months, but I just never thought he would step out of our marriage. Not only did he step out, but he got another woman pregnant—a woman who I considered a church friend.

“When Liam and I started dating in middle school, I found myself falling in love with him because little things that he did just reminded me of my father. I think that’s why I fell for him so hard. My father turned out to be a monster once my mother revealed the truth about what really took place in her marriage that my sister and I were just too blind to see as kids. Liam is my father all over again, and for the first time, I don’t mean that in a good way,” she vented.

I was done rolling the blunt at that point, so I grabbed the lighter and lit it.

“Stop talking about that nigga to me. Shit is really making me mad. I almost want to leave you right here and go find that nigga on my own, so I can beat the fuck out of his ass. Let me ask you something, though, and then we ain’t gotta talk about him no more. I know sometimes a woman will stay with a nigga, even through his fuck ups. I feel like women give niggas a whole bunch of fuckin’ chances before they finally walk away. Right now, I know you’re hurt and angry, but is you done with that nigga for good?” I asked and took a long pull of the blunt, then released the smoke from my lips.

“Markell, he has a baby on the way with another woman. What do you mean am I done with him for real? This hurts me to walk away from the only man I’ve ever been with in my life, but I have to. When I was standing in that bathroom with him and his mistress, he didn’t try to console me for one second. He protected her the entire time, and to me, that spoke volumes. I’m done. If you had a baby on your girlfriend or

wife, would you expect for her to stay? If you say anything other than no, just keep that to yourself because you're going to piss me the hell off," she told me.

I laughed at her calling me Markell and snapping on a nigga. My mama was the only person to call me Markell. A few bitches found themselves trying to call me by my government name, but I ain't play that shit. If I fuck you and strap up, call me Glizzy because that means me and you ain't serious. Now, if I fuck you bare, baby, you can call me Markell Leon West if you want to, but I ain't been with a bitch yet who could get me to slide in some pussy raw. Normally, I correct that shit right off the bat when a woman tries to call me Markell, but Naomi said it, and I swear I ain't even mind.

"Ima be honest with you because you done let me in on some deep shit about you and your husband, so I want to be transparent with you too. I ain't never been in no serious shit before. When I was about to get into something serious, that's when I ended up going to jail, so the relationship shit never happened. I got trust issues like a motha fucka, and I know that plays a part in why I can never take a woman serious enough to get deeply involved with her on that kind of level.

"Eight years ago, when I sat at a round table in front of three detectives, the same nigga that I caught the charge with snitched on me, saying that all them guns and shit belonged to me. If the nigga I knew since I was in fuckin' daycare would switch up on me, I can only imagine what a bitch will do. If I ever get involved with a woman, and we get on some serious shit, her having to accept me having a baby on her isn't even an option. I would never put her in no position like that. I'll never give bitches the satisfaction of laughing at my shorty. If me and my girl gon' be beefing, we gon' beef in the privacy of our home, and not for the whole fuckin' world to see.

"I'm thirty-three, shorty, so if I settle down, Ima take that shit seriously because I want kids of my own one day. I want all my kids to come from the same woman too. No disrespect to the niggas out here with multiple baby mamas, but that ain't what I want. I want all my kids calling the same woman mama," I voiced to her.

“I saw your Instagram. You have women to choose from every day of the week for like the next ten years. It’s going to take a special kind of woman to outshine the thousands of women who you have chasing behind you,” Naomi told me.

I laughed at that. I heard the jealousy behind her words and shit, and I thought it was cute.

“You be stalking a nigga’s Instagram page?” I asked with a smirk.

“Stalking? No. Have I been on your page before? Yes. My sister gave me your Instagram page when I was inquiring about booking a service with you. That’s it. That’s all,” she told me.

I handed the blunt to her, but she shook her head no.

“Just one pull. You stressed the fuck out,” I insisted.

“I’m sure there are other ways that I can deal with my stress, so no. I’m fine,” she said and stood up from the couch.

“I know of another way, but you gon’ say no to that too,” I said.

Naomi walked over to the sliding glass door and looked out of it. I admired her body from behind and just kept mentally appreciating how beautiful of a body she had. I had dealt with women of all different shapes and sizes, but I’ll admit that I was used to fuckin’ with some thick bitches. The asses on some of the bitches that I fuck was always enough to make a nigga wonder how the fuck they got through the day, carrying all that shit on them. Naomi’s body was much different because she was tall and slim, but that shit was sexy to a nigga, though. She had a natural beauty. She ain’t have to put shit on her face to make her stand out from the next woman. I swear I could line ten bitches up next to her right now. Them bitches could be in some expensive labels with a beat face that they’d paid two hundred dollars for, and Naomi would stand out without even fuckin’ trying.

“What’s the other way?” she turned from the window and asked.

“Fuckin’. That usually helps with stress,” I said, and she rolled her eyes.

“If that’s the case, I’d rather smoke with you.”

“Come here then. Fuck you went over there for anyway?” I asked.

“Because that crap is stink. I don’t even see how you smoke that.”

“Man, come back. Shit don’t even stink. This A1 weed.”

The song had just switched to “Brace Face” by Rod Wave. Naomi didn’t have braces, but shit, I felt like this song was for her. She walked back over to the couch and took her seat. I handed the blunt to her, and she held it the same way that she’d seen me holding it. She ain’t even wait for a nigga to give her the fuckin’ instructions before she put it to her lips, did a deep ass inhale, and her ass started coughing.

“You ain’t no fuckin’ pro. You can’t be smoking that shit the way you see me smoking it. Take yo’ time on that shit,” I told her, patting her back as she leaned over, still coughing.

“Here, I don’t even want it.” She handed me back the blunt.

I laughed and then took the blunt from her hands.

“We can try it this way,” I said and then inhaled the smoke.

I leaned down a little bit, put my hand on the back of her head, and blew the smoke out to her parted lips. She inhaled slightly then released it. We did that shit twice, and on the last one, I kept my hand on her head, not letting her ass pull away. I don’t know what the fuck came over me, but I found myself looking at them beautiful, juicy ass lips, and for whatever dumb ass reason, I wanted to kiss her. I was curious to see what her lips felt and tasted like.

Naomi had to have been feeling and thinking the same shit because she met me halfway and kissed me on the lips. She did that shit quick as fuck and then pulled back.

“You got some soft ass lips,” I told her.

She had a look on her face like she couldn't believe that she'd just kissed me. Her ass looked scared too.

"You can relax, shorty. I don't have no plans to fuck you. I was just messing with you when I said that shit."

My face was still in front of hers. She had to be feeling something because if she didn't want a nigga in her face, I'm sure she would have backed up or pushed my ass back. When she didn't say anything, I took that as her wanting to give me another kiss. So, I leaned in again, and she pecked me on the lips.

"You kissing me like we in second grade. Slide your fuckin' tongue down my throat or something," I said, my voice smooth and slow. Shit, if she was going to let a nigga kiss her, I would rather her do the real thing.

Naomi leaned in a little bit more and pecked me again. This time, she opened her mouth slightly, and we started tongue kissing. Her lips were so fuckin' soft, her breath smelled good, and I found myself getting lost in this fuckin' kiss like she was my lady. I felt some shit in that kiss that I've never felt from kissing another woman, so that's when I knew it was time to pull the fuck away. Daddy dick was down there jumping, and I had respect for Naomi, so fuckin' her wasn't an option, primarily because of the shit that she was going through with that nigga. She was probably vulnerable like a motha fucka, and I would be a green ass nigga to take advantage of that. So, I stopped it before shit could go any further.

"Wow. Ummm, yeah. I think I need to stay away from you," she revealed after we'd pulled away from each other.

She threw herself back onto the couch and stared ahead at the TV, but it wasn't playing.

I laughed at what she said and then finished off the blunt. "I'm about to hop in the shower right quick. You good?" I asked.

She just nodded her head, letting me know that she was good.

“You want to take one too? I can wash your clothes for you, and you can throw on one of my shirts and some sweatpants or something.”

“Yeah. I’ll take one when you’re done,” she softly told me.

I went to the bathroom and started the water. Not even on some creep shit, but I had to get away from Naomi fast because my dick was about to burst through my fuckin’ pants, and I didn’t need her seeing that shit. I swear, I could still taste her tongue on my lips. That kiss was everything to a nigga. She had me feeling like a kid all over again when I busted my first nut. After that, the only way my dick would go down was from me jacking my shit, and that’s exactly what the fuck I did while I was in the shower, with visions of Naomi in this bitch with me, riding this shit.

I stayed in the shower for about fifteen minutes, and once I was done, I wrapped a towel around my waist. Then, I went over to the bathroom counter, brushed my teeth, and did my little routine shit for my face, which kept my skin looking good and the bitches giving me compliments every chance they got.

Once I had finished up in the bathroom, I went into the bedroom, where I had some briefs and joggers on the bed for me to throw on. I grabbed a black wife beater and some sweats out of my drawer for Naomi, so she could throw them on after her shower. All this shit was new for a nigga, but naturally, I just wanted Naomi to be comfortable and shit since she was in my home.

“Naomi,” I called out.

She came after about a minute and stood in the room, just looking around.

“Here. You can put this on after your shower,” I said as I picked up the clothes and handed them to her.

“Thank you,” she told me as she took the items from my hands.

I already had a clean towel and washcloth in the bathroom waiting for her.

While she did her thing in the bathroom, I went back into the living room. The second I sat down, my phone started ringing. It was Billion calling. Then again, it could have been Normani.

“What’s good?” I answered the phone right after I turned the radio down some.

“I appreciate you going down there and getting Naomi for us. That’s sis right there. How she doing? How was she acting when you picked her up? I just had to tell my wife to sit the fuck down somewhere, yo. She stressing the fuck out, and I been trying to tell her that Naomi gon’ be good,” he told me.

“She straight. She in the shower—”

“You ain’t drop her off at her mama’s house?” Billion asked, cutting me off.

“I tried to, nigga. She said she didn’t want to be alone.”

There was silence for about two minutes, and I already knew what this nigga was thinking.

“Don’t try no shit with her, Glizzy. I’m only saying that shit to you because Naomi is family, and that’s my fuckin’ sister. That nigga already done broke her fuckin’ heart, and I don’t need you coming over, fuckin’ with her heart either. Leave her alone. You got plenty to choose from,” Billion said, really sounding like an overprotective big brother.

I laughed because this nigga was making me out to be a slut, like I just went around fuckin’ any and everything.

“What you think, nigga? That Ima fuck every woman, I come in contact with? I ain’t even on that with Naomi. She said she ain’t want to be alone, so I brought her back to the crib with me. We ain’t been doing shit but vibin’. Where Normani at? I really thought her ass was gon’ try to fight a nigga when I was held up at the bail bondsman. Snapping on a nigga and shit because the line was long,” I told him, and he laughed.

“She don’t play about her fuckin’ sister. Naomi called, and she was already packing up a bag to leave. She was trying to leave right then. That’s why I had to call you because I didn’t

want her flying by herself. Keep this a secret because she don't want nobody to know right now, but she pregnant again—”

“Billionaireeeeeee! I told you not to say nothing!” I could hear Normani in the background.

“Oh, shit. My bad, baby. I thought you was still in the room with the kids. Damn, my bad. Shit, a nigga happy. I can't keep no shit like that a fuckin' secret,” I heard his black ass say, making me laugh.

I was happy for them. They took a loss a few months ago when Normani miscarried the baby, so the fact that God was able to bless them with another one not even long after, that shit was a blessing. I said before that I wouldn't mind having the same shit with a woman that Billion has with Normani. I wanted that kind of love.

“You can't hold water. I bet you already told your mother and your grandmother, and everyone else, although I told you not to. Who are you telling that to anyway?” I heard her ask.

“This Glizzy on the phone,” he said.

“What's good, sis? Give my nigga a break,” I called out.

“Your nigga needs to give me a break. He's always on the phone, telling my business,” she said.

“Ay, yo' ass is my business. Chill out,” he told her.

I talked on the phone for about five more minutes with Billion, and then we ended the call. Before we got off, he let me know that he and Normani would be back tomorrow afternoon, and he was going to pull up on me. Almost twenty minutes after getting off the phone with him, Naomi finally came from the back, looking more relaxed. My clothes fit a little big on her, but she still looked good, though. She hadn't put her bra back on, so I could see her nipples in the wife-beater that I'd given her to wear. I was going to play it cool and try to act like her beauty wasn't fazing me, but truth is, that shit was so fuckin' hard to do because she was too damn fine.

“I guess in the morning, you can just drop me off at my mom's house. Hopefully, I'll come up with a plan by

tomorrow. I need to get a good family lawyer because Liam is going to try to seek full custody of our son. Sorry if it feels like I'm bringing a cloud of negative energy your way, but this isn't easy to not think about," she told me right after she flopped down on the couch next to me.

"You ain't got to apologize for speaking how you feel, Naomi. I'm also in no rush to get rid of you, so if you ain't ready to go back to your mama's house tomorrow, just let me know, and you ain't gotta go," I said, meaning that shit.

I reveled in that shit because I came home to an empty house every night. Lowkey, tonight, this shit felt good, having someone to kick it in the living room with me because I didn't bring women there, so it was always just me.

"Thank you for that."

Naomi laid her head back on the couch, listening to the music. Not even ten minutes later, I happened to look down at her, and with her head on the headrest of the couch, she was knocked out. I called her name twice because I really didn't think she'd fallen asleep that fast, but when she didn't answer, I knew she was gone for real. I weighed my options on what I should do, and I ended up just lifting her and carrying her bridal style to the bedroom, where I put her down in the middle of my bed. I put a blanket over her and then left the room with a blanket in my hands. I was just going to give up my room and sleep on the couch for the night.

In the morning, once we woke up, I really ain't know where shit would go as it relates to Naomi and me, but I was serious when I said I liked her company, and I wasn't in a rush for her to leave. The reality is that she had a kid. So, as good as that shit sounded about her staying with me for a while, I knew it was more important for her to get back to her son and find a place to reside that was fitting for the two of them. There was no doubt in my mind that her nigga wouldn't just leave the house to Naomi. I wouldn't be surprised if he already had his new bitch living there.

Niggas be bold, then they wonder why women be snapping and just killing they ass. A dirty ass nigga like that deserved

death, though. You don't treat no fuckin' woman that way.

Chapter Eleven

BILLIONAIRE 'BILLION' KNOX

“*M*r. Knox, there’s a beautiful five-bedroom home that just became available this morning. Give me a second to send it over to you. It was a foreclosure, and I was told that there are a few things in the house that need to be fixed,” Courtney, one of the investors for my company, said.

I sat in my bed with the phone on speaker, listening to her.

It was Thursday evening, and I’d just gotten in the house about five minutes ago with all three of my children after getting them from school. I was craving some chicken souse today, and because all the women in my family loved me, all I had to do was call my grandma this morning and tell her what I was in the mood to have for dinner tonight. She came over this afternoon with my mama. They were downstairs right now in the kitchen, putting the final touches on my meal.

As Courtney was talking to me, my phone alerted me that we had motion at the door, and I saw that it was my wife coming into the house. I watched the footage of her coming in from my personal phone, and once she was safely in the house, I clicked out of it.

“When you say that it’s a few things that need to be fixed, what are you referring to?” I asked.

Shit, because she could say that it was a few things, but those few things could be significant problems, costing a nigger thousands of dollars.

“There was a leak in the house from the bathroom that messed up the ceiling. The leak was fixed last year, but it just needs a paint job. The yard could use some fixing, the exterior of the house could use a paint job too. Also, the downstairs bathroom has that older look to it. We should think about upgrading it and—”

“I thought you said this was a beautiful home, Courtney. This house got a lot of shit going on,” I said, making her laugh.

At the same time, Normani walked into the room. She had on her royal blue scrubs and just her socks on her feet since she'd probably left her shoes at the door. We'd gotten back from New York a week ago, and Normani still had her hair straightened. It was parted down the middle, and her long hair was flowing. She looked like she'd gotten her ass kicked today at work. It was flu season, so her office had been busy lately. She'd been leaving the house every morning at four to make her rounds at the hospital, then she would go into the office. So here it was, almost seven, and she was just getting home.

“Hey, baby,” she said, sounding drained and lacking emotion.

“Hold on right quick, Courtney,” I said and then muted the phone.

“Come here, beautiful,” I told my wife after she'd gone into the dresser and pulled out something to throw on after the shower that I knew she was about to take.

She set the clothes on the dresser and walked over to me, standing on the side of the bed. I knew she was tired for real because any other day, if she came home and saw me in bed, still in my work clothes, she would have bitched, but she didn't say shit. I put my hand on her stomach and rubbed it, although she wasn't showing shit. The day before we left to go to New York, Normani came into the bathroom with a pregnancy test in her hands, showing me the double lines.

After the miscarriage and once Normani went back to being her usual self, we started trying again, and it happened fast.

My wife was scared, though, because the miscarriage was a scary one. I wasn't there when it happened, so I didn't witness all the blood and shit, but I was at the hospital to see the rest. That's a feeling I never wanted Normani and me to have to endure again. For the first time in my marriage, that shit made a nigga feel hopeless. My wife was doing all that fuckin' crying over the baby that we'd just lost, and it wasn't a damn thing I could do to bring our baby back. Shit, all I could do was impregnate her with another one, and that's what I did. This baby wouldn't replace the previous one, but shit, I was just glad she even wanted to carry another one for me.

"You walk in the house, and daddy don't get a hug, a kiss, nothing? What's up with that?" I asked, faking like I was hurt by her actions.

Normani released a tired smile as she came closer. She brought her hand up to the back of my head, where she played in my waves, and then she leaned in to kiss me on the lips. She tongued me down for a few seconds, let me know she loved me, and then she pulled away.

"I'm back, Courtney. Send me the address to the location, and I'll go see it tomorrow. From the sound of things, this house gon' require a lot of work. You know I don't mind putting that work in, but this shit gotta stand out from every other house on the block. If not, I don't even care to be bothered with it," I let her know.

While I had her on the phone, she discussed a few more properties with me. I swear, most days, I came home and still worked. Normani hated when I did that shit, but I loved what I did for a living and took that shit real serious. I was always in the mood to snag up a property before another investor did because this was a very competitive business. I was only supposed to be on the phone with Courtney for a few minutes to discuss the original property that she was telling me about, but our conversation didn't end until Normani walked back into the bedroom after taking her shower.

Courtney was a cool white woman. She hustled like a nigga and worked hard as fuck, and that's why she was so important to my team. She had a family of her own with her husband and their two boys. Normani adored Courtney and vice versa. Whenever I was on the phone with her in front of my wife, I never got the side-eye because Normani knew that it was strictly business.

She came into the room wearing an old pink and green AKA shirt with a pair of short black tights that exposed her little thighs and legs. I glanced at her right quick, seeing that she had pulled her hair up in a bun, and then I went back to looking at my phone, scanning the pictures of the few properties that Courtney had sent me.

Normani came and got in the bed. After putting a pillow in my lap, she laid her head on it as both of her arms went around my waist. I could feel her eyes on me, and then she released a yawn.

"You better not take yo' ass to sleep," I told her, putting the phone down, so I could look at her.

I knew from the lowness of her eyes that her ass was going to fall asleep, and it wasn't even eight yet. She laughed at what I said and made herself a bit more comfortable as she continued to lay on me.

"I'm not. I'm just so damn tired. What was Courtney talking to you about?" she asked.

"These new properties that just went on the market. One of them is close to your office. You want to meet me there on your break and see it with me?" I asked, putting my hand on her exposed thigh and rubbing it up and down.

"I'll go with you. Let me see what it looks like," she said. She kept her arms wrapped around my waist while I just showed her the phone and swiped through, so she could see the pictures.

"It has a lot of potential. That's a good area, though. Before I bought my old house, I had looked in that area," she told me.

I showed Normani the other properties that Courtney had sent. In the middle of me telling my wife all these fuckin' grand ideas I had for the properties and shit, if I did decide to flip the houses, her ass fell asleep on a nigga. I knew she didn't fall asleep on me because she was bored with me talking about business, and it was more exhaustion. She was snoring, so I knew her ass was tired for real. I was pissed that she took her ass to sleep because I wanted to lay up and watch a damn movie tonight.

With a light chuckle, I leaned down, kissed my wife on her forehead and her lips a couple of times, and then removed her arms from around me. I stood up, went over to Normani's side of the bed, pulled back the covers, and placed her underneath them. Her ass didn't even stir. I left the room, closing the door behind me.

"Where you going?" I asked my son once I made it out of the bedroom.

He was walking with his Nintendo Switch in his hands and his headphones around his neck.

"I'm about to call my mama. You need to go down there and pop Khari. She being bad. Prosper too. She don't listen," his lil ass said.

I laughed because he had the nerve to sound like his little sisters were stressing him the fuck out. Lil Bill loved Khari and Prosper dearly, but they ran his ass, especially Prosper. She was only two, but her ass was something, man.

"Ima go get them. When you get off the phone, take a shower, and I want to see your homework too," I told him.

"Grandma looked at it. She said it's straight," he let me know.

"I still want to check it."

"Aight then. Where Normani at?"

"She in the room sleeping. Don't none of y'all go fuckin' with her tonight either. You need something, holla at me," I told him.

When Normani and I were both at home, I swear all three fuckin' kids went to her for everything. They were going to overwork the fuck out of my wife, and I didn't need that shit, especially with her being pregnant.

After talking with my son, I made it downstairs, where I heard a bunch of talking, laughing, and shit coming from the kitchen. The stack of mail that I'd left in the kitchen when I came in the house was still on the island, so I took a seat to go through it right quick while I ate my mama and grandma's award-winning chicken souse.

"Here, son," my mama said and set a big bowl of souse in front of me.

That shit was fresh off the stove because I could see the steam coming from the bowl. I ain't even have the time to properly thank her for it because I noticed that a letter was in the mail, addressed to me, from the corrections department. I opened that shit quick as fuck, and when I saw whose name was written as the sender, I sucked my teeth.

"This some bullshit," I mumbled to myself when I saw Raniyah Jackson's name.

I didn't even know how the fuck this bitch knew where the fuck I lived. Raniyah was a part of the infamous Jackson family. She and I were supposed to be on some business shit, and I was going to sell her some land, but once she made it known that all she really had plans to do was suck my dick and fuck, I quickly stopped dealing with that bitch. Before she could be too much of a problem, her ass was picked up on murder charges and found guilty of killing her ex-boyfriend. I swear the second Normani opened her fuckin' eyes, I was going to tell her about this shit. I didn't need to be beefing with my wife again for keeping secrets.

The last secret I kept, her ass spazzed the fuck out, tying a nigga to the bed and shit, and went to beating my ass. I wasn't giving her a reason to do no shit like that again. Hell nah. She still brought that shit up, too, like it was the funniest shit in the fuckin' world.

“What is that?” my mama asked, rounding the island and standing next to me, so she could look at the letter too.

“This that crazy ass Jackson girl that they found guilty of killing her ex-boyfriend. What dealings you got with her, Billion?” my mama asked once she saw the name of the sender.

“I ain’t got no dealings with her, Ma. This bitch crazy. On here talking about she misses me. This some bullshit,” I said and set the paper down, not even about to sit up and read that bullshit.

Once the opening sentence was her saying she missed me, and she didn’t even know me well enough to miss me, I just stopped entertaining it. My mama and my grandma were looking at me funny. They were looking at a nigga like they didn’t believe me.

“Why y’all looking at me like that? I ain’t fuck that girl if that’s what y’all about to ask me. I’ll never cheat on my wife,” I voiced.

My kids were in the next room, playing with their toys and shit they had in the living room, so it wasn’t like I was cursing in front of them.

“I know you aren’t stupid enough to cheat on Normani. The bigger question here is finding out how the hell her ass even got your address. I don’t trust that,” my grandma said.

“And it ain’t like I run around with the same people that she’s cool with. I don’t even know them Jackson niggas. I just know of them. I ain’t about to stress out over that shit. Ma, throw that letter in the garbage. I don’t need Normani trying to read that bullshit,” I told my mama, and she laughed.

“Because your wife thinks that me and Mama are some damn fools. Always sleeping like that. I looked her dead in her eyes when she walked into the house and asked her again if she was pregnant. She lied and said no. So, tell me, son, am I going to be a grandmother again or what? I mean, I already know, but I want to hear it come from your mouth,” she said and folded her arms.

I laughed as I ate more of my food.

“If you know, then why you need to hear it come from my mouth? Ma, get your daughter, with her nosey ass,” I said to my grandma, who was straightening up the kitchen.

My grandma looked at me and threw her hands up in surrender, not wanting any parts of this conversation. Knowing my grandma, she already knew what was up, which is why she didn't even care to talk about it. The two of them stayed around for about fifteen minutes until my mama started packing up all fast and shit like she all of a sudden had somewhere to go.

“Slow yo' ass down. My pops ain't going nowhere,” I said, fuckin' with her as I followed her out the door.

“Billion, please! You wish I was running out of here to go and see your damn daddy,” she said, getting defensive.

“God gon' strike yo' ass down. Lil sneaky ass. You don't think I know you still fuckin' that man? Shit, he already told me,” I lied, but I just wanted to see if she would take the bait.

I had a feeling that my mama and my dad were still fuckin' around, but I didn't have any hardcore evidence. Normani was cool with my mama, and I even tried to get her to spill some shit, but she would never fold. I ain't have a problem with my folks getting back together. Shit, their crazy asses fuckin' deserved each other.

“Watch your mouth. Don't talk to me like I'm one of your little friends. Goodbye, Billion,” she said.

I laughed because the fact that she was getting so angry proved that there was some truth in the things I said.

“Tell my pops I said what's good when you get over there. I hope you make that nigga wear a condom too. That shit won't even look right if you make me a big brother at my age,” I told her.

She couldn't even be mad because she ended up laughing as she rushed to get in her car. The second my grandma was in there with her, she sped off.

After sitting downstairs with my daughters for about an hour and looking over Lil Bill and Khari's homework, we finally made it upstairs, where I started the bathwater for Khari and Prosper. There was a huge jacuzzi sized tub in the bathroom for them, and half the time, Normani would just let the two of them bathe together to save time. So that's exactly what I was going to do.

"You gotta put the bubbles in there like Normani does it," Khari said. Then, like she was annoyed that a nigga didn't do the bubbles and shit that Normani did, she quickly walked past me, went under the cabinet to grab the bubble bath, and poured some into the water as it filled up.

"Aight. What else she be doing, since yo' lil ass know everything?" I asked Khari.

She laughed and looked at me. "You gotta put a shower cap on Prosper's head because she likes to splash water when we in the tub," Khari told me.

I pulled out one of the drawers where I knew Normani kept the shower caps for them and gave one to Khari to protect her braids, and I put one on Prosper's hair to protect her two pigtails. Both of their clothes were dirty, so I already knew they had a good ass day, and after this bath, the two of them should just knock out.

The tub had filled up, and I helped Prosper undress then sat her down in the tub with her sister. I sat on the closed toilet seat and ran my hands down my face.

"You like Mauri, Daddy?" Khari asked as she played with some of the bath toys that I'd put in the tub for them.

Mauri was Denim's boyfriend. That fuck nigga tried to check me about my fuckin' daughter, so nah, I didn't like him, but I also wasn't going to insert my daughter in grown folk's business, so I couldn't tell her that.

"He straight. As long as you and your mama like him, that's all that matters. Stop splashing that water, Prosper," I said because her little ass was getting water all on the floor and shit.

“I don’t like him. I heard him tell Mommy that he don’t like you,” Khari told me.

I chuckled at that. “Why you don’t like him? What he be doing?” I inquired.

Khari had a lot of her mother’s ways, where she really ain’t like nobody, so before I thought too deep into the shit that my daughter was saying, I at least wanted to hear her out.

“He’s mean. He always trying to be the boss.”

“He ever hit you?” I questioned her.

“No. He put me in time out before.”

“Aight. As long as he ain’t putting his hands on you. Ima have a talk with your mama, though. Finish bathing because y’all need to go to sleep,” I said to Khari.

“Sleep with Mommy,” Prosper said.

“No, you ain’t. You sleeping in your own room, in your own bed,” I told her.

She understood a nigga too because she pouted, looking like her damn mama. Her ass was two, and never wanted to sleep in her own damn bed. I liked to get in like two quickies in the middle of the night with my wife, and with Prosper in the bed with us, with her feet all in a nigga’s face and shit, I couldn’t do that. She would cut up at night when Normani made her get in her crib and go to sleep, and I already knew tonight wasn’t going to be any different. My wife was such a sucker, too, so she’d beg me to let Prosper sleep with us, but I always said no. Lil girl was too damn spoiled.

I bathed Prosper, helped Khari wash her face, and then I wrapped the towel around Prosper. As I held her, I handed Khari her towel, and she wrapped it around her. I lifted Khari out of the tub with my free hand. After they’d brushed their teeth, we went down the hall, where I dried off Prosper, put some baby power on her, and then threw her on a onesie. She fought that shit for like fifteen minutes, crying for Normani until she eventually went to sleep. I laid her in her crib, made sure the baby monitor was on and then walked out of the room. I checked on Khari, who had fallen asleep as well, and

Lil Bill was in his room sleeping too. I kissed all my kids goodnight, made sure their doors were closed and went to my bedroom. Normani was still asleep on her side of the bed.

It was my turn to take a shower and handle my business in the bathroom. I was hoping to make enough noise to wake Normani up, but her ass was sleeping like she was in a fuckin' coma. That was my movie partner at night, and not even on no soft shit, but I looked forward to those nights when I would come home from a long day of work, and Normani and I would put a movie on. Although she would only stay up to watch like the first forty-five minutes with me, I still enjoyed it.

I eventually joined her in bed and turned the TV on, keeping the volume low because I wanted to see the last few minutes of the Lakers game. Truth was playing tonight, and Twinkle had already texted me and asked if I had the game on. The Lakers were up by six, and I was watching Truth with the ball, dribbling down the court. I knew he was about to shoot for a three because that was the nigga's specialty. Truth was so fuckin' cold on the court. Basketball wasn't even my sport like that. I loved football, but Truth's team was good, and they always kept me interested. I watched as he shot the ball, and it went through. I wanted to clap my damn self like the fans were doing in the crowd, but Normani would wake up snapping.

The camera zoomed in on Twinkle, and she had floor seats, but she stood up really quick to clap for her husband. I smiled at my little cousin, seeing how she was dripping in diamonds and looking like a true basketball wife. Sitting right next to her was Mia. Still couldn't believe our secret had gotten out because that was just one thing that I would have taken to the grave. The crazy thing about it is, neither of us even said shit; Twinkle's nosey ass was just able to put the pieces together. Mia and my wife were cordial, and all that happened while they were preparing for Twinkle and Truth's wedding since they had to be around each other often.

The light from the TV caused Normani to stir in her sleep, and she jumped up fast as hell.

"Where are the kids?" she asked in that sleepy voice.

“In their room, sleeping. Where they supposed to be?” I countered, looking at her ass like she was crazy.

Normani got out of bed quick as fuck, looking confused like her ass was dreaming or some shit. You know you having some good ass sleep when you wake yo’ ass up, looking like you don’t know what the fuck is going on.

“You not going to bring Prosper in here with us?” she asked.

Her ass was why Prosper didn’t like to sleep in her room now. She was always making her sleep with us. The crazy thing is, my wife was a whole doctor out here who preached to the parents of her patients about not co-sleeping, yet she brought her ass home and did the same shit.

“Bae, she sleep. I told you ’bout that shit anyway. Her butt is getting too big to be sleeping in the bed with us,” I said to my wife.

“I know. I know. Let me just go kiss them, and I’ll come back. You could have woken me up, Billionaire. I would have helped with their baths and stuff,” she said.

“Shorty, I was taking the load off you. I looked over Lil Bill and Khari’s homework. They ate, bathed, all that shit. They good. Don’t go in there waking Prosper up either, trying to be slick,” I told her.

She laughed and then walked out of the room. I focused my attention back on the game. It was three minutes left, and the score was tied. Shit was getting good, so I sat up a little bit in the bed, trying to get a better view.

“Them niggas ain’t fuckin’ around,” I said, watching as a number 3 from the Warriors was able to steal the ball, and he shot it for three, which broke the tie and now had the Warriors in the lead.

“Billionaire?” I heard Normani’s voice come through on the baby monitor.

“No, Normani. I already know what you about to ask me. Bruh, let her sleep,” I said, picking the monitor up and talking on it.

I knew she was gon' take her ass in there and ask if she could bring Prosper back with her. When Normani didn't respond, it proved to me that I was right. By this time, I was on my feet because it was just seconds left in the game, and the Warriors were up by two points. The clock was ticking, Truth had the ball, and he was standing halfway across the court, about to shoot it for three. I knew that nigga was a shooter, but I also knew he had that pressure on him right now. If he missed that shot, his team would lose the game.

"That's what the fuck I'm talking 'bout, man!" I said after Truth made the basket.

The buzzer went off, and he and his team started celebrating their win. I clapped my hands like I was there, happy as fuck for them.

Normani didn't join me back in the room until about ten minutes later. She came in, carrying a plastic bowl in her hands. I already knew her cookies and crème ice cream was in there, which her ass didn't let nobody eat.

"I heard you all the way from downstairs. I'm assuming they won," she said, climbing in the bed with the bowl in her hands.

"Yeah. When they get to the playoffs, we gon' fly out there and go to a couple of games," I said, looking down at her.

"Yes, I could use a mini-vacation. New York didn't really count after everything happened with Naomi, and we had to fly back. Ugh. I just want to go over there and slap the shit out of Liam my damn self. He's doing my sister so wrong. You know he took all the money out of her checking account? Luckily, my sister had another account that he didn't know about, so she's been saving up for years in the event that something like this happened.

"It's been a week, and she hasn't seen LJ because the fool changed the locks and sent her a message, saying that he would have her arrested for trespassing if she comes on the church property. So it isn't like she can see LJ in school either. The only reason she hasn't gone back to the house after she saw that he changed the locks is that she's scared of going

back to jail. You know the case isn't over. She still has to go before a judge, but I'm not even worried about that part because Naomi has a good lawyer. I just don't understand niggas sometimes. We have y'all damn babies, risk our lives in labor, cook, clean, raise your kids, fuck and suck whenever y'all ask us to, then one day a man can just wake up and come to the foolish decision that he doesn't want to be with you anymore. You just don't get any ideas. I already told you that I will kill you," Normani said, talking shit with her ice cream in her lap.

I was lying back on a pillow with one hand behind my head and the other hand using the remote to thumb through the channels.

"Why every time a nigga fucks up, you gotta throw me into the equation? The other day, we watched a movie, and the nigga gave his girl an STD. There you go with yo' 'you better not ever fuck around on me and bring me something back.' Yo' ass be talking fuckin' crazy. Just be looking for a nigga to fuck up. I ain't gon' ever fuck up and make divorce an option. Shorty, you gon' owe me too much," I told her.

She took a big spoonful of her ice cream and laughed.

"Negro, what you mean Ima owe you too much? What does that even mean?" she asked, cocking her head to the side.

"Shit, we can start by giving me back all them nuts I made yo' ass bust over the years. I want all that shit back. All them fuckin' foot massages. All them tricks I taught you to do on my dick, I want all that back. You ain't gon' be doing none of that shit for the next nigga," I told her.

I had my wife crying laughing as she sat next to me.

"And the sad part about it, your ass is probably serious too. You're petty, but negro, I'll be just as petty. I want your soul if it ever comes down to that. Might as well cut that dick off and hand it over to me, too, because you're not going to need it. If we separate, what you need a dick for? So, you can give it away to the next woman? Ummm, I think not," she said before reaching over and taking the remote from me.

I laughed at her because she was just as sick in the fuckin' head as I was.

“On some serious shit though, bae, divorce ain't an option for us. You told me that you would only leave me if I fuck around on you, and you know that shit will never happen. I know you don't like when I keep secrets from you, so let me go ahead and put it out there that the bitch Raniyah sent me a letter from prison. Right hand to God, I only read the first sentence, and I made my mama rip that shit up and throw it out. Normani, I don't know how the fuck she even got our address, but Ima find out,” I said.

I could tell I had ruined the mood just that quick when she rolled her eyes and released an annoyed breath.

“What did the first sentence say?” she asked.

I chuckled because out of everything I had just fuckin' said to her, the only thing that registered was the part about me saying that I'd read the first sentence.

“Something about she misses me,” I told Normani. She rolled her eyes at me again and went back to eating her ice cream.

“I guess now ain't a good time to ask you for some of that ice cream,” I said.

“I wasn't going to give it to you anyway, Billionaire, and you know that,” her smart ass said.

I reached over and snatched that shit from her.

“I'll take this fuckin' ice cream,” I said, fuckin' with her.

Normani came over to my side and climbed on top of me, just like I knew she would. She struggled to get the ice cream from my hands since I was holding it over my head. Her hands went for my dick, and she grabbed my fuckin' balls, leaving me no choice but to run her back her shit. She sat down on my stomach, legs straddled as she laughed loudly once I handed her back her ice cream.

“You ain't have to grab my fuckin' balls. We gon' need that shit,” I told her.

She laughed, finished her ice cream, and then set the bowl on my nightstand. My hands went for her ass, and I gave it a light squeeze.

“You know I don’t want nobody else but you, right, bae?” I asked, looking into her beautiful gray eyes.

“I know. It’s the bitches who don’t know that,” she said.

I started grinding her on my dick because my shit was hard at this point, and I was trying to slide in it right quick.

“Fuck them bitches. As long as you know what’s up. Pull my dick out,” I told her after I removed my hands from her ass.

I grabbed the hem of her shirt and removed it. Her pretty titties popped out, and I held them in my large hands, bouncing them and playing with her nipples. I leaned my head up a little bit to suck and bite each of her nipples. She moaned and ran her hands through my waves. After paying both of her nipples the same amount of attention, I went for her tights and underwear. Once I helped her take them bitches off, she was back sitting on me, but this time, she was naked, and I could feel the juices from her pussy wetting up my stomach already.

I grabbed Normani by her throat, making her come closer to me, and we engaged in a nasty ass kiss. The whole time we were kissing, she was moaning against my lips and grinding her body on me. Still making love to her lips with mine, I was able to reach down and pull my dick out. As I held that big shit in my hand, I tapped Normani on her ass, basically giving her the green light to sit on this motha fucka. So, she did, contorting her face the whole way down into that sexy ass fuck face I loved. She rode my dick at a slow pace, but only half of me.

“Sit all the way down on that shit! Fuck is you doing?” I asked with my hands on her waist, about to sit her ass down for her.

She had her head thrown back, and she was moaning.

“Hmrrrrrr... Babyyyyy. Give me a secondddd,” she moaned, bringing her head back up and looking at me as she

still rode me slow.

“I don’t have a second, shorty,” I said and slammed her ass all the way down.

I started drilling into her pussy from the bottom since her ass got up there and thought this was a trial run. But this was the real fuckin’ thing, and a nigga was ready to fuck. Normani had yet to utter a word because her mouth was just hanging wide open. As I drilled into her pussy, her titties were bouncing, and she had her hands on my chest, scratching at me.

“Shittttttt... Billionaireeeeeee... Fuckkkk,” she cried.

I grabbed her hands, forcing her to keep them shits behind her back and out of the fuckin’ way. Holding her by her wrists, I went to work, and she started hollering out to me that she was cumming. I had to pat myself on the back for that shit because I made her ass cum in less than a minute.

“My dick feels different to you?” I asked, flipping her lil ass over and making her get on all fours.

She put the perfect arch in her back, leaving just the bottom half of her body on the bed, and her ass was tooted in the air for me as she looked at me over her shoulder.

“Shut up, Billionaire!” she said, making me laugh.

“Don’t get mad because you struggle with taking dick. Bring yo’ ass back some,” I said and stood up, legs planted on the floor and dick in my hands, ready to fuck up her walk.

When she didn’t move, I dragged her ass back and slid right back in, throwing my head back as I appreciated the good pussy from my wife. I woke something up in her when I got on her about not taking dick. She started slamming her ass back, matching me stroke for stroke as she mumbled shit that I didn’t even understand.

“Ima stand back and watch you fuck. Let me see if you can get me to nut on yo’ own,” I said as I stopped my movements, put my hands on her ass cheeks, and spread them apart.

My wife stole the show from there because she was throwing that ass back on me, doing that shit deep and slow.

“HmMMM... Babyyyyy. That dick feels soooo goodddd,” she moaned, looking back at me over her shoulder.

“I know it do. That’s why you always saying crazy ass shit. This pussy good too, bae. Damn. Keep going. This yo’ dick,” I told her.

She sped up her movements, and it was a struggle to stand my ass back there and not drill her shit from behind, but I wanted the ball to be in her court just for a second.

“Babyyyyy, I’m cummingggggg... Shittttt,” she cried.

“Damn, girl. Me too. Fuck! Fuck! I’m ’bout to nut,” I groaned and threw my head back.

I made sure her pussy caught everything before I pulled out. Because my wife was a beast now, after fuckin’ with me, she turned around, got on her hands and knees, and started sucking and licking up the juices that were left on my dick. My dick started twitching when she did that shit, but damn, it still was a lovely ass feeling.

After she licked everything up, I laid her ass back on the bed, holding onto her ankles with her legs spread wide like she was doing a split, and I dove headfirst into that pussy. I had her clit in my mouth, and I sucked on it nice and slow. I alternated between doing that and licking it. That shit had her going crazy. Not even a whole minute passed before she came. She pushed my ass back after she got her last nut, then grabbed a pillow from the bottom of the bed and placed it between her legs.

Normani looked at me with a satisfied smile on her face and low eyes. “Thank you, daddy.”

“Any time, baby. You know I’ll make that pussy cum anytime,” I responded.

I didn’t even have the energy to go in the bathroom and wash my dick off. So, I ended up lying on my back with my hand behind my head. Within a minute, I dozed off right along

with Normani. I swear that fuckin' pussy was like NyQuil to a nigga. It always put me right to sleep.

Chapter Twelve

LIAM EDWARDS

“*B*aby, someone is pulling up in the driveway,” Tischina called out to me from the foyer of the house.

I was in the kitchen, making breakfast for her and my son. I’d just taken the last pancake out of the skillet. When Tischina yelled out that someone was pulling up in my driveway, I quickly turned the stove off and went to check it out. LJ was sitting at the dining room table with a coloring book in front of him, looking like he’d just lost his best friend. He hadn’t seen his mother in over two weeks, and he’d been down about that.

I know a lot of people may think I’m wrong for keeping Naomi away from our son, but I couldn’t trust her right now. She lashed out at me in that bathroom, put her hands on me, and was a total embarrassment. I was just afraid to have her with LJ because I didn’t know if she would try to harm him in an attempt to get back at me. Granted, Naomi had every right to be angry at me because what I did was hurtful, but she didn’t have to stoop so low and put her hands on me. She didn’t even behave that way. That behavior was more so up her sister’s alley, and that’s probably where she’d learned it.

Naomi was the victim in this situation. I will not take that away from her, but what I won’t allow her to do is make herself believe that she and I didn’t have problems in this

marriage. As a man, how is it fair to me to want all these children, but my wife isn't able to carry them for me? I said before that it was just one miscarriage too many for me, and that's when I started falling out of love with her. I never had the guts to tell her that because I did love Naomi, and I didn't want to crush her.

What I did do was tell her a couple of months ago that I just simply wasn't attracted to her anymore. I was speaking from the standpoint of the miscarriages, hoping that she would be able to read between the lines, but she probably thought I was only talking about the physical side of things when it was deeper than that.

I made it to the living room and saw that a silver Lexus had just backed into the driveway. That car belonged to Naomi's mom, Melody. Melody was like a second mother to me, and I did genuinely love her. Whenever she came over to visit, it would always involve laughter and smiles, but from the angry look on her face, I already knew this wasn't a social call. When Melody got out of the car, I noticed that the passenger side door had opened as well, and Naomi got out. Naomi was served today with divorce papers, which I had sent to her mother's house, so that could be why the two of them were at my house.

"I'll go upstairs to give you all some privacy," Tischina said.

She was about to walk out of the foyer, but I grabbed her hand, letting it be known that she didn't have to go anywhere. Her stomach was growing so fast these days, but it was still just a mini bump. She stood there, looking beautiful as ever, in just a robe and some house shoes.

"You don't have to go anywhere, baby. This should be quick. More than likely, she needs money. Let me just see what she wants, and then we can get back to having breakfast as a family," I told her, followed by a kiss on the lips.

The knocking on the door was aggressive, and it let me know for sure that this definitely wasn't a social visit. I went over to the door and opened it. Melody stood there with

nothing but disappointment in her eyes as Naomi stood next to her.

Naomi was the kind of woman who was always smiling, no matter the occasion. I could look right at her and tell she was drained. Clearly, I'd had a lot to do with that. She'd always been a tall, slender woman, but in the almost three weeks since I'd seen her, I was able to pick up on her weight loss. She wore black sweatpants that were a little big on her, and even the V-neck shirt that she wore could have been a little tighter. Her long hair was in its curly state, but she had it in a ponytail.

Her eyes fell on me, and then they went behind me to Tischina, who was wearing the robe that used to belong to Naomi. That wasn't done maliciously. Tischina was still in the process of getting her things moved in, and she hadn't brought over a robe yet. I made sure to wash it first before I'd given it to her, and she started wearing it around the house. Tischina wasn't officially moving in with me, but I did allow her to move some of her things in for when she stayed the night. She still had her place, which I felt was imperative for her to keep. Although I was in love now, I just wanted to make sure things were going to work out between us before we really made it official.

I could tell that there was so much Naomi wanted to say and do once she saw Tischina, but I watched her bite her lip and not utter a word.

“As a man of God, how is this even okay, Liam? It's one thing to cheat in your marriage, but your lack of remorse is the part I'm having a hard time understanding. You have this woman standing behind you with a robe on that I gifted to my daughter a few years ago as a birthday present, and you literally don't see a problem in any of this. You are disrespectful, and I'm going to tell you the same thing I told my ex-husband. God will deal with you. You don't get to go around treating people any kind of way and think that nothing is supposed to happen to you in return. My daughters are grown, and I try to stay out of their business, but I'd be a fool

to let someone disrespect and humiliate my child like this and not say a thing about it.

“If you knew you were going to be messing around with this woman, you could have come to Naomi as a man and let her know you didn’t want to be with her anymore, instead of having her find out about you and this... this mess the way she did! Don’t you have any shame?” Melody asked me.

She was angry, and she had every right to be. I already knew how Melody could get when it came to her daughters, so this didn’t come as a surprise.

“I understand that what I’ve done is wrong. You’re not here when I’m on my knees, asking God for forgiveness. I’m not a perfect man, but neither am I heartless. I can’t help who I fall in love with. I don’t want to disrespect you, Melody—”

“You’ll never get to disrespect me, boy. I’ll never give you that much power,” she said, cutting me off.

I released a sigh because no matter how angry I got, she was still my elder, and I had to respect her.

“Naomi knew this marriage was over months ago. If she wants to be in denial, that’s on her and—”

“Liam, you never let me know that this marriage was over. Did we have problems? Of course, we did, but you made it seem like our problems were things that I lacked. I started getting my hair done more than usual and making sure I dressed the part. Everything I thought would make you happy, I tried to do, but I guess it didn’t work because you already had someone. I never took you to be the kind of man who wouldn’t be able to take accountability for your actions. You’re making this out to be my fault when the only one to blame is you because you said vows to me that you didn’t mean. And her because she knew we were married, but that didn’t stop her from fucking you!” Naomi screamed.

The sound of her voice caused little feet to start moving, and my son came running full speed to the front door. He pushed Tischina and me out of the way and cried as he screamed for Naomi.

“Mommy,” he kept crying and saying over and over.

I watched as a tear fell from Naomi’s eyes, which she quickly wiped away as she lifted our son and started raining kisses all over him. He held onto his mother the tightest he’s ever held onto her as he kept crying, asking her where she’d been and telling her that he’d missed her.

“I want to go with you, Mommy. I want to go with you,” he kept saying.

“Liam, I need to go upstairs and get a few of my things,” Naomi said to me.

“Things like what? There’s nothing in this house that you own, so there isn’t anything for you to get,” I said.

“Let me walk away. Let me walk away because I’m going to be in jail today,” Melody said, and then she walked away from the door.

“I couldn’t care less about any clothes, shoes, or anything else that’s in this house. I don’t even want it. You can give it to her and have her squeeze into them, just like she’s squeezing into my robe. I need important documents from upstairs, like my social security card, birth certificate, and a few other things. I’m taking my son with me too. My son is standing here crying, and if you expect me to leave here without him, I’m telling you now that you may as well just go ahead and call the cops on me because it’s not happening.

“I am his mother! I gave birth to him. You don’t have any more power over him than I do. Oh, and by the way, the divorce papers came today. I see that you’re serious about seeking sole custody of LJ, and that’s cute. Sending those divorce papers in the mail was probably the nicest thing you’ve done for me in years. Now, move!” she snapped and pushed past me to go upstairs.

I don’t know why I expected Naomi to be crying about the divorce papers. She sounded a little too eager to sign them. It made me wonder if she might have had someone on the side too.

“Stay down here,” I said to Tischina as I closed the front door.

I jogged up the stairs and followed the sound of movement, which was in one of the offices. Naomi was on her knees, putting in the code to the safe, where I stored our important documents.

“You can take him, only because I don’t like to see my son crying like this. I’m filing for full custody, as you know,” I told her.

She laughed and looked at me and then LJ. It wasn’t an amused laugh; if anything, it was a sarcastic laugh, and she was using that as a way to calm herself, especially since our son was standing right in the room with us.

“Baby, go in your room and get a book bag. Put some of your toys in there. Mommy is coming, okay?” Naomi said to LJ.

He hesitated a little bit at first, but he eventually walked out of the room and went down the hall to his bedroom. The second he was gone, and out of earshot, Naomi grabbed the documents she needed and stood up.

“I saw that in the divorce papers, which is why I said downstairs that it was cute. I mean, Liam, this is a free world, so you can do anything you want, but it’ll be a cold day in hell before I let you and that bitch have full custody of my son! The only thing I will agree to on those bullshit documents you sent me is accepting that this marriage is coming to an end and agreeing that I don’t want shit from you. You want to be nasty? I can be nasty too. I always said that if you and I didn’t make it, the fair thing would be to share custody of LJ, but I want full custody of him. You mistreat me, you have an affair with this woman for God knows how long, and then this is how you do me and expect me to sit back and take it! Please! Fuck you!” she screamed and pushed past me to walk into our old bedroom.

“Since when did you start talking like this? Cursing like that isn’t cute. I really hope you know that,” I told Naomi as I followed her right into the bedroom.

I watched as she walked into the room, froze in place, and the only thing she could do was shake her head. There used to be a beautiful painting hanging over our headboard of Naomi and me on our wedding day. One of the older men at my church, a professional artist, had gifted it to us a few years ago for our anniversary. There were other pictures of Naomi and me in silver photo frames, which went well with the silver and white color scheme that we had going on in the bedroom, but all of that was gone too.

She turned around and stared at me. “Me cursing isn’t cute, but what your doing is cute, right? What kind of example are you setting for your son, Liam? You’re proving to him that it’s okay to be heartless and to treat people any kind of way. What makes me so angry with you is that you didn’t even try to fix our marriage. You just went out, seeking happiness in the next woman, or what you think is happiness, when we had so many options. Liam, we could have gotten professional help. You could have told me exactly what the problem was, and I would have fixed it, and—”

“You can’t carry my babies the way I want you to, Naomi! That’s the problem!” I screamed, cutting her off.

I didn’t want to be heartless and say it, but the problem Naomi and I had, a therapist couldn’t fix. I could tell she was a little taken aback by what I’d just said to her. Honestly, I expected her to cry and run out of the room like she’d done when I told her I wasn’t attracted to her anymore, but she didn’t do any of that.

“I expect that comment to come from a devilish kind of man, but never from you. Then again, I don’t even know who you are anymore, so I have no clue why I’m surprised by anything you say to me these days. I don’t think the problem was that I couldn’t carry your babies. I believe God was trying to show me something in you that I wasn’t able to see with my own two eyes. Me losing those babies was His way of making it where when this day came, and we separated from each other, I wouldn’t leave with too much baggage. That would have been, what? Four kids that I had from you, right?”

“Maybe God knew that you weren’t deserving, and He’s saving me to carry babies in my womb for a man who is worthy of me. A man who will appreciate me. A man who can fuck me, and not like some high school boy who just got his first dose of the gold that’s between a woman’s legs and cums the second he slides inside. One who will go down on me and not be afraid, like a little ass bitch! One who doesn’t have to schedule a time on the damn calendar to make love to me and can simply do me in the kitchen for a quick five minutes while I’m cooking spaghetti. But, negro, all you know is five seconds!

“You think I care that Tischina has you, Liam? You’re not a prize! I stayed with you for yearsrrrrss, accepted all your flaws, accepted your weak ass stroke game, and you get to be the one to back out of this marriage and ask for a divorce because I couldn’t carry your babies? Please!” she said to me, telling me a mouthful.

Not even going to lie, Naomi’s words hurt me a little bit because she knew that one of my insecurities was my performance in bed. I felt like I always disappointed her after sex by getting mine before she could ever get hers, but she always made it seem like it wasn’t a problem. Now that we’re getting a divorce, she decided to speak her mind, which I felt was crazy.

“Say what you want to say, Naomi. I’m with Tischina because she makes me happy, and I love her—”

“Then go downstairs and be with her! What are you doing up here with me then? I don’t need you to watch me!” she screamed.

“Because I know you don’t have any money, so I need to watch you and make sure you don’t steal anything!” I roared.

Naomi walked over and got in my face. Her face was so close to mine that she could kiss me.

“I think you forgot that Melody raised me. From the moment I said I do to you, I had an account on the side, and I’ve been stashing money in that account for over eight years! Trust me, my son and I are good! If I don’t want to clock in to

a job again ever in life, I would still be good. Luckily, I have a sister and a brother-in-law who own a school. The moment you took the money out of my account and made it clear that I could no longer come on church property, I landed a job working at my sister and Billionaire's school. They pay me double what your cheap ass was paying.

“Not only do I have a job, but I think you forgot that Billionaire also flips houses. My furniture should be arriving later this evening at the beautiful townhouse that I now own. Special thanks to my brother-in-law for getting that for me. I lost nothing by the two of us bringing this marriage to an end. If anything, I feel like I gained wings. I can now have pure happiness and no longer have to pretend to be this perfect wife, perfect mom, and perfect woman for you. That woman you have downstairs... God, I hope she was worth it,” she said before pushing past me and walking into the bathroom.

Naomi took her medication from the bathroom counter and then walked back into the bedroom and grabbed her tablet that was still on the dresser. She walked out of the room with the items, then went down the hall to get Liam, and I was behind her the entire time. Our son jumped up once he saw his mom come into the room, and with his Batman book bag on his back, he rushed over to her. She picked him up and walked with him down the stairs.

When we all made it down, Tischina was still standing in the foyer, looking everywhere except at Naomi. It's like she was purposely trying not to make eye contact with her.

“How you get them is how you lose them. Remember that. I want to slap the shit out of you. I'm itching to do it, but it's two things that are stopping me. One, I'll be back in jail. Two, this is now a situation where Liam and I are about to fight for full custody of my son. I don't need anything to hinder me from getting full custody of him. I hope you have a stronnggggg uterus, baby. That man over there likes his women to be able to properly carry his babies. If not, he'll find the next woman to do it. Take care,” she said as she made it down the stairs. “I would tell you about his weak sex game, but you're already pregnant, so I'm sure you know about it

already. Whew. Have fun with that, girl. Have fun,” Naomi said and walked over to the door.

Tischina didn't even bother to say anything, and truthfully, neither did I. For me, I was just shocked to see this new Naomi. I had to have awakened the beast in her with the damage I did because Naomi didn't talk like that. I had been around her for years, and I really couldn't remember a time when I'd heard her curse.

When she made it to the door, I tried to give my son a kiss, but he turned his head as if he didn't want me to kiss him. If anything, he was just mad at me because he had been asking me about seeing his mother for the past few weeks, and I didn't deliver. That kind of saddened me because I felt like my own son was turning on me, but I didn't say anything. I watched them walk out the door, and then I closed it behind them.

Watching from the window, I saw Naomi put LJ in the back of her mom's car. She got in the passenger seat, and just that quick, the three of them were gone.

“So, what now?” Tischina asked after about two minutes of silence.

“The plan is still the same, baby. Let's just wait for this divorce to finalize, and then we can move forward,” I said.

“What about you and me coming out as a couple? You know there's talk about us around the church because of what happened at the picnic, but because it was just us in the bathroom when Naomi came in and was arrested, not many people really know. I allowed you to keep us a secret in the past because you were still married to her. I'm not doing that this time—”

“And I'm not asking you to! Just... just give me a minute,” I said and then walked back up the stairs, went into my bedroom, and closed the door behind me.

I didn't even have an appetite anymore. All the food that I cooked this morning, I didn't even care to eat. Naomi came and just complicated things. I felt like things in my life were

about to take a downward spiral, and I didn't think I was prepared for it.

Chapter Thirteen

DENIM McCLOUD

“*Y*ou need to discipline your kids. You ain’t got no rules for them, Ma, and that’s why they behave the way they do,” Mauri said, getting on me after I had to stop frying fish in the kitchen to get the broom and dustpan and sweep up glass from the floor.

Rylo, Khari, and even Kelsey’s little ass were playing around in the living room with a ball and broke my damn flower vase. It had some beautiful red roses in it that Mauri had come over yesterday and surprised me with when I’d gotten home from work. I had over ten heads that I did today, and my back was screaming, but I had to feed my kids. Mauri bitching to me about disciplining my kids was literally the last thing I wanted to hear.

Instead of saying anything back and even engaging in the conversation, I just ignored him with hopes that he would drop it and just let this shit the fuck go! I loved Mauri so much, but damn, he bitched all the fuckin’ time. I just felt like he was always judging me for how I parented my children, and I hated that.

Our lifestyles were different growing up. My mama and I have always had a good relationship, and she was a good parent. Mauri’s story was different, especially with him knowing since he was six that he was into girls and his family

being unable to accept that. He knew he wanted to be a boy at a young age, which caused many problems in his household as a kid.

He'd told me stories about how he was harshly punished as a child, like having to strip naked and get whipped with belts and shit by his mother and father whenever he got in trouble. I didn't know if he expected me to do the same things to my kids, but I would never in my life whip my kids. Now, do I pop them, jack their little asses up, and even sometimes spank them with my hand? Yes, but I wasn't doing anything extra. Shit, the key to hurting my kids is taking their electronic devices, so that's all I had to do with them.

"You heard me, Denim?" Mauri asked, not taking the hint that I didn't want to talk.

"I heard you. I took Rylo and Khari's phones for the rest of the day. Damn, what you want me to do?" I snapped as I took the fish out of the fryer and set it on a plate that held a napkin and the rest of the fish that I had just fried.

"I just told you what you need to do. You need to discipline them!" he said as he sat at the island and stared at me with a frustrated look on his face.

Mauri was still in his work uniform, which was just a royal blue collared shirt with *Mauri's Fix It* in the left corner and some denim jeans. I had retwisted his dreads for him a couple of days ago, and he had a fresh lineup, so he looked good. He looked good, but the bitch was getting on my fuckin' nerves.

"You need to beat they ass. That's why they don't respect you because you let them do whatever the fuck they want," he said, and I sucked my teeth.

"Who the fuck said my kids don't respect me?" I questioned him, whipping my head around, offended by his words.

"Shit, they do when they showing you that they not listening to you. I was in the house for two fuckin' minutes, and I heard you tell them to stop throwing that fuckin' ball in the house. They kept right on doing it and broke glass. Your

way of disciplining them is to take away a phone that you will give right back to them in the morning. That ain't how you discipline no fuckin' kids, yo!" he snapped.

"Okay. Can you take them outside then, so they can play? I asked you that when you came in the house, and you said no! Damn, Mauri, please don't do this shit right now. If you expect me to pull out a fuckin' belt and whip my kids, I ain't doing that shit. The second I even think about doing that, Khari is going to tell her daddy, and he's going to be kicking down the door, trying to kill me," I told him, and he sucked his teeth.

"Bruh, you act like that nigga is fuckin' God! I hate that shit. You scared of that nigga or something?" he asked.

Mauri acted as if he was so intimidated by Billion. I regret that I told him things about us that happened in the past because I felt like a lot of the stories I told him were why he didn't like him. I basically told him how the nigga broke my heart when he came home from prison, flipped the script on me, and we didn't become a couple like he promised me. He felt like Billion was a fuck nigga because of that, and he wasn't true to his word. He just acted as if he had deep-rooted issues with him, and I didn't know where all of that came from because the two of them didn't even know each other.

"I'm not scared of him. I just hate beefing with him, and I try to stay on his good side because he's threatened me before about filing for full custody of Khari. I'm just not trying to have that happen. Can you please just drop it? I'll talk to the girls when I call them out here to eat," I said.

"Yeah, aight." He stayed in the kitchen with me, and then his phone started ringing.

My girls wanted fries with their fish, so I took the fries out of the fryer and then checked on the wild rice I was making for Mauri and me. Mauri had placed his phone call on speaker, which I hated, but I didn't say anything. Instead, I listened as he accepted the charges from his childhood best friend, Raniyah. Lowkey, I felt like he only put the phone on speaker when he talked to her as a way to try and make me jealous, but it didn't work.

There were times when I had to be on the phone with Billion, but anytime we talked, it was just to discuss Khari. I knew Mauri got jealous just by the way his mood would switch up. He didn't have anyone to sit up and talk on the phone with, so whenever Raniyah called, I felt like he used that as his opportunity to try and make me jealous, but I couldn't give two fucks.

At times, I had to remind myself that Mauri was born a girl, which explained some of his childish, bitch like actions. His best friend was in prison, about to serve a fuckin' life sentence for killing her ex-boyfriend. Trust me, I couldn't care less about the two of them carrying on a conversation over the phone.

“What's good?” Mauri answered the phone for Raniyah.

I didn't know Raniyah personally, but I did know of her. She was a part of the Jackson family. She and her sister were beautiful, and she had some fine ass brothers. I knew they owned hotels throughout South Florida, but that was pretty much it. According to Mauri, he and Raniyah had known each other since they were in the second grade. He said Raniyah was one of the people to accept him for him, while his family judged him for being different. A piece of me felt like Raniyah and Mauri might have experimented with each other in the past, like when they were younger, but I just never asked because, again, I didn't care.

“Hey. Are you sure you sent me the right address for Billion? I sent the letter to him over a week ago. He should have responded by now,” I heard Raniyah say.

I whipped my head around so fuckin' fast to look at Mauri, and his dumb ass rushed to take the phone off speaker. Why the fuck was he giving Raniyah Billion's address? What fuckin' letter did she send to him? There were too many questions in my head, and I knew I wouldn't find the answers by my damn self.

Once Mauri got the phone off speaker, he stood up from the island, but I was on his ass.

“No, what you going outside for to talk on the phone? Put the phone back on speaker. Your ass is looking real fuckin’ suspicious right now. Why the fuck are you giving that bitch my baby daddy’s address?” I asked, following him over to the door.

“Chill the fuck out. I’ll talk to you when I get back in the house.” He pushed me back and went out the door.

I wanted to cause a scene, but it just wouldn’t have been smart on my part with three kids there. Mauri had never been with me to Billion’s house when I went to pick Khari up. For one, Billion made it clear not to bring no niggas to his house, even if I just had them sitting in the car with me, and I respected that. The only thing I could think of was him seeing it on some documents that I had to sign the other day for Khari’s school. My address was on the papers as well as Billion’s. I did leave the papers unattended for a little while when I went to get the kids situated, so they could go to school, but damn, I didn’t expect him to need Billion’s address. That bitch better come back in and tell me something that sounded like it made sense, or else I was kicking his ass out because I didn’t like that.

I fixed all three of my kids’ food, and I didn’t plan to call them in to eat until it cooled down because everything was fresh out of the grease.

Mauri didn’t come back into the house until a good ten minutes later. He was off the phone, his hands were in his pockets, and he had a nonchalant look on his face like nothing happened.

“Ummm, can you let me know why that bitch has Billion’s address? Before you jump down my throat, accusing me again for having feelings for the nigga, that doesn’t have shit to do with it. If he finds out that you are the one who gave Raniyah his address, he’s going to swear up and down that I had something to do with it, and I don’t need those kinds of problems. I just told your ass that he be threatening me to go to court for Khari and seek full custody. Please let me know something because I’m looking at you real sideways right

now,” I said, standing in the kitchen with my hands on my wide hips, ready for his ass to get to talking.

“Look, it ain’t even that deep. I was telling her about you the other day, and Raniyah is my best friend, so she started asking questions. She wanted to know if you had kids, how many, and shit like that. She questioned me about who your baby daddy was because she nosey as fuck like that, so I told her. She started telling me how she tried to fuck with Billion, but the nigga wouldn’t cheat on his wife for her. She made it seem like she had some important shit to tell him and wanted to know if I had his address, but I didn’t.

“The other day, you had that paperwork lying around. I saw his address on it and took a picture. When she called me the next day to talk, I gave it to her. What the fuck is you mad for? You acting like that’s your nigga. His wife the only one who should be mad,” Mauri said, sounding real fuckin’ ignorant.

“I don’t know if I just had a long day at work, and that’s why I’m aggravated, but I can’t do this shit with you tonight. Can you leave, please? I’ll just see you later in the week,” I told him.

“Fuck you. I’ll gladly leave. The way your ass is going to lose me is by me feeling like you still got feelings for that nigga. I’m just having a hard time understanding why the fuck you even care—”

“That bitch is in fuckin’ prison for murder, nigga! She comes from a family of killers, and I don’t need them niggas knowing where the fuck Billion stays because my child goes over there! I heard it in her voice that she was angry that Billion didn’t write her back. That’s your best friend, but there were always rumors going around that the bitch was crazy, and I’m sure you know that shit too. I don’t need his address getting in the hands of the wrong fuckin’ people! He’ll blame that shit on me and swear on everything that I willingly gave it to you. Look, just please go,” I said and walked in front of him to open the door.

“You think too highly of that nigga. Nigga gotta have some kind of gold on his dick,” Mauri said.

I didn't respond. The petty part of me wanted to tell him that Billion had all kinds of rubies and diamonds on his dick, but that wouldn't do anything but make him even more insecure.

Once he was out the door, I quickly slammed it behind him and then locked it. He banged on it with his fist real hard because of the way I had pretty much thrown him out. I watched him from the window as he walked away, and when I no longer saw him, I knew he'd turned the corner and was taking the stairs down.

“What was that, Mommy?” Rylo ran to the kitchen and asked me.

My baby girl was thirteen now. She was becoming a little woman. She'd always looked just like her father, Reggie, but I swear, the older she got, she was just turning into his clone.

“Nothing. Go and get your sisters so y'all can eat,” I told Rylo, and she rushed to the back.

I ended up flopping down on the sofa in the living room and running my hands down my face. I was conflicted about what I should do. Although I was angry at Mauri, I didn't feel like this relationship was over. For that reason, I couldn't tell Billion that he had given Raniyah his address. That was just so fuckin' stupid of him. But, on the other hand, I knew that Billion was a protector and would protect Khari and the rest of his family while she was over there. So, even if that address did get in the hands of the wrong people, I knew Billion could handle himself.

I was just curious to know what the fuck Raniyah wanted from Billion. Also, I was curious to know if he had cheated on Normani and fucked her before. Then again, I doubt it because that nigga had his head stuck so far up her ass that he didn't even look at another bitch.

Chapter Fourteen

NAOMI EDWARDS

“Naomi, I’m curious to know why you agreed to all of this when you signed this agreement eight years ago? I mean, you didn’t even go in and try to ask for a quarter of anything. You basically told him that if there is ever a divorce, you’re okay with walking away with just the clothes on your back. Was this something he forced you to sign or what? Talk to me,” my divorce lawyer, Sage Davis, asked.

Sage had over a thousand reviews on Yelp, and all of them were five stars. She was popular in the Miami area, and I must admit that she was a little pricey, way out of the budget that I had set for an attorney, but I couldn’t put a price on my son. At this point, Liam and I were both seeking full custody of LJ, and I needed someone with a good track record and who I was comfortable with to win this case. I felt like Sage could do that for me. If I didn’t feel so strongly about her, Lord knows I wouldn’t be spending the thousands that I’ve already dished out to have her represent me in this case. I had to tell myself that I was doing this for my baby.

When I went last week to pick up some of my things from my old house with Liam, I promise I saw evil in that man’s eyes. I did not want him to have full custody of our son, and I would break every bone in my body fighting to keep him from coming out on top in this case.

I had been sitting in the room with Sage for over an hour as she looked over the divorce papers that Liam had his lawyer write up and the prenuptial agreement that I'd signed over eight years ago. She had her journal open, which she was using to take notes. I could tell from the lines forming on her forehead that she was confused about why I'd agreed to the things I did eight years ago with Liam.

Sitting in a large meeting room at Sage's law firm with just she and I inside, I couldn't help but admire how beautiful she was. There was a massive ring on her ring finger, and just when our meeting was set to start, her daughter had called with her adorable voice, inquiring about when her mommy was coming home. From the moment Sage opened her mouth to talk to me, I could tell that she was a strong woman. I wish I had half her strength.

Last weekend, when I went into the house and faced Liam, I came off as strong, but the reality is, I had a terrible breakdown the moment I got back in the car with my mom. I just couldn't believe how disrespectful he was. He couldn't wait to remove our wedding pictures from our old bedroom. The bed set that we had, he couldn't wait to get rid of that as well. Just so many things that he'd managed to change in the house, and I hadn't even been gone for a whole month yet.

What really did it for me was having to watch Tischina stand in what used to be my home, wearing my robe. It's like... like I never even existed to him. His ability to move on with her so soon was astonishing, and it let me know he loved her for real because no man was going to do all of that if they didn't love the woman.

"Sage, honestly, I was in love. I was young and in love, and I never in a million years thought Liam and I would separate, so I didn't mind agreeing to these terms. It wasn't even him who came up with all of this. It was his parents. Mainly his father, who didn't want to see his son lose everything or have to split everything with me if we separated.

"You have to understand that this is someone who has been in my life since we were kids. There were never any worries of him divorcing me and leaving me with nothing. I guess I

always thought he would see me as Naomi, the best friend that I was to him before I became his girlfriend and wife. A man I gave everything to... when I say everything, Sage... I mean everything,” I told her, and my voice cracked.

I had done so much crying over the past few weeks that I was honestly surprised I still had any room to shed tears. But there I was again, with big teardrops falling down my face that I didn't even bother to wipe away because I knew they would continue to flow.

“As I'm talking to you right now, I feel like my mother. My mother sacrificed so much of her happiness to live in the shadows of my father, and looking back over the years, I guess I pretty much did the same thing. I always knew that I would be a teacher. I knew from a young age that I wanted to work with kids, preferably younger kids, because they would be the ones who kept me on my toes. Whether it be teaching them in school, Sunday school, children's worship, bible study, whatever it was, I wanted to mold young minds.

“I had dreams of owning my own private school one day, but after a couple years as an evangelist at different churches, Liam finally landed his own church. He needed me to put my dreams on hold and be a supportive wife. I loved him, and I knew it meant the world to Liam to follow in his father's footsteps and become a pastor, so I took the backseat. I allowed my husband to lead. I still was able to teach, but I was limited. I couldn't branch off and do my own thing because Liam would be quick to let me know that I was trying to leave him and how I was the rock that kept his church and his school together. He might not have been able to fuck me good sexually, but I've allowed him to fuck my mind for years, and he did a damn good job.

“Listen, Sage, I don't want anything from him. I don't care about the house, the church, none of that. I just need to win full custody of LJ. That's the only thing I care about,” I told her, finally using the back of my hand to wipe the tears from my eyes.

I'd calmed down by that point. If anything, it was just a lot of anger that lived in me, not so much sadness.

“You don’t even want to see about spousal support? Naomi, I can—”

“No, I don’t want it. I take prescribed medications for migraines, and I usually get an episode when I’m under a severe amount of stress. You can only imagine the amount of stress that I’ve been under these past few weeks. Anyways, the medicine, along with important documents, were at the house with Liam, so I went over there last week to get it. He stayed upstairs in the room, watching me as I got my things, and then had the nerve to tell me he had to watch me because he knew I didn’t have any money. He basically thought I was going to steal from him. Why would I give a man like that the satisfaction of giving me any money? I’ll sleep under a bridge before I take a dime from him,” I said and meant it.

When I finished, Sage released a sigh, tucked her long hair behind her ear, and looked me in my eyes.

“I hate when my female clients have to go through things like this. I promise you when I hear these stories, I just want to get unprofessional for a good hour, have you hop in the car with me, and we pull up on him together. Only a man can have that kind of power over you and have you risking your freedom,” she said, making me laugh.

“Are you married?” I asked.

“No, I’m engaged. I’m planning a wedding, though, with my fiancé. Let me tell you something, Naomi. I may be happy right now, but what I went through in my last relationship, I swear you could put it in a book. The whole situation was a mess, girl. My ex best friend had been sleeping with my fiancé for as long as he and I had been together, had a baby by him... girl, it’s just a mess. This isn’t about me, though. It’s about you and me fighting for full custody of LJ,” she told me.

“Oh, my God. Your best friend had a baby with your fiancé! What? How do you even move on from that? Here I am, pissed at Tischina, and all she was to me was a church friend. I couldn’t imagine a really close friend doing something like that to me,” I told Sage.

She waved it off like it was no big deal. I could tell this was one of those situations where she was over it, and she didn't allow it to have any power over her emotions. Again, I just admired her strength.

“You move on by accepting the fact that what's done is done, and there isn't anything you can do to change the circumstances. My child's father was murdered, and after the truth was revealed, my ex-best friend and I just don't have a relationship anymore. It's better that way. I moved on from it, simply because I moved on with life,” she told me.

I nodded, respecting it. In order for me to move on from this situation with Liam, I had to move on with life. I could start by stopping myself from thinking about this situation every hour of the day and doing something fun. I needed some kind of a distraction. That kind of distraction could easily be Markell, but I was purposely steering left and dodging him. I just wasn't myself when I was around him. The kiss that we shared in his living room, you would have thought we were lovers. I was with Liam for all those years, and I've never experienced a passionate kiss like that with him. So passionate that I had no choice but to break away from it because, in the heat of that moment, I could feel that yearning desire to have sex with him.

When I took that long, steamy, hot shower, I was glad that it tired me out, and I ended up falling asleep on the couch. Don't get me wrong, I did enjoy kissing Markell, but the thing is, I enjoyed kissing him just a little too much. He even admitted to me that he's never had a girlfriend before. I couldn't entertain Markell because, knowing him, he would probably just come around and hurt me ten times worse than Liam had already done. I had seen the comments from all those beautiful women on his social media. Like Normani told me a while back, I wasn't the only woman who thought he was fine, and I wasn't going to be in competition with these women out here.

After Markell dropped me at my mother's house the next morning, we exchanged numbers, but I had yet to answer a

call or a text because I was smart enough to know it wasn't going anywhere.

After another thirty minutes, my session with Sage was finally over. I ended up leaving before her because she told me that she had to meet with another client in ten minutes, so she stayed behind in the meeting room. My phone had been on silent the entire time, and when I looked at it, I saw that I had a missed call from my sister. My mom had sent over a picture of LJ about five minutes ago, and he was taking a nap. I smiled, looking at my handsome boy on the screen, and sent a text message to my mom, letting her know I was leaving.

I was about to call my sister back and let her know how the session went, but my phone started ringing. It was from a number that I didn't have saved in my phone, so I declined the call. The caller literally called me right back. I was opening the door to my car, so I declined it again, and just like the last time, it rang again. I got that feeling in my gut that whoever was calling, it might be something important, so I answered this time as I got in the car and closed the door behind me.

"Hello?" I said in an annoyed tone because of the way they were calling me back to back.

"So, yo' fuckin' phone does work. What you blocked me for, Naomi?" a deep voice boomed into the phone. It was Markell.

I don't know why, but I felt like I was in trouble or something. I put my hand over my mouth, trying to stifle my laugh because he sounded pissed. Truthfully, I didn't even think he would care that I blocked his number. Like I said, I knew he had so many women to choose from that it wouldn't matter if he couldn't get in contact with me, but clearly, I was wrong.

"Ummm, Markell, I just... I just been going through a lot lately. You didn't do anything to me personally. I've pretty much been blocking everyone out these days—"

"I ain't everyone. I'm the nigga you cried and vented to, shorty. Don't put me in the same category as everyone else," he said.

I didn't respond. For one, I didn't know how to react, and secondly, I wasn't used to a man speaking to me like this. I wasn't offended because it was how he talked, but it was really different for me. Markell was the complete opposite of Liam, but I didn't think it was a bad thing.

"Make that shit up to me," he demanded.

"Make it up to you how? What do you need me to do?" I asked, confused by what he thought was about to happen.

At the most, I would apologize, but that was as far as it would go. I could have at least answered one of his phone calls or texts just to let him know that I was going through a lot at the moment, and for that, I was wrong. I didn't have to block him, but I feared I would admit that I didn't want to be alone again and end up going home with him, and who knows? Maybe we would have had sex because when I got around him, the temptation was just so hard to fight off.

"My grand opening is tonight for my restaurant. I want you to come," he told me.

He said it like it was final, and he wasn't giving me an option to tell him no. I looked at myself in the mirror, and my appearance needed some serious tweaking. For one, my curls were really dry, and I needed to be in someone's salon chair, getting it treated. I had missing nails on my fingers, chipped paint, and I was sure my toes looked the same, if not worse.

I looked at the time on the screen in my car, and it was almost noon. If I really wanted to go to this grand opening, I could go to the salon right now as a walk-in and do the same at the nail salon. Then, I would have to go to the mall and find something to wear. I left with just the clothes on my back, and all my clothes were at the old house with Liam. These days, I had just been wearing sweats and tank tops. I wouldn't start my new job until next month because I was still trying to get my mental back in order.

"What time does it start?" I asked.

"At eight. You coming tonight or what?"

“Ummm, yeah. I’ll be there. Is there a dress code? Formal, casual?” I questioned.

“Let me see you in formal,” he told me.

“Is that what everybody else is going to have on too?”

“It ain’t about everybody else, Naomi. I want to see you in formal. Can you do that for me?”

I laughed because he was milking this whole thing with me having to make it up to him.

“You’re really about to have me make this up to you? I’m only agreeing because when I look back on it, I was wrong for blocking you. You seem genuine and like you really care whether I’m okay or not,” I told him.

“Everything that I’ve shown you has been genuine, Naomi. I know that nigga put you through some shit, and I’m just here to show you your worth because obviously, you let him forget just how valuable a woman like you is. I ain’t trying to be on no funny shit with you. I don’t know about you, but when you came over to my crib, I felt like me and you had a good connection, and that’s something I can honestly say that I don’t get with other women. That night, I wasn’t thinking about sex. It was strictly me just trying to get to know you as a person and make you feel a little better because of the shit you’d gone through earlier in the day. I was just trying to make you feel comfortable around me. I dropped you off to your mama’s crib the next morning, and I feel like your ass been running from a nigga ever since,” he said.

I threw my back against the seat, leaning my head against the headrest as I bit hard on my bottom lip. I really didn’t even know what to say to Markell. I agreed with him when it came to me feeling like he and I had a connection the other night at his house, but I didn’t want to voice it for whatever reason. The truth of the matter is that I was still a married woman. Until Liam and I got this divorce, I was still married, and I didn’t want to still have one man’s last name while entertaining the next one. Our vows probably didn’t mean anything to Liam, but they meant something to me.

Although I felt strongly that way, I was still going out tonight to Markell's grand opening because I was happy for him. He was a black man who hadn't even been home from prison for a whole year yet, and he was already making tremendous accomplishments. I could come out, stay for about an hour, give him his roses and help him celebrate, and then I could head back home. I didn't think there was any wrong in me doing that.

"Ima text you over the address. You can drive, or you want me to come and scoop you tonight?" he asked after there had been silence on the phone for at least a good two minutes.

"I can drive. I don't need anyone getting the wrong impression," I honestly said.

"What impression would that be?"

"That we're dating."

He laughed, and I could picture him on his side of the phone, showing his perfect white teeth, with those grillz at the bottom, and his deep dimples.

"Let them think whatever the fuck they want to think. We know what we're doing. I really hope to see you later and that you not planning to stand a nigga up," he told me.

"I'll be there. I promise," I said and left it at that.

We stayed on the phone for about three more minutes because he was at his restaurant, helping with last minute preparations before the event. I assured him one last time that I would be there tonight, and then we hung up. After that, I dialed my sister's number from the car because I wanted to see if she was going to the event tonight. Her husband would definitely be in attendance, but I didn't know if Normani was going as well. The phone rang about three times before she finally answered. Judging from her loud background, I could tell she wasn't home.

"Hey, sis. Give me a minute. Let me walk out of this loud store. I'm at the mall with all three of the kids. Lil Bill has me in this sneaker store with him, and they playing this loud music in here like we're in the club. Hold on," she said.

I laughed at the annoyance in my sister's voice, and then, after a few more seconds, I could tell that she had walked out of the store because her background wasn't as loud as it was when she'd answered the phone.

"Okay, I'm back. How did your session go today?" she asked.

"It was good. I'll tell you more about it later because that's not why I'm calling. Are you going to Markell's grand opening tonight?" I asked.

My sister didn't know about Markell and me kissing because, of course, I didn't tell her. I knew Normani wouldn't judge me, but still, that was something I planned to take to the grave. I didn't regret kissing Markell, but what I can say is that night, I was extra vulnerable, and I was just so curious. I was curious to know how it would make me feel to be a bit intimate with someone other than Liam. Again, Liam is the only man whose lips I've ever kissed, who I've had sex with, just everything, so I wanted to know if I could spot the difference.

The second my lips touched Markell's, some kind of spark ignited in me. Liam didn't kiss me like that. Liam had never in his life kissed me like that. Markell and I hardly even knew each other, but the kiss we shared was so passionate. That's why I was running from him. I felt like if I stuck around, I would eventually do something I would regret, like possibly having sex with him.

"Yes. When I leave here, I'm dropping the kids off with Billionaire's mom. Are you going? You need to. You need to get out of the house. Mommy was telling me that after you drop LJ off at school, you stay in your room all day," Normani said, and I groaned.

"Normani, that was when I was still staying with her. I've been so busy getting this new house in order that I don't have time to just be lying around in my room all day. Markell just called and asked if I would come to the grand opening tonight, and I told him yes. I'm about to see if I can do a walk-in right now and get my hair washed and blown out, and then I need to

go to the nail salon. Since you're already at the mall, and you have a better sense of fashion, can you please find me something cute to wear? Like a nice dress or something. Nothing too tight or too short. I don't have anything nice like that to wear at home because I left all my clothes back at the old house," I said to Normani.

"I'm curious to know what he's going to do with all your old clothes. I've seen Tischina before. She's like twice your size," my sister mentioned.

"Girl, and had the nerve to have on my robe when I went to the house last weekend. The same robe that Mommy gifted to me. That was definitely a test from God that day because Lord knows I wanted to beat that robe off her," I told my sister, and she laughed.

"I swear I'm not laughing at you, Naomi. I'm just shocked by the nerve of his ass and hers. I'll find you something to wear. Shoes, accessories, all of that because if I see your ass in sweats and a t-shirt again, I swear I'm going to scream," she told me.

I'd let myself go for real after this mess with Liam, but I've always cleaned up nicely when it came to my appearance. Every Sunday, I was always dressed well for church, getting compliments from just about every woman in the building. I made sure I looked the part at work too, and just about any time I went out. So, for me to switch it up and to now be in sweats all the time and not making it to my bi-weekly hair and nail appointments, then I knew I'd let myself go for real. I was going to do better. I had to. I had to start back cleaning myself up nicely to show Liam what he walked away from.

"Whatever you get, just please make sure it's cute," I said.

"Oh, it will be. So, tell me, Naomi, what is the deal with you and Glizzy?" she asked.

"Nothing. We're just friends. I haven't even talked to him since I stayed the night at his house."

"Because something had to happen, and you are ignoring him because of what happened. Naomi, sister girl, this is me. I

gave Billionaire the runaround for months because I felt my feelings for him were getting stronger, so I started running. What happened that night you stayed with him? Did the two of you have sex?" she asked.

I laughed because she was all in my business.

"Tell me if you're pregnant or not, and then I'll tell you what happened," I bargained.

Normani came over to my house last night, and I poured two glasses of wine: one for me and one for her. I ended up drinking both glasses because she came up with some quick lie about watching her wine intake. Because I felt like I knew my sister better than anyone else, I knew she was lying.

When I hit her with that ultimatum, she laughed. Her laughter told me everything I needed to know, so I didn't have to ask anymore because I now knew that she was.

"I'll see you tonight, Normani," I said and was about to hang up the phone.

"Hmmm. I'll see you too," she told me and then hung up.

I don't know why, but I was so nervous about going to this grand opening tonight. Markell was popular, so I knew there would be so many people in attendance this evening. I wasn't as popular as he was, but you couldn't be from Miami and not know I was Liam's wife. Tonight, I would probably get some side-eyes, and people were going to wonder what I was doing out with Markell. That was something I just wasn't ready to explain yet.

At the end of the day, I had to remind myself that Liam had moved on. This man had a baby on the way with another woman, and he had already moved her into our home. Now that I was out of the picture, the two of them were more than likely planning a future together. I had to get with the program, face my reality, and move on. Liam did, so I had to do the same thing.

Chapter Fifteen

MARKELL 'GLIZZY' WEST

“*Y*ou need to put a jacket or something on with that tight ass fuckin’ dress. Titties all out and shit. Do that shit when you around your home girls and shit. Don’t do that shit with me,” I said to the woman who birthed me as I stood in front of a floor-length mirror in the office at my restaurant, looking at myself in my black suit.

I ain’t gon’ lie, a nigga was a little annoyed. It was after eight, the event had already started, and Naomi’s ass was nowhere to be fuckin’ found. I had security working the door, watching the line, which was wrapped around the building. I gave all of them special orders to just let Naomi through the door when she got there. I had already sent her a message, telling her to come straight up to the door once she arrived, so she already knew she didn’t have to wait in that long ass line.

I’d already cut the ribbon, gave my speech, and took a bunch of pictures and shit. I don’t know why, but a nigga was pissed that she’d missed all that. I couldn’t let her ass know I was sweating her, so I had yet to call or text her, just to see where she was, even though that’s what I wanted to do. Even when I saw Normani and Billionaire, I didn’t ask Normani about her sister. I had to keep the front going like I wasn’t checking for Naomi when the reality was, I wanted her ass there. All those bitches were in attendance, and many of them

were bitches I had dealings with in the past. The only one who even meant some shit to me was Naomi, and she was the only one who wasn't there.

“Markell, please! If you gon' do one thing in life, yo' ass is going to hate on me. Hush. I look good. Come here and let me fix your tie,” my mama said.

Not even on no weird shit, but my mama was fine, and I think that's why that shit pisses me off when she be wearing tight ass clothes like this. Bitches that I wanted to fuck wore the kind of shit my mama wore. I hated it because I knew other niggas would look at her and want to do the same thing that I wanted to do to a woman when I saw her dressed that way. She stood up tall like me, but I was taller than her. I mentioned that she was a personal trainer, so she had a nice, firm, perfect body. She had long ass jet black hair that went down to her ass, and that shit was all hers too. Although she was forty-six years old, I swear on everything; she had to be drinking from the fountain of youth because she was aging backward. Someone who didn't know us would think she was my girl instead of my mama because she just didn't look like she had a thirty-three-year-old son.

“Yo, Glizzy. Quinn and a couple of her homegirls are almost to the front of the line. I'm letting them in or what?” my head of security, Pablo, asked over the walkie-talkie that I had in my hands.

I was a little shocked that Quinn came out tonight, honestly. After we exchanged words a while back at the club, she hadn't hit my line ever since, so I assumed she got the hint that a nigga didn't want to be bothered with her ass. If she came tonight on some cool shit, just to congratulate me, then I was cool with that. At the end of the day, Quinn was someone I was on the verge of settling down with, but once I was sentenced, all that shit went out the window. I didn't mind her coming tonight, giving me her well wishes, and enjoying herself. I knew Quinn liked to drink, though. Patron was her drink of choice, and if she started that shit up tonight, I was going to have security drag her ass out and ban her from coming back.

“At this point, bruh, I don’t even care. Let her in. Who we got inside working?” I questioned him.

“Manny and Dave.”

“Alright. Have them keep an eye on her,” I let him know and then set the walkie-talkie on the table next to me.

My mama was standing right in front of me, fixing my tie. I looked down at her, ready for her to speak her mind because I knew she would.

“I have no idea why you continue messing around with Quinn’s crazy ass. I think I done spoke to about twenty bitches out there that you used to deal with. You need to settle your ass down, take one of these women seriously, and give me some damn grand babies. Shit!” she said.

She told me this shit all the time, and every time she said it, I swear it would go in one ear and out the other. I didn’t respond because I was still slightly annoyed about Naomi standing a nigga up like this.

After she finished fixing my tie, she still stood right in front of me, looking me in my eyes.

“Your dad would have been so proud of you. You do know that, right?” she asked.

“I know, Ma. I know,” I said.

I pulled her into me with one arm wrapped around her neck and then kissed the top of her head. The second we pulled away, I heard Pablo’s deep voice coming back in on the walkie-talkie.

“Glizzy, Naomi is here,” he said.

I played that shit so fuckin’ cool like I didn’t give a fuck. But, lowkey, a nigga wanted to do some fuckin’ back flips and shit, even though her ass was late like a motha fucka.

“Let her in,” I told him.

“This you? Look at the legs on her,” Pablo said.

“Ay. Watch yo’ mouth, nigga,” I warned.

I heard him laugh, and then the walkie-talkie shut off. From the office we were in, I could look down and see the front door of the restaurant. So, I walked over to the window, looked down, and scanned the area for a good second before my eyes landed on Naomi. She'd just walked in and was standing by the front door. She looked so fuckin' pretty.

I stood there in amazement, watching her in the black silk dress she had on, which had a slit that exposed her slender thigh. Because she was dressed in a pair of black, strappy heels that came up just a few inches above her ankles, I could really appreciate those long-ass, sexy fuckin' legs of hers. I could tell from how her long hair flowed that she must have gone to the salon or something because that shit looked good. I checked out everything about Naomi, and in every fuckin' department, she was killing that shit. Down to the fuckin' make-up on her face.

All I could do was stand back and think to myself how that nigga of hers was a fuckin' fool to let her ass go. If I had a woman like that on my arm, a nigga would have to kill my ass to get me away from her. She was the whole fuckin' package. Her gray eyes danced around the restaurant, trying to see who she knew. Her sister was down there somewhere, so I was sure she would find her.

"I guess she explains why you've been looking out of the window every five seconds. She's beautiful. She looks familiar," my mama said, coming up behind me.

"That's Normani's sister," I told her.

"That's Pastor Edwards's wife. I visited their church a couple of times. Please don't tell me you messing around with this man's wife," my mama said, being all fuckin' dramatic like she always was.

"We just friends. Besides, they about to get a fuckin' divorce. That nigga was a fuckin' dog, just like the rest of them," I said.

"And you know for a fact that she's getting a divorce for real? From the way you damn near busted your ass to get to

this window to see her, I can tell that you're into her. I don't want you getting hurt, son," she told me.

"Ma, gone on with all that soft shit. Look, don't say nothing about it, but that nigga having a baby with another bitch. The bitch work at the church and her and Naomi was cool. He turned out to be a lame ass nigga, and they are in the process of divorcing. Chill out, me and her just friends, aight?" I said.

My mama looked at me and smiled. "Alright. Let's go down. I want to meet your little friend," she told me.

We walked out of the office together and took the stairs back to the main floor. I'd hired a professional photographer for tonight's event. Once I made it downstairs, some women wanted to take pictures with me, so I did that, even though going over to see Naomi was the only thing I wanted to do. My mama ended up running into a couple of old friends, so we separated, and she went with them while I wrapped up my pictures.

Once that was done, I scanned the room. My eyes landed on Billionaire, Normani, and Naomi, who were all sitting in a booth together. I walked over to them with a bit of pep in my step. The way Naomi was seated, her back was to me, so she wouldn't even know that I was about to creep up on her. When I eventually made it to their table, she looked at me and smiled.

"I guess you got lost," was the first thing I said.

"No, my son had a hard time with me leaving tonight. I ended up missing the exit, had to get right back on the highway, only for it to be an accident, which held up traffic. I'm sorry for being late. Here, I got this for you," she said and handed me a small gift bag.

As she spoke, all I found myself doing was looking at her teeth. She had some pretty fuckin' teeth. So straight and white.

"Thank you. You didn't have to get me anything, though," I said as I took the gift bag from her hands.

“Hey, Glizzy,” a beautiful, thick ass woman walked by and said.

I hit her with a head nod and then focused my attention back on Naomi.

“Come walk with me. Let me show you around,” I told her.

She hesitantly looked from Billionaire and Normani to me, and then she got up. I grabbed her hand to assist her out of the booth and put her in front of me with my hand on the small of her back. When she turned, I put my hands on her hips, guiding her in another direction because there was a room that I wanted to show her first. No one was in this part of the restaurant because it didn’t finish in time, which was some shit that I was a little pissed off about, but by next week, we would be ready to roll. I used a key to unlock the room and walked us both inside.

“Watch your step,” I said because there was a step right at the entrance.

I considered this to be a private room. I was leaving this part of the restaurant for folks to rent out for private parties to have their own little space and not have to be in the mix with everyone else. About five flat-screen TVs hung on the wall. Off to the side was the section for the bar because people who rented this room would have their own bartender. There were different booths, high tops, and other tables, and the minimum number of people required to book this room was fifty. There was a sports theme going on with all the Miami teams from football, basketball, baseball, etc.

“It’s so nice in here. This may be my favorite room in the restaurant,” Naomi said.

“Shit, that’s because you haven’t been upstairs yet. You look beautiful,” I told her as I stood with my back against the wall and my arms crossed, watching as her heels clicked on the laminate floor. Seeing her from behind allowed me to notice that her back was exposed. Of course, that didn’t do anything but make the dress even sexier on her.

“Thank you. You clean up nice yourself,” she told me.

She walked back over and tried to stand on the opposite side of me, but I grabbed her hand, putting her directly in front of me. I tried to be cool and keep this thing strictly a friendship, but Naomi was so fuckin’ beautiful to me. I wasn’t aggressive or no shit like that, but I just placed her in front of me, wrapped one hand around her waist, and stared deep into her eyes. I could tell she was a little nervous because her eyes were everywhere except on me. I placed my other hand on her chin, forcing her to look me in my eyes.

“Why you be acting like you scared of me? You think Ima do something to you?” I asked, just curious to know.

She laughed at what I said, then shook her head no.

“I just never been around someone as beautiful as you. You just make it hard,” she told me.

“I ain’t beautiful, Ma. Call me handsome or some shit.”

She laughed again and playfully rolled her eyes.

“You are beautiful. You’re beautiful, in a handsome kind of way,” she told me.

This wouldn’t be the first time a woman had told me that I could come off as a little bit intimidating because of my looks, but shit, I just be chilling. My hand was still under Naomi’s chin, and we were staring at each other again. It was the same kind of stare that we shared when she was at my house, and we started kissing. It was hard for me to control myself, so I leaned in and kissed her on the lips again. This kiss tonight came from me being happy to see her, and lowkey, I could even feel myself liking her. I wanted to respect Naomi as I kissed her, but shit, the nigga in me had to feel on some ass.

My hands held onto her small booty, and I began to rub it, just amazed by how soft it was. She had to be feeling a nigga the same way because she was sucking on my tongue and doing that shit all passionately. I lifted her, still holding her by her ass, walked with her over to one of the tables, and then set her on it. It was the table furthest in the back. Whenever I was around a woman, I knew how to control myself. I got so much

pussy that I had never been the kind of nigga who was pressed to get it from a woman.

Some of my niggas were in committed relationships or married, and them niggas be going crazy over their woman. I never understood why a nigga would do that, but seeing Naomi in this fuckin' dress, I just couldn't control myself. I wanted to eat her whole, and for me to want to eat anything on a woman, a nigga had to like them just a little bit. My mouth wasn't going on just anybody's pussy.

I broke the kiss, and my lips went for her neck, where I started kissing, biting, and licking. Naomi was sitting on top of the table, legs parted a little bit, head thrown back. When I started sucking on her neck for real, she released a sexy ass moan that made my dick jump. Reality must have clicked in because she jumped and put her hands on my shoulders to stop me.

“Markell, we can't—”

“I don't plan to fuck you, shorty. I told you that shit the last time,” I said, looking her dead in her eyes as I cut her off because I already knew she was trying to tell me that we couldn't have sex. I didn't even have any rubbers on me, so I definitely wasn't trying to fuck.

“Then... then what are we doing? I'm starting to feel...”

“What? Horny?” I asked.

I had my hands on either side of her thighs, looking her dead in her eyes. She was so fuckin' beautiful. I've dealt with the baddest of the baddest women, but Naomi's beauty was unmatched. Her beauty was pure. The face was motha fuckin' top tier, and I had never been around a woman like that.

“Yeah,” she told me.

“Let me make you cum right quick,” I said, disregarding everything she'd just told me.

It was like I heard her, but after kissing her lips, sucking and biting on her neck, I was just curious to see how other parts of her tasted. I could tell from her kisses alone that the pussy scent and taste would be to die for.

“What? Markell, no! It’s hundreds of people out there. Besides, we just can’t. I’m still married,” she told me.

“Fuck that lame ass nigga. When the last time you got your pussy ate?”

“Never,” she said, shocking me with her answer.

“What the fuck you mean, never? That nigga wasn’t eating your pussy?” I asked, surprised to hear that.

How the fuck can you be with a woman for eight fuckin’ years and not eat her pussy? That shit ought to be against the motha fuckin’ law. If I was with a woman for that long, I would obviously love her, so I would be eating pussy, ass, licking behind ears, sucking on her fuckin’ toes... all that shit. My girl gon’ know every day that I love her and that I’m obsessed.

“No, he wasn’t. Markell, you’re making me feel like a hoe,” she said, and I laughed. She was dead serious when she said that shit too.

“How the fuck am I doing that?”

“I don’t know. I don’t want you to think that I’m giving it up to you so soon. I have only been with one person, and I made him wait years before he did anything sexual with me. I care what you think about me,” she told me.

“And I think nothing but positive shit about you, Naomi. You letting a nigga eat your pussy doesn’t equal to you being a hoe. Now, if you was in here trying to suck my dick, then I’d probably think you was a lil’ wild, but not a hoe. You just got some shit about you that makes it hard for a nigga to think with a clear head. You got me fuckin’ sweating you, and I don’t even do shit like this. This is one of the biggest days of my fuckin’ life, and I’m here with you. I feel like you done put voodoo on a nigga or some shit,” I told her.

She laughed, and once she stopped, she gave me that serious look again. Her head crashed into mine, and we were back to kissing each other. While we kissed, I reached my hand back, pulling a chair from one of the tables, placed it

behind me, and broke the kiss. I was prepared to eat on some serious pussy. Brought the chair out and everything.

Naomi was breathing heavily with her legs parted a little bit. I placed my hands on her ankles, pulled them up, so they were propped on the table, and opened her legs some. Now, I had perfect access to her pussy, which was covered in black lace panties.

“Markell?” she called my name out it like it was going to be followed by a question.

I kissed her right on her pussy through her panties, making her body jump at my touch, and then she moaned. She had a natural smell coming from her—no odor or anything.

“What?” I asked with my teeth on the fabric of her underwear. Then I pulled them to the side, exposing her fat pussy. It wasn’t all the way bald, but it was cool because I didn’t mind pussy with hair. Pussy that had hair was considered grown woman pussy to me.

“What if we get caught? What if they hear me? Oh, my Godddddd,” she moaned once I got her clit in my mouth. I started sucking on it, shutting her ass right up.

Naomi was so fuckin’ worrisome. I learned that shit about her when she got in my car, complaining about the car smelling like weed.

“You worrying about the wrong thing. Worry about the first nut of many that I’m getting ready to give you,” I said, talking into her pussy.

I had my hands wrapped around her ankles as I made love to the pussy with my mouth. Her pussy was leaking, letting me know she told the truth when she said that nigga never ate her before. Just from how she was leaking, I could tell this was a feeling her body wasn’t used to. I wanted to rip that fuckin’ dress off so bad, but I had to consider that she had to go back out and be around everyone, so I didn’t even try it.

“HMMMMM... Oh my Godddddd,” she sexily moaned again.

This time, she put her hands in my hair, keeping me in place. When her body started shaking like she was having a fuckin' seizure, I knew that first orgasm was on the way. Naomi's leg repeatedly shook after that, she kept calling for God, and within seconds, juices started flying out of her. The majority of it went in my mouth, while the rest shot out on the table. After she came, she tried to push my head out the way, but I wanted more. I wanted to make that pussy cum at least one more time.

"How that shit made you feel?" I asked, removing my mouth from her pussy, so I could look up into her eyes.

"Like I'm sinning."

"Shit, get ready to sin some more then."

"Okay. Wait... wait," she said, trying to stop me from taking her panties off, but I'd already pulled them bitches down, slipped her legs out, and stuffed them in the pocket of my suit.

"What you mean, wait? You said that nigga never ate your pussy. Shorty, you backed up. Shit, I'm helping you," I told her and then dove right back in.

Her moans were louder this time, and I was just glad there was a DJ out front, playing loud music. Otherwise, everyone in the restaurant would have heard Naomi. Her pussy was wetter, and she was bucking her body against my mouth more aggressively than the first time, so I felt like she was opening up a little bit more for me.

"Tell me when you cumming this time," I said, stopping, so she could hear me.

"Okayyyyyy... Keep goingggg," she moaned.

"Beg me for that shit," I demanded and popped her exposed thigh.

She didn't say anything to that. I loved nasty talk during sex, so I had to open Naomi up a little bit because all that crying out for God wasn't all I wanted to hear.

"Beg for that shit, beautiful," I told her again.

“Markell, pleaseeee...”

That probably was the sexiest shit I had heard all night.

“Please, what?” I asked, kissing her on her pussy again and making her body squirm.

“Please make me cummm,” she moaned and put her hand on the back of my head, bringing me back down.

I went back to eating. As badly as I wanted to continue holding onto her ankles, I ended up letting go. I put my hands on her pussy lips, spread them, and continued swiping my tongue up and down her pussy, making her ass go crazy.

“Markelllll... I’m going to cummmmmm,” she cried out, and I kept that same speed going.

Seconds later, her juices rushed out of her again. She pushed my ass back, and I sat there, admiring my work, watching as her pussy jumped from the back-to-back orgasms that it had just endured.

After Naomi came, silence filled the room. I stood up from the chair, leaving her on the table, and went behind the bar to grab some napkins. When I came back, I wiped between her legs, wiped the table, and tossed the napkin in the trash.

“You have to disinfect this table,” she told me.

“Ima do it. Come here,” I said.

Instead of making her get down from the table on her own, I put my hands under her arms and lifted her, then placed her on the floor right in front of me.

“I see you getting me in a bunch of trouble,” she told me.

I laughed at her revelation.

“Trouble with you?” I asked and put my hands on her ass, curious to hear what she would tell me.

“God. That’s who. I’m going to the bathroom,” she said and tried to pull away from me, but I wouldn’t let her go.

I turned her around and walked behind her in a bear hug as we went over to the bathrooms. If any woman I ever dealt with

in the past were to walk in right now and see me all pressed over Naomi, they would probably think I was high on something. I just wasn't affectionate like that unless I was fuckin'. I hadn't even known her ass that long, and she had me fuckin' trippin'.

I eventually let her go, so she could go into the restroom. I went into the men's restroom to throw some water on my face and talk to my dick, telling that motha fucka to go down. My shit was crying right now. When I came out of the bathroom, after washing my hands, Naomi didn't come out until about two minutes later. I could tell that she'd run her hands through her hair because it was back laid down like it was before.

"I've never walked around without any panties. This just feels uncomfortable," she told me.

"Well, the only person who has to know about that discomfort is me and you," I said.

"If they ask, you were giving me a tour, okay? Markell, please don't tell anybody what we just did," she pleaded.

"Shorty, I ain't that kind of man. Nobody gotta know you busted two nuts on my tongue back-to-back but me and you. Chill out with that," I said.

I made sure her clothes were straight, and she fixed my tie. Once she told me that my appearance was straight too, we left the room. This large party room was in the back of the restaurant. Because it was closed off, no one would have any business back there, so we were good to sneak back in and be with everyone else. Well, that would have been the case, but the second I closed the door, we ran smack dab into my mama, who was rounding the corner. She stopped directly in front of Naomi and me.

This shit was no laughing matter because Naomi looked like she would pass out and die from embarrassment, but I fought so hard to conceal my laugh. Embarrassment was written all over her face, and she made it obvious that we had just finished creeping. I was sure she knew this was my mama because she'd been to my crib, and I had a couple of pictures of me and my mama throughout the apartment.

“I was looking for you, boy. I called your phone twice,” she told me.

“We didn’t have sex,” Naomi blurted out.

My mama looked at Naomi and smiled. “That’s good to know. I’m Pumpkin. It’s nice to meet you,” my mama said and stuck her hand out for Naomi to shake.

Naomi shook it, and I noticed her hand shaking as she shook my mama’s hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too. I’m Naomi. I’ll let the two of you talk,” Naomi said, and before I could even tell her ass to hold on, she had already walked off.

Once she was out of earshot, my mama looked at me and laughed.

“I don’t know whose smile was goofier coming out of that damn door, yours or hers,” my mama said.

“She ain’t some hoochie, Ma. I know you be getting on me, saying that all I fuck is hoes, but she’s different, Ma. I don’t know what it is, but I like her. We didn’t have sex, so don’t be side-eying her because I already know how you is,” I told her.

My mom threw her hands up in surrender, letting me know I didn’t have to worry about her talking shit about Naomi. “Son, I knew she was different from the rest when you damn near broke your neck to get to the window and see her.”

She walked off, and I gave it a minute before I joined the crowd again. I entertained some of the guests, and then I walked to the kitchen to check on everyone and make sure they were straight. I had hired some chefs with great credentials for the position. Although each person already knew how to cook, I still shared all my recipes with them because I needed everything on the menu to taste exactly like I cooked it. Naomi told me that her favorite was the seafood rice, honey barbeque chicken wings, and meatballs, so I put that on a plate for her along with some other sides and walked from the back with the food in my hands.

“That’s for me?” I heard a soft, feminine voice call out.

I was almost about to walk past the booth she was sitting in with her girls when she stopped me. It was Quinn's ass. There was a hookah in the middle of the table that she and her girls were sharing. When I started talking to Billion about my idea to open a restaurant, he told me how popular hookah was with women these days, so that was something my restaurant offered too. Damn near every woman in the restaurant had one to go along with their food. The food would bring the crowd, but the bar upstairs and downstairs, the hookah lounge dedicated to upstairs, along with the pool tables and shit, would draw a whole different set of patrons. A bigger crowd meant good business, and good business meant more money in my pocket.

"What's good, Quinn? How you ladies doing tonight? All y'all look beautiful," I said, keeping shit short and sweet because I didn't need Quinn acting up and giving Naomi some shit to side-eye me about.

"That's your way of trying to be funny? Who the fuck was that bitch that you were walking with?" Quinn asked.

I could already see where this was going, so I got the attention of one of the security guards and waved him over, so he could get her. Her words were slurred a little bit when she talked, so that let me know she was drunk. The fact that she didn't even try to congratulate a nigga for this accomplishment let me know that her intentions for coming out tonight weren't pure. Knowing Quinn and her friends, they just wanted to come and be nosey to see if I would be there with a bitch.

"Why the fuck you calling him over here? All I did was ask you who the fuck the bitch was that you were walking with! Damn, I can't ask you a question?" she asked, standing up from her seat, getting loud and in my face. Doing her best to cause a scene because that's just the kind of bitch she was.

I swear I regret fuckin' with this bitch. She just did too fuckin' much. I could feel eyes on me from across the room, and I already knew it was Naomi. I didn't want to look, though. She probably thought I wasn't shit. I told her that I was single and wasn't entertaining, but I could see how that shit might look to her, especially since Quinn was carrying on.

She just had to deal with one fuck nigga lying to her, keeping secrets, and shit, and I didn't want her thinking I was coming around, only to do the same shit because that wasn't my plan with her at all.

“I don't know if you're drunk, high, or what, but watch your motha fuckin' mouth. Not only are you disrespecting me right now, but you disrespecting my fuckin' business. Every time you get around your fuckin' friends, you try to show the fuck off. You know me, La'Quinn. You know the way a nigga will fuckin' handle yo' ass, so stop fuckin' trying me. Get the fuck out, and you and yo' homegirls are banned from coming to my shit,” I told her.

She laughed in my face like what I said was a joke.

“Glizzy, fuck you! Don't nobody want to come to this shit anyway, with this dry ass fuckin' food,” she snapped.

“Yeah, whatever. Only thing dry is your fuckin' pussy! Fuck outta here with that bullshit, man,” I countered.

“Negro, you wish my pussy was dry. I got the best pussy your black ass ever had,” she said.

I laughed in her face. This wasn't even a conversation that I was trying to have with her, but she was trying me.

“I ain't even going to say what I want to say to you in front of your friends. You with your girls, so Ima let you think you got it like that. If that pussy was so great, you would have been the first bitch I called when I got home from prison. You wasn't even in my top ten. Get the fuck on, bruh, 'fore I expose yo ass,” I said once the security came and started ushering the three of them out of the restaurant.

“And I'm slapping the fuck out of your black Barbie. Tell that hoe I hope she know how to fight.”

Quinn struck a nerve when she said that shit because Naomi didn't have shit to do with our issues.

“She ain't got to know how to fight because I'm a shooter. I'm slapping the dog shit out of anybody she tells me even looks at her the wrong way. If you think you about to fuck with her because yo' ass not mature enough to accept the fact

that a nigga moved on, and I don't want yo' as no more, then you got me fucked up. Quinn, I will put yo' ass in the motha fuckin' dirt, bruh," I said, pushing Manny out of the way because he was trying to get between us.

Quinn had me hot. It ain't even so much of her disrespecting Naomi that had me hot like that, either. The bitch just had too much fuckin' mouth, and she was acting bitter. Acting like a bitch who was out for blood and would do some spiteful shit to try and destroy a nigga, and I didn't like that shit. She knew she had me fucked up for real because she didn't say shit else.

Manny escorted them out, and I watched them from where I stood. I already knew Naomi was going to ask me about this shit. I didn't plan to lie to her about shit from the past. Although she and I weren't together, I was feeling her, so shit, I just didn't want to start our shit off with me feeding her a bunch of lies. I wanted her to like me.

Chapter Sixteen

MELODY MITCHELL

(Naomi and Normani's Mom)

“Stanley, when you go through each row, can you please make sure that every pew has a bible and a psalm? Last Sunday, a few people brought it to my attention that their pew was missing both,” I said to Stanley, one of the cleaners at my church.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the women's brunch that I put on for single women had ended not too long ago. I had close connections with many of the women at my church, but single women clung to me for some reason. They looked at me and saw how determined and strong-willed I was and thought I had all the answers when honestly, I really didn't. I did have a lot of knowledge, and I knew how to preach to a woman and let her know her worth, but it took decades in a failed marriage for me to get to that point.

Women in their forties were coming to me and asking how they could get a husband. When I saw that it was becoming a pattern, I knew I had to pick a Saturday out of the month and solely dedicate it to single women. We would sit around, eat good food, and I would explain to them that you don't *get* a husband and that God will send you one because a lot of them just had that misconstrued. Then, I would explain the

importance of the right timing and that it didn't happen on our terms.

A few years ago, before Ms. Normani met her husband, she would come to me with those big, gray eyes, asking, "Mommy, when am I going to find me a husband?" My baby had it bad and was going through it for real because she had to watch her father and I be this fake happy couple, and she also had to watch Naomi and Liam, so I could understand why she felt that way. But boy did she find herself a man.

I let her father get into my head and tell me that Billionaire was just some thug who would turn my daughter's life inside out and break her heart. I've applauded Normani from the beginning because she stood firm in her choice to stick with Billionaire, even though her father tried to bully her out of it. That's what he was.... a big bully. I allowed him to bully me for years until I finally found a backbone and the strength to just walk away from him.

"I'm on it, Pastor Mitchell. You look beautiful today," Stanley told me.

Stanley was a young boy in his twenties, and he gave me a compliment each time he saw me. I thanked him for the compliment and walked back out into the foyer of the church. The second I got out there, I saw a very familiar face that had me sucking my teeth and ready to go into my purse, pull out my phone, and call the police because he was not supposed to be there. I had a judge put strict orders on him, and he wasn't supposed to step foot on church grounds. If he did, I was told to call the police and have him arrested for trespassing.

When my daughters came to me a while back and told me that he had popped up at my church with his son, I knew I couldn't take it lightly. My church security had told me three different times that a mysterious car had passed by the church. Sometimes when I was at home, sitting on my porch, I would see the same car passing, and I knew it was Davidson. It was nobody but him watching me.

"I'm calling the police. You know as well as I do that you aren't supposed to step foot on these grounds. Your ability to

always find a way to do what you want is the reason you and I divorced in the first place,” I said with so much anger in my voice.

Whenever I was around him, the only thing I felt was anger. We are supposed to love our enemies, but it would take a few more long conversations with God and many more prayers for me to love Davidson again because many of my wounds were still so fresh. The second we divorced, he couldn't wait to find his son and rub that in my face. It had been all over the headlines, and he knew I would see it.

If Davidson did anything in our marriage that hurt me to my core, it's when I found out about the baby he had on the way. The same baby he didn't want anything to do with, but once our signatures were on the divorce papers, he went out and found his son. The crazy thing is, I was so committed to my husband back then that I would even tell him to find his son and have a relationship with him, but he never wanted to. Now, all of a sudden, he's daddy of the year with his son, and I just thought he was so full of it.

“Please, Melody. You don't have to do that. I come in peace. I promise, I'm coming to you right now in peace,” he said.

That cockiness, that aura of him being on top of the world and everyone else was beneath him had faded away. Standing in front of me was a man who seemed to be finally humbled. Davidson had always cleaned up nice, so I wasn't surprised today by the black button-down shirt he was wearing and his black slacks. Stacy Adams dress shoes had always been his favorite brand, so that's what he had on. He had a clean face, never really letting his beard grow out, and his waves were black and gray. The gray eyes that he'd given to both my daughters looked so helpless.

“What exactly do you want, Davidson?” I asked.

“I want to let you know, Melody, that I'm sorry, and I love you. I know you probably don't care about any of this, but my life hasn't been the same since we separated. From the moment I lost you, I felt like I lost everything. I lost my

church, my daughters, friends, everything. You probably think that me deciding to look for my son, Aaron, was a way to get back at you, but Melody, I was desperate to have somebody. I felt like everyone here was judging me, only seeing the bad in me, and with Aaron, I could come to him fresh, and he accepted me with open arms. Baby, I'm—"

"Do not call me that," I snapped, cutting him off.

He had the nerve to look at me with sad eyes when I cut him off, telling him not to call me that term of endearment that once sent butterflies through my body.

"Melody, I'm sorry. If you know how to do anything, I know you know how to forgive. I understand that what I did isn't something that you can forgive me for right away, but I'm hoping that you will allow me a chance to make everything up to you. Separating from you, I foolishly thought that the grass would be greener on the other side, but it's not. Melody, you are the only woman I want. The only woman I aspire to be with. I want to get things back right with you and my daughters. So, I'm begging you to give me another chance," Davidson said.

Before I could even answer, I heard...

"Baby, everything alright?"

That deep voice did something to me every time.

The look on Davidson's face was priceless. I wasn't even the kind of woman who found satisfaction in rubbing something in someone's face and watching them hurt. That wasn't what I felt as I watched James come from the back, carrying his toolbox after checking the men's restroom. I was told that one of the toilets was having a hard time flushing, and he agreed to look at it for me.

James became a member of my church almost eight months ago. He was two years older than me. When we first met, being a woman with eyes, of course, I picked up on how handsome he was, but I'd already told myself that I didn't have any desire to move on after divorcing Davidson. The only thing important to me was running this beautiful church,

ministering around the world, and having a great bond with my children and grandchildren. With all of that, I would never have to be lonely, even if I was missing the comfort of a man.

Me and every woman in the church thought Mr. James was a good sight to look at. I didn't miss a beat that happened at the church, so I noticed some women switching up their attire, wearing clothes that were a little shorter and tighter than usual, and trying to get his attention.

James always sat in the front of the church, pretty much to himself. He came up one morning after church, asking for prayer. He had a daughter, who was thirty-two, the same age as Naomi, and she was in a coma after a terrible accident. I anointed his head with oil that morning and prayed for his daughter, Ashley, as if I personally knew her. I kid you not, two days later, I was in the church office and received a phone call. It was James, telling me that after two months, his daughter had finally woken up from her coma. He believed that my prayer had everything to do with his daughter joining the world again. A friendship started after that.

One day, he took me by surprise and asked if he could take me out. Everything screamed for me to say no. I'd already written out my life story, telling myself that I wouldn't get back into a relationship ever again, but I couldn't deny him. He was too much of a good man. It also didn't make it any easier that he was such a good-looking man. A chocolate man is what he was, and that was my weakness. James was a tall guy; if I had to guess, I would say about 6'5". He was physically fit because he took going to the gym seriously, even as a fifty-six-year-old man. He had a clean, bald head and a nice, thick, salt and pepper beard. On Sundays, he would be the cleanest man in the building, dressing like he was on his way to one of those fancy award shows.

James owned a very successful plumbing business, which is why he'd just come from fixing the men's bathroom. He was dressed down in a pair of light blue jeans, a crème-colored V-neck shirt, and his crème-colored work boots. He was an amazing man.

“Who is this clown?” Davidson asked, showing me that he hadn’t changed a bit.

James set his toolbox on the floor and laughed as he walked over to me, showing off those beautiful, deep dimples and a set of nice, white teeth. He smelled so good as he wrapped an arm around my shoulder, pulling me closer.

“I’m James. Nice to meet you, man, but if I’m not mistaken, you’re not supposed to be here. I think you might be trespassing,” James said to Davidson.

Davidson released a sarcastic laugh, shook his head, and then his eyes fell on me.

“You don’t even surprise me anymore, Melody. This what you go for after years of being married to me?” he asked.

“When you say *this*, know that she has a man who loves and protects her. A man who adores every single little thing about her. Where you failed to uplift her, I keep her lifted and motivated. I make sure her confidence is through the roof. Anything Melody wants to do, I’m in her corner, letting her know that she has the strength, the intelligence, and the ability to do whatever she puts her mind to. Let me go ahead and escort you out of here,” James said, removing his arm from around me and walking closer to Davidson.

Whew! A man who could step in and defuse a situation definitely had me needing to get one of the church fans to cool myself down.

Davidson gave me one last look like he was hurt and disappointed in me, and then he turned around, with James right there to open the door and escort him out.

After James closed the door, he walked over to me.

“You should have called me the second he walked into this church, baby. You alright?” he asked.

“Yes, I’m fine. Thank you,” I said.

He hugged me. “You don’t have to thank me for doing my job. Did you give any thought to what I’ve been asking you lately? I don’t want to put any pressure on you, but my

daughter thinks I'm lying about having a girlfriend. I told you that her mother died from complications when she gave birth to Ashley, so my daughter has never seen me date a woman. I'm telling her about you all the time, and she keeps laughing and saying, 'Daddy, I just don't believe you.'

"I want to set something up where I meet your girls, and you meet mine. We can do something in the backyard. I can put some food on the grill, and everybody can get to know each other. No pressure, but I really do like you, Melody, and I just want you to meet Ashley and vice versa," he told me.

My girls didn't know about James yet. I knew they would be on board because it was Normani and her slick mouth, always telling me that I needed to move on and find a man. This was just so new to me. I knew the girls would love James, though. He was the kind of man who was easy to get along with and like.

"I'll set something up. I promise," I said, which made him smile.

"Give me a kiss, woman," he demanded.

I laughed and tried to pull away from him.

"James, no. It's still people here walking around and cleaning."

"Alright, then, just give me a quick one."

I was a fifty-four-year-old woman, but James had the ability to make me feel like a young, silly teenager all over again. It was just pure happiness with him. I hadn't been this happy in years.

I leaned in, kissed him twice on his lips, and pulled away. I was falling for this man. Falling for him so hard.

Chapter Seventeen

TWINKLE HARRIS

“*T*he idea that my sister can be home in a couple of months gives me a feeling that I can’t even explain. Ariel, I don’t think you understand when I say that Loyal is the other half of me. I never needed a best friend because my sister was that for me. Next month will make three years since my sister has been locked up. I swear I was never the same after she went away. I know my sister’s heart; therefore, I know she didn’t deserve the punishment that was given to her. Her parole hearing is next month, and I just... I just don’t know what I will do if they deny it,” I said, my voice cracking and a couple of tears falling in the process, which I quickly wiped.

My mom was sitting right next to me, and when she saw that I’d started crying, she placed her hand on my back and rubbed it in an attempt to calm me down. Ariel sat in the meeting room across from my mother and me. It was just the three of us in the room, and we were discussing Loyal’s case. I had been doing so much research on how parole hearings worked, and the truth is, they could deny Loyal next month. We could be fighting that shit for years before they felt like she was eligible.

I felt like the pressure was on. Although I was strong for my sister, telling her that she was going home and would be with Dream, the reality is that I was scared my damn self.

There were only two options: Loyal could come home and just have to be on parole, or they would deny her parole, and she would have to complete the rest of her sentence. The latter couldn't happen. That would shatter me. It would shatter my sister, and I was afraid that mentally, she wouldn't be able to handle the rest of her time on the inside, so I feared she would try to check out on us. That was a possibility, especially since she was so eager to come home to Dream.

"Twinkle, I need you to have faith that this will work out in all of our favor. I spoke with Loyal this morning on the phone, but it was brief. She's in good spirits. She's being positive, and she's ready for next month. I strongly believe that we have a chance. Since your sister has been incarcerated, she's done so much good with her time. She's proven to be a leader, even taking some college courses and obtaining an associate degree. I think the biggest thing that we will be able to sell next month at her parole hearing is that she's fully aware of the mistakes she's made, and she's learned her lesson. Still no luck from Dream's father?" Ariel asked, talking about Chance.

"Nope, he walked away from his responsibilities and hasn't looked back since. I raise Dream, along with my husband. When we come down to Miami, she goes with my mom," I said to Ariel, and he nodded.

"That will work in Loyal's favor. She can convince them that Dream needs a parent in her life. Right now, she has one who isn't even in the picture and another one serving time in prison. No offense to you, your mother, or your husband because I know you all are raising a beautiful little girl. But the truth of the matter is that Dream needs her mother," Ariel said, and we nodded because it was true.

I was raising Dream to the best of my ability, and I had been doing so for the past three years. Although she lived a good life with me, that little girl wanted her mother. She expressed to me all the time that she couldn't wait for her mother to come home.

"At the parole hearing, is Dream allowed to come? I feel like Loyal is going to need all of the support that day," my

mom said.

“Loyal already told me that if anybody is there, it has to be Dream, so yes, she needs to be there,” Ariel said.

We stayed in the room with him for another thirty minutes or so, and then the two of us finally left. I was in Miami, but I was flying back to California tomorrow. It was the weekend, and Dream was at Billion’s house, hanging out with her cousins.

“You ain’t scared, Ma? I feel like you so chill about this shit. This is stressing me out so damn bad,” I vented after I got in the passenger seat of her car, and she pulled out of the parking lot.

“Somebody has to be strong for the three of us, and that’s what I’m doing. My oldest child is in prison right now. Been in there for the past three years. My relationship with Loyal is nowhere near where I want it to be because that girl is angry at me for reasons that I don’t even understand. But trust me, I’m stressed out just as much as you are. I just choose not to show it in front of you. Where you want to go eat? I’m starving,” she said, switching the subject.

I was glad she did because all that talk about my sister was putting a bitch on edge.

“Let’s go to Glizzy’s new spot. I still haven’t tried his food, and everybody and their mama be hyping it up,” I told her.

“Girllll, I ate there the other day. That food is the bomb. You know I love me an older nigga, but that Glizzy, I’ll make him your stepdaddy any day,” my mama said, and I cracked up laughing.

“Keep it on the hush, Ma, but Normani told me she thinks him and Naomi are creeping,” I told my mama.

We were at a red light, and she gave me a stunned look like she couldn’t believe what I had just said. Normani couldn’t hold water to save her life. She called me a couple of weeks ago after Glizzy’s grand opening of his restaurant, which I missed because I was back in Cali. After I questioned her on

how the event went, she told me she thought Glizzy and her sister were creeping. I couldn't even be mad at Naomi, though, because she and I spoke, and she told me what was going on between her and her husband, how they were divorcing, and everything else. So, if she was creeping with Glizzy, I swear I wasn't even mad at her. That nigga was fine!

"I don't believe it for a second. That's something I have to see with my own two eyes to believe it. Naomi is a good girl," my mama said.

"Shit, Normani was a good girl too. Look at her ass now," I said to my mama, and she laughed because she knew it was true.

We talked about a little bit of everything on our ride to the restaurant, and about ten minutes later, we finally pulled up. Standing outside the restaurant, I had to admit that *Glizzy Eats* had a look to it that no other restaurant had. Glizzy was so fuckin' hood, so the outside resembled a trap house. It didn't have that run-down look to it, but I could tell that it was definitely the vibe he was going for. Parked in the lot, right in front of the restaurant, were six custom-wrapped vans with his company's name on them and his picture. I assumed they were for his catering jobs. To see a black man doing big things like this and fresh out of prison, I swear it was so inspiring.

My mom and I walked into the restaurant, and because it was the weekend, it was packed as hell in there. Young Jeezy played over the loudspeakers and in the lobby area where plenty of people waited to be called. Now, it was afternoon, and these women were dressed like they were headed to the damn club. I wasn't a dummy, though. I knew those bitches came dressed like that to be seen by Glizzy. If Naomi was creeping with this nigga, like Normani said she was, I needed my good sis to practice having some thick skin now because those hoes were lined the fuck up. They weren't even trying to be discreet with that shit.

"You in the wrong neck of the woods, shorty. You take yo' ass to Cali and forget all about the 305," I heard a deep voice say, and it was Glizzy, coming from the back of the restaurant.

Glizzy was best friends with my cousin, so I had always looked up to him as a big cousin. When I first met him, I'm not going to even lie; my ass was crushing. Of course, I didn't say anything about it because it was innocent, and the nigga was older than me. Billion would have killed Glizzy if he ever even thought about entertaining me. I still thought him to be a very handsome man, but no longer was I crushing on him because I considered him to be family. He had his hair braided in two long plaits on each side of his head. He wore a black t-shirt with his restaurant logo on it, some black jeans that were hanging off his waist just a little bit, and black Yeezy's.

Glizzy walked with cockiness, and when he made it over to me, he pulled me in to a hug and did the same to my mom.

"You know Miami is home for me. I'm so proud of you, Glizzy. Look at this. This is amazing," I told him sincerely as my eyes scanned up, and I saw that he had a second level too.

He smiled big at what I said, showing off his perfect smile and perfect teeth that included golds at the bottom.

"I appreciate that. Y'all family, so I'm not about to let y'all wait in this long ass line. It's a table right in the back that just became available. Ima sit y'all right there," he said.

My mom and I thanked him, and then he led the way to the back. He treated us like royalty. On the way to our table, he got the attention of one of the waitresses and told her to come and take our orders when she was done with her table.

"Where Dream at?" Glizzy asked once we had settled in the booth.

There were menus on the table, and even the menus were dope. They had a magazine theme, something I had never seen before. The drinks were named after different sports teams and even after brands of weed wraps. Just everything about this place was unique. Something like this was could definitely expand and have one in just about every city.

"She's good. She's with Billion and the kids right now," I told him, and he nodded.

"Where yo' girl at?" he asked.

“Who? Normani?”

“Nah. The other one,” he said, and I laughed.

This nigga was so cocky that he wouldn't even say Naomi's name, so I was going to play dumb with him because I wanted to see him sweat.

“Mia?” I questioned, and he sucked his teeth.

“Naomi big head ass. Where the fuck she at?” he asked, making me laugh again.

“Is cocky ass Glizzy sweating Naomi? You got all these bitches in here with they ass and titties out, and we know they checking for you, just a little bit more than they are here to check for the food,” I told him, and he flashed that cocky ass smile as he pulled down on his beard.

“I ain't checking for them, though. I want the tall black one with the long ass legs. Y'all women, so give a nigga some pointers. Naomi makes a nigga feel like I'm chasing her ass. It's like, how the fuck I'm supposed to know if she likes a nigga for real? She always making it seem like she so fuckin' busy,” Glizzy said.

My mom cleared her throat, so I let her take the floor since she was older and wiser than me. I knew she could give Glizzy some good advice.

“Because Naomi isn't a bird like a lot of these women that you're used to dealing with. I've only met her a handful of times, but she has the aura of a grown ass woman that's about her business. She has a child, she works, so it's like there are other things that she can be doing in life than sitting by the phone whenever you call and—”

“She hardly answers that motha fucka, though. I'm trying to handle her a little different, but Auntie, you know I'm hood. A hood nigga like me be wanting to pull up, kick a door in, and see what the fuck she doing, and why she can't pick up the phone,” Glizzy said.

I laughed because Naomi had some shit that she would have to deal with if she took his ass seriously. He was going to turn her ass out, just like Billion did with Normani.

“That hood shit may not work with her,” my mama told him.

It was adorable to watch Glizzy sweat Naomi. I swear I wanted to pull my phone out, record his ass, and send it to Naomi, but I probably would have gotten caught. Glizzy stayed at the table with us until a waitress came over to take our orders. The fried lobster bites were something that I kept hearing people hype up, so I ordered that with yellow rice, macaroni and cheese, and collard greens. My stomach rumbled as I ordered the mouthwatering looking food on the menu. My mom ordered her food next.

Not even five minutes later, three women walked out from another booth, and they had to pass our table to get to the front of the restaurant. I looked up at them, not really paying them any attention. My eyes landed on the woman in the middle, and I saw her baby bump, which looked like she was a good six months. Then my eyes settled on her face, and I saw that it was Trinity, Monterius’s bitch.

I’m over the situation. I swear I am. I ride too much dick at home to still be bothered by Monterius, but I’ll always view the two of them as a big fuckin’ joke. The last time I saw Monterius was right before my wedding at the cemetery where Truth visited his father’s grave. Yes, Monterius apologized, and yes, he wished me well in my marriage. But every time I saw him or her, I just thought about when he used to lay her out to me like a dog, and now this was the bitch he was with, and from the looks of things, she was knocked up again with his second child.

That situation with Monterius opened my eyes to a lot of things. When these niggas get around you and are bad-mouthing these hoes, ladies, your antennas better go up. You better realize that nigga don’t hate that hoe as much as he’s making it seem.

“That’s a big ass joke,” I said to my mama.

She discreetly turned her head to see what I was talking about. When she saw her, she laughed and shook her head, then turned back to look at me.

“Hey, just be glad you walked away from that situation. That could have been you right there, and people could have been looking at you, calling you the big ass joke for staying,” my mama said, telling me some real shit.

Them hoes would have had a field day talking about me if I had stayed with Monterius after he had a baby on me. I found true love with Truth, and I was the happiest that I’d ever been in my entire life.

My eyes connected with Trinity for a second, and then I just stopped looking. I didn’t even want her ass to even think for a second that I cared, so I had to avert my eyes. Best wishes to her for a safe and healthy delivery were all I had to offer. That’s it, and that’s all.

Chapter Eighteen

MARKELL 'GLIZZY' WEST

*I*t was Thursday night, a little bit after ten, and I had a blunt hanging from the side of my mouth as I stood in my kitchen, cooking some conch fritters. This was a recipe that my mama gave me when I was about fifteen years old, and after all these years, I still remembered how to make it without having to call her for help. I'd just gotten home from work about an hour ago, and after taking my shower, washing my hair, and everything, I rolled up a blunt. I had a strong need for some conch fritters, and since I had batter for it in the fridge, I just whipped some up right quick.

I had the TV on in the living room, watching the game. My phone was on the kitchen counter, and it started ringing. I damn near broke my fuckin' neck getting to it because I hoped Naomi was calling me back. I had called to check on her around eight, and she said she was about to bathe her son and get him ready for bed, and she would call me later. When I grabbed the phone, it wasn't her calling. Whoever was calling, their number wasn't saved in my phone, but I answered anyway.

"Yo," I said, putting the phone on speaker and setting it on the counter as I used a spatula to take two of the conch fritters out of the pan and set them on a plate.

“Hey, Glizzy. This is Ms. Lauren. How are you doing?” her soft voice said, and it sounded sad as fuck.

Ms. Lauren was my childhood friend, Rickey’s mom. Rickey was a white boy who went to elementary school with me. His ass was crazy as fuck, and because of that, none of the kids at the school fucked with him. Mainly because everybody was scared of his ass. He had the teachers shook too. I swear I used to watch the teachers check his book bag every day. It wasn’t until I got older that I realized they were probably doing that to make sure his ass didn’t have any weapons and shit in there to possibly shoot the school up. Not only did the kids not fuck with him, but they used to bully his ass too because of his weight. He was chunky, and y’all already know how kids can be.

At a young age, my mama taught a nigga not to be no bully. I fucked with Rickey because back then, I used to be fascinated with sports cars. One day at lunch, he pulled out a bunch of little toy cars. I remember him having the SS Camaro, convertible Mustang, a Rolls Royce, and a bunch of other cars. I sat by him at lunch, and we started chopping it up about cars. Mind you, we were only in the third grade at the time, but the way we talked about the bodies of those cars, you would have thought we were full blown mechanics and shit. Ever since that day, I always fucked with Rickey, not giving a fuck that nobody else did.

In the middle of our fifth-grade year, he and his mom took off to California. Rickey used to tell me that his daddy beat his mama’s ass, and I always felt like they left so quickly to get away from his ass. I bet Rickey saw a bunch of shit at home that he didn’t tell me about, and I knew that played a part in why he had so many mental problems.

Anyway, long story short, when I was eighteen, a case made the news worldwide about a kid killing some students in high school. I remember where the fuck I was that day. I had just snuck into one of the many girls I was fuckin’ with house because she invited me over, saying that her parents wouldn’t be home for a few hours. I was on the couch, getting my dick

sucked. The news happened to be on, but neither of us was paying attention.

When I saw Rickey's face pop up on the screen in a mug shot, I remembered pushing her ass off me and grabbing the remote, so I could turn the TV up some and hear what was going on. They were charging him with multiple murders of kids at his school in California. He was given several life sentences. That shit was fifteen years ago. I remember crying like a little bitch over that shit. I would write him at least once a year, but once I was sentenced, all communication stopped, and I hadn't heard from him in eight years. In the letters we exchanged, he told me that the boys he killed, them niggas used to mess with him every day, and he just snapped.

Seeing his mama call me and hearing the distress in her voice, that shit had me turning the stove off. I could already feel that what she was about to tell me wasn't good.

"Hey, Ms. Lauren. I'm doing alright. You good? What's going on?" I asked with my back against the kitchen counter and holding the phone, preparing myself for whatever she was going to tell me.

"Rickey is gone. He hung himself last weekend in his cell. I meant to call you sooner, but I just lost my only child, and I've been out of it so bad lately. I know it's last minute, but tomorrow is his viewing, and Saturday will be the actual funeral. I'm not sure if you can make it out here to California, but I still had to call and let you know. Rickey would have wanted me to. You were the only friend my boy ever had," she said, and her voice cracked.

I immediately felt guilty. I'd been home now for months and hadn't even bothered to reach out to Rickey and have a conversation with him. I don't know what news hurt me worse; this or fifteen years ago, when I found out he was sentenced to life in prison. This shit fucked with me hard because all I could picture was the first time I bonded with him at lunch over cars. I made his ass my best friend, solely off the fact that he was into cars just as much as I was.

“Damn. Damn, this is not the kind of news I was hoping to get tonight. I’m so sorry, Ms. Lauren. I’ll be there, though. I probably won’t make the viewing tomorrow, but I’ll be there for the funeral services on Saturday. When we hang up, can you text me over the details and everything else, please?” I asked.

“Yes. I’ll send it to you now. Thank you, Glizzy,” she told me and then hung up the phone.

Not even a minute later, a picture message came through. It was a flyer showing the details of both the viewing and funeral that would take place this weekend, along with addresses for both. The picture of Rickey had clearly been taken while he was in prison. He was still a big boy like he’d always been, but of course, he was older in the photo. The little smirk on his face was probably the closest thing to a smile that we would get because he didn’t smile for shit. I stared at the picture message for a good two minutes.

“Damn, Rickey,” I said aloud.

My phone started buzzing in my hands, and it was Naomi calling me back. I declined her call because I told her earlier that I only wanted her to call me on Facetime. I just wanted to see her face. Although I was fucked up about the news that I’d just gotten, I still wanted to see her face. She called me regular again, and I declined that one as well. A few seconds later, she called me on Facetime, and that’s when I answered.

“Ay, stop playing with me,” is how I answered the phone.

She laughed like that shit was funny. She was lying in bed. Her room was dark, but I could still see her a little bit since the TV was on, and it was giving the room some light. Her son was lying in bed with her. I could see his head on her chest as she ran her hands up and down his back.

“How are you, Markell?” she asked in her proper voice.

“I just got some bad news. One of my childhood friends committed suicide in prison,” I said.

Having that shit come from my mouth just made me feel bad all over again. The smile that had been on Naomi’s face

was quickly wiped away once I told her about Rickey.

“What? Markell, I’m so sorry. That’s terrible,” she said.

“Come with me to the funeral,” was the only thing that I could think of to say.

Shit, I needed some kind of moral support for this. I already knew I couldn’t count on my mama to go with me because she used to say that Rickey was crazy, and every chance she got, she always said, “You need to leave that crazy ass boy alone.” Of course, she never said it to him, but she would always get on me about it. Naomi was the only person who I would want to keep me company at a time like this.

“Where is the funeral? At what church?” she asked, probably thinking it was somewhere in Miami.

“It’s in California.”

“California? Markelllll,” she whined my name.

I don’t know why, but I loved that shit. Shit brought back memories from a week ago when I was eating on that pussy.

“We would have to leave tomorrow too because the funeral is on Saturday,” I said, just going ahead and throwing everything out there.

“Markell, now you know this is too much of a short notice. My mom usually babysits LJ for me, but she just left for a trip this morning, and she won’t be back until Saturday night and ___”

“Tell Normani,” I said, cutting her off.

“Normani is going to ask too many questions. She will want to know where I’m going, what I’m doing, and who I’m doing it with. My mom doesn’t ask me all of that when I ask her to watch my son for me,” she told me.

“Aight. Ima just go by myself then,” I said.

I wasn’t mad because, at the end of the day, Naomi had a son, and I knew he came first before anything.

“See, now you making me feel bad. Markell, please don’t do that,” her soft voice said.

I watched her as she laid her son down, and it looked like she was about to get out of bed.

“Shorty, I ain’t doing nothing. I respect it. If you can’t go, then you just can’t go. I respect you wanting to make sure that your son is in good hands before you take off somewhere,” I said.

I could hear her walking, and then suddenly a light came on. When I heard an exhaust fan, I knew then that she was standing in the bathroom. I could see her pretty ass face clearer now. She had her hair wrapped up like my mama be doing to her hair at night when she’s trying to protect her blowout or whatever that shit is called. All I could see was the pink tank top that she was wearing, and that was it. I bet she smelled so good.

“I’m going to text my sister and tell her to watch LJ until Sunday. I’ll just say that I want to take a getaway by myself for a few days. Please don’t tell your homeboys, specifically Billion, that you and I are together because my sister will love saying that she knew I was lying this whole time. She swears she knows that something is up between me and you,” Naomi told me.

“Is something up between you and me?” I asked, curious to hear what she was going to say.

“I mean, after what we did last week, there is something up, but Markell, I don’t know. We’ll talk about it in person. I’m not planning to sleep in the same bed as you,” she let me know.

I laughed because her ass was so fuckin’ difficult, man. She made it hard for a nigga, but I swear it just made me respect her that much more.

“I got you. I’m about to book us a flight now, and I’ll send the details over to you. Ima see if I can get something to leave out tomorrow afternoon or evening. You straight with that?” I asked.

“Yeah, that’s fine. I don’t know what this means, but Markell, this must mean something because I hate flying. It’s

literally the last resort for me. I'd rather drive or take a train," she told me.

"It means I ate your pussy good, and now your head is fucked up," I told her, and she playfully rolled her eyes at me.

"I had a weak moment that night. It won't happen again," she said, making me suck my teeth.

"That's bullshit, and you know it. Tell me the truth, Naomi. Since that shit happened, how often do you think about me?"

"I mean, I think of you the same."

"I don't believe that shit for a second. That's why you don't be answering the fuckin' phone when I call yo' ass. It's like you running from me," I told her.

"Markell, of course, I'm running from you. I was around you for all of five minutes, and look what ended up happening. I told you that I need the divorce to clear before you and I start doing anything else. I'm going with you to California, simply as a friend to support you. I want my own room and own bathroom. It's not even you that I don't trust; it's myself," she told me.

"You like me?" I asked, sounding like my ass was in middle school.

"Markell..."

"Naomi, it's a yes or no question. Why you gotta make shit so fuckin' complicated?" I asked.

"Yes. I do like you, but we can't do anything about that. I'm in the middle of a divorce, and we're not going to sit here on this phone and act like you don't have a lot of loose ends that you need to tie up," she said, catching me off guard.

"What loose ends I got?"

"I mean, for one, we can start by what happened between you and that woman last week at your restaurant. Why did you put her and her friends out?" she inquired, talking about Quinn.

Last weekend, after I kicked Quinn out, I went over to the table where Naomi was sitting with her sister, and I gave her the food that I had taken from the kitchen for her. She made it seem like shit was cool. After she got home that night, we even talked on the phone for a little bit, and she didn't say shit about it. It was cool, though, because I wanted her to express how she felt. I never wanted her to feel like she couldn't tell me what was on her mind.

“Me and her got history. It ain't nothing that I need to tie up with her, though,” I explained.

“You told me you never had a girlfriend before. You mean to tell me that the two of you never dated? Markell, she looked pretty upset,” she insisted.

“I had you on my arm, so of course, she was going to be upset. Naomi, her name is Quinn, and we used to fuck around. We almost got into a relationship, but when I went to prison, it just never happened. I told you that before in the car. I just never said her name. That was her last weekend. I wouldn't lie to you about no shit like that. If she was my ex, I would have no problem telling you that shit, but she ain't.

“You already know that when it comes to my past, I'm not a saint, but I'm a single ass man, and I don't owe none of these hoes shit. So, if you and I were to get into a relationship right now, we could do that because I don't owe nobody any loyalty. I have nothing but respect for you, so if I was out here in some serious shit with another woman, I wouldn't be sweating you like this,” I told Naomi.

I couldn't even believe I was on the phone, explaining myself to her. I guess that was the kind of shit you did when you liked someone.

“I just don't want any drama in my life, Markell. I have enough of that with Liam,” she said.

“I ain't going to bring no drama your way. Yeah, we gon' have to talk for real,” I mumbled.

“I'm all for it. I need to be sitting right in front of you anyway when we have serious conversations like this. I need

to watch your body language, so I can see if you're lying to me or not," she said, and I laughed.

"We on Facetime, though. I'm looking you dead in your eyes," I pointed out.

"It's different. Plus, you're high. I can tell by your eyes. We need to have a serious conversation like this while you're sober," she told me.

"Aight. We can do that."

After that, Naomi switched the subject and started asking me questions about Rickey. I laid it all out on the line, telling her why he was sentenced to prison in the first place. When I brought up the shooting that happened in California, she told me she remembered that case. I expected her to remember because, like I said, that shit had made the news worldwide.

I stayed on the phone with her for another ten minutes or so, and after we hung up, I started looking for our airplane tickets. The tickets flying into LAX were expensive as fuck because it was last minute, but I ended up booking anyway. I got lucky and was able to get us first-class seats going there and coming back. Instead of booking a hotel, I rented a two-bedroom, two-bathroom home in Malibu, right on the water, from Air BNB.

I swear I wasn't even doing this shit to set a mood or no shit like that, but I didn't want this to be a sad trip. So, I was hoping that where we stayed could bring some light into this shit because this was the most fucked up news I'd received in a long time.

Two days later

California

“I appreciate you for coming, Glizzy. My son loved you so much. If it wasn’t for you, I know that Rickey would have never experienced what it felt like to have a friend. No matter what school I took him to, the kids always found a way to bully him, whether it was his weight, them thinking he was weird, or even thinking he was crazy. My son wasn’t crazy. I’m not proud of many things he had to see at home dealing with his father and me, and I know that had a lot to do with his character.

“Years ago, I saw a chance to run away from his father after being physically abused for years. I took it and never looked back. But, as a mother, I just can’t help but wonder if things would have been different if we never left. Would my son have still brought a gun to school, killed those kids, and been sentenced to life in prison? Would my baby have still killed himself if we never left? I just... I just don’t know,” Ms. Lauren said and broke down crying.

We were standing at the gravesite after we’d just watched them lower Rickey’s body into the ground. Today was very sad and depressing. Rickey didn’t have a lot of family, and like his mom said, he didn’t have friends either, so there weren’t many people at the funeral. Seeing Ms. Lauren cry during the services had fucked me up bad because I just felt like a mother wasn’t supposed to have to bury her child like that. As hard as that shit was on me to go up to the front of the church and talk about some of the good memories that I had with Rickey, I did it. Not many people had gone up to speak positive things about him, so I did, thinking it was the last good gesture that I could ever do for him. Shit really fucked me up once I got a hold of the obituary and saw a picture of Rickey and me that Ms. Lauren had taken when we were in the fourth grade. She’d chaperoned our field trip to the zoo.

I pulled Ms. Lauren into me and hugged her.

“The thing I learned about death is that you’ll drive yourself crazy wondering about all the things you could have done differently. Since you called and told me about what happened to Rickey, I even found myself saying that I should have reached out to him when I came home from prison. You know your son better than anyone, but Rickey was my friend. I remember in one of the letters he sent me years ago, he told me that when he died, if that shit was true about dying and being reincarnated, he would want to be a dog in the next lifetime because at least people would treat him better.

“I ain’t justifying what he did, but Rickey talked about death often. He talked about going to a place where he was loved more, respected, and cherished. The only thing helping me get through this shit is knowing that he finally got what he wanted after all these years. The world didn’t deserve Rickey. He had too much shit to offer,” I told her.

She was softly crying as I spoke to her, and it took her about two minutes, but she eventually pulled away. I hadn’t seen Ms. Lauren in years, and she still looked exactly how I remembered her from years ago. She was a slender woman. It was Rickey’s father who was big and where he’d gotten his weight from. Judging from the bags under her eyes, I could tell she wasn’t getting any sleep. I felt so bad for her, though. Those bloodshot red eyes told her soul. To lose your son to the system and then, fifteen years later, to lose him for good was just fucked up.

“Thank you for that. Is this your girlfriend? I’m sorry. It’s nice to meet you,” Ms. Lauren said, speaking to Naomi, who had been standing beside me the entire time.

“Hi, nice to meet you. I’m Naomi. My deepest condolences to you. I just learned about Rickey two days ago from Markell, and I’ve heard nothing but good stories about him. I feel like I know him,” Naomi said to Ms. Lauren with her hand extended.

Naomi and I got to Cali last night at a little bit after ten. She dropped her son off with her sister like she told me she would. Yesterday evening, I picked her up from her house, and we headed to the airport. Once we got to the house where we

would be staying until tomorrow afternoon, Naomi took her shower and passed out in her room. She had stayed up the entire flight, so by the time we got settled in the house, I guess she was tired.

I didn't sleep at all last night. While she slept, I was out in the backyard, sitting by the beach, just taking in the fact that I was getting ready to bury a childhood friend. Shit was just fucked up how life worked, but to keep myself from stressing out about it, I was trying to think about the good times that Rickey and I shared.

"Thank you so much. I really do appreciate that. Thank you both for coming. I have to get going now. I would like to say one final goodbye to my son. Glizzy, please keep in touch," Ms. Lauren told me.

She gave me one last hug and even did the same to Naomi. I promised her that I would keep in touch, and then she walked away, going back over to Rickey's grave. Naomi and I both turned our heads to look at her, and then we looked at each other.

"I feel so sorry for her. Situations like this just make you want to go home and hug your kids much tighter. You just never really know how much time you have with your loved ones, so you have to cherish every moment with them. I couldn't imagine burying my son. The thought of it just makes me so emotional," Naomi said, and her voice cracked.

Her eyes got a bit watery, and the second she blinked, a tear fell, but she quickly wiped it away. During the funeral, I happened to glance at Naomi twice, and both times, I caught her with a tissue in her hands, wiping her eyes. Everything about the service was just depressing. Rickey's life was sad, and even though Naomi didn't personally know him, I had been telling her stories about him since Thursday. Hearing about Rickey and having to witness the way Ms. Lauren broke down in the church would have made anyone emotional. I put my hand around Naomi's neck, pulling her into me for a second. I stayed wrapped up with her for a few moments, allowing her time to get it together, and then we pulled apart.

Looking down at her outfit of choice for the funeral had a nigga damn near blushing all over again. She wore all black, just like me, but she wore a black dress that had a bit of a tight fit to it, but it wasn't to the point that the shit looked like a club outfit. The dress really emphasized her tiny waist and the little booty she had on her, but that shit was cute, so I wasn't complaining. She wore a black hijab, which just showed a little bit of the front of her hair. She did her own make-up this morning while I was sitting in her room, chilling on her ottoman, and like always, it was just enough. She wore black heels that made her long legs stand out even more, and a black Tory Burch purse was on her shoulder. Little gold accessories like her necklace, bracelet, earrings, and some rings were on her finger. Naomi was just a classy ass woman and standing next to her, I couldn't help but feel like she made a nigga look better.

"I always get shy when you start staring at me like that. What exactly are you searching for?" she asked.

I was peering at her hard, but I was only doing that shit because she was so fuckin' beautiful.

"I just never came across nobody as beautiful as you. You probably think I'm running game on you, but seriously, your beauty is unmatched. Come on. You want to get something to eat? I know yo' ass hungry," I said, and she started laughing as we walked over to the Mustang that I'd rented.

"What's that supposed to mean? You trying to call me greedy?" she asked.

"Nah. We got to the house last night, and you showered and took yo' ass to sleep. You ain't eat nothing this morning either, so I know you hungry. Let me find out that you scared to eat around me," I teased.

"Not at all. I'm not that scared to be around you," she told me.

Naomi and I ended up eating at Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles. Neither of us had it before, and I can't even lie, the food was good as fuck. I hardly ate out because I enjoyed eating my own food, but I enjoyed the little date that Naomi

and I had. I felt like I learned more about her. We had to wait damn near thirty minutes to be seated, and for those thirty minutes, we sat outside the restaurant on one of the benches, just talking. I basically found out that I had a little smart ass on my hands after Naomi told me about her education. I mean, it wasn't that much of a shocker because I could tell from her conversation that she was smart anyway. She talked to me a little bit about her father and how he and her mother divorced a couple of years ago. Really, anything that I didn't know about her, I found it out today.

I let down my guard as well with Naomi, sharing with her how my father was murdered when I was ten years old and how I knew that shit had a hand in why I grew up to be the man I am today. When my pops died, that's when I became nonchalant with life. I stopped showing a lot of emotions, and I started getting into trouble with the law. I even talked to Naomi about my mama, telling her how close our bond was and shit like that. I never opened up about this kind of shit with a woman, so I knew I was interested for real.

Now, it was hours later, a little bit after eight. I was sitting outside in one of the beach chairs with a blunt that I was almost finished with and enjoying the peaceful sound of the water. I came out there nearly an hour ago, leaving Naomi in the living room because she had fallen asleep while we were watching *Training Day*.

Billion had called me almost thirty minutes ago, just to check in on me and see how I was doing because he knew why I was in Cali. I chopped it up with him, and one of the things that made me smile from our conversation was hearing my brotha motivate me and tell me that I would have to open another restaurant soon. He told me that he drove by the restaurant today after leaving from looking at a property, and there was a line outside the door with people waiting to come in and eat. Shit like that made me proud. I had a good staff working for me, so I trusted that they would handle shit in my absence. I gave my mama strict orders to check in on shit for me while I was away, and I knew her bossy ass didn't have a problem running shit for me while I was gone.

“I was looking all over the house for you. Here you are,” I heard Naomi call out from behind me.

I turned around in the layout chair to look at her. She’d changed out of the lounging clothes that she had been in earlier and put on pajamas. It was a red and white striped set from Victoria’s Secret that I could still see, although she had a throw blanket wrapped around her because it was pretty cool out there. She had her hair pulled up in a bun, and because I could smell a sweet scent coming from her, I assumed she must have just finished taking a bath. She had her sandals on her feet and was holding her phone in her hands.

“All yo’ ass do is sleep,” I told her, and she laughed.

“I think the plane has me tired like this,” she said.

She tried to sit in the other layout chair next to me, but I grabbed her hand, making her sit with me. I put her in front of me and right between my legs. I finished the blunt because I knew she didn’t like the smell of it.

“It’s so beautiful out here. I’ve always loved the beach. When I was a kid, my father would religiously take us to the beach on the weekend. This is just so peaceful,” Naomi said.

A beach was a place where you could go to just sit down and think. I could even see myself falling asleep out there; that’s just how peaceful this shit was.

“Yeah. This shit is real nice. I always wanted a house on the water. I wouldn’t want it to be my main house, though. We from Florida, and it be hurricanes and shit, so maybe like a little vacation home,” I said.

Naomi turned her body around in the chair and faced me, sitting Indian style.

“What? Why you looking at me like that?” I asked.

“How come you don’t have any kids?”

“Because I wear condoms when I fuck,” I told her and laughed.

She laughed too and then playfully hit me on my leg before she grew serious.

“Markell, I’m serious. I know I have a way of showing you that I’m not interested, but I’m only doing that to protect my feelings. After Liam, I have this guard up because I’m afraid of getting hurt again. You’re a good man from what I can see, and you openly talked to me about a lot of the women you’ve dealt with in the past. I guess I’m just curious to know why you never settled down and had children. Do you want children?” she asked.

“Shit just ain’t that simple, Naomi. I don’t want to offend you with this, but I love pussy. Weed and pussy are like my top two things in life that I love, but as much as I love pussy, that rubber wasn’t coming off unless I saw myself really fuckin’ with a woman for the long run. I watch a lot of my niggas go through baby mama drama, and I didn’t want that shit. I firsthand used to see that shit from Billion and his baby mamas. Although I wasn’t physically here to witness it because I was locked up, he would still call and put me up on game to the bullshit he had to deal with from both his baby mamas.

“To answer your last question, of course, I want kids, but it gotta be with the right person. I can’t have just anybody raising my son and daughter. If Ima have a daughter, whoever Ima have her with, I gotta be able to know that person is someone I wouldn’t mind my daughter growing up to be like,” I said, telling her the truth.

“What’s the ideal kind of woman for you, Markell? I’m curious. You seem like your expectations are realllyyyy high. I only say that because I know you’ve dealt with some beautiful women in your lifetime, and you mean to tell me that you weren’t interested in at least one?” she asked, unable to believe this shit.

“You think I’m looking for a perfect woman, but I swear I’m not. My woman gotta be beautiful, and I mean on the inside and outside. I done dealt with women who were beautiful on the outside before, but their inside was ugly as fuck. Nasty ass attitudes and shit like that are what I ain’t interested in. I hate a bitch who acts like the world owes her some shit. I want somebody smart. I’m not going to pretend

that I know everything, so I wouldn't mind learning from my girl—good conversation, good personality, someone that's good with kids because I want kids.

“Ima be straight up, my lady gotta know how to fuck me. After working long days, I want that pussy anywhere I can get it. Knowing how to fuck is teachable, though, so I won't even stress the last part. Basically, she gotta be you,” I said to Naomi.

I could tell she didn't expect me to say that. I was always saying shit to her, so she probably never knew when to take me seriously.

“What you look for in a man?” I asked.

“Ugh. I don't even know where to start. It's not like I'm going to make it difficult to have me, but Liam messed it up for any other guy after him, so it's like I know what I don't want this time around. My wants are really specific, and you may feel like I'm nitpicking everything,” she said.

“Aight, so tell me.”

“I just want someone to believe in me. Someone who will make me feel like my dreams are just as important to him as his dreams are. Don't get me wrong, Markell, I love teaching. I absolutely love working with children. I believe that I was put on this earth to mold young minds but working at a school isn't all I want to do with my life. I want to have my own private Christian school. I just took the backseat for years with Liam. Even when I would bring up starting the process of getting my own school, he would always get mad and say that he needed me to continue working for him. So whoever I get with, I need them to not box me in and limit what I can do because I have big goals that I put on hold for a man who ended up doing me so wrong.

“I also need someone to pick up on the little changes in me. I've always been slim, but I've been losing a lot of weight because of stress. Tell me that you noticed a change in my weight and question me on my mental well-being. Don't make me feel like I'm nagging you if I simply ask you if we can go out one weekend for dinner. When I say that I need a break

from my son, don't look at me as if I'm neglecting my son instead of just merely needing a minute to sit down and catch my breath. Let me know I'm beautiful, even when I just woke up, and my hair is all over my head, and I have eye boogers. Randomly kiss me throughout the day and tell me that you love me. Massage my feet. You don't have to make love to me every night, but at least three times out of the week. You think I'm asking for too much?" she asked.

"Shorty, that's light. If a nigga really loves you like that, he gon' do that shit regardless. We ain't gon' be fuckin' three times out the week, though. I need mine seven days a week," I told her, and she laughed.

"What about when I'm on my cycle?" she inquired.

"Shit, it's ways around it."

She laughed again, and when she stopped, I pulled her closer to me. My hands went to the small of her back, and we stared deep into each other's eyes. Naomi was the epitome of the woman I wanted, and I knew for a fact that I could be everything to her that she had just described.

I leaned my head into her, and we kissed. We kissed deeply, with my hands on her ass, squeezing that shit. I eventually pulled us back, so I could prop my back against the lounge chair. Naomi was on top of me, kissing me deeply. I knew this beach was making this moment spicy as fuck because she was grinding her pussy in my lap, right against my dick. The past couple of times that Naomi and I had started kissing like this, I was always able to control myself and not fuck because I felt like it just wasn't time. My wallet was in my pocket, and I had a condom in there, which I felt like I would use tonight because I couldn't go to sleep with blue balls. It was dark out and really just the two of us. Everyone was probably in the house, chilling and shit.

I eventually broke the kiss. Naomi had her hands in my hair while I went for the buttons to her pajama top and started unbuttoning it. I got to the last button at the top since I'd started at the bottom, and pretty, small, perky titties that I was seeing for the first time were staring back at me. The way my

dick was jumping, you would have really thought this was my first time seeing some titties. I put my hands on her shoulders, pulled the shirt off, and set it on the chair next to us. From there, my head leaned in, and I started sucking on her right nipple, making her moan as I played with the left one.

“Markell...” she moaned my name.

I didn't stop sucking on her nipples to answer. If anything, I just looked up at her while I kept them in my mouth. Her skin tasted so fuckin' good. I ended up wrapping my arms around her waist and flipping us, putting her on the bottom while I got on top. I licked, bit, and sucked my way down her stomach. When I got to her pussy, I removed her pajama bottoms along with her panties. This was my first time seeing her naked, and it was easily the most beautiful body that I've ever seen on a woman.

Grabbing her by her ankles, I was now on my knees in the sand. I went to eating on that pussy, just like I'd done at the restaurant. She tasted just as good this time as she did the last.

“Ohhhhhhhh,” she cried and put her hands on my head.

She lost control and started shoving her pussy in my face. That's how I knew she was horny for real. I loved the fact that Naomi could get super wet. She tasted so fuckin' clean as I feasted on her. This time, to test her tightness, I slid in a finger, which caused her to jump a little bit, but then she relaxed. I slid another one in, which had her moaning louder, and then a third one eased in, and there was no doubt in my mind that the neighbors heard her ass. Her pussy was virgin tight. It was sucking my fingers in each time I ran them inside of her. With three fingers fuckin' her and my tongue licking and sucking on her clit, I had her ass in heaven.

“Markelllllll, we not... We not supposed to be doing this,” she moaned, legs shaking the whole time.

“Why we not? I'm not making you feel good?” I asked, speaking into her pussy.

“You areeeeeeeee... I'm going to cummmm... Oh my Godddddd,” she screeched.

She ended up squirting. Juices flew out everywhere, and I lapped up all that shit. After she came, I kissed my way up her body and sloppily kissed her on her lips as she was under me, still grinding in the seat. In the middle of us kissing, I dug into the pocket of my sweats, pulled my wallet out, and grabbed the only condom I had in there. I broke the kiss to put the condom on my dick, which felt like it would break.

“Be easy with me, Markell, please. I’m not as experienced as you are,” she told me once I had stood up and got the condom out.

I pulled my dick out of my sweats, and she made a loud, screeching sound once she saw it. That made me laugh. The reaction from women when they saw my dick for the first time was always comical. I was a skinny nigga, with a big, fat dick, and the women loved that shit. I knew how to work this motha fucka too, and I bet after this shit, Naomi will never think of that lame ass nigga again.

“You scared to take it?” I asked as I rolled the condom on my dick.

Once it was on, I grabbed her hand and placed it on my dick, so she could feel it. It jumped in her hands because my man was ready to experiment.

“I just... I just don’t even know what to say. Please be gentle with me,” she told me again as I walked over to her, dick in my hands, ready to dive in.

“Give me a kiss,” I instructed with my lips right in front of hers.

Naomi was nervous, and I was just trying to rid her of all that. As I lay on top of her, I could literally feel her body shaking. She did, however, lean her head in and kiss me. I took her hands and placed them around my neck. In the middle of us kissing, my hand came down, and I started rubbing on her pussy, making her break the kiss and moan against my lips.

“Pussy so fuckin’ wet. Damn, girl,” I said.

Naomi closed her eyes and threw her head back, still moaning. I took that as my opportunity to catch her off guard

and start slipping inside of her. She quickly shot her head up and tried to move her arms from around my neck, but I reached back to grab her arm, not letting her move.

“Markelllllll... what the... Shittttt,” she cursed.

That was probably the sexiest way I ever heard somebody say *shit*. My hands were on the side of the chair, and I was in a squatting position as I watched my dick push into her tight ass pussy and open her up. I eventually had it all the way inside, and I kissed at the two tears that fell from Naomi’s face as I slowly fucked her. I had never in my fuckin’ life felt pussy this good and this tight. I was biting my lip and moaning and groaning my damn self.

“Slower... Ohhhhh... baby... go slowerrrrrr,” she moaned with her eyes down, watching the way I was fuckin’ her.

She called me baby, and to a thug ass nigga like me, that shit made my knees week.

“Ain’t no way this ain’t virgin pussy,” I groaned, not believing that shit as I continued to pump in and out of her.

“It’s not. Markell, I have a sonnnnn... Damnnnnn,” she moaned, cursing again.

“I need proof, shorty. Pussy too tight. Besides, where yo’ fuckin’ stretch marks?” I groaned, getting carried away and starting to stroke her a little faster but still keeping my strokes nice and deep.

I was inside the pussy, just saying crazy shit. She removed her arms from around my neck, put them on my arms, and closed her eyes as she lay down and took that dick.

“I’m cumminggggg againnnnnn,” she cried.

She got her second nut off, and I pulled my dick out for a second, so I could stand up and turn her around. I had to hit that shit from the back. Naomi’s arch was completely off, so I had to adjust her. Once it was right, she turned around and looked at me over her shoulder before I slid back in.

“I never came from penetration,” she weakly said to me.

“Most women don’t. So, consider yourself lucky, beautiful,” I said as I placed my hands on her hips and eased back in.

One leg was planted on the sand, while I had the other one in the chair, and I started killing the pussy from behind. She was adjusting to my size because she was no longer trying to push a nigga out of her. Instead, she was trying to fuck back.

“Markellllll... don’t tell anybody that we did this... pleaseeee,” she moaned, looking back at me as I stood tall in that pussy. Her juices were dripping down the condom.

“I don’t got to tell nobody we was fuckin’. Yo’ walk gon’ speak for you. Yo’ walk gon’ let your girls know that you was out in Cali getting fucked and not on some bullshit ass, me-time trip that you told your sister,” I said and slapped her on her ass, making her body shiver.

I pulled her up a little bit, keeping the dick in her but still able to play with her nipples and suck on her neck.

“When we get back home, see what the fuck you gotta do to hurry up this divorce process. This my pussy now. I got you from now on,” I said and meant that shit.

“Markellllll... I keep cummmminngggggg,” she cried.

“As you should! As you fuckin’ should. Get that shit off, baby,” I said in her ear.

She got hers off, and I pulled out, lifted her in my arms, holding her by her ass, and bounced her up and down on my dick. I wouldn’t be able to hold off on my nut much longer, and this would be the position where I busted. Naomi’s titties bounced as I guided her up and down on my dick.

“You heard me about that divorce?” I asked.

“I hearddddd youuuu... Hmmmmmmm,” she moaned.

“You gon’ make that shit happen?” I asked, bouncing her faster.

“Yessssss,” she cried.

“And this my fuckin’ pussy?” I questioned, feeling my nut right there, about to let loose.

“It’s yourssssss... Oh Godddddd,” she screeched.

“Say it’s my pussy,” I demanded as I leaned my head in to bite her neck. I did that shit to stop myself from moaning.

“It’s your pusssssy, Markell. It’s yourssss,” she moaned.

That’s all a nigga needed to hear to get me to bust. It felt like I was nutting for at least two minutes. Naomi wrapped her arms around my neck tight as hell after we finished. Then, like we owned this beach, I picked our clothes up from the sand and walked naked with her in my arms over to the sliding door, taking us into the house. I dropped the clothes on the floor, and instead of taking Naomi to her room, I brought her into the room with me. I fell back on the bed with her in my arms and threw my head back, feeling high after the pussy that I’d just gotten from her.

“I can’t believe we just did that,” she confessed.

“Is your pussy thumping?” I asked.

“It is...”

“Then believe it. We in a relationship now. I hope you know that,” I said with my eyes closed, on the verge of falling asleep.

“I’m still married, Markell. How—”

“Yo, stop saying that shit. Fuck that nigga,” I snapped and opened my eyes to look at her.

She had a look on her face like I hurt her feelings. That’s not what I was trying to do, though. I just didn’t see that nigga as a threat. The way I saw it, the two of them were done, and we just had to wait for the divorce to clear, so I wasn’t fazed by that shit.

“You ain’t gotta remind me that you married. That shit gon’ get handled, aight?” I said.

“Okay,” she murmured and wrapped her leg around me, getting closer.

“On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate the sex?” I asked with my eyes closed.

She laughed with her head on my chest. “One thousand. This is why I hesitated to come to California with you. I told you I don’t trust myself when I’m around you. I don’t know who this Naomi is when I’m with you,” she told me.

“Shit, I fuck with this Naomi, though. That pussy was a killer,” I said, licking my lips to emphasize how good her pussy tasted.

She laughed and playfully hit me on my chest. “I’m keeping this between you and me.”

“I heard you say that bullshit. Do what you gotta do, shorty,” I told her.

If Naomi thought for a second that her people didn’t know she was out in Cali with me, then she was living in her own little world. Even when I was talking on the phone with Billion, he told me to tell Naomi what’s up. People knew we were creeping, but Ima let her live in la-la land and believe that we were the only people who knew we were messing around.

Chapter Nineteen

SHAMAURIA 'MAURI' DAVIS

“It looks like you lost a little weight, but you ain’t gon’ ever lose that ass. That shit still fat as fuck,” I jokingly said to Raniyah early this morning during visitation.

I joked to make light of this situation, but there wasn’t shit funny about what Raniyah was facing. She was given a life sentence after being found guilty of killing her ex-boyfriend. Yet, Raniyah always had a nonchalant attitude. I felt that most people would have folded and probably would have been sitting across from me right now with tears in their eyes because of their fate, but she was relaxed.

Five minutes ago, when she walked to the table to sit down with me, she laughed and talked shit with some of the other inmates who were in the visitation room with us as well, visiting their loved ones. The fact that she could be so cool about the shit really let me know that it had to be something wrong with her ass for real, but hey, she was my best friend, and I would rather this be her mood than for her to be sad and shit.

“You know this ass ain’t never going nowhere. What’s up with you? I been in here for six months now, and this is only my second time seeing you. You know that if the roles were reversed, I would have been down here to check up on you

every weekend. Your bitch must be taking up all of your attention and have you forgetting about little ole me,” Raniyah said, making me feel bad.

This shit just didn't feel real; sitting across from her with her long hair braided back in about twelve straight back braids. Raniyah always had nice, chocolate skin that would make any bitch envious of that shit. Even with her being in prison right now, she still looked as if she had a bomb ass skin routine. She's always had a perfect body with a slim waist, wide hips, and a fat ass. All of that was still there, but I did notice that she was losing weight. I knew her better than anyone, so as happy as she tried to make herself seem, I knew she was in there stressing, which is why she was losing weight.

Raniyah and I had been best friends since we were kids. She was literally the first person I expressed my feelings to when I was younger about being gay and wishing that I was a boy. I knew I could trust her with my secrets and go to her before going to my family because she wouldn't judge me like they would.

My mama was a Christian woman, in church every Sunday, so you already know I couldn't come out of the closet while living in her house. I remember when I was thirteen years old, I put on some boxers with my jeans one day, and when my mama saw that shit, she beat my ass. Even with her being a Christian, she looked me in my eyes and told me that she wasn't about to be raising no gay ass daughter. I couldn't live my life the way I wanted as a teenager because living under my mama's roof, I had to respect her rules. So, I wore the dresses and shit that she bought me until I turned eighteen, graduated from high school, and eventually moved the fuck out.

Raniyah came from money because her dad used to be a big-time hustler in Miami, but then they switched shit up and started doing legit shit with the hotel businesses. Raniyah's graduation gift from her father had been a brand-new Mercedes coupe and a beautiful apartment out on Miami beach. She allowed me to move in with her, so I didn't have to be struggling once I left my mama's house. From then on, I

was able to live life the way I wanted. I could finally be true to myself, wear my boxers, sag my pants, and not have to wear dresses and shit anymore.

Raniyah respected how I wanted to live so much that she gave me the money for the surgeries that I needed to have done. If you were to look at me now versus seeing a high school picture of me, your jaw would touch the floor. My mama saw the new Mauri maybe about a year after I had all the surgeries done. She looked me right in my eyes, told me that I was dead to her, and she and I haven't spoken since.

I lost family due to my wanting to live a life that made me happy. Of course, that shit hurt me, but it would hurt me even more if I had to live my life to make others happy and be this person I knew I didn't want to be.

“Me and her on a little break right now. She ain't been fuckin' with me like that ever since she heard you ask about Billion getting that letter you sent him. She's pissed at me that I gave you his address,” I told her.

She sucked her teeth. “Why the fuck does she care? Is she still fuckin' him?” Raniyah asked.

“Nah. She just acts like she is so fuckin' obsessed with that nigga. She talking about she got a lot of respect for him, but I know if that nigga pulled his dick out and told her to suck it, she would drop down on her knees and do that shit with no hesitation. I love Denim, but it's always ‘Billionaire this or Billionaire that.’ She is so fuckin' fragile with her own damn daughter, thinking that the little girl gon' go back and tell her daddy that Denim disciplined her. If we going to keep that shit a buck, that nigga not even her real daddy anyway,” I said, speaking on something Denim had told me months ago when we were lying in bed, pillow talking.

“I wish I got the chance to suck that dick. Mauri, you know me. You know I'm used to getting any nigga I want. I never had a nigga turn me down, except for Billion. You know how I can get when I don't get my way,” she stated.

“Raniyah, you know I love you like a sister, but look where the fuck you at. What the fuck can you do with that

nigga while you locked up? That nigga married with fuckin' kids. I don't want to sound heartless, but he ain't thinking about you," I said.

I wasn't even trying to take that nigga's side or no shit like that, but she sounded like them white bitches off those Lifetime movies who become obsessed with a man and just didn't know how to leave well the fuck alone.

"All I want from him is a fuckin' conversation and for him to acknowledge the letter I wrote him. What the fuck is the harm in that?" she questioned.

"That nigga don't like you. You ran into his wife and tried to insinuate that the two of y'all were messing around. It's plenty of niggas that you can send letters to. Why you trying to fuck with a nigga that's taken?" I asked, not understanding her.

"Bitch, when you wanted to get rid of your pussy for a dick, I didn't ask you no fuckin' questions. I just gave you the fuckin' money. When you wanted to remove your fuckin' titties, I didn't have a problem dishing out the cash for that shit either. All them fuckin' surgeries, them hormone medications, all that shit, I didn't have a fuckin' problem helping you out. The one fuckin' thing that I need you to help me out with, you got so much to fuckin' say, and you sitting here right now and fuckin' judging me when I never judged your ass. You don't look shit like the bitch that your mama shitted out. You owe me, Shamauria!" she said, disrespecting the fuck out of me.

It was her calling me Shamauria, knowing that name died when I transitioned. Raniyah and I were best friends, so of course, we had argued over the years, but she's never disrespected me like this before. This wasn't her first time, though, throwing it in my face about her paying for my surgeries. Even after I started my own computer repair business and paid her back every single dime that she had given me, she still found a way to throw that shit in my face, and I hated it.

I wanted to walk away and leave her at that table by herself, but the truth of the matter is that Raniyah didn't have many people in her corner. Her little sister Reign stopped

fuckin' with her months ago before she had even been sentenced, and her brothers didn't fuck with her either. They didn't stop fuckin' with her because of this situation that she got herself in, but more so because Raniyah had a way of fuckin' people over. I guess everybody was just sick of her shit.

"What you need me to do, Raniyah?" I asked.

"I'm going to write another letter, and I'm going to send it to your apartment. It'll be in your best interest to make sure he gets the letter and responds. I want to see him in person and —"

"You know that shit ain't going to happen," I said, cutting her off.

"Make it fuckin' happen! You know me, Mauri. You know I don't take too kindly to the word no, and you know how I get down when I feel like a motha fucka isn't being loyal to me. The last nigga who was disloyal to me, I put his ass in the fuckin' dirt, and that's why I'm sitting here in this orange jumpsuit now. Pull some strings and make some shit happen. I may be locked up, but I can get you hit, and you know that," she said, sounding like the fuckin' devil.

She stood up from the table and went over to the guard, letting him know that she was ready to go back to her cell. Chills ran down my spine as I replayed the threat that Raniyah had just given me. She acted like she was asking me to do something simple for her. How the fuck was I supposed to get that nigga down there to see her? I didn't even like that fuck nigga, and I was sure he didn't like me either.

I just needed to cut all ties with Raniyah and move the fuck on with my life because this bitch was weighing me the fuck down. Although that's what I wanted to do, I just didn't know the kind of shit she was into and the people that she could call to try and kill me for not doing what she'd asked. She looked me dead in my eyes and told me that she could get me hit, and I wasn't taking that lightly. Not even for a second.

Chapter Twenty

NORMANI KNOX

“Good morning, my beautiful chocolate sister. What did you cook for breakfast this morning? Me and my baby are starving,” Naomi said, coming into the kitchen after Billion had opened the door and let her in the house.

She was holding LJ on her hip, and I leaned in to kiss my nephew on his lips because he had them puckered up, waiting for me to kiss him.

Naomi was extra happy this morning, and I paused from stirring the grits to look at her because the tone of her voice was just too damn chirpy. For one, it wasn't even ten in the morning yet, and she came over all ecstatic. Second, my sister wasn't even a morning person. It was Saturday morning, and we were getting ready to hang out while my husband stayed home and watched all the kids. Before we left, I wanted to make a quick breakfast.

Everything about Naomi was off this morning, but not in a bad way. I wondered if she knew she came over here this morning glowing, and I'm not talking about the highlighter from the Fendi makeup she was wearing. She had a silly grin on her face and marks on her neck that looked like either bite marks or leftover handprints. Naomi's skin was a darker

brown, but I could still vividly see her neck and the bruises that stood out.

She was so cute today in her royal green cotton dress with a denim jacket on top since it was a little windy out this morning and some crème-colored Converse sneakers. It was a cute look, and the little gold bag that she had wrapped around her gave off that laidback vibe that we were going to need for our trip to the mall and wherever else this Saturday morning would lead us since neither of us had to be on mommy duty. Her long hair was pulled up in a ponytail, showing off the perfection of her face. My big sister was beautiful; she always had been.

“Why are you so happy this morning?” I asked.

Naomi laughed, lowered LJ from her hip, and came over to me. She placed a kiss on my cheek and sat down at the island on one of the barstools.

“What do you mean why am I happy this morning? It’s a beautiful day, Normani. Have you even stepped foot outside this morning? The wind is blowing, the birds are chirping, God woke me up, and I’m alive and healthy. Why wouldn’t I be happy this morning?” she asked.

LJ had already run out of the kitchen to go upstairs where Lil Bill and Khari were, so it just left my sister and me alone in the kitchen. I turned the grits down, placed my back against the counter, and looked at Naomi, laughed, and shook my head.

“Only good dick will have you all alert and chirpy like this in the morning. You had sex with Glizzy, didn’t you? I mean, that much is obvious, but I would just love to hear you say it,” I said.

“Normani, please! What did you make with the grits? I’m starving,” she said, trying to change the subject.

“Ima call Mommy. I bet she knows,” I threatened, and Naomi laughed.

“There is nothing for her to know, Normani. Why would you assume that I had sex with Glizzy?” She looked up at me

with those same beautiful gray eyes that I had, which I wanted to pull out of her damn face for being so secretive.

Naomi had always been secretive like this. Ever since we were kids. I wasn't even keeping my pregnancy a secret anymore. I broke down a couple of weeks ago and just told the family because I was tired of lying about it. I think the miscarriage had me afraid to say anything. Another child was growing inside of me, with a strong and healthy heartbeat. I just prayed to God that in another seven months, I got to hold another beautiful, healthy baby.

"Then what is that shit on your neck?" I asked.

"A bruise. I fell yesterday. Billionaire, please get your wife. I feel like I'm being interrogated," Naomi said to my husband, who had walked into the kitchen holding a newspaper that he more than likely just took from our driveway.

He laughed at Naomi and took a seat next to her at the island.

"Normani, chill out. Leave your sister alone, baby," he said to me.

I wasn't even mad that my sister was messing around with Glizzy. I mean, from the dumb ass, goofy smile on her face, it was obvious that she was happy, but I just wanted her to admit it. I wanted all the details, but you would have to hogtie Naomi to get the scoop, and she probably still wouldn't give up what she was doing.

I ended up leaving the situation alone, only because my husband told me to, but the second me and Naomi got in the car, I would be on her ass with it right again.

I finished cooking breakfast about twenty minutes later. It was ham, sausage, grits, eggs, and bacon for them to eat. I fixed my husband his plate and a plate for all the kids; I even fixed Naomi a plate with her lying ass. I just put a couple slices of ham and some eggs on a plate for myself, which I quickly ate because I still needed to go upstairs, take a quick shower, and throw on some clothes.

I finished up in the bathroom about twenty minutes later and came out with a towel wrapped around my body as I stood in my massive walk-in closet, going through racks and racks of clothes to see what I wanted to throw on. Since it was windy out, I decided to throw on my crème-colored Gucci hoodie with some distressed denim skinny jeans and low-top Gucci sneakers. I grabbed some accessories from the drawer where I kept my jewelry. I used the lotion that I had on the island in my closet to moisturize my body and slipped into my underwear and bra. As I was snapping my bra, my husband came into the room.

“You taking them anywhere, or you staying with them in the house all day? I’m only asking because if you plan on leaving with them, I can touch up Prosper and Khari’s hair right quick,” I said, looking up at him.

He was so handsome. It’s been almost three years, and you would think I would have come to grips with how handsome my man was. But nope, I was still obsessed, and I still got butterflies in the pit of my stomach whenever he came around.

“Shit, if I take them somewhere, I can slap some product on their hair, put it in a ponytail, and we can go one about our business. Why you putting them tight ass jeans on? I thought you wasn’t supposed to wear jeans when you pregnant?” he said after I just finished slipping my legs into my jeans and was fastening them at the waist.

“Here goes Doctor Knox. Billionaire, for one, these jeans aren’t tight. Secondly, I barely have a stomach, so it’s not like I’m suffocating the baby. Go back downstairs and watch the kids. Let me get dressed in peace,” I told him as I picked the hoodie up off the island and removed the tag since I’d never worn it before.

“If you give me a quickie, I’ll give you the scoop on your sister and Glizzy,” he said, hopping up on the counter and looking down at me.

I laughed at him because he was such an asshole.

“Ooooooh, you’re a little liar. Last weekend, when Naomi dropped LJ off over here, talking about taking a little me-time

vacation, I told you I didn't believe her because my sister hates planes. She's damn sure not going to get on one by herself. I asked you if you thought she was somewhere with Glizzy, and you swore up and down that you don't know what Glizzy be doing. I knew you knew something because I know when your ass is lying to me," I said as I slipped the hoodie over my head.

"Yo' ass talk too much. If I had told you that I knew something, you would have gone back to Naomi, telling everything I told you, with yo' big ass mouth," he said.

I laughed again as I walked over and stood in the middle of his legs while he sat on the island. Pressing my elbows into his lap, I leaned in and kissed him on his lips a couple of times.

"You gon' fuck me for some information? Shorty, that's nosey as fuck," Billionaire said and laughed.

"Boy, I'm just kissing you goodbye because I'm about to slip on my shoes and run out the door. You just want to fuck me. That's all that is," I said, trying to pull away from him, but he put his hands on my butt and pulled me closer.

"You my wife. Ima always want to fuck you. Even when you walk around with them old lady gowns on," he told me.

I cracked up laughing and even hit him as he talked mess about my pajama dusters that I put on at night to go to bed. But, hell, they were comfortable.

"Ooooh, see, you ain't right at all. You see how you do me? Now, if I said I always want to fuck you, even when your dick is soft, I would be wrong, right?" I asked.

He shrugged like he didn't care what I said.

"Even on soft, my shit still big, so fuck is you saying? Normani, you know as well as I know that it don't take much to get me on rock anyway. Gone put your shoes on, so you can leave with your sister. Fuck around and show you that ain't no soft dick over here," he told me.

"Hmmm. Show me tonight, daddy," I said and then kissed him on his lips one final time before I walked out of the closet, holding my sneakers.

I went back into the bathroom, where I threw some water on my curly hair and fingered it a little bit, leaving it out today. I wasn't wearing any make-up this morning, but I did put a little bit of lip gloss on my lips. I didn't put my shoes on until I made it downstairs. By this time, Billionaire was in the living room with all the kids, and I hugged and kissed them. As I was running out the door, I heard Prosper crying and calling after me. My daughter was a daddy's girl, but she had her days when she wanted me and didn't want me out of her sight. I loved Billionaire's children as if they were my own, and I loved my daughter, but these breaks away from them, I promise, I needed those.

"You driving or me?" I asked my sister once we got outside.

"I'll drive, preggo," she said, already with her keys in her hand.

I was glad she said that because I really didn't feel like driving this morning. So, I walked over to the passenger side of my sister's Mercedes and got in. She came around, put her seat belt on, and then pulled out of the driveway.

"You know Liam paid this car off about a year ago. He took everything from me, but for whatever reason, he let me keep the car. I'm going to trade this in one day next week. I don't want anything that's a reminder of him. Then, I'm just so annoyed with this whole divorce. I'm trying to play it cool because Sage told me that if I act a fool, the judge can suggest Liam and I undergo mediation and for us to take some kind of parenting classes, and I don't need that.

"The divorce is only annoying me because Liam isn't willing to accept any of the terms that I had Sage write up for him. I agreed to have my son during the week and let Liam get him on the weekends, but that's the exact schedule he's trying to put me on. He wants LJ during the week, and I get him on the weekends, but that will not happen. Liam has been calling and texting to get LJ, and I don't know if I'm wrong for this, but I haven't been letting LJ go with his dad, only because I can't trust Liam. He's petty, and I feel that if I break down and take LJ over there, I won't get him back. He's still attending

the same school, but you know Mommy will pick LJ up for me, and Liam isn't bold enough to not hand LJ over to Mommy. Ugh. I hate to keep talking about this with you because I know it's draining, but this is my reality," my sister told me.

"What does LJ say? Does he say that he wants to see his dad?" I asked.

"Normani, no. The day I went and got my son from over there, LJ got in the car and told me not to take him back over there. My baby will be four years old in a couple of months, and of course, he's too young to understand what's going on, but I know he sees some evil in his father. That little boy has not asked to speak to his father since he's been back with me.

"Yesterday, me and LJ were at the table eating dinner, and his iPad started ringing. He was right there, watching YouTube on it, and it was Liam calling. He declined it four times, and then Liam called me. I stepped out of the room to answer, and we had a whole screaming match. He told me that I was turning his son against him and all kinds of other craziness. I even gave the phone to LJ, telling him to talk to his dad, but he cried, saying that he didn't want to. I think poorly of Liam, but I will never speak on the ill feelings that I have for him in front of his child," my sister said.

"Damn, I hate this for you so much. I never would have expected this from Liam. I loved the two of you together, ever since y'all were in middle school. You couldn't tell me that Liam wasn't my big brother. How the hell does a person just change like that overnight?" I asked, still unable to believe that my sister and her childhood boyfriend, who had become her husband, were getting ready to divorce.

"I'm going to tell you something that I never told you before. I didn't need the sympathy then, and I don't need it now, but I do think it will help you to get a better understanding of why Liam all of a sudden changed on me," my sister said.

I sat up in my chair and faced her as she drove because I felt that whatever she was getting ready to tell me would be

jaw-dropping.

“I’ve suffered three miscarriages—”

“What? Naomi, when? Why didn’t you say anything?” I asked, cutting her off.

“I just didn’t need the extra conversation on this subject. That was something hard that I had to go through. It made me feel like less of a woman. Ever since Liam and I were kids in middle school, he always talked about wanting a big family and having a bunch of beautiful children, and I was all on board for it. It’s always just been you and me. I used to beg Mommy to have more kids, but she never did. I was pregnant before LJ, and that’s the first baby I lost. I suffered two more miscarriages after giving birth to LJ, and I can honestly say that’s when I noticed the change in Liam. I felt like he stopped loving me the way he used to once he realized that I wasn’t woman enough to bear his children for him.

“I’m a smart woman, so I saw all the signs, but this was something that I was just too afraid to ask him, out of fear that I may have been right. A few months ago, Liam told me that he wasn’t attracted to me anymore. He didn’t say exactly what needed to be fixed. Naturally, I thought I was turning him off with my nagging, the weight that I’d lost, and how emotional I had become, but I was way off. The day I popped up at the house to get LJ, he was finally man enough to look me in my eyes and tell me he wasn’t attracted to me anymore because I couldn’t properly bear his children,” Naomi told me and then laughed through the tears that had fallen from her eyes.

Just to know that my sister had experienced three miscarriages that I didn’t know anything about, then for Liam to use that as the reason to divorce her made a couple of tears fall from my eyes as well. That was fucked up, and you just don’t treat people like that. Especially not someone who you were supposed to have loved.

“And the part that hurts me the most in all of this is that he never even allowed us the chance to weigh our options. We went to a couple of doctors, but I was told by all of them that I was healthy. There was nothing wrong with my uterus.

Everyone marked it as me being stressed. I think he felt like it would just be hard for me to go full term, which is why he kind of stopped trying. It's like I was no longer needed or of value to him once he saw that I couldn't do that one thing for him in our marriage that he desperately needed me to do. I stuck beside him, even when I wasn't happy in our marriage myself.

"I guess I loved him so much that I wanted to fight and work through our problems, but he didn't want me anymore, and I've accepted that. Liam has a baby on the way, and he's moved on. It is what it is, and you can stop crying, Normani, and feeling bad for me. I'm not crying because I'm sad. I'm crying because I'm angry. I want to drive over to that house and set it on fire, but I can't because I'll be in jail for arson and probably first-degree murder," she joked.

I laughed through my tears, too, as I wiped my face. We were almost at the mall when my sister's phone started ringing on the car's Bluetooth. Markell's name flashed across the screen, and she almost broke her damn neck trying to unplug her phone from the USB that connected to Apple play, so I wouldn't be able to see his name on the screen. She declined the call and then kept on driving, like nothing even happened. I laughed to myself, and then the phone started ringing again. I watched her from the corner of my eye as she looked down at the phone in her lap and answered it this time, putting it to her ear.

"Hey," she said, trying to sound all dry.

I could hear his deep voice, but I couldn't make out what he was saying.

"No. I told you... I mean, I'm in the car with my sister," she said.

Naomi went silent because he was saying something to her. She laughed at whatever he said, and I don't know why I got all giddy, but I did. I was happy that my sister was happy, even though she was trying to keep this lie going for as long as she could.

“No, because I’m not telling you what mall we going to,” she told him.

“No,” she said again. She blew out a breath and then hit a button on the phone and set the phone in her lap.

“Normani?” Glizzy’s deep voice came through the phone.

“What’s up?” I answered.

“Your sister told you we go together?” he asked.

“Markell! See, I’m about to hang up. That’s not what you told me you were going to say. You said you were just saying what’s up,” Naomi said, pissed that he had blown her cover.

I was laughing, and so was he.

“No, but I guess I know now,” I said.

Naomi shot me a look and then rolled her eyes.

“I told you, shorty, that you not about to keep me no fuckin’ secret. Everybody knows that shit anyway. I told my niggas a week ago. I just wanted to break the ice, so there it is. The cat is out of the bag now,” Glizzy said.

I don’t know why, but I was cracking up because this was something that Billionaire would do. Glizzy obviously didn’t give a damn about what my sister was saying. He was showing that he liked her, and I thought it was adorable.

“Call me when you leave the mall,” he told her.

“Goodbye, Markell,” she said.

“Tell me what you told me last night before you hang up,” he said.

Listen, he was showing off, and I loved every second of it.

“No. Bye, Markell,” she said again.

“What? You embarrassed that I told yo’ business?” he asked.

“Nope. I just want to get you off the phone before you start saying other stuff. Goodbye, Markell,” she said, trying to hang up.

“I ain’t gon’ tell her we be fuckin’ and—”

Click!

She hung up, and I was crying laughing.

“You liar! I told you them wasn’t no damn bruises on your neck,” I said to Naomi, and she laughed too.

“They are bruises. I didn’t lie about that,” she insisted.

“Yeah, but you said you fell. You fell your ass right on top of some dick. How was it? I’m dying to know. I gotta tell Askiya and Twinkle this. I can’t believe you,” I said, still in shock.

I really just thought my sister had hickies on her neck from maybe the kissing going too far, but I didn’t think it was hickies from having sex. I didn’t think it went that damn far.

“And this is why I don’t tell you anything. You talk too much,” she said as she pulled the car into the mall.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Answer my question. How was it?” I asked again.

“I didn’t walk in your house this morning all giddy because I was happy to see you. I’m on a high, Normani. That man puts it downnnnn. We not even in the mall yet, and I’m ready to cut this little outing short, so I can get back to him,” Naomi told me, making me smile.

“Yesssss. I love it. I love it,” I said and reached my hand out so she could give me a high five.

Glizzy was way out of my sister’s league, but that’s exactly how it was with Billionaire and me. Sometimes, opposites just attract. I could hear the happiness in her voice as she talked about him, and even when she was on the phone with him, I could hear the joy in his voice as well. I wanted Glizzy to treat my sister like the queen she is, make her overly happy, and have Liam be sick to his damn stomach once he saw what he so easily gave away with his stupid ass.

“I’m curious to know what you told him last night,” I said, referring to what Glizzy said just a few moments ago on the phone.

She shut the car off and laughed.

“I was having sex with him, Normani. It was in the heat of the moment. I told him that I loved him,” she said, followed by a laugh.

I laughed too. My sister was so far gone off Glizzy. I was usually on top of things, and I couldn't believe this slipped right under me. I mean, I had my suspicions, but I never had anything to prove it. Either way, I was happy for them.

Chapter Twenty-One

LA'QUINN FREEMAN

“Here goes his black Barbie right there,” my best friend, Zoie, said from the passenger seat.

We were at this bitch’s job, just on a friendly visit. I swear I wasn’t there to bully this girl because I didn’t even get down like that. I was all for women sticking together, women being bosses, independent about their shit, making their fuckin’ money, and working hard, but I couldn’t shake this shit with Glizzy and me. Y’all gotta know that I wasn’t just some slut that he was fuckin’ back then. Me and that nigga were living together, doing shit that couples do, taking trips and shit, and practically in love.

When Glizzy and I were fuckin’ around, neither of us wanted to step things up a notch and get into a relationship. Shit, I was young too and fuckin’ with other niggas aside from Glizzy because I wasn’t ready to be tied down to just one nigga. Plus, I knew I wasn’t the only bitch who wanted Glizzy. I’d be a fuckin’ fool to cut off all my niggas for a nigga who was going to do him the second I turned my back. A hustler raised me, and that hustler was my mama. My mama got whatever the fuck she wanted from these niggas solely off her looks, her ability to dish out to these niggas what they dished out to her, and because she was just a total vibe.

At a young age, I was taught to never fall in love with any man because the only thing that would happen is me getting my heart broken in the end. She was speaking from personal experience with my dad but fuck that nigga. I don't even want to talk about that sperm donor. At thirteen, I kid you not, my mama sat me down and spoke to me about not falling in love with none of these dirty ass boys out here and to just keep a couple of male friends on call, so I could always have options.

I took those lessons with me as I got older. The only nigga who had me willing to say fuck it to all the shit that my mama had taught me was Glizzy. Glizzy was just that nigga, period. He was a hustler, he fucked and sucked me good, he provided, he was smart, funny as hell, and I found myself falling for him, so he and I had agreed to me moving in, especially since I was always at his house. This was over eight years ago before he was sentenced.

Literally, the night before he was arrested and sent away to prison, we had been in bed, pillow talking and saying that we wanted to try the relationship out. Glizzy was the kind of man who wouldn't express his love, but he would tell me every chance he got, "I care a lot about you, La'Quinn." I actually loved him, though, so even when I found out that he would have to serve eight years, I was still willing to hold him down. I wouldn't have been willing to do that shit for no other nigga. He didn't want me holding him down, though, because, in his words, he wanted me to move on with my life and not hold me back. I could see why he would say that because it was going to be eight years that I would have to be without him, but I knew I could wait for him.

Although the two of us did end up calling the relationship off and shit, I would still visit him about twice a month, and I would accept his calls. Although his homeboys were making sure he was straight, I put money on his books, and we would communicate through letters. So, here we are, eight years later, and that shit hurt me that he came home and didn't even try to pick up where we left off. I was embarrassed because, during the last year of his sentence, I was telling damn near everybody that when "my man" came home, we were going to work our shit out, but he was released and did a bitch so dirty.

I didn't even know the exact day that Glizzy would be released because they were playing games with him, but I knew an approximate date. The only reason I knew the nigga got out was that Zoie followed Billion on his social media because she was one of his little groupies. She called me after she'd sent me a screenshot of a picture that Billion had posted of him and Glizzy together, and he was welcoming him back home. That shit hurt me, but I played it cool, and when he called me two days after that picture and asked where I was, I told him. He pulled up on me, and I swear he fucked me for twenty minutes straight, all over my house.

After the sex ended, the nigga didn't even cuddle with me like he used to do, so I took that as a red flag. I zoned out for a little bit as I thought back to that day.

"Where you going? I know you not about to leave me already," I said, lying on my side with a pillow resting between my legs, so I could calm down that thumping feeling that was going on with my pussy.

My body had little beads of sweat on just about every part, and I'd just caught my breath after being worked out and feeling like I had just run a race. Glizzy had just come back into my bedroom after going into the bathroom once the sex ended. He just had his polo briefs on that was responsible for carrying all that dick he just used to fuck me. He had his signature two braids in his hair, his beard was longer and thicker than it's ever been, and there was no doubt about it; he was the most handsome man that had been put on this earth.

"Ima come back later in the week. I got to handle some business," he told me as he stepped into his black joggers and kept them low, so he could sag in them.

"Handle some business or make your rounds and go fuck some more hoes?" I asked, sitting up in bed and watching him as he laughed and grabbed his shirt from the bed, then put it over his head.

"Why you say crazy shit out of your mouth like that, Quinn? I said I got to handle business, so I'm about to handle

some fuckin' business. Get up, so you can come lock the door behind me," he said and slipped his feet in his Gucci slides.

"Who all have you fucked since you've been home?" I asked.

"This my cue to leave. A nigga ain't been home for a fuckin' week yet. I ain't about to be in this bitch arguing with you, Quinn. I ain't doing this toxic ass shit with you, yo. I left that shit in the fuckin' past, man. I ain't leaving you to go fuck no other bitches. I was writing you while I was in prison, telling you that I wanted to open my restaurant. I'm going to look at some properties. Fuck, man! I shouldn't have to even explain that shit to you. My word should be good enough for you," he said, getting angry.

He walked out of the room, and I quickly threw on my silk robe to follow him out the door.

"I thought when you came home that we were supposed to be working on us," I said, jumping in his face before he could get to the door.

"Man, you ain't think I was going to find out that you fucked Junior while I was locked up? That's the same nigga who sold me out to the fuckin' feds eight years ago, so he could get less time on his sentence. Some of them fuckin' drugs that I got caught with was his shit, and he pinned that shit on a nigga. He came home five years before me, and I had to find out from niggas in prison that you fucked that pussy ass nigga. You knew that nigga was dirty because I told you that shit, and you still fucked him. I did have plans to work on us, but when I found that shit out, I deaded all thoughts of being with you," he told me, and I sucked my teeth.

"Why would you come over here and fuck me then?" I asked.

"Shit, yo' pussy didn't do nothing to me. Only you did. You kept fuckin' calling, so I pulled up. Dick is what you wanted anyway, so don't act like you fuckin' hurt," he told me.

I'll be honest and admit that Glizzy and I hadn't been good for probably like the last four years of his sentence. That's

around the time I fucked Junior. Honestly, I didn't know niggas gossiped in prison, so I didn't think he would ever find out. But I knew that something in our relationship had changed when he told me to stop visiting him. He wouldn't call me as often as he used to, and then I lowkey felt like he was trying to put a bitch in the friend zone. I just summed it up to him being depressed in prison because he still had four years to complete.

I didn't take him not wanting me to visit him anymore to heart. I assumed it had to be hard knowing that I was still living my life on the outside while he was on the inside. So, to find out that this nigga switched up the play, all because I fucked Junior was some crazy shit to me. Petty as fuck too.

"Dick and you! Glizzy, I want you! What the fuck is so hard for you to understand about that shit?" I screamed at him, my voice cracking a little bit because I was allowing this stupid ass nigga to get me emotional.

"You ain't loyal. Me and you could have had some shit, but the day I found out that you were fuckin' that nigga, the way I felt about you changed. Did I expect you to sit down for eight fuckin' years and not fuck nobody? Nah, because I know you like to fuck just as much as I do. You could have got with any nigga in the fuckin' world, but to get with the one nigga that got me more time, knowing that nigga got me more time, then nah, I can't do it. I don't trust you after you did that shit.

"You liable to set a nigga up or some other fucked up shit that I just can't take a chance on. Even when I told you eight years ago to live your life and not wait for me, a part of me still wanted to be with you because, on some real shit, Quinn, I really did fuck with you. I moved you in my house and everything, so it wasn't like the idea of having a future with you was some shit that I just couldn't see happening because I did. I won't come over and fuck you no more because I ain't going to take advantage of your heart and your feelings. Be easy, and I'll holla at you later," he told me.

"Fuck you, Glizzy. I hate you!" I yelled.

He ignored me as he walked out of the house. One thing he wasn't going to ever do was argue with a female, so I wasn't even shocked that he didn't talk shit back to me. His ability to be so nonchalant, though, was making me angrier. That was one of the things I hated about him. He lacked at showing emotion, and I hated that shit. I hated that I could rarely get a reaction out of him. So, to get the reaction out of him that I wanted, I planned to keep pushing. Push and say some fucked up shit to him that would hurt him in the same way he hurt me.

"That's why Junior fucked me better than you, you selfish bitch," I said, lying out my ass, knowing damn well that Junior wasn't fucking with Glizzy when it came to sex.

Like the cocky bitch that he was, Glizzy laughed as he walked over to his motorcycle that he'd rode over on.

"If that nigga fuckin' you better, why you doing all this, shorty? You walking out here in your fuckin' robe and shit, with no shoes on, looking like a fuckin' foot dragger. Take yo' stupid ass in the fuckin' house!" he said as he got on his motorcycle.

"I really hope something happens to your ass. You gon' do me like this out of all people? Me, Glizzy?" I screamed at him with fresh tears falling down my face.

He walked away from the bike and got in front of me, all aggressive in his movements.

"Bruh, stop standing your ass here, acting like you some fuckin' saint. You trying to make a nigga feel bad for coming over here and fuckin' you when you know that's the only fuckin' thing you wanted from me in the first place. I was barely in the house before you were on your knees, sucking my dick. You and I have history, Quinn, and Ima always fuck with you, but anything that me and you were supposed to have went out the window the day you started fuckin' Junior. You fucked that nigga, knowing that me and him were beefing because of the way he threw me under the bus. Chill the fuck out and go in the house with that all shit," he barked at me.

I raised my hands to wipe my eyes, and he backed away from me, got on his motorcycle, and left.

That was the last real conversation we had because, after that day, he stopped answering the phone for me and responding to my text messages. I saw him that night at the club, and he curved me. Then, at the grand opening of his restaurant, he curved me again and even went so far as to kick me and my homegirls out. I saw him walking around the restaurant with that black bitch, and it was rumors going around Miami that Glizzy was fuckin' with a pastor's wife.

My other homegirl, Shay, worked at this school, substituting throughout the week, and she told me a couple of days ago that the bitch worked there. So, there I was, parked in the lot with Zoie, waiting for this bitch to come out. School had already let out, and we'd already seen a few teachers get in their cars and leave, so I knew she would be coming soon. Again, I wasn't no fuckin' bully, but I just wanted to go straight to the source, have a conversation with this bitch, and just see where she stood with Glizzy. I was not taking too kindly to the fact that this nigga had come home from prison and had done me like this.

So, fuckin' what I fucked Junior! His ass done fucked so many bitches I knew that I lost fuckin' count. I didn't fuck Junior out of spite, either. Shit, that nigga was fine, he was paid, and that shit happened years ago. Glizzy never made it seem like that shit was a problem back then, so I didn't know why he was making it a big deal now. He knew he was wrong for the way he was dogging me. I felt like he was just using the situation with Junior and me to justify the fucked up shit he was doing when he knew good and fuckin' well that we were supposed to have a future together.

"Whatever you do, Quinn, please don't put your hands on this bitch. I'm sure this fancy ass school has all kinds of security, and an uppity bitch like her, you already know she's going to press charges on you," Zoie said.

I was in the driver's seat, looking up every two seconds at the main entrance, just to see if she had come out yet, but she hadn't. Shay already told me that this silver Mercedes belonged to her, and we were parked right next to it, so I knew we hadn't missed her.

“I ain’t gon’ touch that girl. I just want to talk to her,” I said to Zoie.

I swear I didn’t plan to fight her. I wanted to have a woman-to-woman conversation and just find out the status of her relationship with Glizzy. I loved his ass, and I couldn’t just walk away so easily like this.

“There she goes right there. Zoie, you know I’m not a fuckin’ hater, so I’ll admit that the bitch is pretty, but she’s not even his type. Look at her,” I said, watching Naomi as she walked out of the school building.

She was dressed in a red, long sleeve silk shirt that she had tucked into a pair of black slacks. Black ballerina shoes were on her feet, and she had some long ass hair. I could see what had attracted Glizzy to her because he was a sucker for long hair, whether a weave or natural. She had a purse on her shoulder, and she was carrying a few manila folders in her hands. I knew she was a teacher, so it was probably work that she would have to go home and grade.

“Best friend, you know I love you now, but this bitch can be any nigga’s type. She too fuckin’ pretty,” Zoie said, sounding like a fuckin’ groupie.

I sucked my teeth at her and then got out of the car. Zoie followed suit.

“Naomi?” I called her name out, being respectful with it.

This was my first time being this close up on her in person. She had gray eyes and everything. Shit, she was beautiful, and I could see what had Glizzy so attached.

“Yeah. What’s going on?” she asked, continuing to walk until she got to her car, which was parked right next to mine. She popped the trunk, put the folders and her purse back there, and then she quickly closed it.

“I’m Quinn. This is my best friend, Zoie. You don’t know us, but you and I know a mutual person, and I just have a few questions for you,” I said.

She paused in her spot, looking me up and down, trying to see where she could possibly know me from. When Glizzy

kicked me out of his restaurant, he caused somewhat of a scene, so if she thought hard enough, she would probably remember me from there.

“Okay, I’m assuming this is about Markell. What’s up?” she asked, already knowing what was up.

I laughed at this bitch calling this nigga Markell. Nobody called him that shit but his fuckin’ mama, and I couldn’t stand that bitch because she acted like nobody was good enough for her son. She gave off vibes like she wanted to fuck him herself, and that’s why she felt like no one was good enough for him.

“How long you been fuckin’ him? I want to get straight to the point,” I said.

She squinted, looking at me like she couldn’t believe this shit, but hell, I was dead ass serious.

“Look, I don’t know you, and honestly, I’m not even sure how you know me. If you want to know something, as it pertains to Markell and me, then it was other ways you could have asked. This is my job. You don’t pop up on me where I work to ask me something like that—”

“Bitch, I’ll pop up on you anywhere I fuckin’ want if I need to ask you a question. I don’t give a fuck about this being yo’ job. I want to know how long you been fuckin’ him because we just fucked two days ago,” I said, lying through my teeth, but she didn’t need to know that.

When I said that, I could tell by the way her face shifted that she was saddened and angered by the news.

“You’re the woman that he had security escort out of the restaurant, right? Quinn, right? We had a really brief conversation about you, and I was told that you were someone from the past and someone for me not to worry about, and that’s what I’m choosing to do. I’m not really sure how you had sex with Markell two days ago because if he’s not at work, then he’s at my house, but I’m curious to know what you want me to say. Am I supposed to say congratulations? Like,

honestly, where is this going?” she asked, cocking her head to the side, trying to play like she was dumb.

She could put on this front all she wanted, but I knew I had this hoe hurt. I could hear it in the shakiness of her voice.

“You trying to be funny like I won’t slap the fuck out of you,” I said and stepped up, but Zoie grabbed my arm and whispered for me to chill out.

No one would agree with what I was doing right now. I could see you bitches taking her and Glizzy’s side because you don’t know much about me, but I was only acting from a place of hurt. Can you imagine being in a nigga’s life for over ten fuckin’ years, loving him, getting to the point where you think that you and this person are going to build something, and shit doesn’t go that way? Then, this model bitch comes along, who doesn’t even know this nigga for a whole fuckin’ year, and rumors were already going around that the two of them are dating. That shit was hurtful.

“Slap me because I asked you a question? What you’re doing right now is weird, and I still don’t even know what purpose you’re trying to serve. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t come back to my job with this craziness. This is ridiculous,” she spat, and then she quickly got in her car.

There was so much more that I wanted to say, but a part of me was embarrassed, so I stopped while I was ahead. She eventually peeled off, and I went over to my car and leaned against the hood.

“Quinn, I personally know how much you love him, but you going to have to let him go. I feel like you going to make shit dangerous because you already know she’s going to go back and tell him about this—”

“Fuck her!” I spat, cutting her off.

Zoie released a sigh, then came over and stood right next to me. I was trying not to get emotional in front of my best friend, but it was hard. Yes, I fucked around with other men while Glizzy was away, but I still waited for him. I didn’t allow myself to love anyone because he was the only man I

loved and wanted to be with. I had so many plans for us. I just knew that when he came home, we would pick up where we'd left off before he was arrested, have a bunch of beautiful ass kids, and get married. It would hurt me to my core if he did all those things with someone else, and truth be told, I didn't even think I would know how to handle that.

"Come on. Let's go," Zoie said to me after about five minutes of silence.

I wasn't sure what step I would take after this, but right now, I just needed to get off this school's property because I'd already made a fool of myself.

Chapter Twenty-Two

NAOMI EDWARDS

“*M*ommy, you’re driving soooo fast. Are we racing somebody?” my son asked me from his car seat, with happiness in his voice.

It wasn’t until I looked down at the speedometer that I realized I was doing 90mph on a 35mph street. My blood was boiling, and even after picking my son up from my mom’s house after I left work, I still hadn’t calmed down. I couldn’t get what had happened almost an hour ago out of my head.

I knew things like this would happen, though. A week ago, when I finally revealed the truth to my sister that Markell and I were seeing each other, Normani gave me her blessings and let me know how happy she was for me. But in that same breath, she explained that everyone wasn’t going to be pleased. There were going to be old flings popping out of the shadows, trying to break apart what Markell and I were just starting. I kept all those things in mind, but in reality, I thought that I would be fine, especially since Markell had already told me that he didn’t have any exes, so I shrugged it off.

For this woman to pop up on me at my place of business, threaten to slap me, and carry on the way she did, that was enough for me to realize that a relationship with Markell was just too much for me. No, I wasn’t scared of her because she would have to do a lot more than threaten me for me to be

scared, but it was just the simple fact that I wasn't about to put up with shit like this! I was already going through a nasty divorce with Liam. We had court next week, and I would have to fight for full custody of my son. I didn't need any extra stress from Markell's groupies. So, I was bowing out of whatever we were building.

I had already sent him a message, telling him that I didn't want to do what we were doing anymore. Right after I sent the message, I blocked his number, so I had no idea how he responded. I was so angry that I even blocked the restaurant number because sometimes he called me from the phone in his office.

No amount of sex, attention, good looks or any of that could make me change my mind. Why the hell would I leave one relationship that had just brought me down and gave me so much stress, only to jump into something that would do the same exact thing? Before these women tried to kill me to get another chance with Markell, I was going to happily walk away and keep my damn sanity as well as my life. I had to keep my feelings from getting hurt because I knew that's exactly what would happen.

To even think she stood there and told me that she had sex with him two days ago! Although Markell was at my house two days ago, he didn't stay the night, so I don't know what he did when he left, although he told me he was going home. I felt like such a fool for having sex with him. He did exactly to me what I thought he was going to do, which was break my damn heart. The thing that made me so angry is that I was falling in love with him. We just had sex yesterday. On my lunch break, I went to his restaurant, and we had sex in his office. I told him that I loved him in the heat of the moment. That was like my second time telling him that. I was so upset with myself that I wanted to cry.

"No. We're not racing, baby. Mommy is going to slow down," I said and eased my foot off the gas a little bit because the way I was speeding, I was liable to get a ticket. My mind was just racing with so many things, and I blacked out for a minute, which had me driving so recklessly.

As I drove, my brother Aaron had called me twice. I felt so bad for ignoring him because I knew he was trying to work on a relationship with Normani and me, but now just wasn't a good time. I was in a bad mood, I was annoyed, and I just didn't want to take it out on him. He'd reached out before, but that was right when Liam and I started the divorce process, so it wasn't a good time then either. I did plan to call him back because Normani and I had already sat down with my mother, and she didn't have any ill feelings about us getting to know our brother. It was something that would definitely happen, but I just didn't know when. I wanted to meet him when things in my life were going well, and I wasn't such an emotional wreck all the time.

LJ and I made it home about ten minutes later. I pulled my car into the driveway of our townhome and quickly got out. I opened the door for my son, took him out of his car seat, and then reached in to grab his book bag along with some of the action figures that he had in the back seat with him. While he did that, I popped the trunk to grab the folders and my purse. I was supposed to grade schoolwork and homework tonight, but the way my mind was going into overdraft, I really didn't see how I would get anything done tonight.

"Can we have pizza tonight, Mommy? Please?" LJ asked as we stood on the porch, and I turned the key to let us inside.

I'd already taken out some ground beef sliders this morning because I was going to make some cheeseburger sliders and French fries, but pizza did sound easier tonight.

"Yes. When we get in the house, go right up to your room, so you can get out of your school uniform," I told him.

"Okay, Mommy. I saw Daddy today in school," my son told me.

LJ would be four soon, but his ability to carry on a conversation like an older child always shocked me.

"Did you?" I asked, sounding all happy when I really wanted to roll my eyes at the mention of his father's name.

I opened the door for us, allowing him to go in first while I disabled the house alarm with my key fob.

“Yep. Mommy, I don’t want to go with him. I want to stay with you,” he said in his sad little voice, looking just like his father.

I set the items on the table and pulled my son to me, making him rest his head on my thigh as I massaged his back.

“You are staying here with me,” I told him. This was a conversation that I had with my son at least once a week.

“Daddy said that I’m coming to live with him and Ms. Tischina. I don’t want to live with them. He said that I’m going to live with them because you’re a bad mommy,” he told me.

I sucked my teeth and then bent down and lifted LJ in my arms. His face was still holding onto that sad look as he wrapped his little arms around my neck and stared up at me, waiting for me to tell him what he wanted to hear. As soon as this school year was over, I planned to switch my son’s school and put him where I was teaching now. I hoped that I would win full custody of him next week, so I could really do it.

Liam was messy. He acted like a little child. For him to even tell my son that he was going to move in with him and Tischina was the kicker for me.

“You’re not going anywhere, baby. You’re going to stay right here with Mommy. There will be some days that you have to go and spend time with your dad, though,” I told him.

“I don’t want to,” he said.

“I know, but baby, you will have to. Let’s not think about that right now. Let’s get you changed out of this uniform and into some play clothes, so you can play with your toys while Mommy gets on the phone and orders our pizza. Are you okay with that?” I asked and tickled his stomach, making him erupt in laughter.

“Okay, Mommy. Okay,” he said through his loud laughter, making my heart melt. I kissed him a few times on his cheeks, and then I let him down.

We made it upstairs to his bedroom, where I went into his drawers and pulled him out an undershirt and some basketball shorts for him to lounge around the house in. I even went downstairs and grabbed him a pack of graham crackers that I knew he loved, some apple juice, and I peeled an orange for him. Once LJ was settled, and I knew he wouldn't come out of his room unless I called for him since he would be playing with his toys, I went into my bedroom to call Liam. He could think whatever the hell he wanted to think of me, but the second he started badmouthing me to my son, that's when he and I were going to have a problem.

With my bedroom door closed, I sat at the foot of my bed and called Liam. I didn't even have his number saved in my phone anymore. Liam has had the same number since the two of us were in middle school, so I just knew it by heart after all these years.

"Baby, you can just go ahead and set that down on the table. I'll handle it. Let me take this call. Yeah? Hello?" he answered.

I couldn't do anything but laugh at him.

"You're such a clown," I told him.

It was the only name that fit him. I mean, there were other things that I wanted to call him, but I had a long conversation with God last night, and I was working on my language. I had never cursed this much in my life until a few months ago. It was him answering the phone while carrying on a conversation with Tischina, trying to be petty, but I really didn't care. He could have sex with her right in front of me, and I wouldn't shed a tear. I was just over him and the entire situation.

The crazy thing is, when Liam and I were together, I had a good relationship with his parents. I guess they were rocking with their son because I was quite sure they both knew that we were in the process of divorcing, and neither of them even bothered to call and see how I was doing. Both of them were lame, just like their son.

"If you're calling me to pick a fight, I can hang up this phone on you right now, Naomi. Your mouth these days is the

reason I am fighting for sole custody of LJ. You let anything fly out of your mouth these days, and I don't need my son around that kind of talk—”

“Liam, shut up! Please, just shut the hell up! I'm not calling you to pick a fight. I'm calling you to tell you to watch how you talk about me in front of my son. Where do you get off telling my son that I'm a bad mother? Don't try and taint the image that LJ has of me—”

“Like how you've tainted the image that he has of me? That little boy used to adore me. When I would come home from work—”

“From cheating, but continue,” I cut him off and said.

“Work, cheating, whatever you want to call it, but whenever I would come home, he would be sitting by the door, ready to jump on me with hugs and kisses. Suddenly, he doesn't want anything to do with me, and he wants to only live with you! I know you put that mess in his head, so yes, I do think that you are a bad mother! What kind of mother gets her child involved in adult situations? You are unfit, Naomi, and I cannot wait to let the judge know just how unfit you are!” he said.

Hearing him say that had me jumping up from the bed, prepared to read him! A Facetime call came through from my sister because we usually called each other after work, but I declined it. I would just call her back when I was done saying to Liam what I had to say.

“You want that bitch over there to raise my son so bad that you will convince yourself that I'm an unfit mother when you know that's the furthest thing from the truth! My son has a roof over his head, a room filled with everything that he will ever want and need, clean clothes on his back, and a hot meal every morning before I send him off to school and at night before he goes to bed. He had a doctor's appointment with my sister a few days ago, and I was told that he was just as bright and as healthy as he could be! All of that is my doing!

“When we were together, you know as well as I know that you were hardly home. Therefore, you never had time to fulfill

your obligations as a parent! Talking about I'm unfit! Unfit is having my son around you and that woman when our divorce isn't even final. Literally, the same day that we called it off, you had LJ around her. You don't want full custody of LJ because you crave to have your son in your life. This is just your way to hurt me.

"You can tell that judge anything you want, but there's nothing you have on me that'll make a judge side with you and give you sole custody of LJ. So what, I say a few curse words here and there? I'm constantly pushed by you, so I lose self-control. If my son comes to me again and tells me that you were talking bad about me to him, just go ahead and call the cops on me because I'm slapping the shit out of you," I told him and ended the call.

Today started out as a great day, but the second I stepped foot out of my job, that's when the drama came. My leg was bouncing up and down because I was angry. It took me about five minutes to calm down. Once I did, I went on the *Pizza Hut* app since that was LJ's favorite pizza and ordered dinner. After that, I Facetimed Normani back. She answered on the third ring, and I could see that she was still in her scrubs, so she had to have just gotten home from work.

"What's wrong with your phone? Glizzy called Billionaire, saying that he's been trying to get in touch with you. I was calling, and you weren't answering. What's going on?" she asked with a look of concern on her face.

I looked at my sister for a few seconds, and I just broke down. Nothing was going right in my life, and I was angry. I felt like God was mad at me, and He was punishing me for something that I didn't even know I did. I just knew that Markell coming into my life was going to be the comfort of a man that I was missing, but he ended up being full of lies and secrets too. He played that nice guy role with me just so he could get me to have sex with him.

"Naomi, what? What's wrong with you?" my sister asked, confused as to why I was carrying on.

I wasn't a crier, and when I did break down and show my emotions, it was usually in private. I was always the strong big sister who put my feelings on the back burner and never allowed anyone to see me get emotional, but I just couldn't front at that moment.

"I'm just... I'm just angry, Normani. I'm angry about a lot of shit right now. If Markell calls Billionaire back, tell him the reason he can't get through to me is that I have him blocked. I should have never messed around with him in the first place. This is nobody's fault but mine," I said, all over the place as I tried to explain to my sister what was going on with me as best I could.

Of course, she didn't know what the hell I was talking about, so when I calmed down a little bit, she asked me what happened. In a much calmer tone, I told her what happened earlier at my job when the two women approached me.

"Naomi, listen to me. At the end of the day, it's on you to make whatever decision you want when it comes to you and Glizzy, but don't let no jealous ass bitch run you away from him! I told you last week that it was going to be plenty of that. When I first got with Billionaire, I had to deal with both his baby mamas and even a couple of women he dealt with in the past. Like you, I was ready to run off, but you give them bitches the upper hand when you do that. They will try you because they know you as a pastor's wife, and they are going to think you're soft. Naomi, I'm telling you, please don't let these women have the upper hand—"

"Normani, she said she had sex with him two days ago. We just had sex yesterday. I'm not going to be one of the many women in his life that he's getting sex from. I would rather be lonely and single before I let a man degrade me like that," I said to my sister.

"Did you talk to him? Did you at least ask him if that was true? You know bitches will lie," Normani said to me.

"I didn't ask him. Look, Normani, whether it's true or not, I just don't want to endure any more of this kind of drama. They came to me at my damn job. They look like the kind of

women who are nothing but trouble. If they want him that bad, they can have him. I'm not fighting over no man. At all," I told her.

Normani tried to convince me in every way possible to take Markell off block, so I could just hear what he had to say, but I wasn't doing it. After that, I went ahead and told her what had happened on the phone with Liam and me. I just didn't want to be that person in Normani's life who was draining her with my bad news and drama. So, just feeling defeated and annoyed, I told her that I would call her later once I was in a better mood.

Almost three hours later, I'd eaten pizza in the dining room with LJ and took him upstairs, where I assisted him with his bath because, at his age, he thought he was a big boy and could bathe himself. I was just there to get the spots that he missed. He'd brushed his teeth, put on his pajamas, and said his prayers. After that, he went fast asleep in his big boy bed with no problems.

While LJ was sleeping, I got his uniform and shoes ready for school tomorrow and left them on his dresser. From there, I went into my bedroom. Although I was distracted by the events that had taken place today, I did manage to get the bulk of the homework and schoolwork graded. By the time that was done, it was well after ten at night, and that's when I finally took my bath and everything.

I couldn't seem to fall asleep, so I went downstairs and did the one thing that I did when I couldn't sleep: clean. Dressed in nothing but an old t-shirt that fit me like a short dress and my house shoes, I filled a bucket with water and Lysol cleaner and prepared to mop the floor. I had soft gospel music playing from my phone, and there was even a glass of wine on the island that I needed more than anything. There really wasn't much for me to clean because I kept a clean house, but when you're desperate to clean up, you'll find a mess.

I washed the few dishes in the sink, fluffed the pillows in the living room, straightened up some of LJ's toys, and swept the entire downstairs area. I was mopping the floor when all of a sudden, there were three loud knocks on the door, which

made me jump as I held the mop. I looked out the peephole, and Markell was standing on the other side of the door with a hoodie over his head and a pissed-off look on his face.

Markell would usually come over at night after LJ was asleep because I still wasn't ready to introduce the two of them, although Markell had asked me on a couple of occasions when he would meet my son. Whenever Markell came over, I would sit on pins and needles, anxious for him to get there, but not tonight. I didn't even want to see him. He banged on the door a little louder, and the only reason I went to turn the handle is that I didn't want him to wake up my son. I opened the door but kept the chain on, so he couldn't come in.

"I'm not letting you in. Please stop banging on my door like this. My son is upstairs sleeping," I said, and he sucked his teeth.

"Naomi, what the fuck is wrong with you, man? What the fuck you doing this shit for? If you wanted to go back to your husband and you just needed an excuse, you could have just said that," he said, trying to put this on me.

"Markell, fuck you! Seriously, fuck you! I told you what he did to me, so why would you think I'm trying to call this off to be back with him?"

"Then what the fuck is your problem?" he barked.

I couldn't believe we were arguing like this. He made me so happy when I was around him, and now look what we were doing.

"I told you what my problem was! Did you not read the message I sent you?" I asked with just as much anger in my voice as he had.

"You going to take another bitch's word over mine? That shit is stupid as fuck. Then, you don't even try to hear my fuckin' side because you were so quick to block me. That shit is childish as fuck, yo," he said.

"I'm not doing this with you, Markell. What we had was fun, but this is the part where I walk away," I told him.

“Yo’ ass used me, man,” he said, shocking me with his words. So much so that I leaned the mop on the wall and folded my arms so I could look at him like he was crazy.

“Used you? Used you for what?” I asked.

“A nut. You know as well as I know that you just wanted a nigga to fuck you! You looked me in my fuckin’ eyes and told me that you wanted to see where this shit could go between us, and the second a bitch lies on me, you take her word over mine. Fuck you, man. I should have left your indecisive ass the fuck alone,” he vented.

“Markell, you act like you’re the only man in the world that I can get good sex from. If I used you for sex, I would have had sex with you the first time I was alone with you. You sound crazy.”

“Man, open this motha fuckin’ door!” He used his strength to push the door in, which broke the cheap chain.

I tried to scream, but his hands went over my mouth.

“Shut the fuck up!” he said with his hand on my mouth. He used his other hand to push the door closed.

Markell backed me against the wall, and looking into his bloodshot red eyes, I could tell that he was high. I also smelled the weed on his clothes.

“Answer me something. You believe I fucked that bitch two days ago? Say yeah, and I’ll leave you the fuck alone. You won’t ever have to worry about a nigga sniffing up behind you again.” He moved his hands from my mouth, and his face was so close to mine that I could smell the mint on his breath.

“Why would she tell me that, Markell?” I screamed with tears falling down my face because I was at my breaking point.

“Bitches lie, Naomi! That’s the fuck why! Answer the question, though. You think I fucked her for real? Two days ago, you know how hard a nigga was working at the job because I had three catering events. I came over here around ten at night, busted you down right quick in the bedroom, and I left as soon as you fell asleep! You knew how fuckin’ tired I

was that night, so you think Ima come over here, run up inside you, and then go fuck on the next bitch? What kind of dirty, dumb ass nigga you take me for? Tell me if you think I did that shit, so I can leave you alone,” he said.

“No, I don’t think you did it, but—”

“So, what the fuck you carrying on, doing all this dumb ass shit for? I was trying to get in touch with your ass for a whole fuckin’ hour, man. It was busy at the restaurant today, so I couldn’t just leave. If you ain’t ready to be with me, then say that shit. Let me know so I can fall back,” he told me.

“If I’m going to have women pulling up on me while I’m out, then no, this isn’t what I want to sign up for. I’m trying to find peace, Markell. With everything that I have going on in my life right now, I don’t need the added drama,” I told him, expressing how I really felt.

“Any bitch that says something to you, I’ll handle that shit. You think Ima let a bitch just pull up on you, and I ain’t gon’ do nothing to handle it?”

“It shouldn’t have to even come to that point! They shouldn’t be coming to me, period!” I screamed.

“Ima leave you the fuck alone,” he said and stepped back.

“I’ll appreciate it if you do.” I pulled my shirt down a little bit because it rose a little when he had me backed into the wall.

“Shut up. Yo’ ass ain’t gon’ appreciate shit. You gon’ be crying the second I walk out the door,” he told me.

I laughed to keep from raking his eyes out because he was pissing me off.

“I’ll be crying, and you’ll be on your way to have sex with Quinn. Go! You liar!” I said, and it was his turn to laugh.

“That nigga fucked your head up, man. You can’t even tell when you got a real nigga standing right in front of you versus a lying ass nigga. I ain’t been fuckin’ nobody else but you, Naomi. I put that shit on my daddy,” he told me.

“Yeah, well, it’s still over.”

I was about to walk over to the door and open it for him to leave, but he grabbed my arm and pushed me back into the wall.

“Let’s do a goodbye fuck then,” he said, dead serious.

I don’t even know why, but his words caused the hairs on my back to stand up.

“Not happening. You need to leave,” I told him, not as strong as I was a second ago because just that quickly, he was breaking me down.

“Ima leave. Let’s just fuck and say goodbye since that’s what you so desperately want. Let me beat that pussy up one more time as a farewell, and you ain’t gotta worry about me no more. Another nigga will never do to that pussy what I was doing to it, so let me just bless you before I go,” he said, already lifting me in his arms and holding me by my bare behind since I wasn’t wearing any underwear. All I had on was this shirt.

I knew it wasn’t healthy to have sex with Glizzy, especially since I was trying to let him go, but one last time wouldn’t hurt. This was, in fact, going to be the last time, too, because I was done with him after this.

Markell pushed me against the wall and held onto me with one hand while he quickly removed my shirt, making it fall to the floor. He held me naked in his arms. With my arms wrapped around his neck, he fumbled with his slacks, got his dick out, and just that fast, he pushed inside of me, slamming me up and down on his dick, making me cry out.

“Markelll... Damnnnn... my son is upstairs,” I cried, basically telling him not to make my body feel so good.

“Shut yo’ ass up, then.” He put his hands on my hips, making me go down on his dick even deeper.

The dick was amazing. It was running in and out of me, and it felt like Heaven. This couldn’t be the last time. I wanted this kind of treatment every day of the week, but I had to walk away now. If not, I was going to get my ass hurt.

“You gon’ leave a nigga for real, baby? Shit was just getting started with us,” Markell said with his lips right in front of mine, doing his best to make me feel guilty.

I was nonstop moaning, rolling my eyes, and in about three more strokes, he found my spot. He stayed on it, giving my pussy a beating that only he could do, and just that fast, I started to cum. Markell kept me in his arms and walked with me to the downstairs bathroom because I was just too loud to have sex all out in the open when my son was upstairs. He got us inside, turned the light on, and lowered me to my feet. I almost fell and busted my ass, but he grabbed me, preventing me from hitting the floor.

He put me in front of him, making me face the mirror, and he came behind me, kissing and sucking on my neck while he played with my nipples. I was so horny. With every kiss and lick that he placed on my neck, I moaned louder. What he was doing to my nipples felt so good that I thought I would lose my mind. His hands eventually stopped playing with my nipples, and his right one grabbed my neck, where he forced me to lean my head back to kiss him. We shared the nastiest kiss that we’d ever experienced. I reached behind me, grabbed his dick, and eased it inside of me.

“Ooohhhhhh... baby... it feels so goooooddd,” I moaned, not even able to lie and say it didn’t.

“So, why you trying to leave me then? If I’m making this pussy feel good on a regular, why you trying to fuckin’ leave me?” he asked.

Markell continued sucking on my neck and grabbed my left leg in his arm, holding it by my knee as he got even deeper inside of me. I watched us in the mirror as we practically tried to fuck each other’s brains out. My hands were on the edge of the counter as I squeezed it with all my might, to the point that my knuckles were turning a little red. I dropped my head while my eyes continued to roll.

“Shittttttttt, Markellllll... baby, I love youuuu,” I cried, knowing another orgasm was right around the corner. Every time we had sex, I was pushed to express my love for him.

“I love you too, baby... fuck,” I heard him groan behind me.

“Answer my question, Naomi,” he said and slapped me hard on my thigh, making my body shudder.

“HmMMMM... I don’t want to leave, but you’re going to hurt meeeeeeeee... Markelllllll,” I yelled because he kept finding ways to get deeper in me, and I knew he was doing it on purpose.

He knew the dick would force me to say what my heart felt, but I was just too stubborn to say it myself. One of those things was telling him that I loved him.

“I ain’t gon’ hurt you. I’ll put a hurting on this pussy, but that’s it. Damn, give a nigga a chance,” he said and sped up his strokes, so I knew he was getting ready to release this time with me. Reality checked in for me just that fast, which was followed by:

“Markellllllll... Oh, my Godddddd... Baby, stay right there... stay right there... you aren’t wearing a condommmmmmm,” I moaned.

I didn’t know if I wanted him to stop or keep going. I felt my orgasm creeping up into the pit of my stomach, and I didn’t want that feeling to stop.

“Shit! Fuck, girl! Fuck, Ima nut,” he groaned in my ear with his hands on my waist, holding me tightly.

He never pulled out; he came right inside of me. Now, the plot thickens. I wasn’t on any kind of birth control.

“Markell, I’m not on birth control,” I weakly told him.

He had the stamina to keep on going because he lifted me and set me on the counter, and I was the dummy who just kept on letting him.

“Who the fuck said anything about you being on birth control?” he asked with his hands on my thighs, spreading my legs apart, ready to climb back in.

“Put a condom on, Markell,” I said.

His lips were right in front of mine, and he leaned in to kiss me. This was my cue to push him back, but my arms went around his neck. I pulled my legs up on the counter and opened them as I hungrily kissed him, getting ready for another round. His hard dick rested right at the base of my pussy. I broke the kiss and guided him right back in. He stroked me long and deep and then laid me back on the counter, grabbed my feet, and started sucking my toes.

Looking down at his abs, which were covered with tattoos, his face that was handcrafted by God himself, that long, beautiful hair that was pulled up into a ball, and that beard had me going crazy. He was sucking on my toes like he did on my lips.

“I got condoms in my pocket. Shit!” he groaned, about to pull out, but I stopped him.

“Nooooo... don’t stop,” I said, sounding possessed.

We went at it hard in that bathroom. There was no way I could possibly say goodbye to him after this. If anything, the sex that we just had made me fall in love. It further complicated things, and I no longer wanted him out of my life. Markell knew what he was doing when he requested a goodbye fuck. He knew with his skills, I would only end up staying.

Chapter Twenty-Three

TISCHINA YOUNG

“*Y*ou must ain’t sucking enough dick or something over there. That nigga was supposed to have broken you off with a few stacks by now. What the fuck you over there doing with that nigga then? Spending all them fuckin’ hours over there with him, playing house and shit, but when you come back home, yo’ hands is empty,” my husband, Antonio, said as I walked into the house after spending the weekend with Liam.

I was working my way to being eight months pregnant, and I was exhausted. I barely had my foot in the damn door before my husband started jumping down my throat about some damn money that I didn’t come home with from Liam when he was counting stacks and stacks of cash on the kitchen island.

I’m sure a lot of you may be confused, so let me explain a little bit about what’s going on. Antonio, who I’ve been married to for the past five years, is a mega scam artist. We’ve been in this line of business for over ten years, and we’ve made a killing. It started out with me meeting men at a club or a bar, flirting with them, enticing them with pussy, getting them drunk, and having them come home with me, so Antonio could rob them blind. Now, of course, this wouldn’t be just any old man. It had to be a man with status and someone who had a coin.

Antonio and I would travel around the world, doing schemes. I had a gorgeous face and a pleasantly plump body, but ladies, I swear, niggas love us more than they love skinny bitches; I promise you that. Antonio was into all kinds of scheming techniques, including identity theft, credit card fraud... anything you can think of that could make him some money, he was doing it.

See, I had an education. I had a degree in accounting, so I was pretty much a genius when it came to anything that involved money and numbers. Before getting with Antonio, I was finishing up school and working part-time at a bank. Antonio would come into my lane at work once a week, and most times, it would be every Monday. Every time he came in, he deposited large amounts of money into his account. Antonio was a handsome man who drove a nice car, and because I'd seen his account on many occasions, I knew he was wealthy. Truth is, I assumed he was a drug dealer. He just didn't have that everyday man, working a nine to five kind of vibe about him.

After months of coming in my line, he finally asked for my number. Antonio was fine, so I would be a fool to turn him down. He called me that same night and asked if he could take me out that weekend. I wasn't seeing anyone at the time, so I took him up on his offer. You know how first dates go, where you get to know each other, and all that other stuff, well, that's pretty much what happened between us, but Antonio lied to me about everything.

This negro told me he owned clubs, and the money he deposited was the earnings from his businesses. I believed him. I mean, it was easy to believe it since his best friend owned a popular strip club. The negro even took me to one of the clubs, and the way he was respected and known, I had no reason to think otherwise.

We eventually got serious in our relationship, and that's when he started being honest with me and let me know that he was basically a scam artist. Most women in their right mind would have left. Then, on top of that, any woman with a damn brain would have gone far away from his ass once he asked

me to be a part of his schemes, knowing that I was risking my freedom. The thing about Antonio is that he talked a good talk. He knew how to convince people, and what did it for me was when he told me that I could be making what I make in a year as an accountant in just one month if I worked with him. Not that I was greedy for money, but I didn't come from a lot of it.

My grandmother raised me. My mom pretty much handed me over to my grandmother when I was born, and I wasn't the only child my grandmother was raising. She raised some of my aunts' kids too. My grandma worked at a daycare, and she wasn't bringing in much money, so honestly, all I knew was the struggle. The opportunity to finally make some real money and not have to struggle in life anymore is what won me over.

Ten years later, I had made more money with my husband than I could have ever dreamed. Being pregnant and knowing the amount of money we had stashed away, I was ready to end this shit, settle down the right way with Antonio, and walk away from this shit while we still could. But my husband had other plans.

“Baby, Liam isn't an easy lick like the rest of these niggas. He's smart, and that nigga is stingy as hell. I told you that he's getting a divorce. They go to court tomorrow to fight for custody of their son, so that's been taking up a lot of his time. He admitted that his wife had been stealing his money for years, putting it to the side, so his trust is fucked up right now. I'll be glad when this shit is over. I'm tired of fuckin' him. Although the sex is only two minutes at most, it's the worst two minutes of my damn life,” I complained as I sat on the couch in the living room.

Antonio stopped counting money and took a seat on the couch next to me. He grabbed my swollen feet and started massaging them with one of his hands while his other hand rubbed my stomach, where my baby was kicking... our baby was kicking. I was pregnant with my husband's baby, not Liam's. The math just didn't add up to it being Liam's, but the nigga was so sprung off me and my pussy, that his stupid ass didn't even know that.

“And, baby, I feel bad that I still got you out here doing this shit, but I just know what that nigga is worth. That church alone is worth a cool million. I know you ready to walk away from this shit, but before we walk away, I want to make sure that we can walk away and be well off to the point that we don’t ever have to double back and do this shit again. I want to be able to fly my wife all around the fuckin’ world until the day we die. Just thug this shit out for daddy a little while longer,” he told me. He stopped rubbing my stomach and put his hand under my chin, then leaned in to kiss me on the lips.

Antonio was handsome. Easily the most handsome man I knew. He had beautiful chocolate skin, and a body ripped with muscles because when he wasn’t participating in illegal activities, he would be at home working out. He sported a bald head and a full, thick beard that I loved to sit on and cream on because he ate the best pussy. Liam didn’t eat pussy, and I personally didn’t see why Naomi stayed with his ass for so many years. She hated my guts, but I swear I didn’t want her husband. I just wanted his money, and once I was done, I had every intention of giving him right back.

I put this good pussy on him, played that role like I didn’t want to be the woman in his life that he was hiding, and shit worked quickly in my favor. I had to pretend that I was hurt, and I needed us to come out because I had to look like I gave a fuck, when in reality, I couldn’t care less. I would never in my fuckin’ life be with a man like Liam. That son of a bitch was nasty, and he was selfish, and I’m solely talking about how he was handling his divorce. I knew I was doing wrong, but the way he did Naomi was crazyyyyyy. That man didn’t want her to have shit. Not only that, but with him, it was always about his image.

I was begging for us to come out with our relationship, which was the role my husband had me playing. Everything with Liam was always, “The church might think this, and the church might think that.” It was sick the way he thought, but I had to tell myself that this was just a role I was playing and a job I was doing so Antonio and I could get a fat ass check. Liam had the money. I had seen the church accounts, and it was just a matter of playing my part, so I could get some of it.

See, my husband and I were new to Miami. Well, we'd been here for four years, so technically, that made us still new. Working for the church was just a ploy to get me closer to the money; they didn't know shit about me. My real name isn't even Tischina. When you're in the kind of business that I'm in, and you're tricking these niggas out of their money, you never give them your real name. My real name is Cassandra. That's the name my mother gave me. For the past ten years, I've been giving niggas every name but the one given to me at birth. Sometimes I forgot what my real name even is.

My husband and I are never in one city for too long. At most, we'd stick around for a year to make our money in one city and get the fuck out. I recommended Miami because the cities we went to were usually up north. I wanted some nice, unpredictable weather, which is exactly what Miami gave. Antonio did his research and found out about the Temple of God church and how popular it was. Of course, he'd looked up Liam's net worth, and to him, that was the green light.

It definitely became a green light once he saw that the church was looking for an administrative assistant. I had the requirements for the job, ended up applying online, and they invited me to come in for an interview. At the time, we were in Philly, but we packed up all our shit and hopped on a plane the next morning. I was interviewed by four that afternoon and hired on the spot.

The thing with Liam is that we had to move differently. For one, we couldn't catch him slipping at a bar or anything of that manner. Scamming Liam was different from any other victim that we'd ever worked with. My husband actually wanted me to get into a relationship with him. Listen, I wasn't down for none of that shit initially, but again, Antonio had a way with words, and he knew how to convince anyone to do what he wanted.

We thought it would be easy, and Liam would right off the bat want me, especially since I could sense tension between him and his wife once I started working there. But it took three fuckin' years for this nigga to finally get with the program. Three years for this man to open up to me about him and

Naomi and to establish some kind of trust. By year one, I was ready to wrap this shit up, but my husband had faith that Liam would finally come around.

We were now into a year of us messing around, and Liam would give me money to pay for all the bills at my house, but it was nothing close to the amount that Antonio wanted. I didn't know what we needed to do to make Liam cut a check on me because he was such a complicated, calculated man. Naomi had fucked up his trust, too, when it came to women and his money, so this shit had just been draining over the past few months. The fact that I was pregnant wasn't making it any easier.

“Let's talk numbers. How much did the church bring in last Sunday?” Antonio asked, getting right down to business.

I loved my husband dearly, but sometimes I wanted to have intimate moments with him where we didn't just talk business, scheming, and plotting on niggas. I'm not going to lie, sometimes I questioned if he even loved me for real. I personally believed that any man who really loved me wouldn't be okay with me fuckin' other niggas, giving the pussy away, and most importantly, putting my freedom on the line. I was almost eight months pregnant with his baby, and he was cool with me and Liam still having sex. At times, I felt like he only got with me because he knew that I had brains, and my book smarts mixed with his street smarts would make us a powerful team.

“They made close to seventy-five thousand,” I said to Antonio, and he made a loud, whistling noise.

I worked as the administrative assistant at the church, so my hands were pretty much in everything. Now that Liam and I were getting closer, but still not coming all the way out with what we were doing because he wanted to wait until the divorce was final, I felt like he was trusting me more and letting me hear important conversations that he didn't allow in the past.

“And that's just on a regular third Sunday. That nigga got too much fuckin' money. We gotta rob this nigga fuckin'

blind. You gotta step shit up a notch,” Antonio told me, making me suck my teeth and move my feet out of his lap.

“I’m doing everything I fuckin’ can. What else you need me to do?” I screamed.

“I bet he got some kind of trust fund set up for his son,” Antonio said.

I could see the antennas going up in his head and his devil horns coming out because whatever he was getting ready to say, I could tell it was going to be evil.

“Where you going with this?” I asked.

“Shit, if we get rid of the son, I’m sure whatever money he had set up in that trust fund will then go to our baby, mixed with the money he’s going to put in for our child anyway. You already said that he planned to open a trust fund for the baby, right?” Antonio asked.

I overheard Liam telling his dad the other day that he was going to the bank one day to get an account opened for “our” son. I didn’t even answer Antonio’s question because I was a bit annoyed with him.

“That lil nigga, what? About to be four, right? It got to be a few million put aside for him,” Antonio said.

Oh, yeah, Antonio didn’t have a single problem with Liam signing the birth certificate because, to him, our son was an investment and would keep him paid.

“What do you mean get rid of his son? Antonio, what the hell is wrong with you? Nigga, we don’t go after kids, and you fuckin’ know that,” I stood up and screamed at him.

“Why the fuck you care about that lil nigga? You even said it your fuckin’ self that Liam is obsessed with the idea of you having the baby in two more months. If we get rid of his oldest one, what the fuck you think he gon’ do with the trust fund money? He gon’ put that shit in the account for the new baby, on top of the other money that he gon’ put in there. You can sign off on that shit with him, and with your signature on it, that money belongs to you too, and—”

“He has to trust me nigga in order for me to sign off on that shit. What makes you think he will trust me in that way? He was with his fuckin’ wife since they were kids, and he still made her sign a prenup where she agreed to not even get her fuckin’ toothbrush out of the bathroom if they ever divorced. I don’t think this plan gon’ work,” I said, shutting it down.

“Man, make that shit fuckin’ work! Fuck that nigga’s brains out. You better do something! Threaten that you won’t let him see the baby if you can’t sign off on the trust funds. Something, Cassy! You know how to get what you want out of a nigga. You been doing this shit for years with me. Stop acting like you dumb,” he said.

I stood in front of my husband with my arms folded, looking him dead in his eyes.

“If this works and he trusts me enough to put my name on the trust fund, we can be done with this shit once and for all?” I asked.

“If we can get a cool five million out of this nigga, we can walk away,” he told me.

“You said that you were going to get rid of his son. How the hell do you even plan to do that?” I asked.

“You fuck and suck. Let me worry about that shit,” he told me.

I knew this shit was wrong. Trust me, I knew it. Ten years ago, when Antonio had me jump into this shit with him, I knew it was wrong to be stealing like this from innocent men. Now, there I was, ten years later, and we were about to get an innocent child involved. I was Antonio’s partner, though, and I told him years ago that I would do anything for him because I loved him. I didn’t want a child to get hurt, but this was my man, and I was going to stick beside him.

To be continued