



The  
*Warden*

RENEE WILLIAMS

The Warden  
Renee Williams  
**Monet Rose**

Copyright © 2022 Renee Williams

All rights reserved

The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Cover design by: Monet Rose

*To my hubby, thank you for being the man who has promised to always  
guard my heart.*

*I love you!*

# Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Steven](#)

[Dimitri](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Dimitri](#)

[Dimitri](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Dimitri](#)

[Addy](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Dimitri](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Stephanie](#)

[Nyah](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Steven](#)

[Ayanna](#)

[Nyah](#)

[Books In This Series](#)

# Ayanna

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught movement. Classes ended a few minutes ago, and I thought all the ladies had left for the night, so it was surprising someone would still be here.

Turning around, I was met with a blast from my past. Immediately, my breath was caught in my throat. Light perspiration covered my lip.

I didn't understand life. It was complicated for no damn reason. Then, it had a way of making a fool out of all of us.

I was at peace. All the danger surrounding my friends-turned-family had calmed down. Roshaun dumb ass was dead since he couldn't quit pursuing my best friend, Yara. My girl bossed up on him and found a man who put Roshaun in his place. Meaning, he was in Hell along with our best friend, Sam, who I still loved to this very day.

It still saddened me to think she was willing to sleep with a man who almost killed Yara. Yara and I never discussed Sam anymore, but Sam was still a ghost who stayed haunting my mind and dreams. I hated losing her, but I understood there was no way to allow her to remain alive after everything she had done.

Then, there was Maxim, Dimitri's cousin. Maxim's dead wife's boyfriend Anton decided to avenge a murder he committed. Shit, sounded crazy and stupid to me, but he was the type of man who lived by one of life's crazy psycho creed: if I can't have you, no one can. Like I said, it was all complicated and convoluted. Needless to say, his ass along with their cousin Nik was dead too. Yes, Dimitri's cousin was part of the plot to bring down his own family. I couldn't make this shit up if I wanted to.

All that had happened months ago. Things were finally moving in the right direction. Yara and I were leaving the exotic nightclub business behind and had already opened a

dance studio. We wanted to teach little girls how to dance, do choreography, and teach pole dance classes.

Yara wanted to have more babies and focus on her family. I was fine with that because I had my Addy. My seven-year-old daughter was the center of my world, and I had already distanced myself from the business to be more involved with her life a long time ago.

I was a single parent who had a huge village supporting me. However, at the end of the day, Addy's happiness and well-being depended on me. I couldn't stay out all night when I knew she was at home waiting on me, so I made the change early.

I said all of that to say we were finally able to catch our breaths. Things were getting back to normal, but as usual, life had to show her ass. She just couldn't sit her ass down somewhere. Yes, I considered life a female because who else had this many mood swings and knew how to make shit complicated. Certainly, not a man. They were too simplistic and couldn't think of things this damn elaborate to upset the dynamics of life. All they were good for was fucking, nutting, and destroying. Life was too intricate for them to be the orchestrater.

Hence, Addy's sperm donor standing inside our brand-new dance studio caught me off guard. I never thought I would see him again. Honestly, I wasn't even mad about it. He made his choice. Both he, Addy, and I had to live with it.

Masking my distress, I studied him from head to toe because it had literally been years since I laid eyes on him. Matter of fact, it had been almost eight years since I last saw him.

There was no way I wanted him to pick up on my anxiousness and misconstrue it for anything besides irritation over the fact that he had shown up unexpectedly.

I hated to admit it, but he was aging gracefully. His face and body were still gorgeous. His smooth blemish-free chocolate skin was beautiful. Yes, I said beautiful because Steven knew exactly how to take care of his body and skin.

When I was with him, he consistently received manicures, pedicures, facials, and massages. Everything a man in corporate America needed to look the part.

He was six feet tall, medium built, and sexy as hell. The cobalt blue, long-sleeve Polo shirt he wore clung to his biceps like a second skin. His body was still one of his major assets after all these years.

The blue shirt he wore made his chocolate skin look even more alluring. I knew he deliberately wore this color. He remembered how often I told him I loved cobalt blue on him.

He studied me in the same manner I did him. He gazed at me from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet, which were shoeless since I had taken off my shoes once everyone had left the room.

He licked his lips sexily. It took everything in my power not to roll my eyes. Back in the day, a move like that would have me creaming my panties. Now, my kitty was dry as the tissue paper aisle during the early days of Covid.

Steven was no longer the man I thought he was. I didn't get butterflies from looking at him. Matter of fact, I felt extreme disgust.

Sure, he was sexy, possibly one of the sexist men I had ever seen in my life, but I could no longer look at him that way. He had ruined all my feelings toward him.

The only thing my mind conjured now was the last time I had been in his presence.

*At eight months pregnant, my feet hurt so damn bad walking through the mall. They were swollen, and I couldn't wait to have this baby. I didn't see how KeKe Wyatt did it. This shit was not for the weak. I was weak, exhausted, swollen, and tired.*

*If I thought my baby would be fine, I would have had her today.*

*"I want a Cinnabon before we leave the mall," I told Sam and Yara who had decided to accompany me to the mall.*



*“I bet your greedy ass does want a Cinnabon,” Sam said, rubbing my stomach as she walked beside me.*

*“Girl, leave her alone. You know our baby has given her a sweet tooth,” Yara replied, smiling wide.*

*I loved Sam and Yara. I met both of them dancing at a strip club, but they had immediately become my family. We were there whenever we needed each other. It amazed me how fast we fell into our friendship.*

*They were always claiming my baby was their niece, and I loved to see it. Adelynn nicknamed Addy was going to have the best aunties. They shopped more than I did. We shopped so much that a shower wasn't even necessary.*

*Even Nyah, Yara's younger sister, loved my baby. The bond between us was strong as hell. The other girls at the club hated our relationship and how we always looked out for each other. Before I got pregnant and Yara met Roshaun, we would tear the club up. We had men coming from all around just to watch us strip.*

*I couldn't lie. I didn't miss those days, but I did miss being with them every night. As soon as Steven found out I was pregnant, he demanded I hang up my stilettos. He took care of my every need, and I didn't have to ask for a thing. He was the best man I had ever met. He loved everything about me including my flaws, and I loved him for it.*

*“Come on, greedy.” Sam immediately started walking toward the food court.*

*“Yep, I sure am greedy. Matter of fact, I'm purchasing two Cinnabon's. I plan on eating one right now, and I'm taking one home with me for later,” I told them already tasting the sugary treat melting on my tongue. I was obsessed with Cinnabons.*

*“Okay, now. I know babies give you an excuse to gorge, but you do have to live after she's born. So, be ready to go to bootcamp when this is all over,” Yara told me, giving me the side-eye.*

*“First of all, I have only gained twenty pounds. I’ve exercised this whole pregnancy. Don’t play with me, honey,” I told her with a stank look on my face.*

*It was true too. I ate a lot of junk, but I was still getting in the gym to work out with a trainer. I plan on being summer bunny fine as soon as I had this baby. Steven met me at the top of my game, and that was where I was going to stay.*

*“I know. Relax, I was joking with your angry tail. I want to look just like you when I’m eight months pregnant,” Yara said with a sappy look on her face.*

*I turned to her so fast. “Are you pregnant?” I asked, glancing down at her stomach. I didn’t notice any difference in her, but I knew it didn’t mean anything. We stayed fit. Therefore, it would be hard to notice major changes affecting our bodies.*

*“Yes.” She smiled biting her lip. It took everything inside of me not to grimace or cringe.*

*“Congratulations,” I told her trying to sound sincere because I hated Roshaun’s punk ass. She and he had been together for a minute, but he was possessive and crazy. He lived as if he were single but wanted her to respect their relationship. Females, the ones we worked with and others, stayed confronting her about his trifling ass. Yet, she stayed because he took care of her and Nyah. I wanted so much better for her, but I couldn’t make her choose herself. She was too beautiful for a man of Roshaun’s caliber to waste all her good years. Now, they were having a baby. A baby I was sure he would use to control and manipulate her into doing everything he wanted her to do. I hated she would have ties to him that would last her a lifetime, which I was sure was his motive for getting her pregnant.*

*He was the type of man who was never going to stop cheating. There would be no waiting him out until he outgrew his whoring stage. He wasn’t outgrowing anything. He thought because he had money that it made him irresistible to women. It didn’t. He was simply a well-dressed thug.*

*“Congratulations,” Sam repeated my statement with a frown. “That man cheats and acts a fool on a constant basis. Ain’t no way I would have his baby, and you shouldn’t be congratulating her on this bullshit.”*

*“Sam,” I growled. As much as I loved her, sometimes she just couldn’t help being too damn blunt. It wasn’t our place to judge Yara’s relationship with Roshaun.*

*I wouldn’t date him, but she would have to see shit for herself. I talked to her about him several times, but she wasn’t budging. I was leaving it alone until she was ready to leave him alone. Roshaun was so trifling that he’d eventually do some shit that would push her away for good.*

*Yara glared at Sam.*

*Sam shrugged her shoulders in response. “What? You know it’s the truth. That negro doesn’t have a committed bone in his body, and he has other children he doesn’t see or do anything for. What makes her think he’s going to do better by hers?”*

*“It’s still not your business. Damn, stay in your lane,” I told Sam with irritation. I was not in the mood for their back and forth arguing over Roshaun’s no-good ass.*

*“Yara, have you told Roshaun?” I asked, trying to change the subject because I saw the glossy looks in her eyes, and the trembling of her lips. She was hurt by Sam’s comments.*

*“Yes, I told him. He’s excited. I’m happy too. We talked about it, and he promises he’s going to do right,” she told us, practically begging us with her eyes to let it go.*

*She didn’t have to beg me. I was minding my business. However, Sam was a different ballgame.*

*“Well, I hope it’s a boy since I’m pregnant with a girl. Now, we need Sam to get pregnant and join our crew.” I laughed knowing it would never happen.*

*“Girl, ain’t no way. These men are only good for dick and money. They ain’t worth putting my heart on the line just to have them shit all over it. I’m good getting the money, cars,*

*clothes, purses, and all the other material shit they can offer. I'm going to be Auntie Sam for life." She stuck her tongue out.*

*She was so damn negative. She got on my nerves. I didn't know who had hurt her, but I wished she let it go. She was a great friend and loyal as hell, so I let her toxic energy slide a lot of the time because her positive qualities outweighed her negative ones.*

*"There are good men out here. You have to find the right one." I believed it. Not all men were trash. Because we worked at a strip club, we met certain type of men. They weren't necessarily the committed type because they dropped thousands in the club on a nightly basis.*

*Some of them wore their wedding bands as they asked to get their dicks sucked in the private rooms of the club. Hell, some of the married men came to the club more than the single ones. I was sure all those things were contributing factors to how Sam felt about men. I chose to think not all were bad.*

*"What the fuck?" I heard Sam say loud as hell in the food court, causing me to look up from ordering my food.*

*"I know damn well that's not Steven over there with a woman and a child," she said, angrily pointing to Steven. With wide eyes, I watched him sitting with a woman, and a little boy was on his lap. His wedding band seemed to blink at me.*

*Wedding band?*

*My heart was doing somersaults inside my chest. I watched him for what felt like hours, but it was only a few seconds. Sights and sounds around me faded into the distance as I watched him interact with his family.*

*My baby was doing flips inside of me as if she felt the tension and anxiety surrounding me. I was weak as I headed his way without any thought. This was like my worst nightmare. Yes, I met him at the strip club, but he asked me out when he saw me at a restaurant away from my job.*

*Truthfully, I had only seen him in the strip club once. He was there for a bachelor party for one of his friends, and he had never returned.*

*He knew I stripped, but not once had he ever handled me like a stripper. He opened doors for me, took me out on dates, and spent quality time with me. It took us almost six months to even have sex because I wanted to be sure about him.*

*“Are you married?” fell from my lips. I knew damn well this man hadn’t led me on for two fucking years. I wasn’t that stupid. There was nothing naïve about me. I met several men in the strip club and managed to avoid all the bullshit that came with dealing with any of them.*

*“Excuse me?” the woman bellowed, but I couldn’t look away from Steven. Her question was merely a distraction from the answers I needed.*

*The look on Steven’s face provided all the answers I needed. My heart was in my throat as I waited for the verbal confirmation his face was giving.*

*“I can explain,” he replied, placing his son in the chair next to him and standing to his feet.*

*My eyes glanced down at his son. He never even told me he had a child. Tears filled my eyes as I looked at his son. He was a miniature replica of Steven. He had Steven’s same chocolate skin and deep dimples.*

*My daughter had a half-brother I had no clue even existed. Steven was out here living a whole lie. Hell, he had me out here living a whole lie.*

*I didn’t want to cry in front of all these people. I couldn’t break down. I had given Steven so much of me. Most importantly, I had given him my trust.*

*It was hard as hell for me to trust someone. I was the type of person who believed in guilty until proven innocent.*

*Trust was such a small word. It was only five letters, but it packed a big punch. It was a fragile thing. It was glass. You could crack it with small lies like where you were going, where you have been, or lying about not answering your phone. However, Steven had shattered my trust with his actions. He was married with a child. He had lied in so many*

*ways that I couldn't even contemplate all the ways in which he had betrayed me.*

*"Are you serious right now?" the woman demanded angrily, jumping to her feet.*

*I didn't even glance her way as I waited for Steven to explain himself.*

*"You can explain what, Steven? Are you married or not? It's a simple question." I ignored her question and placed my hand on my back to support the extra weight I was carrying from the baby he asked me to have for him.*

*"I can answer for him," she growled. "Yes, he's fucking married. Who the hell are you?" she demanded, getting louder with every word she spoke.*

*I didn't blame her. I would have been confused and pissed too if some pregnant woman was in my husband's face.*

*"His baby mama," Sam replied, standing next to me. Sam was always on go. However, I didn't need that right now. I needed answers from Steven who couldn't seem to find the words to explain himself.*

*Light perspiration coated my maternity top. The whole pregnancy I was constantly hot. This situation was making me feel even hotter as I waited.*

*"His baby mama?" his wife asked, glaring at me, then down at my stomach like she wanted to snatch my baby out of my womb or stomach her out of my stomach.*

*"Yes, his baby mama. This fool is out here creating babies knowing he's married. See, this is why all of them are trash," Sam fumed.*

*"So, you're the bitch who's been sleeping with my husband?" the woman scoffed with a nasty smirk on her face. "I hope you know you're not the first, just the most recent."*

*Sam sucked her teeth. "Girl, you sound stupid. That ain't nothing to be bragging on. There's no way I would admit to being that dumb, talking about she's not the first, only the*

*most recent. That means you're stupid for being with his trifling ass," Sam responded mockingly.*

*I couldn't say anything as Sam and Steven's wife argued back in forth.*

*My eyes remained focused on Steven, who couldn't seem to find his words. I was confused. Steven had his own three-bedroom condo. I had spent several nights over there with him. I had clothes at his place. I even spent nights over there when he had to travel for work.*

*Steven spoiled me ridiculously. There was nothing I asked for that he wasn't willing to provide. He wasn't a thug. He made legal money. He was nothing like Roshaun. He didn't have golds in his mouth, several children, or several women on his arm.*

*But he had a wife, which was even worse.*

*"Don't look shocked. You're probably some stripper he met. He loves them gullible and stupid. Did you really think a man like him would have a woman like you hanging on his shoulder? He's the president at an architecture firm. You could never play the queen role. Steven loves me. He's never leaving. As far as that baby, it's going to be yours because ain't no way I'm accepting an outside child."*

*Rage bubbled inside me. This man really fucked me raw knowing he was married. I felt stupid as hell. Here I was condemning Yara for being pregnant for Roshaun, and I was pregnant for a corporate thug. At least Yara knew what she was getting. Me? I was standing here bewildered how my life had turned upset down within a blink of an idea.*

*"Hoe, you know what? I've had just about enough of your silly ass. My girl may be pregnant, but I am not," I heard Sam say.*

*"Please, honey, stay out of grown folk's business," Steven's wife told Sam, shooing her away with her hands.*

*"Nope, that's it." Whap! She slapped the piss out of Steven's wife. "You dumb hoe!" She punched her in the face.*

*His wife tried to grab Sam's hair, but it was wrapped in a bun. She couldn't grip it.*

*Sam grabbed Steven's wife by the neck and slammed her to the ground. "Y'all married women kill me knowing your husbands ain't shit, but always attacking the wrong person."*

*Whap! Whap!*

*"Get off me," his wife yelled.*

*"Nope, you were talking all that shit. Back," she kicked her in the stomach, "it," she kicked her again, "up."*

*Every time Sam stomped her, she gave her a speech. "She didn't even know his lame ass had a wife."*

*His wife tried to get up from the ground, but Sam kept kicking her preventing her from moving any further. "You look foolish out here attacking a pregnant woman, but you got the right one today."*

*Sam continued to wail on her. I can't even lie. I was pleased. His wife's audacity caused her to get her ass beat in the mall.*

*"Y'all cut this shit out. I can't believe y'all are out here fighting in front of everyone," Steven fussed like he had the right to say a damn thing when he started everything with all his lies.*

*He pulled both women apart. Sam continued to try to go around him, but he grabbed his wife around the waist pulling her away.*

*"SJ, let go," he called, dragging his wife who was still trying to fight to get away from him. He eventually placed her over his shoulder and stormed out the mall with their son turning around every so often. I saw the tears on his face, and immediately felt ashamed of everything he witnessed. He should have never been placed in this position. He was a child. He was supposed to be protected, not exposed to his father's infidelity and lies.*



*“Let’s go before some rental cop comes and tries to arrest our asses,” Sam growled, snatching her purse from off the table and walking in the direction we had parked beside Macy’s.*

*“Are you okay?” Yara asked.*

*“No,” I whispered. I was sleeping with the enemy and foolishly allowed him to impregnant me.*

*Tears seeped from my eyes. I was about to be a single parent. It was never part of the plan. I felt stupid because I so readily agreed to have Steven’s baby without the benefit of having a marriage certificate.*

*“It’s going to be alright.” Yara tried to comfort me by rubbing my back.*

*“It’s not. Did you hear his wife say I wasn’t the first stripper he has done this too?” His wife’s words circled around my head like angry vultures, eating on my fears and pride. She was the queen. He wasn’t leaving her. I wasn’t good enough to stand by him.*

*“It doesn’t matter. Karma is real. He’ll get his,” she said as if that made me feel any better. It didn’t because it felt as if karma was kicking my ass too.*

*“How am I going to take care of this baby?” I asked, opening the door to Sam’s red Mercedes-Benz S 500 sedan. She loved this car. She brought it for herself for her birthday, but Yara and I knew better. We were sure her sponsors purchased the car for her.*

*“You’re going to put his weak ass under child support. You did not know he was married. This is not your fault. You have no reason to feel bad. See, that’s why ain’t no way I’m giving some man my heart. He can get some pussy, but that is it. I should have slammed that hoe face into the ground. I’m so pissed right now. I broke a nail,” Sam seethed.*

*I laid my head back on my seat, ignoring all of Sam’s ranting and raving. I didn’t have the energy to think about anything but the fact I was having a baby by a married man. I didn’t have a job because I allowed him to bamboozle and*

*hoodwink me out of my job. I felt dirty, and I hadn't even done a damn thing wrong. I was the victim.*

*Steven and his wife were accustomed to this game they played. I was the unwilling participant. I looked down at my phone. Steven hadn't even tried to call or text me. He was probably too busy trying to soothe the situation over with his wife.*

*When Sam parked in front of my house, I slowly opened my door as I felt too mentally and physically exhausted to walk inside my own home.*

*"Do you want us to come in?" Yara asked with concern edged throughout her voice. I appreciated her wanting to be there for me, but I needed some time alone.*

*I shook my head in response. The sympathetic look on her face only made the situation worse. I didn't want to breakdown and lose it in front of them.*

*"No, I'm good. I just need a moment. I'll call you two later, and Sam, thank you for beating her ass like I wish I could have," I told her, trying to break the emotional quicksand we were sinking into.*

*She smiled. "Boo, you know it was no problem. If el negro comes around, call me. I will tase, mace, and beat his ass with a bat. Shit, I could get one of my sponsors to handle his ass if you want me to. Say the word honey, and he will be handled. The nerve of his soft ass trying to cheat on you. I told you about messing with those lames. At least Yara knows Roshawn ain't shit. This fool blindsided all of us even me, and you know I'm usually aware of dogs off leashes."*

*"Fuck you, Sam. I'm tired of hearing your mouth. Take me home," Yara demanded.*

*"Fine. You two are my friends. I'm trying to save you from destruction, but you don't want me too."*

*"Shut up, Sam. Just drive," Yara told her, rolling her eyes at Sam.*

*"I'll call you tonight," Yara said from the window.*

*I nodded my head, trudging into my condo that Steven had purchased for me. I guess it was one thing I could thank myself for doing correctly. At least I had enough sense to put everything in my name. My daughter and I wouldn't be homeless.*

*I walked toward my bedroom, looking around my room. Steven's things were in my closet, in my dresser drawers, and spread around my room. His cologne littered my dresser. All indicating he was my man and stayed with me on a constant basis. We shared my place and the place he made me assume was his.*

*Tears continued to fall from my eyes. There was no way I didn't think he was mine. All indications said he was. I believed my lying eyes, and his lying mouth.*

*I stood from the bed and walked in the bathroom to take me a hot shower. I pulled up Spotify. I deliberately chose Shirley Murdock because I needed her guidance to get through what I knew I had to do because I knew for a fact Steven would come over tonight. There would be no way he would let this go without trying to explain his position or convince me to stay with him. He hadn't said anything in the mall because he wanted to get the words right. He needed time to think up a lie.*

*I wasn't a dummy. I understood men like him even if I hadn't realized who he was up until I encountered his wife in the mall.*

*He was a cheater except he was worse than all the rest. He lied about having a wife and child. What type of man denied his own child? If he could deny his wife's child, mine didn't stand a chance.*

*I angrily swiped the tears spilling from the side of my eyes. I knew this was only the beginning. It was going to be many nights I spent crying just as much as the baby would after I deliver her.*

*I quickly finished taking a shower because I didn't want Steven to catch me in one of my most vulnerable states. He would be here soon. If there was one thing Steven wasn't*

*lacking, it was audacity. It took a bunch of guts to manipulate me into thinking I was his one and only.*

*He was a narcissist. The nerve to ask his mistress to have his baby, knowing he already had a family at home. Therefore, there was no way he wasn't going to show up to explain what happened today.*

*I carefully eased out of the shower and wrapped myself in a towel. I took care of my facial routine for the night. If nothing else, there was comfort in performing the same rituals and routines I did every night. I tensed when I heard my front door open, and the alarm being disarmed.*

*Taking a deep breath, I eased out of my bathroom. My heart clinched inside my chest as I gazed at the man who I swore was going to be my forever.*

*His chocolate skin was smooth without any blemishes. He kept his beard neatly trimmed, but it didn't take away from the deep dimples which came out to play regardless of whether he was smiling. I hoped our daughter had his dimples. His beautiful white teeth were another asset he had going for him.*

*One of my favorite past times was rubbing my hands through his waves. Even when he needed a haircut, his hair was still soft. I prayed our daughter had his soft texture of hair too because mine was coarse.*

*His height was another plus I loved about him. I was 5 ft. 8 inches. There were so many things to love about this man, including the way he loved me.*

*He ran his hands down his waves, looking at me contritely. "I'm sorry. There were so many times I wanted to tell you. I didn't know how to." He dropped a tear.*

*"Why?" It was really the only answer I wanted from him. "How could you do this to me? To us?" I asked with pain gripping my chest. My baby rolled in my stomach.*

*My baby was the only person I was concerned about. I didn't know what was going to happen when I stopped dealing with her father. I knew how some men could be when they no longer were with the mother. They divorced the child too.*

*Thinking about the moves Steven had made these past two years, I didn't know what to expect from him.*

*Steven walked closer to me. I wanted to hold up my hands to prevent him from getting closer, but I didn't. I loved him. He had my heart even if he no longer had my mind.*

*He gazed into my eyes. "The first time I saw you, I wanted you. You were so beautiful and vibrant. You didn't carry yourself like all the other women in the club. Even though you danced, there was this innocence about you," he admitted as he walked close to me. "I had to have you."*

*"So, you wanted to destroy my innocence? You wanted to break my heart?" He was a destroyer. He destroyed my life without remorse. He saw my innocence and desire to be with a man who would love me, and he used it against me.*

*He shook his head in denial. "No, baby, I wanted to love you. I wanted to please you. I wanted to give you the world." As soon as I was in reach, he pulled me close to him. He held me tight as if he were scared, I was going to run away.*

*"You mean all the same things you give your wife," I asked, curious how he thought he had the right to lead me and his wife on.*

*"I love my wife, but we haven't been happy in a long time. Honestly, it may sound hard to believe, but I am no longer in love with her. I know it's cliché, but it's the truth." He tipped my face up to his, so I could look in his eyes. To see his sincerity? If that were the case, he was already too late. He had shown me who he was, and I believed him. It wouldn't take me days, weeks, and months to realize he wasn't going to leave his wife for me.*

*In some women eyes, it would be hard to believe I would leave him alone this easily, but what the hell could I do? He had a wife. I didn't want to question where the hell he was at one day like I was sure she did. That was her job. I didn't sign on to play "Where is Carmen San Diego?" or in his case, where is Steven? He wasn't going to constantly have me in my feelings and stressed the hell out for no reason. I was cutting bait while I still had my sanity.*

*His eyes held mine. "I'm in love with you, Ayanna. Say the word and I'll leave her for you." He brushed tears from my cheeks with his thumbs.*

*He wasn't leaving his wife for me. If he was going to leave her, he would have left her when we first got together. He was doing what liars did: lie.*

*Steven broke so many promises to me. He told me we were going to be together. He promised he wanted to marry me. How do you promise marriage when you're already married? This was all such a waste. His secrets had consequences, and I was going to be the one paying for them. He would go back home to his wife and child while I was left to pick up the pieces of my tattered life. All the while, I would raise my daughter by myself with periodic financial and emotional support from her father. None of the things I ever wanted for my child.*

*"I'm so sorry baby. I love you and our daughter." He kissed the corner of my lips, but all I heard was Shirley Murdock's voice in my ears.*

***I didn't notice then/You were someone's husband/***

***My desire for you is strong, but I won't do wrong/***

***You're that lady's husband/My decency prevails, yes, it does/***

***And it won't let me keep you, no/ So I'm letting you go/Letting you go***

*I pulled back from him. "I can't. You have a wife, Steven. I won't do that to another woman." I knew the saying of you lose him how you got him. I wasn't fucking up my future being with him. My future husband was out there somewhere, and I was going to wait for him.*

*"Baby, I told you. I'll leave her for you," he begged.*

*I shook my head. "I don't want you to leave her for me. I'll never be able to trust you. It'll drive me crazy not being able to trust what you are doing when you're away from me. You've already shown me that you can lay next to me knowing you were living a whole lie. I won't do that to myself."*

*He kissed my lips again. "I'm sorry, baby. We can work this out. I promise. I would never do that to you, Ayanna."*

*I smiled sadly. "You already did it to me. Just because I didn't know I was the other woman didn't mean I wasn't."*

*"Please, Ayanna. Give me a chance. I don't want to live without you," he pled, pulling me back into his body.*

*I didn't put up any resistance. I loved him too much to pretend I didn't want to be in his arms. It was one of my favorite places to be.*

*Him kissing my neck, trying to get me to give into him, made my heart hurt even more. The idea he would try to use my body to make me capitulate to him pissed me off.*

***My desire for you is strong and I won't do wrong/cause I know in my heart***

***That you are hers/I know, I know you are husband/That's why I've got to let you go/***

***Desire says I should, but I say no***

*I pulled myself away from him, creating much needed space. I didn't care what my body wanted. Steven wasn't mine. Had never been mine, and would never be mine.*

*"Go home to your wife, Steven. We can co-parent. I want you in our daughter's life. I don't want you in mine." I couldn't help the tears I was shedding. This was emotional for me.*

*"Baby, you don't mean it. We can work this out. I know we can. Regardless of what is going on, you know I love you. I've always taken care of you. I've given you any and everything you have ever asked me for. Give me a chance. Give us a chance," he dropped to his knees, kissing my stomach.*

*My tears dropped on his head as I ran my fingers through his waves. I knew getting over him wasn't going to be easy. Sam would tell me to simply move on and find someone else, but I knew it wasn't going to work. Right now, all I saw*

*was Steven. I spent two years with him, dreaming of forever. My heart would never be the same. After this, my trust would look different. My faith in men was shaken. I couldn't trust my instincts. I thought I had a bullshit meter, but I was wrong. I recognized Roshaun as an ain't shit man and didn't recognize my man as being cut from the same cloth. The only difference was he dressed his up better.*

*I knew there was going to be many nights where I was going to break down and wonder if I would ever get over him. I didn't know how long it was going to take to get over him, but I was going to be better off without him. I wasn't going to spend any more time thinking Steven could change or trust I was going to be enough for him.*

*I wasn't enough. If I had been enough, he would have chosen me way before I found out his wife existed.*

*I inhaled a deep breath and clinched my legs close. He used his hands to pry my legs wide and lick inside and nibble on my pearl.*

*Tears ran down my face because I knew I was wrong for fucking her husband. I knew we were wrong for what we were about to do. He had a wife, but my body shook from him inserting his tongue inside me and using it as if it was his dick penetrating me.*

*I threw my head back as my tears ran into my ears.*

*"I love you, Ayanna," he breathed as he continued to finger me and lick all around pussy. When his hands spread my ass and inserted one finger in my ass. My whole body shook as he penetrated me from two ends. I couldn't speak as he took the next ten minutes pleasing me and bringing on one of the strongest orgasms I've ever had in my life.*

*I looked on silently as he removed all his clothes one by one. His chest was well built because he worked out religiously. His chest was wide, and it was one of my favorite places to sleep. My eyes crawled all over his body, memorizing every curve and indenture.*



*I didn't resist when he sat on my bed and pulled me into his lap. Since I had gotten bigger with our daughter, this was the most comfortable position for me. I slowly eased down on his erection. My body jerked when he lifted me and started stroking me from the bottom.*

*"I'm so sorry baby. I love you." He stuck his tongue in my mouth, kissing me passionately. My salty tears mingled with our tongues.*

*Tears continued to pore down my face. I was broken.*

*"Baby, don't cry. I'm going to be here for you and my daughter."*

*I nodded my head because there were no words I could say in this moment. I raised my body up and rotated my hips. I met him stroke for stroke. I loved Steven. I wanted to spend my life with him. I thought I was going to spend forever with him, but his forever wasn't his to give.*

*Steven continued to work my body until I had to hold onto his shoulders as my body jerked on top of his. Next, I wrapped my arms around his neck, kissing him like it was the last time. I couldn't let him go. I kissed his neck, rubbed his head, and pressed my body into his groin. I wanted to be in his skin. I wanted to be in his heart. I wanted to be in his head. I wanted to be one with him. Breathe the same damn air he breathed.*

*"I love you," I whispered, sticking my tongue in his mouth again. My salty tears, female essence, and Steven all mixed in together creating a toxic mix. "I love you so much, Steven."*

*"I'm sorry baby. Please forgive me," he replied, holding me close to him as he continued to punish my insides.*

*My heart hurt wondering if this was the same way he handled his wife's insides before he left to come see me. Did she cry just as passionately as me? Did she beg him to stay? Did his son listen to them argue and fuss about me? It was all too much.*

*"Shit," I screamed as I squirted all over him.*

*“I love you baby. I’m going to make it up to you. I promise,” he said, holding me tight as he released inside of me.*

*He squeezed me tight as we both gathered our strength from all the work that we had put in. I kissed him on the lips as I felt his dick twitch inside me. I wished we could stay this way forever. Pretend as if there were nothing outside this moment. Pretend the mall incident never happened. Pretend he didn’t have a wife and child waiting at home for him. I wanted to pretend as if there was nothing outside of us. Just me, him, and the baby I was caring who represented all the love I held for him in my heart.*

*Instead of staying wrapped in his arms, I slowly removed myself from his body. I stood on shaky legs and looked into his eyes. His eyes were begging me to ignore the fact he had lied for two years. He wanted me to forget everything that happened today. I couldn’t. I had to be true to myself.*

*I couldn’t be a hypocrite. All the shit I talked to Yara about being with Roshaun knowing about his other women would make me appear the fool. I wasn’t going to be one of those women who told other women to leave their no-good man, but I couldn’t let mine go.*

*I kept chanting the same words over and over in my head because I knew they were true no matter how I felt in the moment.*

***So, I’m letting you go/letting you go/ You’re that lady’s husband.***

After we broke up, I spent months stressing and crying over the bullshit he had pulled. I cried a fucking river when he and his wife sent me the paperwork dissolving his parental rights. I almost had a breakdown dealing with his bullshit and a newborn baby. To add salt to the wound, his ignorant ass wife constantly called me. That was one of the lowest points of my life. If it hadn’t been for Yara and Sam lifting me up mentally and spiritually, they would have broken my spirit.

It took so much praying and fasting to deal with the fact that Steven had used me.

Once I was delivered from ignorance, I promised I would never place myself in that type of situation again. The next man I fell for was going to have a private investigator researching his ass. I might even turn into Inspector Gadget and follow him myself.

I had been single since then. Yes, I got dick, but I did what a lot of men did. I received my fix and moved the hell on. Dating Steven was such a teachable moment for me. No man was taking ownership of my heart again. Steven really made me look at every man suspiciously. It scared me the way he was able to pull the wool over my eyes. I knew people claimed women saw red flags, but my ass must have been color blind because I was oblivious when it came to him.

Now, here was Dimitri. I didn't even want to think about the man who was currently ruining all my panties and running through my dreams. He had slowly restored my faith in men even if I was scared to let him in.

With every moment he spent with me and Addy, he was gradually destroying the defenses I had built around my heart. His love for my daughter was evident, and it endeared him to me more than anything else could in this world.

Addy was my life, and anyone who loved her the way Dimitri did, made it hard to resist.

Thinking about him made me realize this idiot was still standing in front of me as if I had any emotions left to give him.

It was laughable. His dick was good but not that damn good. I had run into better since we had broken up.

Finally, I broke eye contact with him. I didn't know why he was even here. There was nothing for us to discuss. Those papers he and his wife sent me gave me the ability to distance myself from him and her. It was a clean break. I didn't have to worry about seeing him. I never had to worry about him trying to worm his way into my panties. She kept a

tight grip on him because he never crawled back my way again.

“Why are you here?” I asked, trying to hold onto my poise. I said a quick prayer, hoping he wasn’t about to make me use any of the self-defense moves I had learned. Because Lord knew, I would try to break his fucking back if he came at me wrong.

“I wanted to talk to you,” he told me with a smile on his face.

I chuckled. He couldn’t be this stupid. There was no way he thought this through. Nothing about this was cute or right.

“About?” I asked curiously. I wasn’t entertaining him, but I was certainly interested in what he thought we could possibly have to talk about.

If he told me he wanted to get back with me, I was going to throat punch his ass. I was willing to fuck a gremlin before he ever smelled my pussy again.

“Why did you have to say it like that?” he asked, walking closer to me.

I took a few steps back away from him. There was no need for him to be close to me.

He took another step, but I held up my hand to stop him from getting closer to me.

Now, I was really frowning at his ass. He was really trying it. I shouldn’t care, but I was nervous for him. First, I was aware that at this moment Dimitri knew he was here.

His camera happy cousin, Maxim, had cameras everywhere around the studio and on the streets. I wouldn’t be surprised if he knew Steven was coming before he even arrived.

If Steven knew what was good for him, he would get the hell on before Dimitri arrived. The men in the Vasiliev family had no problems killing, maiming, or injuring anyone who they deemed a problem.

Steven was certainly presenting himself as a future thorn in my side.

“Look, I don’t have time to play games with you. We are not friends. You don’t have a reason to be here.” I was no longer concerned about why he was here. He wasn’t getting whatever he thought he wanted from me.

I had no fucks to give as soon as his wife stepped into the picture. They could play in traffic and kiss my ass. He disowned my baby to keep her happy. Therefore, they could stay happy together and leave me and my child out of it.

“I’m sorry. I know you have heard me say this before, but I really am. I should have chosen you. From the moment I saw you, I knew you were the woman for me. My wife and I really were going through problems. Neither one of us were happy with each other. I wasn’t lying to you. Everything I felt for you was real. I know everything you felt for me was real.”

I frowned at his statement. What did he mean by *he should have chosen me*? I was no longer an option as soon as I realized he was married. I withdrew myself from the equation.

“I was going to leave her until she told me she was pregnant. I think she set me up so that I would stay.”

*How does a woman set her husband up? I guess I was simply boo boo the fool to him.*

He gave me a sorrowful expression, which didn’t move me one way or another. His ability to lie about his whole life for years made me cognizant of the fact he was most likely a pathological liar.

“Ayanna, I stayed with her because she pregnant. What kind of man would I have been to walk away from my pregnant wife?”

*A piece of shit, and the same type of man who cheated on his wife and signed over his parental rights.*

“I was going to leave again, but I didn’t want to leave my newborn son. I felt as if I needed to stay with her to work on our marriage and to be there for my son. It took me a month to realize I didn’t want to be with her. I really wanted to be

with you. I packed my shit up to leave, but she told me she would take everything I had if I walked away from her. I don't know. I was scared. I didn't want to start over with nothing, so I stayed."

I silently listened to everything he had to say without interrupting him. I wanted him to get it all off his chest before I sent him on his way. There was nothing he could say to justify lying to me for two years.

"It was stupid to stay with her knowing I wanted you, but I promise you that I have thought of you every single day. I have missed you every day I haven't been in your presence. I know it's been years, and you have every right to be angry with me. What I did to you was wrong. I get it, but I love you. I loved you then, and I love you now. If you give me a chance, I swear I'll prove to you that I can be a better a man. A man you can trust and depend on. It's not a day that goes by I wish I had fought for you. I hate how we ended. It kills me that you had to find out I was married that way. You are a good woman and deserved so much better than what I gave you."

With every word he spoke, my disgust built for him. Not one time did he mention our daughter.

"And the baby I was pregnant with?" I asked him because I refused to call her *our* child. He didn't deserve to wear the title he so carelessly threw away.

Once again, he tried to appear contrite. I wasn't buying it. I prompted him to ask about Addy. He would have never brought her up on his own. That was obvious to see.

"I should have never given up my parental rights. I want to be in my daughter's life. I wasn't sure how Stephanie would act if I had tried to bring her around. Then, you started ignoring me, so I thought it was best to simply walk away," he told me, trying to sound sincere.

I sucked my teeth in response. Out of all the stupid shit that spewed from his mouth today, this was probably the worst. Nothing should have prevented him from being involved in his daughter's life. Whatever he was saying was an excuse to justify walking away from his child.

Before I could respond, I sensed his presence as usual. It had become my new superpower. I could pinpoint him in any room because his scent entered the room before I ever saw him.

My heart thumped hard against my chest. Over the past few months, it had become difficult to resist his allure. Even now, I wanted to climb all six feet three inches of him.

Ignoring Steven, I watched Dimitri as he ambled into the room.

The look on his face was serene. If I didn't know him so well, I wouldn't suspect how pissed he was. He was always calm no matter the situation. He wasn't the raging angry type, which made him dangerous. This made people underestimate how vicious he could really be. Steven's dumb ass would never anticipate Dimitri would snatch his whole face off.

The look in his eyes warned me not to show Steven any emotions. Dimitri held my gaze unflinchingly. I wanted to smile because he didn't have to worry about that. Steven wasn't getting shit from me but attitude and disgust.

Dimitri's lightly tanned skin glowed as he approached us. His beard was low-cut and made me think of all the ways I could moisture it. Namely, by setting my pussy directly on his face and wetting it up with my essence.

Dimitri stood out amongst every man in the room for me, including his brothers and cousins.

Sighing, I watched as his eyes finally left mine and turned to Steven. Steven didn't even know what he had gotten himself into by approaching me.

I was a mama bear about Addy. I would beat any ass, take any charge, and lay down my life for her. Where Steven had messed up was that Addy had a father figure who wouldn't lose one lick of sleep when he slowly tortured him for daring to think he could even come back into her life. If he knew what was best for him, he would make himself scarce.

# Steven

I know I fucked up. Matter of fact, as soon as I saw Ayanna in the mall while I sat with my wife and son eating lunch, I knew it was over. It still didn't stop me from going to her house to try and salvage our relationship.

I went to her house knowing she would never trust me again. She didn't understand how I felt about her. She had me wanting to do like the man on *Harlem Night*. I wanted to call Stephanie and tell her I was never coming home, but I couldn't.

I didn't lie when I told her my wife threatened to take me for everything that I was worth. I started dating Stephanie when we were in high school. She was the first woman I ever had sex with. We dated all through college. I cheated on her during college, but there was no woman I was ever willing to leave her for. I was committed to her. It was true when men said *you have my heart; she just gets dick*.

Those were my feelings every single time I cheated on Stephanie. I genuinely loved her, but we had been together so long our marriage became stale. I was content cheating with various strippers. They never made me want to leave my wife. They never penetrated the walls around my heart until I met Ayanna.

Ayanna was and still is a beautiful woman. Her body drew me in before anything. I noticed her titties, ass, and thighs before her face because my wife was beautiful too. She enthralled me from the moment she stepped on the stage. She put every stripper to shame when she sensually moved her body through her song. After her set, I knew I was going to fuck her. It was all that was on my mind, but she screwed it all up from our first conversation. She made me want to make her mine.

Ayanna was the innocent stripper. I may have only gone to the exotic club once where she danced at, but my homeboys went often. They watched her frequently for me. They even tried to hit on her to see if she would bite. She



never would, so I knew I couldn't use the same tired lies on her because she wasn't interested in my money. I couldn't buy sex from her. Therefore, I went another route to convince her to be with me.

When I approached her at the mall, my intentions were to wine and dine her. Then, fuck her and leave her like I had done all the women before her. However, Ayanna proved to be so much more than just a stripper. She had hopes, goals, and aspirations. She was loyal as hell to her friends. She had a caring heart. She was a good girl, who was using stripping as a means to an end.

I fell in love with her. I told her another truth when I told her I was going to leave my wife for her. I was willing to give Stephanie half and rebuild with Ayanna, but Stephanie deliberately got pregnant. She knew our marriage was on its last leg. She trapped me with a baby to make me stay. I should have left. I didn't. I wanted my child raised in a two-parent household.

My mother was a single parent who worked two jobs to take care of me and my siblings. I didn't want my child to go through that. For about half a minute, I contemplated leaving Ayanna alone and focusing on my pregnant wife and child.

It took me one day of digging into Ayanna's pussy to realize I couldn't let her go. The thought of any other man having her made me sick to my stomach.

Getting her pregnant was my last-ditch effort to tie her to me. Deep inside, I knew it wasn't going to work. I tried it anyway because I was desperate. My other plan was to try to keep her from finding out about my wife and son.

We stayed far enough away from each other that we should have never run into each other. Ayanna was a homebody, and so was Stephanie. It was the devil the way we all collided in the mall.

I almost shit two bricks when her loudmouth ass friend Sam called my name. I was like one of those cartoon characters on television. Sweat rushed down my back, my

heart beat like a fucking drum, and I was stuttering like a damn fool.

The look on her face told me everything I needed to know. There was no going back. I should have known what I was doing wasn't going to last forever. There was no way I could have continued to take care of two houses, but I was willing to try because I didn't want to really lose either one of them. They both played a major part in my existence. If I had to choose, I wish Stephanie had walked away instead of Ayanna, but Stephanie didn't have shit. She depended on me for everything. I knew I could soothe her over with a few words and some dick. I had done it so many times in the past. The routine of fuck and forgive were ingrained in her psyche. We were a toxic married couple.

She loved the life we lived. She enjoyed vacations, money, cars, clothes, and all of the benefits of being with someone of my status. She loved the appearance of a happy marriage instead of a real happy marriage.

Ayanna, on the other hand, would not forgive easily. I hated I didn't snatch Stephanie's ignorant ass up before she started spilling all my secrets. Ayanna didn't need to know I had been involved with other strippers. She made Ayanna believe she was like every other stripper I fucked when it was the furthest thing from the truth.

She owned my damn heart and soul. At that time, I should have left Stephanie. Instead, I snatched Stephanie up and let her curse me out the entire way home.

I ignored every word she said to me as I contemplated what I needed to say to Ayanna to make things right between us. Stephanie wasn't leaving, so I didn't even know why she was acting such a fool. By the time we arrived home, she had calmed down. I apologized as usual and assured her I would never do it again. Gave her some *I'm so sorry dick*, and I was on my way. She didn't argue because she knew where I was going. We had played this game frequently. She made me promise not to leave her. Of course, I did. I would have committed to anything to leave the damn house.

The whole way I drove to Ayanna's house I contemplated what I could say to her. Everything I came up with felt inauthentic. How could I justify lying to her for two years? I couldn't admit to asking her to have my baby to keep her near me. All of it sounded selfish. It was unforgivable, but I couldn't imagine letting another man have her.

Walking into the condo I bought her was the hardest thing I ever had to do. Watching tears drop from her eyes broke my soul. I loved her. Truthfully, I was in love with her. She was my future, and I let her get away for a woman I was tired of entertaining.

There were so many ways I could have handled our relationship. I could have walked away from my wife. I could have left Stephanie alone when I found out Ayanna was wifey material. Regardless of what men said, they knew wifey material when they met her.

When she slept with me after she found out about my wife, I really thought she was going to forgive me. Her pussy was just as wet and gushy as it had always been. You couldn't tell me I wasn't putting down good dick to save my relationship. After she took my soul through my nut, she literally kissed me bye and sent my black ass on.

She made me act like every other bitter man who couldn't have his way. I pulled back my finances. I didn't think it would work, but I tried anyway. I stopped giving her money or doing anything for her. She didn't have a job, so she had been depending on me the whole pregnancy. However, she never broke. Through the rest of her pregnancy, she remained strong. No matter what I did to break her, she didn't bend. She didn't even break when I refused to come to the hospital when she was delivering. She rose above my bullshit then too.

She still didn't block my number. I really thought I had a chance with her when she sent me pictures of our daughter. I wasn't moved by those pictures. If I couldn't have Ayanna, I didn't want the baby. Therefore, I was all aboard when Stephanie suggested I sever my parental rights. I thought she would call me crying and begging me to stay in her life even if it was only for our child.

I waited daily to hear from her regarding the paperwork. I knew Ayanna. She wanted me to be there for our child. She often discussed how she was affected by her father not being in her life. She didn't want her child raised without a father.

She never did contact me after those papers. It made things worse. She blocked my number after the parental right fiasco, and I never heard from her again. To say I was fucked up was an understatement. Ultimately, I had to move on with my life, with Stephanie, and I hated it. I felt like leaving Stephanie every day because I blamed her for causing such a damn ass scene at the mall.

Then, one day, Ayanna crossed my path again. She didn't see me, but I saw her. She was still beautiful. Her body was a work of art, and I hated I couldn't touch her canvas anymore. When I saw her, it was as if I had to keep seeing her.

I started following her occasionally. I watched her to see who she was with and what she was doing. She never seemed attached to anyone, which made me believe she was still attached to me mentally. It made me feel good. Truthfully, I was content knowing she was alone. For whatever reason, it allowed me to leave her alone without interference.

Her being alone kept me from checking up on her as often as I should. But then suddenly, one day everything changed.

There was some man sniffing around the woman I wanted to be my forever. I convinced myself if I gave her a little time she would come around and forgive me. All she had to do was remain single, yet here was some man ruining my future.

I observed his interactions with her for months. The first time I registered him was over a year ago. One day I was driving by her house and noticed him helping her place clothing in her car. I didn't think anything about it, but I did follow them to some big ass compound. I drove right past it, so they wouldn't notice me following them.

Over the past year, I saw him with her more and more. I noticed the look in his eyes when he gazed at her. I knew what the look symbolized because I still had the look in my eyes. Quite frankly, I didn't think I would ever lose it. She was the one who got away.

Never had there been a man she was interested in since we broke up. I knew because I was obsessed with everything Ayanna.

It was obvious by the look in her eyes that she was in love with him. It made me feel as though I was breaking every time I observed them together.

Some Russian bastard was getting everything I ever wanted. I was 6 ft, and he was taller than me. I stayed in the gym, but he looked like a smaller version of the guy who played Ivan Drago in the movie *Rocky IV* except he was Russian for real and not Swedish.

I didn't know where she found his ass at, but I wished she would send him back. I knew his name was Dimitri Vasiliev. I made it my mission to learn information about him and his family. There was very little to find. He was squeaky clean. He wasn't a cheater, so I couldn't even use it to my advantage because I would have sent her pictures and evidence to run him away.

I made a decent salary, but his family was rolling in the dough. I couldn't even pretend to compete. Thank goodness Ayanna wasn't the type of person who was interested in a man for his money.

If I could kill him and get away with it, I would.

He didn't have a right to touch her. She was connected to me. I ensured that by giving her a baby. It didn't matter that I wasn't involved in her life. I left part of me inside her. She couldn't get rid of me. I was irreplaceable.

He was an asshole. Every time I observed them, her response to his touch pissed me off. She should only respond to me. I poured out my heart to her a few minutes ago, and she acted as if she didn't give a damn.

I was finally ready to leave Stephanie. I wanted to be with Ayanna, but she was standing in front of me with disgust on her face.

After having our son, Stephanie and I realized we really didn't want to be parents. We were both busy. I worked long hours, and she had whatever she was into daily. However, I was willing to be involved in my daughter's life if Ayanna took me back.

I was grasping at straws. "I want to be in my daughter's life," I blurted, hoping it would make her look at me differently.

While I was speaking, his ass walked through the door. Immediately, he had all her attention, leaving me glaring at her as if I wasn't a fucking catch. Who in the fuck did he even think he was?

# Dimitri

Immediately stepping into the room, my eyes planted on Ayanna. She had all my attention, time, and energy. Her beautiful brown skin was flushed from finishing a dance class. Her solemn brown eyes stared back at me intently. Her high cheek bones made her face stand out. Her lips were so full and plump, and I couldn't wait to taste them for myself.

The idea of wrapping my hand around the long, straight ponytail and fucking her from the back was one of my nightly dreams.

She was considered tall for a woman. However, she was mostly legs, and what beautiful legs they were. They were strong and fit, contesting to the fact she had danced her whole adult life. Her body was a damn work of art. I admired every curve of her body.

There wasn't an outfit she could wear where it didn't outline the definition of her body. I loved looking at her even if it was only on one of the videos I had attached to my phone.

Her ass was tight and fit. The idea of gripping her ass as I plunged into her stayed prevalent in my brain. I couldn't wait to have her. Call her mine.

Whenever she was around, there was this blaze burning between us, which was hard for me to ignore. She was fighting against it. She was literally running scared. Every time I tried to talk to her, she resisted all my overtures even though I knew she wanted me as much as I wanted her. I understood why. Men like the ones in my family would always be connected to danger. It didn't matter if we went searching for it or not. It would find us, and anyone connected to us would be part of the fray.

It was one of the reasons we trained the women in our families so hard. They learned self-defense, how to fight with knives, and how to shoot guns. Even Addy was learning how to fight with weapons, and she was only eight. We did everything in our power to ensure their safety after the death of Maxim's first wife.

The women in our family had security, and Maxim had cameras monitoring their locations. It was all part of the precautions we took to ensure their safety. They had jewelry that could always pinpoint their locations.

Some would call the men in my family possessive, but when you have lived the lives that we have lived, you learn to protect what belongs to you.

I waited patiently for her to be mine. While waiting, I made sure I demonstrated how she could trust me by keeping my word to her and Addy. If I said I was going to do it, I did.

Addy and Ayanna belonged to me, and I would do anything to ensure they were always safe. When Addy was kidnapped, it scared the hell out of me. I feared what would happen to Ayanna if we couldn't get her back.

Both Addy and Ayanna had slowly recovered from the kidnapping. It took Addy months to be able to sleep in her room. She didn't feel safe unless I was near her, so I moved in with Sacha and Yara to be close to them. Ayanna was initially against it, but Addy wouldn't rest without me. So, she eventually had to put her feelings aside and allow me to help Addy through her mental recovery.

In the beginning, Ayanna was hesitant about me being around Addy so frequently. I knew it had everything to do with Addy's father. He was the reason she was so difficult with me. I knew I was going to have to force her to accept me, and everything I offered.

When I first met Ayanna, it didn't take long for me to realize Addy's father was never around. Once Maxim looked up his information, I understood why. He was married and didn't want anything to do with his child. Ayanna never talked about him disappearing from Addy's life, but any woman would be devastated if a man she loved refused to be in their child's life.

Once she accepted that I wasn't going anywhere, I attended Addy's therapy with them. They both dealt with PTSD.



I wanted to snatch them up and take them to my house. Instead, I slept in one of Sacha's guest rooms and stayed there every night until Addy felt comfortable sleeping alone again.

Now, I made sure they were both well taken care of even if they weren't aware.

Still intently staring at Ayanna, I watched her body language. It was easy to perceive the irritation and annoyance on her face.

I recognized everything about Ayanna. I could identify when she was aggravated with someone because the slight curling of her bottom lip was evident, and her eyes would crinkle slightly around the edges.

Her energy screamed get the fuck out my face. She was not happy Steven had shown up unexpectedly.

I nodded my head. My lady wasn't falling victim to his lies and games. I knew some women would let a man control their hearts for years even when they didn't deserve their love or loyalty. I would have been pissed if she had been upset because he was in her presence.

He should no longer have any ties on her heart. He wasn't shit, and the fact he had stayed away from her and Addy for so many years proved it.

Finally putting my eyes on him, I was aggravated. He was the reason Ayanna gave me a hard time. He was the one who ruined her faith and trust in men. I was paying the price for his ignorance.

It was easy to detect the possession in his eyes as he stared longingly at her. To *him*, he still owned her heart and mind because they shared a child.

Making my way toward my woman, I smirked in his face. I listened as he stated how he wanted to see his daughter. It was laughable because his actions didn't support his statement.

Maxim had informed me of his location as soon as Steven made it near Ayanna. I *allowed* him to talk to Ayanna. Get his feelings off his chest. He didn't realize it, but I kept

track of him just as much as I would any other enemy. It was my job to be aware of everything pertaining to Ayanna. I wasn't doing my job as her protector if I didn't always know his whereabouts.

I knew he kept track of Ayanna. He wasn't interested in Addy.

I understood men like him. He didn't want his daughter, but it wasn't beneath him to use her as leverage to convince Ayanna he would be a good man.

It wasn't going to happen, but I had to give him some credit for trying the shit anyway.

"What daughter?" I asked, standing behind Ayanna and wrapping my arms loosely around her waist. Immediately, I felt her breath hitch from my nearness. I made sure to press my erection into her body. It was almost painful because I've been waiting a year and half to sleep with her. At this moment, my cock was ready to burst through my pants and imprint itself inside her body.

She needed to know that whenever I was near her, she had me ready to bend her over. When I finally got Ayanna in my bed, she was going to pay for all her resistance.

I wanted to be sensitive to her feelings regarding the danger in my life, but when you found your soul, there was no way you would ever let them get away.

Steven glanced at my arms holding Ayanna tight. I refused to allow any space between us.

His jaw tensed watching our interaction. His ire was unmistakable. If he knew how much I wanted to fuck Ayanna, he would *try* to kill me before I killed him.

Reaching down, I inhaled her vanilla scent, ignoring his presence. It didn't matter what she wore, she smelled appealing. I allowed her sweet scent to envelop me and keep me grounded so that I wouldn't take out my gun and kill Steven. Now wasn't the time or the place, but it was coming. Steven wouldn't have it any other way, especially since he realized she had moved on.

I licked the pulse point in her neck before giving Steven my attention.

Steven was an established man. He was an architect and made a few million a year. It was an impressive salary. I couldn't knock him for that. What I was knocking him for was being an asshole. He cheated on his wife with Ayanna and ended up losing her through his own negligence. I couldn't blame him for wanting to hold onto her. She was beautiful, caring, sexy, and nurturing. Simply put, she was everything you wanted in a woman. Ayanna was an independent woman. Even with all my assets, she never asked me for one thing. I was sure she understood I would give her the world if she asked for it, yet she never asked me for anything. I was willingly giving her my heart. She didn't understand the significance because I had never allowed anyone else this opportunity to get close to me.

If it had been me, I would have divorced my bitch of a wife and chose Ayanna. But every man wasn't strong enough to make the hard decisions. I didn't have a problem making the tough choices. Her ass would have been gone.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked, swelling his chest. He was trying to impress Ayanna, but he would soon learn he had damaged that bridge beyond repair. I had stepped in and taken his place both in Ayanna and Addy's lives. There was no place for him anymore. Besides, he signed his parental rights over before Addy took her first breath. Weak shit. What man allowed a woman to dictate whether he took care of his child? I wouldn't have cared if I had cheated on her or not. My child would have still been a part of my life. She could have left if that was what the fuck she wanted to do, but my child would have been off limits.

"This conversation is between me and my baby mother," he responded with a smirk on his face.

Once again, I admired his bravado. If I had been a lesser man, I would acknowledge him.

"I'm...", Ayanna started to say, but I gripped her waist, indicating she shouldn't say anything else to him.

Reluctantly easing from her body, I withdrew one of my blades from my jacket pocket. It was one of the special made ones that Viktor, Sacha's bodyguard, made for the family to always keep on their body. We understood guns weren't feasible in certain situations. Today was one of those situations.

I walked around Ayanna and pressed the tip against his jugular. It was a serrated thick blade. The razor-sharp metal gleamed in the bright light of the dance studio.

I wasn't one for a bunch of conversation, especially by a man who had walked away from his child.

His eyes ballooned in shock. He stared at the deadly blade.

"I don't give a fuck who you thought you were. Ayanna doesn't belong to you. She never belonged to you," I told him calmly.

I pressed my knife further into his skin, piercing it and drawing blood. I allowed a few of the red drops to land on his shirt before I continued my conversation.

Men like Steven needed time to allow their brain to catch up with their actions. I wanted him to thoughtfully think of the consequences of his actions if he ever came around my family again because they were mine.

"Addy is my daughter and isn't shit here for you. This is my first and last warning. The next time I won't say one word. I'll kill you in your sleep and place your head by your bitch of wife's pillow."

Yes, I knew everything about his wife too. I knew she hated Ayanna to this very day. She blamed Ayanna for all the issues in her marriage, instead of the man standing in front of me.

I pressed my knife further in his throat and watched as more blood trickled from his throat. I wanted him to understand I wasn't fucking around with him.

He held his hands up in surrender. "I don't want any problems. I just wanted to see," he started to say, but I pressed

my knife further in his throat causing blood to rush from the wound. He was going to need stitches.

If he continued to talk, I was going to slice his throat. Then, no words would be able to leave his mouth.

Beside me, Ayanna hadn't made one sound. She knew me. I would keep my word if he ever came around again.

I was a hair's breath away from ramming my blade through his neck.

Her long, elegant fingers wrapped around the hilt of my knife.

She tried to push against my chest, so I would retract my blade. I resisted. She controlled me when it came to a lot of things, but her safety wasn't one of them.

Heat radiated off me. My muscles tensed as it took everything in me not to kill him in front of her. He was prey, and I was doing what every predator wanted to do.

Kill and eliminate the opposition.

Balling up her face, she told him, "Steven, leave. There's nothing here for you. You signed your parental rights over, so there is nothing left to say. Go enjoy your life. Tell your wife hello."

"Dimitri," Ayanna called.

"Yes, love," I responded.

She smiled slightly. "Let him go. He promises not to come around again. Steven knows he fucked up his chances to ever be with me or Addy. He will not come around again. Will you, Steven?" she asked with her lip curled in disgust.

He frowned at her question.

I studied him intently.

Death was all I saw in his future. He wanted to die. His desire to be with Ayanna was going to cost him his life.

"Okay," he whispered, backing away from my blade.

He held his neck. I stood passively, watching him back away. The look in his eyes told me everything I needed to know. Steven was a dead man walking.

I would be visiting him sooner than he thought.

Once he made it to the door, he turned to walk away. I didn't need to watch him. Maxim had a tracker on Steven and his wife's car, cameras in their house, and kept track of their credit cards.

I knew exactly how to find him when I was ready.

"Did Maxim tell you he was here?" Ayanna asked, eyeing me up and down.

I nodded my head. Ayanna didn't know how sexy she was to me. The first time I walked into Yara's office and saw her I knew she would be mine.

She had an air about her, which was irresistible to a man like me. She was strong. She took care of her daughter and was doing a wonderful job of it too. Watching her be a mother to Addy made me want to make her a mother of all my children.

I pulled her into my body. "I told you last month at Maxim's wedding I was done waiting."

She glanced back at me. I wanted to kiss her lips.

"Dimitri," she whined. "I'm scared."

"You know me. You know my family. When we find the right one, we don't step outside of our relationships. If I'm with you, there is no one else."

I deliberately misinterpreted what she was really scared about. I chose to address the easiest conflict in any relationship we would have, trust.

I didn't have a problem with commitment. At twenty-eight, I had reached a point in my life when I was ready to settle down.

Sacha getting married and having a family showed us that it was something we all could do. Hell, Maxim was a

married father of two sons now.

I wanted that for myself. I wanted to be a father to Addy, and a husband to Ayanna. If she needed me to marry her tomorrow, I would do it without any questions.

“Dimitri, you know how much Addy loves you. What if we don’t last?”

“What if we do?” I asked her.

I wasn’t scared to love Ayanna. Loving her was the easiest part of it all. It fascinated me to know how Steven let such a beautiful, successful, loving woman get away. She was everything I envisioned my future wife would look like.

If I were a weaker man, I would be intimidated by her constant resistance to being with me. I wasn’t. She had her reasons, and I respected them. She had a daughter to raise and keep safe. She couldn’t afford to make mistakes where her daughter was concerned.

She turned in my arms, looking into my eyes as if she could determine my truth. She didn’t have to do that. She should just take my word. My word meant everything to me. It was all a man had at the end of the day.

She sighed. My heart beat in my chest erratically, waiting for her to say the words. I needed her to say the words I had been waiting a long time to hear. I would be a liar if I said waiting on her response didn’t scare me. She had many reasons to tell me no, but I didn’t want her to. Something inside of me craved this woman and knew she was meant to be mine. The time was now.

She blew out a breath. “Your life is dangerous.”

“Yara’s life was dangerous, yet I didn’t see you distancing yourself from her.”

She frowned at my statement. It was true. The only reason my brother Sacha met her friend was because she needed him to protect her from an ex-boyfriend. He tried to kill Yara on several occasions. She stayed loyal to her friend. I wanted the same commitment.

“That’s different, Dimitri.”

My cock jerked at her calling my name. I wondered how it would sound when I eventually had her in my bed.

I raised my eyebrow at her statement. It was the same. She was living in denial.

“How?” I asked, wanting to hear her explanation.

She sucked her teeth adorably. I stumped her with my statement, and she didn’t have a comeback to refute me.

“I plan on keeping you and Addy safe the same way they keep Yara and Lauren safe.”

“They are married to them. It’s still different,” she replied, trying to be contrary. She ran her hands frustratingly through her ponytail.

My eyes held hers. “Do you want me to marry you?”

Her eyes widened. “What! No! I didn’t mean it like that,” she replied, staring at me as if I were crazy.

I held her chin up, so she could look directly at me. “I want to marry you. If you weren’t so difficult, we could have been married by now,” I told her honestly.

She was impeding our progress. I wanted a future with her. She had to let go and let me.

She bit her bottom lip as if being with me was a hard decision. She knew she wanted me. I caught Ayanna numerous times eyeing me like a new pair of heels she wanted to purchase. Yes, Ayanna had a fetish for shoes. Shoes of any kinds from heels to tennis shoes.

“Give us a try and let’s see what happens. Say the word, beautiful,” I encouraged her, anticipating being able to call her mine.

She grinned, making my heart settle inside my chest.

Finally, dammit. This woman had control over me that I never wanted her to know she had. If so, she would run me like a well-oiled machine.



Her eyes met mine again. “Okay, Dimitri. I’ll give us a try, but you better keep me and Addy safe,” she answered with her hands on her hips.

I pulled her body into mine as I slid my hands down her back and onto her ass. “With my life. No questions asked.”

I kissed the side of her neck. The contact sending erotic tendrils down my spine.

Her breath quickened as I tasted her delicate skin. When I lifted her up by her ass, she wrapped her toned legs around my waist.

I supported her body easily. This was the intimacy I had been waiting years to enact.

“Dimitri,” Addy yelled, causing Ayanna to scramble from my arms and damn near break her tailbone trying to unwrap her legs from my waist.

I had to stop myself from chuckling at her reaction from Addy catching us in a compromising situation. I planned on being affectionate with Ayanna. Addy would eventually see numerous intimate moments between Ayanna and me.

# Ayanna

Addy stopped in her tracks, glancing from me to Dimitri. A big smile was spread across her face.

*I'm sorry* Yara mouthed, holding her daughter Natasha's hand.

"Does that mean you're my mother's boyfriend?" Addy asked, smiling widely. Every one of her thirty-two teeth were showing.

"Yes," Dimitri answered before I could.

I waited breathlessly for her response. I knew Addy adored Dimitri, but I was still worried how she would respond.

I wasn't one of those mothers who brought men around their children. Men knew of Addy, but they never met her.

She was like a ghost when it came to the men I dated. However, Dimitri and I were different. She has been knowing Dimitri for almost two years. He became a hero in her eyes when he saved her after she was kidnapped.

For the longest time, he was the only person who made her feel safe. He practically moved into Sacha's and Yara's house since that was where we stayed when Anton was trying to kill Maxim and Lauren.

Matter of fact, we were still in their house because quite frankly I never felt comfortable enough to return to my condo with enemies popping out at us like jack-in-the-boxes. All of our clothes and personal items were at their place. Sacha assured me there was more than enough space for all of us, and that he enjoyed having Addy around.

Addy clapped her hands in excitement, bringing me back to the conversation. "Yes, I prayed that you would become mommy's boyfriend. Then, you can marry her and become my daddy."

My eyes widen in surprise at her statement. She never told me she wanted me to be with Dimitri.

"I've already asked to marry your mother," he replied.

“You did?” she asked, glancing between us again with rapt attention. “What did she say?” she asked glancing down at my hand.

“Wait. Where’s her ring? I thought you were supposed to give her a ring when you proposed,” she asked curiously.

I chuckled. My baby understood the engagement assignment.

“Did he even get on his knee, mommy?” She placed her hand on her hips, causing me to smile at her antics.

I shook my head. “No, he didn’t give me a ring or get on his knee.”

“Dimitri,” she whined. “You didn’t do it right. Mommy, you said no, right?”

A smile quirked my lips. “I said no,” I confirmed for her.

“You can still be her boyfriend, but next time when you ask to marry her, you have to do it correctly. Ask Uncle Sacha. He’ll help you. That’s how he married Auntie Yara,” she told Dimitri, giving him the best advice.

I felt the same way. When he threw out, *did I want to get married*, I wanted to tell him yes. I did want to get married, but not enough to not have all the bells and whistles accompanying a future proposal.

He stared at me intently. “I’ll remember your advice for the next time I ask your mother.”

His words warmed me because he was confirming for me there was going to be a next time.

Addy smiled proudly. “Don’t worry, mommy. He’s going to be better prepared next time, so you can say yes.”

The look in his eyes gave me goosebumps. Steven made me feel this way in the beginning. I never thought I would feel butterflies in my stomach again.

Dimitri kissed the side of my head. “Be ready to say yes the next time I ask you.” My clit thumped at his words. “I

have to go, but I'll see you tonight at the closing of the club."

I nodded my head in response, resisting the urge to pull him by his shirt and drag him to me.

"I'll take Addy with me. She still has to complete her training tonight."

"Okay. Addy, I'll see you tonight," I told her, kissing her on the forehead.

"Okay, mommy. I can't wait to do my training. I've been working out by myself."

"Ad, I go," Natasha asked in her baby voice. She was so cute, looking like her daddy with her silky hair and olive skin.

"Aunty Yara, can she come with me?" Addy asked.

"Puwlese," Natasha begged, looking at her mother with beautiful blue eyes. She was going to be a little heartbreaker when she was older.

"Are you sure Addy? You said you were going to train," Yara reminded her.

"She's fine. I'm sure one of my uncles will watch her until I'm finished, or she can play on her mat."

"Okay. Natasha, give mommy a hug and kiss." Yara bent down and Yara placed kisses all over her face.

When she was done, she reached for Addy's hand. "Ready."

Me and Yara watched as they walked excitedly out of the dance studio followed by Dimitri.

I remembered the first time Addy begged me to allow her to train with Dimitri, his brothers, and his cousins. I was nervous as hell watching my baby train with adult men.

I anxiously sat and nibbled my lip the entire time they tossed my baby girl around on a mat. So many times, I wanted to intercede and prevent them from being too rough with her, but I knew it was for her own good.

The lives we lived with this family was dangerous. Hell, the world we lived in was dangerous. I didn't delude myself into thinking the only danger Addy could incur was through the Vasiliev Family. Yara's situation had proven that danger could come from any direction. Therefore, her being able to protect herself was necessary.

A trigger for me in the beginning was allowing Addy to be alone with any of the men. Did I think any of them would hurt her, or do something to her? No, but a mother could never be too sure.

I grew up in a family who ignored certain situations that was staring them right in their faces. Everyone knew Uncle Tim was a pedophile. In my family, we didn't call them pedophiles. We simply said he liked to touch little girls. No one ever stopped him from coming around or touching little girls. He was allowed to attend family reunions and be around family as if he wasn't a danger to all the girls that were around.

The only thing they ever did was warn us to never be alone with him. At first, I didn't understand. Uncle Tim was funny and gave all the children in the family dollars so that we could go to the corner store and purchase us some snacks.

There would always be some aunt who would tell him to get away from us, but he would eventually find his way back to us.

I was fine with Uncle Tim until he cornered me in a bedroom when I ran inside the house to change out of my church dress into my play clothes, so we could play outside. My mom would have had a fit if I had messed up my church clothes.

Uncle Tim was in the house. He didn't rape me, but he scared the shit out of me by touching me inappropriately. His fingers brushed across my young body. He touched my budding breast, which were covered by my brand-new training bra.

The whole time he touched me he had an innocent look on his face as if what he was doing was appropriate. It was

uncomfortable and unpleasant as he brushed his hand against my private area.

I was frightened to move the whole time he touched me. I was relieved when my big cousin, Cam, came into the room and cursed him out.

He pretended like he wasn't doing anything, but she knew better. She snatched me out of the room, and I never looked at Uncle Tim the same.

I even told my mom what happened, but her only concern was whether he had taken my innocence. Since he hadn't, her advice to me was to stay away from him.

No one called the police. No one stopped him from coming around. Through the years, I heard whispering regarding the fact he wasn't the only uncle in the family who touched their female relatives. Once I graduated high school, I distanced myself from my family.

My mother and I had a fractured relationship. I allowed her to talk to Addy, but Addy did not go to my mom's house alone. Uncle Tim was still around terrorizing the next generation.

So, to be around a family that consisted of nothing but men was a lot for me. I had to slowly gain trust in them. Maxim immediately sensed my hesitancy. He provided me access to cameras wherever Addy was. I could peep in to watch her training whenever I wasn't around.

He gave Addy a modified watch, which allowed me visually to see her and track her movements. I appreciated everything he did to help me find comfort in her being with them.

Honestly, all the men did a wonderful job of keeping Addy safe and allowing me to be the protective mother I needed to be.

"So, you and Dimitri?" Yara asked with a smug smile on her face.

"I don't want to hear it," I told her gathering up my things, so we could leave and prepare for tonight.

She shrugged her shoulders innocently. “I mean. We both saw this happening. I give you an A for effort though. You fought this attraction as hard as you could. Everyone knew you were going to lose, but it was cute watching you fight the good fight.”

“Girl, hush and wipe down the poles with Lysol wipes, so we can prepare for our last and final show at the club.”

“Oh my gosh, don’t make me cry. I’m getting emotional just thinking about it,” Yara sighed, leaning against one of the poles.

“I know. You remember when we first started dancing together. Girl, we gave them hell every night before Roshaun and Steven.” I beamed while thinking about the early days of our career before men interrupted our journey.

In the beginning, I was scared to be in the spotlight. Scared to undress in a club full of men. The first night I threw up all my dinner. Having Yara beside me gave me the courage to return to the floor and put on a show.

We made \$5000 that weekend. For an eighteen-year-old girl, I felt like a millionaire. Eventually, both of us fell in love with dancing. It became more about our craft than entertaining men. When Sam came along, we became a deadly trio.

I was proud to say that through the years things hadn’t changed between me and Yara. She was my sister. Yara’s sister Nyah was my baby sister. They became the family I needed when I left my other one behind. Even through it all, we were still standing.

“Do you ever think of Sam?” I asked her without looking at her facial expression.

She sighed. “Yes. Believe it or not, I miss her a lot. She stood by our friendship. She was there whenever we needed her. I don’t know why she would sleep with him. She talked about Roshaun like a dog. Never in a million years would I have thought she would have slept with my man. I never put anything pass Roshaun, but Sam was my girl. She was one of

my best friends. You and I know he was willing to sleep with anyone who had a hole. I hate it was her. I despise the fact she turned on me. I thought we were like sisters. She should be here with us. Hell, she probably would be the one to still run the club after you and I retired.”

“Right,” I chuckled, wiping a tear from my eye. “Sam didn’t want to be anyone’s mother. She was content to be the doting aunt. She was so selfish. I can’t believe she did this to us.” I swiped the tears from my eyes.

Sam was with us from the very beginning. I thought we would always stay together and run shit. It hurt me that she threw it all away out of jealousy and materialism. I knew money made her world go around, but not enough to ever turn her against her family.

“I know. I think about her all the time. I don’t talk about her because it hurts to think about how she was willing to help a man kill me. Roshaun didn’t want either one of us.”

Roshaun was always a puppeteer. He had the uncanny ability to woo women into his web. Women like Sam and Yara who should have known better.

“Roshaun ruined a lot of lives,” she said softly. “When I look at Natasha, I wonder what my son would have looked like. I think about the fact that I probably would have had him in basketball, football, and baseball. He killed our son. He beat him from my body, and she slept with him knowing he almost killed me too. For her to deal with him after that guts me, Ayanna.”

As much as I missed Sam, the things she did were unforgivable. Except love didn’t work like that, you didn’t stop loving a person because of their deeds. You learn to live with the aftermath of their deceit.

I didn’t want to talk about Sam anymore. Matter of fact, I wouldn’t bring her up anymore. She was better off being a memory.

“I’m so excited for this show tonight. I hope I don’t mess up. You know it’s been years since I really danced.”



After Addy, I became a bottle girl to make money. The idea of taking off my clothes no longer appealed to me, but I had to take care of my daughter. So, being a bottle girl was the next best thing.

We stayed at the studio cleaning and filling out the schedule for the next set of classes. The business was doing great, and I felt good about where we were headed.

Finally, we had made it to the club and were preparing to shut the club down for the last time. We had sold the business to another group of females looking to enter the business.

“Umm, does Dimitri know you’re dancing for the closing of the club?” Yara asked as she fixed her thigh high boots that she was performing in for tonight’s finale.

“No, it’s a surprise,” I told her honestly.

Yara had decided to close the club because between being married to Sacha and having their daughter, she didn’t want to be involved in the business anymore.

Both of us decided to open a dance studio that catered to women who were interested in learning how to pole dance, dance teams, step teams, and other choreography. We figured with both of our talents we had a lot to offer.

“I don’t think our men like surprises. Sacha had to see my outfit and the routine before he would even agree.”

“I’m sure,” I replied, pulling up my bathing suit top. “We have on clothes, so he should be perfectly content with me dancing tonight.”

“Well,” she said clearing her throat, “your outfit is a little more risqué than mine.”

I looked down at my red boy shorts with the matching cross bra that wrapped around my stomach. The outfit reminded me of a bathing suit. It didn’t feel inappropriate. There was no way in hell I was dancing in those long ass tights Yara was wearing with an off the shoulder shirt. It was cute, but I thought my outfit was cuter.

It was hot as hell out there and unless they wanted me to pass out, I was wearing my outfit.

“Don’t tell her anything. You know she’s hardheaded,” Nyah said, pulling up an outfit like ours, but she had on less than me.

I glanced down at Nyah’s outfit. Her bikini bottoms and barely-there bra left little or nothing to the imagination. She was the last one to talk.

“Nyah, your outfit is way worse than mine.”

She waved me off. “Girl, I’m single. I can wear what I want.”

Before today, I would have screamed I was single too, but I had agreed to try a relationship with Dimitri. I hoped he wouldn’t act a fool over my outfit. It had been planned long before we were a thing.

“He’ll be fine,” I told her, making sure my bra was secure on my breast and didn’t provide anyone with a sneak peek.

“Alright. Don’t say shit when you get snatched off the stage. I’m going to laugh,” Nyah chuckled, fixing her boots.

“I’ll be fine. This reminds me of old times,” I told Yara, walking up to her as she fixed her face covering that was similar to the one that we had all decided to wear.

“I know. The only woman missing is Sam,” Yara said with a sad look on her face. We had talked about Sam earlier. I wasn’t going to bring her name up again, but obviously she was on Yara’s mind heavily today since Sam had been a big part of this business.

I was still pissed at Sam for being a damn traitor. We had been girls for too long for her to turn her back on Yara. I knew she constantly made little snarky comments to Yara, but we all said cutting remarks in a joking way. I didn’t take anything they said seriously. I didn’t think Sam meant half the things she said to Yara.

Nyah sucked her teeth. “Fuck her. She made her decision. She should have stayed loyal. Nobody made her do any of the things she did,” Nyah said, shrugging her shoulders nonchalantly.

Nyah didn’t get it. We had stood by each other through thick and thin. Sam had been there when Roshaun caused Yara to lose her baby. She helped nurse Yara back to health when she could barely walk from the ass whipping Roshaun gave her. I would have thought him almost killing Yara would have been evidence for Sam to realize what he was capable of doing. Never would I have ever thought Sam would stoop so low.

I clapped my hands. “Alright, ladies. Let’s change the subject. This is supposed to be a joyous occasion. Are you ready to close the door on our baby?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m going to miss this place. It provided a good living for us for years. I met another sister here, and it introduced me to my husband,” Yara replied with a goofy smile on her face when she mentioned her husband.

I was shocked when Yara told me Sacha had watched her the night she danced for her retirement. Now, years later, they were married with a child and in love. Life was truly amazing.

“I know. Maybe, I’ll meet my husband tonight,” Nyah said, placing her covering over her face.

“Not in no damn strip club. You need to find you some man who works a 9 to 5. We have enough thugs in this damn family,” Yara snarked.

“9 to 5? Nope, that was Ayanna. I like me a little thug. I’m a lot to handle, and I don’t have time to babysit anyone’s feelings but mine and Nikki’s.”

I smiled thinking about how much of a mama bear Nyah had turned into. Raising Nikki was one thing Nyah took very seriously. Too bad, Nikita was just as disloyal to his family and had to die a harsh death like Sam. It was ironic that

he was the one who killed Sam because she was a traitor, and he ended up being a traitor himself.

“Obviously, Ayanna has given up the idea of getting a 9 to 5 man. If she tries it, Dimitri will take his head off,” Nyah said.

I wanted to chuckle it off as if she was joking, but I knew the truth. Dimitri wasn't allowing anyone in my space. I was his, and if I didn't know nothing else, the men in this family took care of anyone they considered their own.

“Ready, ladies?” Yara asked.

I blew out a deep breathe. I was ready. I hadn't danced in a strip club since I had Addy. I helped some of the girls at the club with their routines periodically, but after Steven, I was done taking my clothes off. This would be the first time in years I performed in front of a room full of people.

I performed breathing exercises and relaxed my muscles waiting on the song to drop. I was nervous thinking about Dimitri being out there watching me. But I was also stoked thinking about him seeing me in action.

“Have fun,” Yara said as she hugged each one of us individually. Dancing with them one final time would be a nice ending to a wonderful adventure. We lined up at the door and waited. Nyah was going to be the first person out the door. I was next, and finally Yara would walk in last.

When we heard the sound of waves drop from *Kissing' on My Tattoos*, we started exiting the room dragging our chairs behind us.

After every kissing on me, kissing on me August uttered, we situated our chairs in the middle of the floor. I could barely see anyone between the lights and veil covering my face, but I knew for a fact Dimitri's penetrating eyes would be focused directly on me. I couldn't lie. I wanted to put on a show for him. Yes, I knew he found me attractive, but he hadn't touched me intimately since I committed myself to him.

My goal tonight was to push him over the edge and make him claim me in every way possible. I was tired of

waiting. I wanted him, and this was going to ensure I received everything I wanted.

By the time August Alsina started singing, we were weaving a spell through the club. I placed one of my legs sensually on the chair and faced the crowd and slowly ran my hands down my body. Quickly, while holding onto the back of the chair, I placed the other leg on the chair and spread both my legs open at the same time. We fanned our legs out several times in a scissoring motion. The only sound that could be heard through the club was August singing.

As August Alsina continued to sing, we flipped around in the chairs and started popping our ass as if we needed to make money to pay off student loans, car, house, and daycare bills. Standing up in the chair, I twerked and felt money raining down around me.

I didn't need to turn around because I already knew Dimitri was standing directly behind me. I smelled his cologne permeate the air. His presence was always a heady combination. From the moment we met, I always knew when he entered the room because he commanded my attention even when I didn't want him to.

Using the back of the chair, I placed my legs on either side of it and proceeded to pop my ass to the song.

Dancing was such a high and I missed it. I was excited we opened a dance studio. It would give me a chance to go back to doing something I genuinely loved.

Kicking my legs out and easing the chair away from my legs, we pushed the chairs as far away as we could. I didn't bother to look at Yara and Nyah. I knew they were on beat and killing this choreography. We had practiced for days to perfect this.

I turned back around and found Dimitri in my personal space. Never missing a beat, I took the opportunity to slide between his legs. I placed my hands on his pectorals and started rocking my body against his. Then, I shifted again by using his thighs to ease back between his legs. Dropping to the floor, I held my ankles.

He placed his hands on my ass, and I made my ass cheeks bounce one by one to the beat. I needed to see the look on his face, so I turned around and looked in his face.

His eyes were so dark. I couldn't read them, but the intensity spoke volumes. I stood to my feet and jumped up placing my legs around his waist.

His hands immediately attached to my ass cheeks as I continued to bounce on him. I didn't utter a word as I felt my body being carried away from the dance floor.

I lifted and kissed his tattoo located on his neck as he walked us to the exit. I heard August Alsina say *We better stop playing (We better stop playing) Before someone gets hurt. I don't want nobody but you kissing on my tattoos.*

Tonight, I planned on kissing every tattoo gracing Dimitri's body. He had several, so I knew it was going to be a long night.

I continued to kiss him as his driver opened the bulletproof Tahoe door for us. I straddled his legs as soon as he sat.

"Are you trying to get fucked in this car?" he growled in my ear.

"Yes," I breathed in his ear. That was exactly what I wanted. I had denied myself the pleasure of his body for too long. We had waited long enough.

"Nyet. Our first time will be in a bed," he replied, moving my boy shorts to the side. I sucked in a deep breath when his fingers entered my sex. He proceeded to bring me to a climax as the Tahoe sped down the street trying to get us back to the compound.

# Ayanna

As soon as we walked through the door, Dimitri lifted me up. I wrapped my legs around his waist as he carried me into his bedroom.

Once he closed the door behind us and locked it, he placed me on my feet in front of him. With unsteady hands, I slowly unbuttoned his shirt.

He shrugged out of it without looking away from me. I helped him pull his t-shirt over his head.

This wasn't the first time I had seen Dimitri's bare chest. However, it always surprised me how massive his chest was. He had muscles upon muscles. His body was ripped. He was impressive as hell.

I was nervous. He exuded aggression. Dimitri looked at me like he was about to tear my ass up.

Sexual attraction oozed between us as he stared down at me. He was a real-life predator.

He stood back from me as he removed the rest of his articles of clothing. If I was a lesser woman, I would have fucking gasped in response of his tool, curving in my direction.

Good grief. What a tool it was too. It was long and thick with blue veins pulsing. I forced my eyes away from his erection, so I could remove my clothing.

I swallowed. His gaze trailed down my aroused body, lingering on all the places he had never seen before.

He focused on me with laser intensity. If he were a superhero, his eyes would have scorched me. "You're beautiful, Ayanna."

Those were the first and only words he had said since he entered his bedroom, but they still sent electricity through my system.

For a second, I thought he was going to pounce like the beast I knew he was. Instead, he slowly walked toward me.

His cologne wafted to my nose, causing me to inhale a deep breathe. Dimitri picked me up and laid me gently on the bed.

His pupils dilated as he cupped both of my breasts in his hands. My erect nipples pebbled, waiting for his attention.

My lips parted as he wet them with his tongue.

I spread my legs apart. He traced patterns across my flesh, causing tingles to infiltrate my stomach and wind downward to my clit. A shiver raised along my spine as his rough callused fingers slid down my stomach. His other hand pinched my nipple, making it immediately pebble in response.

My nether lips throbbed as he awoke every nerve inside my body. Automatically opening my legs, I inhaled deeply when he slid one fingers into my opening.

My womb clenched.

“Right there,” I moaned softly as he rubbed slowly inside my slickened channel. It had been a long time since I had someone who knew how to handle my body correctly. My hips rose on its own volition in search of the orgasm I knew he was going to provide.

With half-mast eyes, I watched as he plucked my nipples to his own tune. When he lowered himself down my body, my body tensed in anticipation.

My body warmed all over. Everything he did to me was erotic and sensual. It reminded me of the pornos where you watched a man give a woman a massage and his dick caressed her body. I felt like those women.

“Shit,” I hissed as he licked between my legs. My body burned hotter with every fiery past of his tongue.

My arousal washed over me as he continued to eat my pussy like he was eating a Baklava. I dug my heels into the bed, knowing my orgasm was right there. His talented tongue had me ready to smother him between my legs.

“Dimitri,” I shouted as my body collapsed against the bed.



Knowing what I noticed earlier, I couldn't wait for him to penetrate me. He kissed my inner thigh before rolled onto his back next to me.

“Ride me,” he demanded.

On unsteady legs, I threw a thigh over his body and eased across his waist. My sex dripped in anticipation at the thought of him invading my body. This was the connection and moment we had both been waiting on.

“Damn,” I hissed, sliding down his erection. I wanted to scream from how full he was making me feel, his cock buried deep inside of me. It had been too long. His girth was doing its job. Sensation blitzed my body, overwhelming me as I rode him.

My body was on fire as sweat coated my nose from the work I was putting in to ensure our movements resulted in our completion.

“Shit,” he growled as he stroked me from below. He gripped my waist tightly as he plunged in and out of my wet tunnel.

My whole body tingled as I grounded my sex down on him as he pressed his hips up to meet me.

His hands eventually dropped to my buttocks as he palmed them in his hands. Spreading my cheeks allowed him greater access as he drilled inside of me. With frantic movements, I fucked him back, feeling my orgasm surfacing.

My body exploded, splintering into a million fragmented pieces. Sweat dotted my brow as I slumped against his chest.

I closed my eyes as Dimitri flipped me over onto my back, leaving him on top. He caged me in with his arms as hovered over my body, slamming our bodies together as he searched for his release. Bending his head, he nibbled on my lips until I opened my mouth to receive his tongue. Dimitri understood this moment. He knew kissing and fucking was a heady combination if done correctly.

The head of his erection rubbed against my spot that hadn't been touched in forever.

“Dimitri,” I yelled into his mouth.

“Fuck,” he growled, pumping in and out of me. He controlled my body, my mind, and my pussy. It was as if he were stamping his name on every area of me, ensuring no other man could compete with him.

When he detached from my body and ate me like a starving man on a stranded island, I knew for a fact I wasn't going any damn where. Dick this good was hard to come by. In fact, men swore they put it down like this, but they were delusional. Good dick had a woman calling men in the middle of the night like: where he at? Send him to me. Dimitri was going to have me clinching my legs all day thinking about what we had done.

He pulled out of me to shift his attention back to my lower lips. He licked, sucked, fingered my hole until tears seeped from the corner of my eyes. I was passing out MVP awards. He had the Most Valuable Penis Award. This man knew what the hell he was doing, and I made a personal note in my mind to enjoy it every chance I had.

His tongue moved in urgency, causing my essence to rain from my body. A warm gush of liquid squirted from my body, causing me to have a silent scream.

“Just like that love,” he called, licking up everything my body put out as if his tongue was a wet, warm cloth.

Dots blinked from my eyes as he thrust back into my body, causing more warm liquid to stream from my channel.

More tears pooled in my eyes. I had never in my life cried during sex. This shit was voodoo. Instead of Russia, I was going to have to check if he was from New Orleans. There was no way my body should be feeling this way. He even ate me like he was eating a warm Beignet. I melted right in his damn mouth. Leaving the space between my thighs, he placed his dick back inside me and delivered more thrusts.

“Please, Dimitri,” I begged, knowing I couldn’t take much more.

I pressed my hands to his chest because I was feeling him in my damn stomach. He needed to get his because my selfish ass had surely gotten mine.

I squeezed my pelvic muscles, hoping it would trigger his release. I licked and nibbled on his neck, hoping I was loving on one of his soft spots. His hips pounded into me erratically, triggering another orgasm from me, instead of him.

“Ayanna,” he called, thrusting inside me and releasing all at the same time. My body shook and tingled as he gazed down at me with a hungry expression.

“No, sir,” I told him tiredly. I was the cliché people loved to say: put a fork in me. I was done. The shop was closed. I felt his dick still jerking inside of me. I didn’t know what he was smoking, but he wasn’t getting ready to abuse my poor kitty. She needed to live to get fucked another day but not today.

He smiled innocently before kissing the corner of my lips.

“Mmmm,” I hissed as he rotated his hips a few times before slowly exiting my body.

My eyes closed for a second when I felt him get off the bed. I danced every single day, but my body was sore as hell.

My eyes popped back open when I felt him run his hands between my thighs.

When I didn’t move, he prodded me.

“Come shower with me,” he called, looking down at me.

Lethargically, my eyes slowly caressed his naked chest. His tattoos were on full display. Next time, I would kiss and lick every single one. He was so damn sexy that I had to bite my lip.

He smirked. “I thought you were tired.”

I smiled cheekily. “I am, but I can still admire how gorgeous you are,” I told him honestly.

He frowned as if I had offended him.

“What? You know you’re sexy. Women look at you all the time,” I told him, easing from the bed.

My eyes widened when I saw the puddle on his bed. Embarrassment flushed my cheeks. I couldn’t believe I had made this big of a mess.

Glancing back over at him, he had a wide grin on his face.

Jerk.

“We’ll change them when we get out of the shower.”

He said that as if we had another choice. The whole damn bed was like a puddle after a hard rain. I hoped he had a mattress pad because I knew we had saturated his mattress.

“Come on.” He reached out his hand to me. I intertwined my fingers with his, loving the connection we were building.

He opened the shower door for me to enter first. He had several shower heads inside. His shower was huge. It amazed me the things money could buy. Things like heated showers, floors, and towel holders. Money didn’t play fair. Someone who came from my upbringing never witnessed any of life’s little pleasures until I encountered this family.

Dimitri squeezed my hand, causing me to search his face as my eyes continued to roam down his body. It was as if I couldn’t keep my eyes off of him.

My face flushed as I bit my lip. His dick swung between his legs like a pendulum. It was hypnotizing. He gently pulled me into the shower as he closed the door behind us. I backed up toward one of the showerheads.

It should have been weird showering with Dimitri for the first time, but everything about us felt comfortable. Maybe, it had something to do with us knowing each other for a long time.

Dimitri reached for a fresh towel, covering it with soapsuds. He slowly washed my body, causing goosebumps to cover my flesh. I should be tired, but my body was screaming for release.

My eyes fluttered when he ran the towel across my skin. It felt erotic. His blue eyes were darkened with arousal as he quietly washed my body.

“Dimitri,” I moaned, wanting him to do more than touch my body with the washcloth. I needed him.

He didn’t say a word as he picked me up by my ass. I wrapped my legs around his waist. I couldn’t lie. It was sexy as hell when a man could pick you up and fuck the breath out of you.

He leaned down. Our tongues danced as I lowered myself on his erection. I deepened the kiss as I grinded down on him.

“Shit,” I whimpered as he fucked me from the bottom. Water beat down my back as he beat down my insides.

My breathing became labored as he methodically built my orgasm. He stroked me so good that I couldn’t hold it in.

“Dimitri,” I moaned as he continued to give me stroke after stroke. My body jerked as I released all over him. He continued to work my body until I felt him place his head into my neck and bite me until he released inside me.

I slowly eased my legs from around his waist. My legs were shaky. Neither one of spoke as he cleaned us up again.

Once we exited the shower, Dimitri wrapped a towel around his waist before he walked over to me and handed me a towel. Going into his linen closet, he grabbed some fresh sheets.

I blushed thinking about how I saturated his bed with my essence. I remembered when Lauren told the story about having extra towels, so they didn’t mess up the bed doing sex. I now understood why it was a good idea.

We silently changed the bedding. When we were finished, I gazed at Dimitri. “Can I borrow a shirt?”

“Why?” he asked me with a perplexed look on his face.

“I... umm don't have anything to sleep in.”

“You don't need anything to sleep in.”

My cheeks reddened. I walked to the light switch in his bedroom and flipped the light off. I was comfortable with my body, but I needed a minute to feel comfortable enough to walk around him in the nude.

I walked toward the bathroom and unwrapped the towel from my body. When I entered the room, Dimitri was in the bed with the television playing a hockey game. I have never watched a hockey game before. I was more of a basketball or football type of girl, but I was willing to try anything at least once.

I slid into the bed and inched closer to Dimitri. His eyes lifted to mine as he pulled me into his body. I laid my head on his bare chest as my eyes drifted close. I relaxed to the sound of his heart beating beneath me.

His hand rubbed up and down my back soothingly. I didn't know what I expected when dealing with Dimitri. I knew he had a tender side because of how he handled Addy, Natasha, and Nikki, yet the way he was alleviating all my fears were impressive.

His voice was the last thing I heard. “Thank you for being mine.”

I woke up with the steady throb of his erection pulsing into the crease of my butt. The urge to rub against him was so strong. I pushed my ass further into his groin, feeling his silken skin caressing mine. With every brush of my hips, my clit thumped.

I couldn't lie. I slept good as hell in his bed. It had been a long time since I had slept with anyone. His sheets were supple against my body. Then, having his warm body wrapped around mine, it was the best night ever.

A slight smile graced my face, remembering everything we had done last night. I rubbed my ass against his erection again. I felt him stir behind me. He grinded his erection deeper into me.

Being naked allowed me to feel every brush of the silk he had pressed against me. My sex flared to life. I couldn't wait to see what he tasted like inside my mouth. My center became wet, thinking about how hard I was going to have to work to swallow the monster he was toting between his legs.

Opening my legs for him, he trailed his hands down my body until they were between my legs. Fire immediately spread over my body. His fingers spread my sex. I squirmed from his touch. He slid his thick fingers between my opening.

I wanted him to touch me so damn bad. "Please," I begged, rolling my hips against his groin. I breathed out a sharp breath when his fingers entered me.

"Dimitri," I moaned as his fingers stroked me. He squeezed my clit between his fingers, making me jerk in response.

My body spasmed as he worked his fingers inside of me. I was sensitive from his touch. Dimitri lifted my leg and planted himself inside me. I shuddered around his dick.

We were both breathing heavy as he held my leg in the air and stroke me from the side. His strokes sped up as he skillfully worked my body. Never in my life had I come in this position, but here I was creaming all over him.

I slammed my head on the pillow as he continued to hold my leg and give me death strokes. He released inside of me again.

Drained, I trembled as he lowered my leg back down. My eyes were almost closed when I heard him speaking.

"I want you and Addy to move in with me." He continued to kiss the back of my neck.

My body immediately tensed. We just committed to being with each other. Shit, I had been running from him for almost a year. He wasn't even giving my ass time to adjust to

being with him. He was jumping into this relationship feet first.

He wasn't even giving us a chance to actually learn one another. I didn't know what it felt like to date Dimitri. Yes, I was around him all the time, but not as my man. Only as someone who was interested in pursuing me.

"Dimitri," I sighed, not wanting to ruin our moment. I loved everything about what happened last night. My body was still feeling the aftereffects, but this was not something I wanted to discuss after an enjoyable night.

I wasn't trying to fall fast for Dimitri. "I don't know, Dimitri. Relationships are hard work. What if you get tired of me? What happens to Addy then?"

He tapped me on the shoulder. "Turn around."

I shook my head. "I haven't even brushed my teeth, sir. I will *not* be talking in your face." I was not one of those people who thought it was cute to kiss with morning breath.

He chuckled. "Let's get dressed then."

I stood up from the bed. I tried to reach for his nightshirt to cover myself up, but he gently pulled it from my hand.

"Leave it."

I frowned at him. He may be comfortable as hell, but I didn't like walking around in the nude, but I quietly complied and followed him into the bathroom.

Dimitri handed me a fresh toothbrush in the package. We brushed our teeth and washed our face. Once we were finished, I used the bathroom and washed my hands.

"Let's finish our conversation."

I nodded my head, knowing I was in for a fight. Dimitri hated the word no.

I sighed heavily and said, "Dimitri, we're together. Why can't that be enough for now?" I didn't want to sound like I was whining, but I knew I was. My issue wasn't whether



or not Dimitri would be a good man. My heart was safe with him. It had everything to do with it being too soon to make such a huge commitment.

He remained calm as he answered my question. “It is enough, but I want you and Addy here. You don’t even have to sleep in here with me if you don’t want to.”

Shaking my head, I snorted. He kept a straight face as he told that lie.

“We’ve been apart long enough. I want you in my space. I want you two in my house. You know how I feel about you. I have felt this way for a long time. I love you, and I would never hurt you.”

I didn’t know what to say. Did he really love me or was he simply infatuated with the idea of being with me? It wasn’t unheard of for a man to want or love a woman if she was something he felt was unobtainable. Once he received it, he didn’t want it as much as he thought he did. Was this the case with Dimitri?

“You don’t have to say it back. I didn’t say it to make you say it. I want you to know how I feel. Us waiting a long time to get together is not going to change anything. You know my heart. It’s been yours a long time.”

I sat quietly for a minute going over his words. I was so scared to trust another man. Quite frankly, Steven had me looking at every man with a side eye. Men didn’t understand how they could shatter a woman’s trust. I wasn’t stupid. I knew all men weren’t like Steven. The problem was weeding through the ones who *were* like him.

Steven had me so deep in depression after I had Addy. It nearly broke me when he mailed me papers to terminate his parental responsibilities. Even after finding out that he was married, nothing made me think he wasn’t going to be a father to our child. I believed in my heart he was a good man even if he was flawed. Just because a man was a cheater didn’t mean he couldn’t be a good father to his child. Steven proved me wrong.

I wasn't ever going to give him another chance to be with me again, but I would have respected him more had he helped with our child. Him being an asshole about his daughter made me lose the last bit of respect I had for him.

Did I think Dimitri was like Steven? In my heart, the answer was no. I trust him when it came to me and Addy's safety. I trusted him to do whatever he said he was going to do. He had done so much for me and Addy. Saving her life should have been enough. Did I trust him with my heart?

Dimitri looked into my eyes, trying to snatch my soul and heart with one look. "You can trust me. I won't let you down."

I bit my lip. I needed to cut this mess out. Dimitri kept my heart pounding when he was near. He had since I met him for the first time. There was no point avoiding the inevitable.

"Okay, Dimitri. You win."

He lifted my chin until my eyes met his. "No, we win."

I prayed to God I was winning because my ass couldn't take another loss. Dimitri was too good to me and Addy. Losing him as my man would be bad but losing him as a friend would tear me all the way up.

Steven and my relationship foundation wasn't structured in the same way as mine and Dimitri. Steven and my relationship were built on straw. It wasn't meant to last. It was constructed with lies, deceit, and one-sided commitment, but I promise this shit felt like it was built like the last little pig house. It was built on bricks. I wanted it to last.

# Ayanna

Dimitri, Addy, and I walked into Sacha's and Yara's kitchen looking like a family. Yara had a goofy grin on her face when she saw us together, which had me shaking my head at her.

"Another one bites the dust, huh?" Nyah asked, cutting up an apple for Nikki.

"I don't know what you're talking about." I told her, lying through my teeth.

"No, ma'am, you know exactly what I'm talking about, walking in here looking like Chester Cheetah."

"I don't look like Chester Cheetah," I told her about to sit down in a chair at the table. Before I could sit down, Dimitri grabbed me and placed me on his lap. His arms wrapped around my waist as he kissed my neck.

"Uhhh," Nyah called with a smirk on her face. "Is this a new couple alert?" her ass asked pointing between me and Dimitri.

I rolled my eyes with a grin. "Yes."

"It's about time," Sacha remarked, causing my eyes to snap to his. "I was tired of him practically living over here."

I bit my lips to keep from laughing at Sacha's statement.

Dimitri pulled his head from my neck. "They are moving in with me."

"Well, okay. This went from 0 to 80 quick as hell," Nyah stated. "I mean when did you all make this thing official?"

"Yara and Nyah, can I talk to you two upstairs?" There was no way I was having this conversation around Addy, Dimitri, or Sacha.

"I'll fix Addy's plate and come upstairs to help you pack when you finish gossiping," Dimitri stated, walking to

the stove.

Addy giggled at his comment. She was such a little traitor. She thought everything Dimitri did and said was cute.

Before I could get out his lap, he cupped my chin and brought my lips close to his. He pecked my lips a few times before reluctantly allowing me to disengage from him so we could walk upstairs to talk.

Once we made it up into the room, I sat on the bed not bothering to pack one thing.

“Well?” Yara asked, sitting on the bed.

“I’m scared,” I admitted. Yes, I talked all that shit to myself about our relationship being made from bricks, etc., etc. Yet, here I was looking around the guest bedroom I had resided in for months, nervous to pack me and my daughter up and move a few feet down the road.

Yara eased closer to me on the bed. “Ayanna, it’s natural to feel this way. Anytime you do something this big, it’s going to give you anxiety. You wouldn’t be human if you didn’t feel nervous about taking your daughter into a new environment. It’s a lot. I certainly understand. I feared approaching Sacha about protecting me. I was frightened about hopping my happy ass on a plane, flying to Vegas, and marrying him all within forty-eight hours of officially meeting him.”

“I know. I’m still shocked you had the nerve to approach a man you had never spoken to and asked him to protect you. I don’t know how you did it.” I understood where she was coming from. It had to take nerve to go up to a man she didn’t have any affiliation with. She needed Sacha to help her with Roshaun. Roshaun was an asshole. He wouldn’t leave her alone, which made Sacha a necessity to handle the complications Roshaun was causing her.

I didn’t have a necessity for Dimitri. My life was good living here with Yara, Sacha, and Natasha. My daughter and I were safe. We didn’t need anything.

“Trust me, I get it. Moving in with someone is a big commitment. Anything can happen. It’s a risk but is he worth it? Does he make butterflies go off inside your chest? Do your eyes follow him whenever he is in a room? Does he make you feel protected? Most importantly, do you feel you can trust him? If you can answer yes to those things, I think you’re making a wise decision. I know this is about Steven. I don’t blame you for feeling as if you need to protect yourself. Roshawn’s ass had me doubting love too. I was willing to marry Sacha *because* I didn’t think I could love him. In my mind, it would be better to marry someone who couldn’t hurt me. Imagine my surprise when I fell head over heels for my husband. I love him. There is nothing I wouldn’t do for him, and I know he feels the same way about me and Natasha.”

I wanted to tell her she got lucky finding Sacha. There were so many things that could have gone wrong with her approaching him, but God favored her.

“Look, I know I don’t have a man,” Nyah said with a cheeky smile on her face. “I say go for it. Dimitri looks at you like a chocolate sundae on a hot ass day. He treats Addy like she’s his own. He would body anyone for you two. He’s rich, sexy, and loyal. As far as I know, he doesn’t go on unexpected business trips or business trips period.” She raised her eyes questioningly at me.

“No.” She had me thinking about Steven’s business trips. I never thought anything about them. He was the head of a big architecture firm. It made sense to me that he had to travel. Not once did it cross my mind that he was hiding a family from me when he left me to handle “business”.

“He handles everything at Vasiliev Headquarters. He practically moved in here because this is where you are. I say give him a chance. I’m positive you’ve given some other sorry ass man a try. Lord knows it’s some men in my past I would like a do over with and pretend I never met them.”

Nyah was making sense. This is why I loved having them in my life. We vibed with one another. Their spirit was always calming and soothing and they made me feel comfortable with sharing my concerns with them.

My thoughts were all over the place. On one hand, I trusted Dimitri. On the other, I could erase the nerves I was feeling.

“What if Addy gets attached, and he leaves us?” That would surely devastate her. It would break me too.

Yara sucked her teeth. “Girl, it’s too late for that. Addy is already attached to Dimitri. She follows him all of the time. I’m sorry to tell you friend. Your daughter has chosen Dimitri. She’s waiting on you, girlfriend. Besides, if he starts acting a fool, we can beat his ass. At this point, with all our fighting skills, we’ll win.”

I chuckled, thinking about us attacking Dimitri.

Nyah clapped her hands, “Let’s pack this shit up, so you can go. All this conversation is cute and all, but you know these Vasiliev men don’t take no for an answer. Next thing we know, Dimitri will be in here packing all your shit up or hiring someone to do it.”

“Right, I’m sure he feels like he gave you enough time. First, you had enough nerve to do your little strip tease last night. That alone had him tired of waiting on you to realize he was the man for you. Then, I know you gave him some good, good last night. Yep, you are packing your shit. Get it going.” Yara clapped her hands in my direction.

“Ain’t no backing out of it now. Should have kept you little hotbox to yourself,” Nyah added, trying to be funny.

All of us burst out laughing.

We stood up from the bed. “I don’t have any boxes. What am I going to pack all our stuff in?”

“You can borrow some of my suitcases, but I want all my stuff back.”

“Don’t nobody want your little luggage,” I told her, frowning up my face playfully.

“You say that now, but I almost choked on my spit when Sacha rolled in a custom Chanel luggage set.”

My eyes widened. “Oh, he is spending money, money,” I told her playfully.

“You don’t even know the half. These men have real money. This is not Monopoly money. Now that you are his, I’m sure Dimitri is going to try to spend all types of money on you. You’re going to have to tell him to stop.”

Nyah snorted. “Nope, I wouldn’t be saying stop. That’s you, boo.”

“I don’t know. Your man looks like he has some change too,” I said being messy since she constantly had a sassy comment about my situation.

Nyah’s lip curled. “What man? I’m single as a dollar bill. I’m like Tommy, except Nyah ain’t got no man.”

“So, No isn’t your man?” I asked with one eyebrow raised in question.

Shaking her head at me as if I were crazy, she said, “I don’t know that man. He helped me one little time, and now he’s supposed to belong to me? I think not.”

I threw one of my shirts at her. She knew damn well No had saved her life. “First, don’t play with him. It was not a *little* situation. Nik was going to have you in Russia on your Florence shit, taking care of him and his child. So, stop playing.”

She sucked her teeth before responding. “Fine, he saved my life. I appreciate it, but do I owe him my vagina?”

I rolled my eyes. “No, you don’t owe him your vagina, but he is nice-looking.”

“I guess,” she replied innocently.

“Stop lying,” Yara said, walking back in the bedroom with a beautiful luggage set. She was right. This was nice as hell. I wanted one. It didn’t have to be Chanel, but I could use a new set of luggage.

“Lying about what?” Nyah quizzed.

Yara raised her eyebrow. “You don’t find him attractive? Don’t lie either. You know I can tell when you’re not being honest.”

“I do...” Nyah started.

“Don’t lie. You’re my little sister.” Yara had a hand on hip, waiting on Nyah to answer.

Nyah stood glaring at her sister for a minute. “Fine, he’s attractive. It doesn’t mean I want him.”

“No, it doesn’t, but it doesn’t mean you don’t either. Attraction breeds connections,” Yara remarked, placing the shirts in the luggage I had placed on the bed.

“I would have to see him first,” she muttered.

“What did you say?” Yara cupped her hand behind her ear.

She tilted her head slightly, mumbling something under her breath. I didn’t hear what she said. She repeated herself. “I’ve seen the man one time. He’s never gotten in touch with me, so it’s not that deep. I’ll probably never see him again.”

I couldn’t tell if she was sad about it or not, but I wasn’t so sure if she was right.

“I don’t know, Nyah. You never know. You guys built a connection.” I folded my jeans up.

“A connection of him almost taking a man’s life, I guess,” Nyah confusedly stated.

Yara nodded. “Relationships have been built on less. Look at me,” she told her.

Nyah snickered at Yara. “You know what, Yara? I’m about tired of you and your man. Yes, you found your man on a fluke. That situation was unrealistic as hell. I’m happy for you. He loves you. You love him. You’re a happy family.”

“Shut the hell up,” Yara laughed, tossing my shirts this time. “Don’t Barney my marriage.”

We all burst out laughing. The rest of the time we continued to fold clothes and prepare me to move in with



Dimitri. The whole time I had a smile on my face. However, I was shaking like a stripper waiting outside on cold winter night. My whole life was about to change, and all I could do was pray to God Dimitri wouldn't let me down.

# Dimitri

I held out my hands to Natasha, who immediately jumped into my arms. She was a beautiful little girl. She was a beautiful mix of Yara and Sacha.

“Hi, beautiful,” I crooned at her as she shyly smiled at me. I kissed her cheek as she laid her head on my shoulder.

“Hi.”

She was such a little faker. I didn't know why she was acting so innocent. I knew Natasha. As soon as I put her on the floor, she would tear through Sacha's office messing and touching every single thing in sight. I couldn't count the times I had to move her from something dangerous before she could touch it. She was a naturally inquisitive child.

She stayed into everything, but we didn't care. Besides Addy and Nikki, she was the baby girl in the family, and we would do anything to make her happy.

She was loved, and she knew it.

Looking at her made me wonder what a child between Ayanna and I would look like. Men didn't discuss children with other men. I came from a big family. We were close and spent an enormous amount of time together training, working, or hanging out together.

It was so many of us that we didn't really need outside people in our circle. We had each other. We trusted each other. Nik may have turned against the family, but he was never part of our nucleus group. It was always Sacha, Michail, Maximum, Alexi, and me. Viktor became a brother to us, so it was hard to perceive him as anything but that.

I wanted at least four more children from Ayanna. I wanted to fill our house with love and children. There was nothing like spending nights at your cousin's houses, creating lifelong bonds.

I wondered if at that moment Ayanna was caring my child. I knew she wasn't on birth control, and it never crossed

my mind to do anything but release my seed inside of her.

Yara was beautiful and bossy when she was pregnant with Natasha. It made me contemplate how Ayanna would behave when she eventually became pregnant with my child. Visions of her carrying my seed flashed before my eyes, making me want to drag her back to our house and ensure we created a new life together.

She never mentioned having other children, but she was a nurturer. I couldn't imagine her not wanting to have other children. Addy was getting older. She may not want to start over because of Addy's age, which meant I really needed to ensure she conceived soon.

"Are you happy now?" Sacha asked with a slight smirk on his face.

I placed Natasha on the floor. She immediately ran to Sacha who picked her up and nuzzled her neck.

"I am." I would never hide my feelings from my family. If you couldn't be true with family, who could you be true with?

Sacha looked at me then said, "I see you didn't waste any time getting her and Addy to move in with you."

I chuckled. "No, it's been long enough. Even after all this time, she was hesitant about moving in with me."

"Can you blame her?"

"Yes."

Sacha smirked at my response. "You two have only been together for one day. Even you have to admit it was fast as hell for you to ask her to live with you. If I were her, I would have had to think about it too. The poor woman was already scared after her asshole baby's father cheated on her. I'm sure it would make anyone cautious about being in another relationship. Then, add in the fact she has a child, she has to be more careful than a single woman."

"We may have only been together for one day, but I have been wanting her for close to two years. I have been

patient and understanding. It was time for her to move on with her life.”

Sacha shook his head. “As much as I love you, you can’t dictate when someone should be ready to move on from a relationship.”

I frowned at him. “I’ve done everything to set her mind at ease. It was time for her to let her fear go. Love is scary. She’s not the only one worried.”

“True, but she doesn’t know you. She doesn’t understand our family. Once we find the woman we love, we’re like wolves. We mate for life. You just need to make sure she or Addy never has anything to worry about.”

“That’s the plan.”

I looked up as Sacha’s office door opened. “You finally got the girl, huh?” Michail asked with smile.

“Yes, and you’re still trying to get the girl.”

He raised his middle finger at me. “It won’t take me two years to get her. I’m winning mine over.”

I snorted. “It doesn’t appear as if you’re winning her over. Last I noticed, she was still avoiding you.”

“That’s because you don’t know what you’re looking at.” He sat down in the chair across from me.

Maxim walked in with both boys in their car seats. They were getting bigger. Once again, it made me think about my own child.

I stood and grabbed one of the car seats from him.

“Thank you,” he said, glaring at Michail.

“What? I was going to get him” Michail told him.

I glanced down to determine which twin I had. It amazed me how difficult it was to tell them apart. They looked like Maxim with their dusty blond hair and blue eyes.

“You have Mav.” Michail glanced over as I pulled Mav out of his seat.

“How do you know?” I asked, looking the baby over. There was nothing distinct I could use to figure it out, yet Michail had done it effortlessly.

“I don’t know for real. I just know. I’ve been able to tell them apart since they have been born.”

“He’s the only one other than Lauren and I who can tell the difference,” Maxim admitted. “It surprises me too.”

“Yara asked Lauren to bring some luggage over. What’s going on?” Maxim asked, handing Micah to Michail.

I tried to restrain the pride in my voice as I answered his question. “Ayanna and Addy are moving in with me.”

I was happy as hell repeating my new change of status. This was a long time coming. I had been holding back my feelings, trying not to run her off. Eventually, I couldn’t hold it in any longer.

“Congratulations,” Maxim told me. “I understand what it’s like to want someone and having to keep it to yourself.”

He should have known. He deliberately allowed Lauren to think he would be her sperm donor and walk away with his child or children as he later learned. His possessive ass didn’t go anywhere. He kept constant watch over Lauren. He was simply scared to allow her in his world because of the murder of his first wife. It was commendable, but I learned early in life you couldn’t let fear run your life. Further, you couldn’t run from your destiny. What was going to be was going to be no matter how hard you fought against the inevitable.

Come to think of it, Ayanna and Maxim had a lot in common. They both loved people who they later found out didn’t love them. Maxim even had to learn that his child by his wife might not have even been his. Lillian was murdered, and the answers to all his questions would never be answered.

They were both with selfish people who took their love and kindness for granted. Maxim was blessed to find Lauren. She loved him and the family they created, and I planned on being Ayanna’s blessing.

I stood up from my seat with Mav in my arms.

“Where are you going?” Sacha asked, watching Natasha who was moving things around on his desk, throwing papers around, and trying to crawl across his desk.

“I’m going to help Ayanna and Addy pack their things.” Really, I wanted to be in Ayanna’s space. I wanted to see with my own eyes how she was packing her things to come be with me. I didn’t think she would renege, but I wasn’t taking any chances.

I couldn’t wait to have her sleep with me every night.

“You should have a seat. I’m sure they are having girl talk,” Sacha remarked.

“Girl talk?” I asked, frowning. “About what?”

Michail laughed. “You.”

I pulled Mav in a little closer, looking at them with confusion. Why were they talking about me? I hadn’t done anything to Ayanna.

“Yes, you. Those women talk and gossip on the phone constantly. You may as well get used to it. When she’s mad at you, she’ll call Yara. When she’s happy with you, she’ll call Yara. Your business will no longer be your own,” Sacha confirmed, catching me by surprise.

Occasionally, I discussed my concerns with my brothers and cousins, but I did not tell them about my personal affairs often.

“Yes, I’ve listened to Lauren and Ash gossip about Michail all the time,” Maxim responded.

Michail turned to Maxim quick as hell, causing us to chuckle. “What did she say about me?”

Maxim waved him off. “I can’t tell you.”

“You get to listen in on their conversations, but you can’t tell me? That’s bullshit and you know it. I would tell you.”

“I’m not using my computers to listen into their conversations. It’s when we are lying in bed at night, and they are talking. I can hear what they are saying. I can’t repeat their conversations. It would be a breach of their privacy.”

“You don’t give a damn about privacy. You’re always listening in on people’s private affairs, asshole,” Michail growled in annoyance.

“I care about privacy when it comes to my wife. I don’t want to get on her bad side. Her being pissed at me is not a good thing.”

Michail huffed before responding, “We all have to suffer for the greater good.”

Maxim shook his head in denial. “You wanting to know what my wife and her sister are discussing is not the greater good.”

“It is to me. I can’t be like Dimitri. I can’t wait that damn long to get my wife. My balls will fall off.”

I frowned at him. “Fuck you.”

He glared at me.

The door opening caused all of us to look up. Addy walked in looking directly at me.

“Can you help me pack? Mommy is in there talking, so she said she’ll help me later. I want to have my stuff packed too.”

I stood to my feet once again with Mav hanging onto my shirt. I was glad to get out of this room. Besides, it would put me closer to Ayanna, so I was happy to help Addy pack to move to my house. My wanting Ayanna in my life meant I had to be extra careful with the most important person in her life.

“Yes.” I handed Mav to Maxim. I walked to the door and met Addy. I followed Addy up the steps to the room she was sleeping in.

We passed the room Ayanna slept in as we walked toward Addy’s bedroom door. All I heard was feminine

laughter and muffled conversation, confirming what Sacha said.

If I were technology savvy like Maxim, I would listen in to see what they were saying about me and what was so funny. Instead, I followed Addy into her room. She had already dumped a bunch of clothes on the bed.

I started folding them to the best of my ability, so we could place them in boxes or luggage. After ten minutes of silence, I kept noticing Addy looking at me.

She appeared nervous. She was never uncomfortable around me, alerting me something was going on with her. Her anxiousness had me on full alert. Did she have a problem with moving to my house? Now that I was with her mother, did she feel left out? No, it couldn't be the reason she was behaving in this manner. She seemed excited at the dance studio when she learned Ayanna and I were together.

I cleared my throat. "What's wrong?"

Her eyes looked glossy, making me even more apprehensive. I was accustomed to energetic, happy Addy. This child before me was someone new.

"There's a dance at my school."

She became quiet. Did she like a boy? Shit, I hoped it wasn't about a boy. She was almost nine. I was not the person for this conversation. She needed to talk to her mother. If it was up to me, she would never date. I was thinking so deeply, I almost missed her statement.

"It's a father daughter dance."

I sat up straighter, relieved it wasn't about a boy. I could handle a conversation about a father daughter dance. She had my undivided attention.

"They had it last year, but I didn't go. I want to go this year," she whispered lowly.

Her beautiful eyes had tears on her eyelashes. "I want you to take me to the dance. I want you to go with me to the dance."



I pulled her next to my side. “I would love to go with you. I’ll even take you to buy a new dress and shoes for the occasion. Were you scared to ask me to go with you?”

She nodded her head in response.

“You don’t ever have to be scared to ask me anything? I’m here if you ever need to talk about anything.”

“Okay.”

She was still looking timid. I thought she would be happy now that I told her I would love to go to the dance with her. However, her little face still looked flushed, and she looked like she was going to throw-up at any moment. I didn’t know what else could be going on with her.

“What’s wrong?” I asked her for the second time.

She looked me directly in my eyes. “I want to call you daddy. Can I call *you* my daddy? Everyone has one, but I don’t. Even my friends whose mothers are single have a daddy. They come to school and pick them up. They attend daddy and donuts. They participate in field day activities with them. Some of them volunteer when we have field days. I want that too.”

Tears rushed down her face. My heart felt heavy in my chest. I ached for her in this moment. She was a beautiful little girl. Her innocence and view of the world was a beautiful thing. She was always so sweet and mannerable. How could anyone walk away from her?

I would love for her to call me daddy. However, I didn’t want to overstep my boundaries with Ayanna. We were finally together, and I didn’t want to ruin it. Children were sensitive subjects.

She swiped the tears away from her face. “Never mind. You can just take me to the dance. Thank you.”

I heard the hurt in her voice, thinking I didn’t want her to call me dad, but it was the furthest thing from the truth.

“I would love for you to call me dad, but you need to talk to your mom first. I don’t want her mad at me or you. This

is a discussion we all need to have together.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Why would she be mad because I want you to be my daddy? I don’t have one, and you want to be my dad, right?”

I smiled at her innocence. “Yes, I would love that more than anything in the world,” I confirmed for her.

This caused a beautiful smile to spread across her face. “Then, why would she be mad?”

“She might be mad because we didn’t include her in our discussion. Since we’re a family now, we have to make certain decisions together. We can’t leave anybody out. It’ll cause division, and we don’t want that. Also, since I’m not your biological father, your mom needs to make the big decisions. This is a real big decision,” I told her cautiously, once again hoping this conversation wasn’t a damn landmine.

“I know you’re not my real dad, but my mom told me he didn’t want to be my daddy. So, I choose you.” She shrugged her shoulders, but her little face gave away the pain of her father leaving her behind.

She looked at me for reassurance. “I should be able to get another one because I shouldn’t have to go my whole life without one.”

Her trying to explain to me why she deserved a daddy broke my heart. Addy was a beautiful little girl. She didn’t deserve to feel doubt and sadness about why an adult man chose to neglect his parental duties.

I picked up her hand and squeezed it. “No, you shouldn’t have to go your whole life without a daddy. I’ll be happy to be your daddy. However, we need to talk to your mother.”

I was still being careful about my words, but I certainly didn’t plan on letting her down. The last thing she needed was to feel as though another man didn’t want her in their life. I wasn’t going anywhere. I loved her and her mother. We were a family. Me being her dad was simply another piece to the puzzle being set in place.

Addy released my hand and gave me a big hug. “I love you,” she told my holding me close. “Dad.”

I shook my head at her antics. She was insistent about calling me dad. Her mother was going to kill both of us if I didn't discuss this with her immediately.

She glanced at me out the corner of her eyes, making me smile. I nodded my head. “I love you too, daughter.”

A big smile spread across her face, causing her deep dimples to appear like a rainbow after a storm.

With every passing day, I found another reason to end Steven's life. Breaking my daughter's heart was another nail in his coffin. Her feeling less than or inferior was a wound he inflicted on her heart and mind.

## Ayanna

Living with Dimitri was easy. He made sure that Addy and I were comfortable, and he insisted on making sure I knew his home was *our* home.

After Steven, I just knew I was going to be paranoid about being with a new man, but it wasn't true. I didn't feel the urge to search Dimitri's phone or question where he was going. In reality, even when I was with Steven, I never had the desire to question him. I had faith in my man until he showed me differently. No one wanted to be with someone who was controlling, paranoid, and questioned any and everything they did.

Being in a relationship was all about respect. Respecting the person's boundaries and making sure everyone was clear on what was happening. I was immature to be with someone who couldn't tell their significant other where they were going.

I didn't understand men who had issues with it. It was not a possessive thing. If you weren't doing anything shady, what was the problem?

“So, what are you here buying?” Nyah asked as we walked around the mall. I was tired of being at the compound

and wanted to get out, walk around, shop, and enjoy mall watching.

“Addy needs more clothes. You know she’s getting so tall. It’s ridiculous. My baby is sprouting up like a weed.”

“I know. My little Nikki is getting big too. I’ll probably buy her a few outfits too.”

It was like Addy went from being my little baby with puffballs decorating her head to being independent, wanting to select her own clothing, hairstyles, and shoes. I loved she was maturing, but I still missed those days of her laying in my arms as I rocked her to sleep.

“Addy was adorable for the father daughter dance.”

“I know. I took a hundred pictures of them together. You couldn’t tell her anything when Dimitri handed her those roses.” I cheesed hard as hell when it came to my baby. It didn’t matter to me that she was the spitting image of her biological father. I would never be one of those women who hated their children because of the father.

I would simply hate the father. It made more sense because the child didn’t ask to be here. My decisions were all mine.

I mentally flashed back to the father daughter dance. My baby looked gorgeous in her pink V-neck tulle ball gown. It was floor-length, and it had a bow in the back. I made sure she looked age appropriate. Nothing grinded my gears more than seeing eight-, nine-, and ten-year-old little girl looking grown. This was not their high school prom. If parents did too much now, what would they look forward to later? As the Bible said, everything had a season. My baby could wait to grow up.

Nyah cleared her throat. “How do you feel about Addy calling Dimitri daddy?”

I chuckled. “I can’t lie. When Dmitri told me what she asked him, I was shocked as hell. I never realized how much Addy missed having a daddy in her life. I mean I grew up without one too, so I should have known. But I couldn’t do

anything about it. Steven didn't *want* to be a father. I couldn't make him love her. I talked to her about him not being around. Truthfully, I tried to give her more love to make up for him not being around. However, it obviously didn't work."

It still bothered me how a man who begged me to have his child literally walked away and has never seen his daughter. Him walking away from her showed me his true character, and I would never forget what he did to me.

"You raised her to the best of your ability. She's beautiful, creative, respectful, and sweet. I must say you have done a damn good job. I hope to be half as good raising Nikki as you are raising Addy."

I smiled at her compliment. It meant a lot to me to hear I was doing a good job with Addy. I felt as if I were, but everyone could benefit from someone telling them well done.

"Thank you, girl. You know you and your sister were there every step of the way. I couldn't have done half of the stuff in my life without you two watching Addy and lending a helping hand when I needed a mental break. As much as I love my child, there were times I wanted to run away."

Sam, Yara, and Nyah's assistance meant a lot to me because I wasn't close to my family. They stood ten toes down for me when I needed them, which was what friends were supposed to do. I watched Natasha and Nikki when they needed me too. I didn't do it out of responsibility. I did it out of love.

"You know Addy was our first baby. Now, children are falling all out of the woodworks. You have Natasha's little spoiled bad butt. Sacha let's her get away with everything. Then, you have Nikki. She gravitates to everyone in the family. She's so affectionate. I worry if she will feel the same as Addy in the next few years. Every day, I wonder what I'm going to tell her when she grows up. Hell, do I tell her the truth? That her father was a fucking villain who almost got our whole family killed, but he loved her? Or, do I make up some bullshit lie, and she finds out later and hates me?"

I sympathized with Nyah. “I do *not* envy you. Hopefully, by the time she’s ready to know about her daddy, you’ll have figured it out. Either way, you know the whole family is here for you. By the time she’s ready to talk about him, we would have covered her with so much love that no matter what you tell her she’ll be okay.”

Nyah bit her lip in indecision. “Me too, girl. From your lips to God’s ears because I would hate for her to despise me one day.”

“So,” Nyah dragged out. “Speaking of babies.” She looked over at me with a mischievous look on her face.

“What about babies?” I asked, playing clueless.

She glanced down at my stomach. “Are you and Dimitri planning on having a little Dimitri?”

I giggled. “Well,” I dragged out like she had earlier. “We’re *not* trying not to get pregnant if that’s what you’re asking me.”

It was true. From the moment we slept together, we hadn’t used protection, and he certainly did not believe in the pull-out method. In fact, I was getting a sneaking suspicion I might be pregnant even now. I was waiting to find out because I didn’t want to be disappointed, and I didn’t want Dimitri disappointed too.

He hadn’t said anything about wanting me to have his baby, but I saw the way he looked at the rest of the children in our small circle. He wanted a baby, and I wanted to give him one.

Trust, I prayed with everything in me I wasn’t making a mistake like I did before, but everything about us was good.

He made me feel loved and appreciated. Whenever those nervous fears tried to come to the surface, I stomped them down.

Another two hours later, we were leaving the mall. We parked close to the entrance of the mall. I didn’t believe in far parking spots. I had PTSD from the last shooting I was involved in. I would have driven around the mall a million

times to avoid parking in a covered garage. Nobody was trapping my ass again. Because we had quite a few shopping bags, we had dropped them off into my trunk. We only went back into the mall because I wanted to get a Cinnabon.

Craving a Cinnabon was another reason I started thinking I may be pregnant again. I couldn't get enough of them when I was pregnant with Addy. I would have Steven make special trips to the mall to purchase me one.

Walking out of the mall, I kept my head on a swivel. It was part of Bad Guys 101 training. Training with Dimitri made me aware of my body's warning system. I was already on high alert because this family was a beacon for danger. It didn't take much for me to become suspicious of something. Sometimes, I was simply being paranoid, but in this instance, I knew something was wrong.

My heart rate picked up the further we moved toward the parking lot. I had no idea what was causing this reaction. It was like my body was screaming danger, danger.

Scanning the parking lot, I stood still, reaching for the knife Viktor had given me. I hate I left my gun locked in my car since Macy's had metal detectors. I didn't want some wannabe Otis from *Martin* searching my purse and having to explain I had a license to carry. Or, some white *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*, trying to call the actual police on my ass.

I should have known better than being out without security. I had gotten too comfortable. Even malls weren't safe these days. Hence, Lenox Mall was about to make me and Nyah a damn statistic.

"What do you hear?" Nyah asked, noticing my body language. She grilled me as she waited quietly near me because I had stopped to determine where the danger was coming from. We both looked around the parking lot. She reached inside her crossbody Chanel bag and grabbed her knife too. It was a shame how conditioned the women in this close-knit family had become. We were so aware of constant danger that we literally prepared for some mess to pop off at any given moment.

“Nothing. I hadn’t heard a sound, but my instincts were screaming loud like an invisible dog whistle,” I told her honestly.

“Ayanna, if you tell me someone is after us, I’m going to be pissed because I recently had my nails done. You know they are not cheap,” Nyah gripped, looking around uneasily.

We couldn’t see anything even though it wasn’t even dark outside yet. It was spring and time had changed. I noticed people walking toward their cars, but nothing appeared alarming. However, something was making the hairs raise on the back of my neck.

Sweat dribbled down my back. All this danger grated on my nerves and was one of the main reasons it took me so long to give into Dimitri. Constantly looking over my shoulder caused me anxiety and had me in a constant state of awareness and paranoia.

“I don’t know, but you know ever since I was attacked in the garage my ass doesn’t do any underground parking.” When Roshaun was after Yara, he attacked Yara and I in an underground garage. I was shot, and my baby was kidnapped. Having something like that happen was enough to have me experiencing PTSD. PTSD was real. It had me jumping at shadows and any unexpected noises.

Something was happening, and I was trusting my instincts. I would rather be safe than dead. I’d rather laugh because I was being wary without cause than excusing a true threat when I could have prevented something from happening.

“Come on,” I told Nyah. We started walking toward my car, which was only a few feet away. I would feel more secure if we made it to the safety of my car. It could shield us from danger if necessary or give us the opportunity to get the hell out of danger.

“We should just-,” I started to say, but before I could get the word out of my mouth, footsteps could be heard



moving toward us from the mall's exit that we had just left. Damn, the danger was behind us and not in front.

Several men ran up and surrounded us. Terror crawled through my veins, attempting to immobilize me. It was almost as if all my training was trying to fly out of the window. Training was mute if I was too afraid to use it.

Internally, I knew there was no way in hell we would be able to fight all of them, but we were going to give it our best shot. I wasn't going to allow either one of us to be taken anywhere. I would rather die than be kidnapped. Being kidnapped was literally my worst nightmare. It wasn't only the idea of being raped. It was the thought of being taken somewhere where no one knew was I was.

Also, Yara would never forgive me if I allowed her baby sister to be killed or kidnapped. At least I went to the mall with Nyah. It would have been worse if I had been alone.

Both of us had fighting skills. We were fast, nimble fighters. No man would take us without killing or injuring us. I had a daughter, so I had too much to live for to allow some clowns to take me away from her. I would do anything to ensure I made it home to her.

I stood to my full height, ready to do whatever I needed to do to get out of this situation.

"Is there a problem, gentlemen?" I asked, trying to remain calm because if I learned anything else this past year and a half, I learned you had to always be confident and logical and to think on your feet at the spur of the moment. People sensed fear and would use every opportunity to take advantage of any weaknesses you displayed.

"No, no problem. We simply need you to follow us," the man nearest me replied as if we were going to follow him like sheep.

Frowning, I appointed to myself. "Me?"

Shit, I was confused, and I know he didn't think I was simply going to follow him because he asked.

*What the hell was going on now? I couldn't catch a damn break.*

This was not supposed to be happening. We had killed all our enemies. Roshaun's dumb ass was gone since he couldn't leave Yara alone. Nikita and Anton were dead because they didn't have enough damn sense to stay away from Maxim. The only enemies I had was Steven and Stephanie, and I knew neither one of them were that concerned about me to send someone to hurt me. It had to be someone connected to Dimitri and his family.

People loved kicking over a hornet's nest. They weren't happy until they stung all their asses. If Nyah and I survived this, this was going to be some more bullshit the family had to deal with. This time, it was obviously centered around me.

He smirked. "Yes, you. But we'll take her too." He gripped his dick, smirking at Nyah.

*Shit wasn't even cute.*

"Boy, fuck you. We're not going anywhere with you," Nyah growled with a snort. If we weren't in such a terrible situation, I would have laughed. Nyah said exactly what I was thinking. However, I refrained. Nyah had the propensity to be outspoken. We didn't need to provoke any of them to hurt us before we could react. We needed the advantage of them being caught off guard.

"We're not asking you shit," the other guy responded with his nostril flaring. Nyah was antagonizing them. We didn't need to do anything to make this situation any worse than what it was.

Blood pounded through my ears loudly as I planned to react. At this point, I didn't know who was after us or why, and it didn't even matter. We needed to stay alive.

I gave Nyah a look, knowing we had practiced drills constantly in the indoor gym at the compound. We weren't Lauren or Ashlynn, who had been trained since birth to fight,

but we could certainly hold our own. Hopefully until the calvary came.

I eased the knife from the knife holster Ash gave me. Ash had been practicing knife fighting techniques with the females in the family, and I was about to see if it was going to pay off.

Turning, to the guy nearest me, I slammed my knife in his neck before he could make a move.

His eyes widened when my knife penetrated his trachea, causing blood to spurt from his neck like geyser.

I surprised myself, but when it was a me or him situation, I was choosing me every single time.

Nyah was fighting, and I didn't even need to look to confirm it. She understood the assignment as well as I did. Kill or be killed. We were truly living Darwinism's evolutionary theory of survival of the fittest.

Despite my desire to look, I knew I had to take care of as many men as I could. I ducked a punch coming right toward my face. Slicing his chest open, I spun behind him and cut his back open.

I didn't know what they used to sharpen this blade, but it was cutting across skin as if it was a sheet of paper. I appreciated its accuracy.

If I had my gun, I would have shot every single one of them. One of the men tried to raise his gun to shoot Nyah, but I sliced his wrist open, causing him to drop his gun. Blood was flying everywhere. If I took a moment to look at all the blood saturating the ground, I would probably be sick to my stomach.

Nyah and I worked like smooth operators. We were trained as a team, and we acted as such. Our moves were coordinated to perform as much damage as possible in the shortest span of time. We were taught how to use our bodies as weapons. It was a skill, which all the men drilled in us constantly. Never lower your guard, strike with the intent to kill, and fight until your last breath.

In the next instant, another guy pulled his gun. I snatched it like I practiced with Dimitri and placed the barrel to his chest and shot. I watched as he fell to the ground, but I didn't stop shooting until all the bullets were released.

Once the bullets were gone, another guy ran toward me, but I threw the gun at him and dropped low to the ground, grabbing the extra gun he hid in his sock, killing him.

The sound of gunfire going off near my head stopped me in my tracks. Bullets blasted glass and concrete right beside us. Bullets whizzed around our heads.

“Shit,” Nyah whispered as we sprinted toward a car near us and ducked down.

Adrenaline was racing through my system. My heart was beating so loud I swore someone would be able to hear it.

“Did you see anything? Who's shooting?” Nyah asked, leaning against the car to prevent her body from being seen.

I shook my head no.

A bullet pinged against the car we were hiding behind. The shot barely missed us. The bullet penetrated the doorframe of the car, causing us to scoot back further. This was some bullshit. This family could not get away from mayhem and danger. It was like we all had attack us written on our backs.

Unable to get an exact location of where the shots were going off, I slid my phone from my crossbody bag dialing Dimitri's number. Placing the phone to my ear, I waited nervously for him to answer.

I hoped Maxim was watching us on the cameras because we could use his help right now.

“I'm three minutes away,” he told me before I could even get a word out of my mouth.

Before I could react, bodies started falling, contorting in agony. Piercing screams reached my ears, and I heard people scrabbling to get away from our area.

Some sounded like females, but most of them were males.

I covered my mouth with my hands, so I didn't unintentionally make a sound. The last thing I wanted to do was be the dumb damsel in distress who gave away her hiding place by screaming or breathing loud as hell.

*What in the hell is happening, now?*

My gut twisted and bile rose to my throat as more men continued to fall. Nyah and I scooted closer, getting as far away from the fallen men as possible.

Who was killing the men trying to kill us? That was the mystery. However, I wasn't raising my head to see for myself. I wasn't that damn brave or stupid.

"Who's killing the bad guys?" Nyah whispered as we crouched in terrified silence.

"I have no clue," I responded with tears blurring my vision. I blinked them away. Silence. Everything had gone eerily quiet. I wanted to peep my head around the cars to see who was doing all the damage, but I was too scared to risk it, but I damn sure wanted to know what was going on around me.

I held my breath as Nyah and I both froze. My eyes rose to the shadow standing in front of us.

"Are you okay?" the accented voice asked us.

"No?" Nyah asked, scrambling to her feet. "What are you doing here?" Her voice was high pitch, alerting me to the adrenaline rushing through her body.

Instead of answering her, his eyes glanced over her as if reassuring himself that she was okay. I stood up from my position on trembling legs.

No? Was this the same man who saved her from Nikita? If so, how did he know where we were? He seemed to always be at the right place at the right time. I couldn't tell if it was serendipity, suspicious, or stalkerish. All I knew was that

it was one of the s's. However, at the moment, I was happy as hell. He saved our asses, so he was fine with me.

We relaxed slightly but fear remained. I wouldn't be comfortable until Dimitri, Sacha, or someone else from our circle arrived. I didn't know how No knew we needed assistance and got to us before my man could. Hell, he needed to explain how he happened to be here when we needed him the most. Until he did that, I was going to keep my knife handy.

I jumped when several cars tore through the mall's parking lot. No turned so fast that he was like water. He raised his gun, waiting for anything. Now, I understood what Bruce Lee meant. No's power and strength was effortless. Who was he? Nyah had some damn explaining to do.

Dimitri, Sacha, Maxim, and Michail stepped out of a black, armored Navigator in front of us. As they exited the vehicle, each man had a red dot positioned on their heads.

*What in the fuck is going on now?*

No lowered his gun and placed it back in his waist. He slowly shook his head without looking anywhere in the parking lot. He was obviously calling off his guards because the dots immediately disappeared from the men.

This was power, money, and respect. Whoever he was, he had men protecting his front, side, and back.

"No, did you hear my question?" Nyah asked, glancing at him with fascination.

His obsidian eyes stared at her without any emotions. He was so hard to read. "I'm making sure you're fine," he responded.

She glanced at him curiously. "But, how did you know where I was?" she questioned him.

It was a good question. I was asking myself the same thing.

He refused to answer her. Turning toward Sacha and Dimitri he gazed at them with his hands folded behind his

back.

“I trust you have everything under control?” There was a saying about it wasn’t what you said, but how you said it. He wasn’t saying he would kill anyone who endangered Nyah, but he was saying he would kill anyone harming Nyah. His body language screamed “I will kill you all”.

“Nyah is safe, correct?” he gazed at the men without blinking. The same energy was present. He was pissed and holding on to his composure by a thin string.

Sweat dribbled down my back double time. Every word from his mouth was a whip. Was he threatening Sacha? Shit, this man had balls of steel.

“She’s my sister-in-law. Of course, she is fine.” Sacha stared No directly in the eyes. “Who the fuck are you No? I’ve seen you around twice, and every time some shit is going down. Are you friend or foe?” Sacha asked with obvious annoyance in his tone.

My heart stopped when red dots appeared all over Sacha’s body again. It was obvious to me the people holding the guns belonged to No.

“No, what in the hell are you doing?” Nyah demanded, stalking over to him. “This is my fucking family.”

Viktor stood protectively in front Sacha while Maxim, Dimitri, and Viktor pulled their weapons, pointing them at No.

I squeezed my legs together because it felt like my bladder was about to release. I didn’t want any of these men hurt. They were all my family. I couldn’t imagine anything happening to either one of them.

No’s body froze as soon as Nyah touched him. His eyes slammed into hers, and the heat in his eyes was obvious to anyone looking.

“Don’t make me your enemy. If you hurt them, you hurt me.” Her eyes held his, attesting to her statement.

He took a step back from her. He shook his head again, and the dots disappeared as if they had never been there.

I released the breath I was holding and knew for a fact I was throwing these panties away.

“Sacha, we’ll talk. Make sure Nyah is protected.” He bowed toward Nyah and walked away without noticing the bomb he has left in his wake.

Nobody said a word as we watched No walk away. I glanced around the parking lot, trying to identify where his men could be standing. I didn’t see anyone, and it made me even more nervous. No was a bad, bad man.

Once he left our sight, everyone relaxed. “Maxim, we need to find something on him. He’s focused in on Nyah, and we need to find out why,” Sacha told him with his eyes watched No’s Mercedes cruise pass where we were standing.

I glanced over at Nyah, but her eyes were centered on No.

“I’m trying, but his ass is even more of a ghost than we are,” Maxim responded. “There is very little information on him. Everything is fake. At first glance, it looks authentic, but I created our cover stories. I can spot false details and planted dates. Whoever he really is has been hidden through many layers.”

“What do you mean you can’t find anything on him?” she asked curiously.

“There is the basic information such as his name, date of birth, profession, and trivial things. His identity is as clean as ours, but we know for a fact something is missing. No is connected to something. I don’t know if it’s the mafia, Yakuza, or what. All I know is that he is hiding something.”

If Maxim couldn’t find anything on him, something in the milk wasn’t clean. I knew what that meant. No was dangerous. Wherever he went, people followed him, and they were trained to protect him at all costs. There was only certain type of men who needed this type of protection. I guess he could have been a businessman, but what type of businessman needed this type of protection?



He looked as if he trained as much as we did. Then, he had tattoos crawling up his neck. You couldn't see them all, but you could see them peeking from his wrist as well.

I avoided Nyah's eyes because she had attracted the attention of a man who was fraught with danger. Matter of fact, I was positive we hadn't seen the last of him.

"Are you okay?" Dimitri asked, walking up to me.

"Yes," I whispered, holding onto him.

"You did good, love," he squeezed me around my shoulders, comforting me. My nerves had finally settled.

"Thank you. I was so scared," I admitted. Looking around the parking lot, police were walking around cataloguing the damage. My stomach bubbled seeing all the dead bodies spread around the parking lot. Most of them looked like the men accosting us, but I was positive some innocent bystanders had to have gotten shot.

Dimitri lifted my chin, preventing me from looking at dead bodies. "I know, but you did good. Even though you were scared, you protected yourself. You did what you were supposed to do."

"Let's get in the car. We need to leave. I'm sure the police are going to come to the compound to figure out what happened."

"Okay."

Nyah walked over and grabbed my hand. "This family is a magnet for drama and danger."

I wanted to disagree with her, but I couldn't. "I know. What did we do in our life to attract this type of karma?"

If anyone asked me, I would have sworn I was a good person. I volunteered my time at women shelters. I gave money at grocery stores when they asked for donations in the checkout lines. I tried to be a good person. There was nothing I could think of to warrant constant unrest in my life.

She squeezed my hand. "I know our lives appear dangerous, but I honestly love our lives. We're rich, happy,

surrounded by love, and have a family willing to do whatever for us. I say life is good.”

I shook my head. “We are loved. I wouldn’t want to go to war with anyone else other than you all, but we are *not* rich. The men we surround ourselves with or rich.”

She waved me off. “Tomato tomahto. We have access to endless funds. We don’t want for anything. We own our business. We don’t answer to anyone. We stay in beautiful homes. We have a family who love us dearly. We’ve met some bomb ass new friends. I’d say we’re doing well for ourselves.”

I heard her, but did those things outweigh all the danger we were constantly facing?”

“And the danger?”

She shrugged her shoulder. “As far as I know, Yara’s situation was brought on by her selecting the wrong asshole to love. Maxim’s situation was his own. As far as today, if I heard correctly, they were after you? Even if we had never met them, you and Yara’s situation would have still transpired. I choose to look at the glass as half filled. If we didn’t have them, we would be fucked. Therefore, I’m glad they are here.”

I thought about what she said for a minute. She was right. If someone was after me, I needed them to protect me. In essence, they were my shields. I ran from him thinking his life was dangerous. Come to find out, I wasn’t as innocent as I thought. I threw a stone, and my house was made of glass.

We both entered the armored vehicle.

“What happened?” Dimitri asked as soon as we were settled comfortably inside.

I ran down everything we went through as soon as we exited the mall. The men asked a few questions, and we answered what we could.

“What race were the men?”

I cleared my throat, trying not to be offended. Being with someone of another race sometimes still had me in my feelings when topics about race was brought in the

conversation. I had to learn to relax into the conversation and remind myself no one was trying to offend me.

“They were African American.” I hated saying it because I hated when we were connected to a crime. It made me feel judged.

“That means this doesn’t have anything to do with our family. We wouldn’t have hired African American men to kidnap anyone,” Dimitri responded nonchalantly, causing my hackles to rise. What did he mean by his statement?

Nyah sucked her teeth. “What are you trying to say?”

Good. I wasn’t the only one feeling some type of way about his statement.

“I’m not *trying* to say anything. Russian men do not trust anyone but other Russian men. Americans are not the only racist people. Do I think it is right? No, but in this case, it eliminates anyone connected to our family as options.”

She rolled her eyes. “I guess but the only person who hates Ayanna is Stephanie.”

I ignored the fact she left Steven off. He could hate me now too since I refused to give him an opportunity to treat my life like a revolving door.

I shook my head. “As much as I’m sure she hates me, does she really have funds to hire someone to come after me, and is it really that serious?” I couldn’t even imagine it was deep enough for her to want me dead. Did she really love Steven so much she would go this far?

It didn’t make any sense to me. Steven wasn’t worth all of this, or maybe, he was to her. I couldn’t comprehend how when he cheated on her and had a child with another woman. I guess it wasn’t for me to understand.

“To *you* it isn’t serious because you don’t want his ass. To *her*, it might be everything. You see enough *Snapped* or *Dateline News* to know people will do a lot of shit for love. As far as the funds, her husband is not destitute. She can access funds if necessary.”

I heard what she was saying, but I still didn't agree. "I guess, but I can't see it. It sounds too farfetched to me."

"Regardless, I'll start looking into it. I keep track of their funds, and I haven't seen any large sums withdrawn from their account or the one she has hidden from him," Maxim replied.

This was new information to me. I had no clue he was keeping tabs on Steven and Stephanie. When we ended, I no longer concerned myself with him.

"Well, at least she's smart enough to have her own money since she wasn't smart enough to leave him alone," Nyah said.

"She could have money in a safe deposit box, a safe somewhere, or hidden somewhere no one knows about. Either way, I'll put someone on her to make sure we keep a close eye on her. We know for a fact Steven didn't do this. We have someone watching him." Maxim typed on his computer, making me think he was already doing what he could to find out what had happened today.

"We're going to go back and look at the footage from the mall today. Maybe, we'll see something which could lead us to the person who paid them," Dimitri told me squeezing my hand in comfort.

"You're safe, love. We'll make sure you're always protected," Dimitri told me.

I know he meant for it to sound comforting, but I wasn't confident. Our history showed people could get to you at any time and any place. The only faith I had was in my family. I knew they would do any and everything to make sure they found the person responsible for what happened today. God help them once they did because they wouldn't show any mercy.

# Dimitri

It was two weeks later, and all was quiet. Nothing or no one had tried to harm Ayanna. We hadn't put our guards down. It was one of the ways people lured people into making a mistake. They allowed time to pass. Then, they came after you when you least expected it.

Ayanna and Addy had been staying with me for two months. They fit me perfectly. I knew who I was as a person. I was a protector. I would go to any lengths to protect my family. My brothers and cousin meant everything to me but having my own family was something different.

Waking up next to Ayanna was spiritual. She would be alarmed if she knew how many nights that I simply watched her sleeping or listened to the breaths she took.

She often looked at me oddly when I either patted or pointed to my lap for her to have a seat. She didn't understand I always wanted her near me. Only she could bring out this side of me. When I was younger, I knew I didn't want to be with anyone. My life was dangerous in Russia, and I refused to place my family in any danger. As soon as Sacha mentioned coming to America and starting over, I was willing.

I enjoyed the power we wielded in Russia. Our names caused fear, but it kept us on constant watch from the government and outside parties trying to take over our territories. By the time we left, I was ready to stop all the killing and constant looking over my shoulders.

Meeting Ayanna was destined. Everything about her checked all my boxes. Adding Addy to the equation was unexpected. I never thought I would want a woman with a child. However, hearing Addy's voice brought me a sense of peace other people may not understand. Her innocence and energy made my once quiet house feel like a home. No longer did I feel lonely when I was in this big house by myself. They filled all the empty spaces.

Ayanna was a nurturer in every sense of the word. She made sure Addy cleaned her room even though I had a service

who came in three times a week to clean the house. Her philosophy was that it would build character if Addy cleaned after herself. I didn't know how Addy cleaning up her room would do that, but I didn't intrude on anything she said. I followed her lead.

I tried to observe how she handled Addy and incorporated it into how I interacted with her. Unbeknownst to Ayanna, I read articles on parenting. I didn't want to fuck this up. I read both parents needed to agree with how to handle a child. I wasn't a true parent yet, but I knew Ayanna wouldn't dedicate her life to anyone who didn't value her and her daughter.

When we originally constructed our houses, all of us knew we wanted a family. It was the major reason we left Russia in the first place. Having them here was accomplishing one of the goals I had set for myself.

Now, listening to her throw up in the bathroom for the fourth day in a row brought about a euphoric feeling for me I couldn't describe even if I wanted to. Reaching into my nightstand draw, I stood up from the bed. Following the sounds of her throwing up in the bathroom, I made my way to her.

I had been waiting to hear those sounds since I began making love to her. Ayanna was sitting on the floor with her head leaned against the wall. She looked up as soon as I entered.

Her teary eyes stared back at me. "I feel like crap."

"I'm sorry," I told her honestly. I wanted a baby, but I didn't want her to have to suffer for it to happen.

"You've been sick for four days in a row."

She closed her eyes and nodded her head in response. "I know."

"Have you purchased a pregnancy test?" I asked carefully. I didn't want her upset. I knew women could be sensitive about the topic.

Without opening her eyes, she responded to my question. “No. I don’t need to take a test.”

I gazed down at her. “Why not?” I was curious what her response was going to be.

She opened her eyes and focused on me with a slight smirk on her face. “Because I know I’m pregnant.”

Standing to her feet, she walked to the bathroom sink.

I watched her closely. “How do you know you’re pregnant if you haven’t taken a test?”

She shrugged her shoulders as she reached for her toothbrush and toothpaste. “I know my body.”

Ayanna was acting calm. She was making it hard for me to gauge her reaction. I watched her as she brushed her teeth, while not taking her eyes from me. Instead of responding, I brushed my teeth and washed my face too. I knew how she felt about us having conversations or kissing before we brushed our teeth. I wouldn’t have cared either way, but she was a stickler. Therefore, on the mornings I wanted to make love with her before she brushed her teeth, I would have her get on all fours and get it from behind. Making love to her in any position was exhilarating to me.

Once I finished brushing my teeth and handling my hygiene, I kissed her neck and placed the pregnancy test I purchased two days ago on her bathroom sink.

She looked down at the test.

“Even though you *know* your body, I need more of a confirmation, love.” I wanted to see the proof. Once the test confirmed she was pregnant, we would see a doctor next. I wanted to experience every facet of this pregnancy.

She turned around and wrapped her arms around my waist. “When did you buy a pregnancy test?”

I held her tight to me. “The second morning I heard you throwing up in the bathroom.”

She smiled into my face. “You didn’t say anything to me.”

I kissed her forehead. “I know. I was trying to see if you would continue to be sick in the morning.”

She shook her head at me, while continuing to smile. “If I’m pregnant, how will you feel?”

Gazing in her eyes, I told her the truth. “Like the happiest man alive.”

She reached for my face and pulled me down to her. “You want me to have your baby?”

“I want you to be the mother of all my children.”

“Me too. I love you, Dimitri,” she admitted.

My heart leapt in my chest. Ayanna has told me numerous times she loved me, but this moment somehow felt more special. Maybe, it had something to do with the fact she may be about to give me a child.

“I love you too.” She pushed her tongue into my mouth and kissed me passionately. I was blessed she no longer fought her feelings for me.

When she came up for air, she smirked. She patted me on the chest. “Well, since you don’t want to take my word for it, let’s take this test.”

She moved from my arms and reached for the test on the counter. She opened the box and immediately took out the items. She walked back into the bathroom.

I frowned at her as she lowered herself onto the bathroom toilet. “You don’t need to read the directions?”

“Nope. Point and pee. That’s it.”

I wasn’t sure if she was correct, but I watched as she wrapped the stick in tissue, wiped, and flushed the toilet. She placed the stick on the counter as she washed her hands.

I watched her leave the bathroom. “You don’t want to see the results?”

She shook her head. “Nope, that was for you. I know I’m pregnant. I know my body. You’re going to be a daddy soon, and you better cater to my every need, want, or craving.



I don't want any shit out of you. I better not run into some Russian hussy talking about you're her man or husband, or I'm killing you both."

She was being dramatic. I was nothing like Ayanna's sperm donor. "Don't compare me to him," I growled.

"I'm not comparing. I am telling you that I don't want no shit out of you. You wanted this baby because you worked day and night to implant him or her." She raised her eyebrow in question.

I smirked because she was right. I did do everything I could to get her pregnant. She glanced over at the clock on the nightstand. "You should probably go check that."

I walked back into the bathroom feeling anxious. I wasn't sure I had ever felt this nervous about anything in my entire life. I wanted this with Ayanna. It would connect us together for life. I wanted a forever bond with her.

Looking down at the test, I noticed two lines. Instead of asking her what the two lines meant, I picked the box up from the trash.

Reading over the direction, it stated two lines meant she was pregnant. I was about to be a father. A grin slipped onto my lips. I was happy as hell.

Turning around, Ayanna was leaning against the door with a smug look on her face. "You don't have to be so happy."

I tried to wipe the smile off my face, but I couldn't. "I'm not sorry," I told her honestly. "I'm upset you don't feel well, but my baby is laying comfortable in your womb."

She chuckled. "I know you're not sorry."

I walked up to her and touched her stomach reverently. "I hate you might continue to get sick, but I love you for providing our child with a home. I'm going to spoil you," I promised.

"You already spoil me, Dimitri."

I kissed her forehead. “I’m going to spoil you even more,” I responded in a thick accent. It was proof my emotions were getting the best of me. It was hard keeping all my emotions in check.

“Dimitri,” she pouted. “I don’t need anything else.”

“Okay,” I simply responded.

She frowned at me. “Are you even listening to me?”

“Yes.”

She rolled her eyes. “But you don’t care what I’m saying. Do you?”

A smirk crossed my lips.

She caught on quick.

“No.”

“Remember that when I’m craving some nasty food or want you to go out of your way to get me some ridiculous food I could wait for.”

“I won’t mind. I’m looking forward to it.” Ayanna was concerned about whether I would be annoyed with catering to her during her pregnancy. She didn’t have to worry about anything. I took her happiness seriously. Part of being a man was handling your responsibilities. When I asked Ayanna and Addy to move in with me, I was making a commitment to both of them.

Deliberately cuming inside Ayanna meant I was agreeing to take care of our child inside and outside of her womb. I wanted a family, so whatever it entailed, I was willing to take on. Ayanna and I discussed how she felt at the beginning of her pregnancy with Addy. She was happy and fulfilled. Once she found out about Steven’s wife, it was hard for her to deal with her pregnancy emotionally knowing the father had lied and refused to talk to her if she didn’t want to be with him.

“We’ll see.”

I leaned down and bit her neck and kissed every spot I bit. She brought out this side of me. Prior to her, I was content with fucking someone and moving on. With her, I wanted to provide her with slow kisses and passionate moments.

“Dimitri,” she moaned as her eyes smoldered.

I led Ayanna back to our bed. She was already nude because she was accustomed to sleeping this way with me every night.

I loved to feel her silky skin rubbing on me through the night. I was addicted to her. I didn't want to sleep without her. I understood how men became obsessed. I wanted to be inside her or near her all of the time.

Making love to her was euphoric, and every time I was inside her, I wanted to live there. Make it my home and remain cocooned within her warmth.

As I laid down on the bed, she slowly lowered herself on me. She gasped as our bodies connected. I smacked her ass because every time I slapped her ass, she wet my dick. I didn't need to see to know it jiggled in response to every hit of my hand. My baby loved rough sex.

She leaned forward, causing her nipples to brush across my lips. Her breath caught. Before she could move, I captured one and sucked it into my mouth. I sucked hard, leaving marks over her breast. I wanted her to remember me every time she looked down.

“Dimitri,” she hissed breathlessly as I added suction to her nipples.

Releasing her nipple, I gripped her neck and slipped my tongue inside her mouth. We kissed until she released me so that she could place her hands on my chest. She rode me slowly with her eyes closed. I watched her through hooded eyes as she bit her lip and rotated her hips. Laying beneath her, I allowed her to run the show. My love knew what to do to ensure she reached her pinnacle.

Spreading her ass cheeks, I slipped one finger in her hole. The hitch in her throat indicated she enjoyed being

penetrated in more than one location. She bucked on top of me as I rotated my finger inside her. When she lifted again, I removed my finger and brushed it into her wetness. As she eased down again, I placed two fingers inside her ass, using the come here motion with my fingers.

“Dimitri,” she sighed as I continued to work my fingers inside of her.

Her tight walls surrounded me with the warmth I was now accustomed to receiving from her.

“Yes,” she hissed as I inserted a third digit and stroked her from the bottom. Her body shivered as she released her cream down my dick. She even had my balls wet.

She tortured me by riding my tip only. Then, slamming down. Her eyes were squeezed shut. I loved to watch the expressions gracing her face as we made love.

She was doing everything she could to force me to cum, but I wasn't ready. I grabbed her by the waist, snatching her off my dick. Continuing to lay on my back, I shoved her pussy in my mouth. Licking her center, I tasted our combined essence.

“Oh God,” she screeched, holding onto the headboard.

My tongue dove inside her walls, snatching her juice before they could spill. I ate her until she was jerking and shaking against my tongue. Still, I refused to allow her to move. Gripping her thighs, I flicked her pearl. Her hands gripped the headboard, holding tight. Her pussy was so good. I didn't think I would ever get tired of it. I hummed, slurped, and licked every inch of her juicy clit, wanting her to understand pleasing her was my job, and I had excellent work ethic.

She rained down inside my mouth. I drank her down and slammed her back on my dick.

“Dimitri,” she screamed as I thrust inside her.

“Yes,” I growled, pounding into her from below. I didn't stop until she was laid across my chest, shuddering and shaking from another orgasm.

My fingers dug into her ass as I tried to fuck her into another dimension. My stokes became erratic as she kissed, licked, and sucked on my neck as I had done her earlier. Tingling sensations were racing down my spine. I knew what it indicated, but I didn't want to come yet. However, I couldn't stop this if I wanted to. She was squeezing my dick with a chokehold.

“Fuck,” I roared when her walls tightened around me as she pulled my nut from me. Pleasure saturated my body.

“I love you,” she moaned into my neck.

I lifted her head from my neck. I wanted to see her eyes. “I love you too.”

I continued to pump into her slowly until I had nothing left to give. My waist, dick, and nuts were saturated, but I didn't care. Both of us liked it nasty and wet.

My baby was having my baby. She deserved everything I had to give.

# Ayanna

A month after we discovered I was pregnant, Ash and I sat down at Cajun Heaven to eat my new favorite thing: fried lobster. Their lobster tails were so light and airy it felt like eating a little piece of Heaven. I didn't even like steak, but their \$150 porterhouse was good as hell.

I couldn't tell if it was the baby, causing me to crave steak or my ass was simply greedy.

I glanced up at Ash. She was frowning.

"What's wrong with you?" I asked, taking another bite of my lobster.

I moaned it was so damn good.

"Michail is walking through the door." I glanced over to see him headed our way. He walked with a confident swagger. Hell, they all walked with the same confidence. It didn't hurt that they were rich and handsome.

"His ass gets on my nerves with his good smelling ass."

"Lies. Lies. Lies. He doesn't get on your nerves. At least his looks match his cologne." We both burst out laughing. I loved myself some memes. They were funny as hell sometimes but told no lies.

"And, you know you want that man. You might as well stop playing. You're only prolonging the inevitable. Look at me." I nodded toward my stomach. "This is what running got me."

She sipped her Bob Marley. "I am not going to give into Michail. He's annoying."

"Okay, whatever you say. Can I try your seafood pasta?" I asked, holding my fork near her plate. I wasn't going to tell her anything. When Michail finally trapped her, I wouldn't even do her dirty by saying *I told you so*.

"Ayanna," Michail said, pushing Ash over who refused to make room for him so he could sit next to her.

“Hey, Michail. What brings you here?” I asked, sampling more of Ash’s seafood pasta. If he spoiled her appetite, that was on her. I didn’t have any problems eating both of our food. This food must have had drugs in it because I was addicted.

Michail looked over at Ash, who was rolling her eyes. “My future wife,” he responded.

“Ah, you guys are so cute.” I stuck my fork into her plate again since she was busying frowning at him.

Ash popped my hand. “You will not be messy and eat my food too.”

I giggled. “My fault. I thought you were too annoyed to eat. You know there’s people in other countries starving. We can’t let good food go to waste.”

She sucked her teeth. “You better be happy you’re pregnant, or I would have to meet you in the training room.”

“You can meet me in the training room,” Michail interrupted.

She gave him a mischievous smirk. “Maybe, I will. I might be able to beat some sense into you.” She stuffed a shrimp in her mouth.

“I didn’t know you like to be spanked,” Michail replied with a lustfully expression.

Ash’s eyes heated from his response. I shook my head. Yeah, it was only a matter of time. She was already practically his. She reminded me of myself in the early stages of Dimitri.

Running only lasted for so long when you wanted the man too. It was always the same with women. We could remain friends with man as long as we weren’t attracted to the man. As soon as the woman became attracted, the “my buddy” friendship died a swift death.

My bladder started screaming for release after drinking two glasses of lemonade. It reminded me of how I felt when I was pregnant with Addy. I visited the bathroom constantly. This pregnancy was obviously the same.

“I have to go to the restroom.” I placed my fork down and scooted from the table.

“I’m coming with you.” Ash stood to her feet too.

I wouldn’t dare tell her no. The way my life was built, having another person around was an asset. I knew the guards were around the bar watching me. One or two of them would even follow us to the ladies’ restroom. Still, one never could be too careful.

“He makes me sick,” Ash muttered as we entered the bathroom.

I didn’t bother to respond to her lie because she was lying to herself.

“Did you hear me?” she asked giving me the side-eye.

“Yes,” I replied without saying anything else. Really, there was nothing to say. She would have to figure out her relationship with Michail by herself like I had.

“You don’t have anything to say?” she asked.

I walked into the stall before I answered her question. “Nope, you don’t want him. Got it,” I called, releasing my bladder and flushing the toilet.

By the time I exited the stall, she was standing by the sink glaring at me. “You’re not cute, Ayanna.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “*You* said you didn’t want him. I said okay. What’s the problem?”

“Nothing,” she mumbled, sounding like a child. I knew she wanted someone to convince her to give Michail a chance. I wasn’t going to do it. People figured out things at their own perfect timing. Maybe, she wasn’t ready to accept Michail. I wouldn’t push her because I would hate someone trying to convince me to do something I wasn’t ready to do.

I washed my hands in the sink. She continued to glare at me. I sighed. “Fine. What don’t you like about him, Ash?”

She rolled her eyes. “I don’t like that he’s a twin and chose me because his brother was dating my sister.”



I dried my hand with a napkin. “What makes you think he chose you because Maxim is with Lauren?” I asked, curiously. Both Lauren and Ash were new to me and Yara. We met them through Maxim, so I tried not to intrude in their personal business the way I would with Yara and Nyah. However, since she was opening the door, I was going to walk through it.

She groaned in frustration. “I heard him say it on the phone the first time Maxim and I met.”

It was apparent she was bothered at the thought of him choosing her because she was Lauren’s sister. I would feel the same way. This was their biggest obstacle. He needed to convince her he wanted her for her.

“Have you asked him about it?” Sometimes, a conversation could solve a lot of issues people were having.

She blew out a breath. “I have,” she whined. He claims he was joking, but I don’t know what to believe. This family is close. You know that.”

I nodded my head in response. They were very tight knit. Our circle was small. It had to be, considering how many individuals had problems with us.

“You believe he wants you because he knows he can trust you, and you’re already part of the family,” I surmised.

She bit her lip. I saw confusion written all over her face. She didn’t know if she should take him seriously or not. Her facial expression said it all.

“Yes.”

I walked to her and reached for both of her hands, so she could understand what I was about to convey to her.

“With your line of thinking, I should feel the same way about Dimitri.”

“It’s diff-,” I cut her off before she could finish.

I continued. “Listen, I know what you are about to say. It’s not different. I met Dimitri through Yara. If she had never married Sacha, I’m positive I would have never met him. I

*choose* to believe Dimitri wants me for me. I trust that if he didn't want me that he wouldn't have pursued me.”

I didn't know if what Ash said was true. I never really thought Dimitri chose me because of Yara or Sacha. I ran from him because I didn't want to date a man whose life was filled with danger. I didn't want a bad boy. I wanted a simple life. Living with Dimitri was never going to be easy.

I was a woman, so I understood how scary it could be to give your heart to any man.

“Maybe, there is some truth in what you are saying. They could feel comfortable with women they are surrounded by because they trust us. I don't know, but what I do know is that you are a beautiful Black woman. Your skin is flawless. Your spirit is calming. I envy your fighting skills. You own your own business. You're classy, educated, and sophisticated. Everything about you screams wifey material. There are more reasons for a man to love you than the fact his brother married your sister. You are worthy.”

She stood there listening to me, silently crying. Eventually, she loosened our hands and wiped the tears from her cheek.

“Girl, you are a bad ass,” I continued to feed into her soul.

I looked in her eyes and paraphrased one of my favorite poems of all time *Ego Tripping* written by Nikki Giovanni. “You are so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal. You cannot be comprehended except by your permission. I mean...you can fly like a bird in the sky. We are beautifully made. You have a right to ego trip. It is understandable to be hesitant with how he came at you originally. However, give him a chance. Watch his actions, not his words. If you relax on him a little, he'll *show* you everything the rest of us already see. He wants you.”

She gave me a big hug when I was finished speaking. I loved sisterhood. I knew women got a bad reputation for being messy with one another, but when we found a real crew, it was

a beautiful thing. We spoke life, faith, assurance, and love into each other. I appreciated having all these women in my life.

Talking to Ash made me feel a pang in my chest. I missed Sam. I wished she could have been here to experience this bond we were making with these women.

“Thank you. I needed to hear this.”

“You’re welcome. Now come on before your man comes in here and snatches us out this bathroom,” I told her laughing. I was being funny, but it was true.

These men did not play about any of us. Michail would come in this bathroom and run both of our asses out of here.

Walking back toward the front of the restaurant where we were sitting at, I felt eyes on me. I discreetly tried to turn around to see who was staring at me. After all my run ins with crazy people, I was always attentive. I couldn’t ever be too careful.

Finally, I noticed Steven and his wife sitting next to each other hugged up, kissing, and eating dinner.

I couldn’t do anything but shake my head. I should have known Steven was full of shit. It wasn’t as if I ever planned on getting back with him or anything. It irked me to see him sharing a kiss with his wife as if he hadn’t told me they were divorcing.

I don’t know what even possessed him to come around me with lies spilling from his mouth.

Before I could turn my head, his wife looked up, catching me gazing at them. She smirked as if she had a prize.

She waved her ring finger at me as if I gave a damn. She beamed, stupidly with her ring in the air. I chuckled. She didn’t have anything to be proud of.

She was messy and a fool. It was apparent she loved him more than she loved herself because ain’t no way I would let the same man trample all over my heart. At least make it a new man. When women said things like better the devil you know, I disagreed. Damn that. Since I knew he was the devil,

there wasn't shit he could tell me. Let a new man trick me. She knew what to expect with the old one.

After Steven betrayed me, there wasn't shit he could ever tell me that would make me believe anything he said.

Her eyes traveled my body with a stank look on her face, causing me to want to slap fire from her rude ass.

"Ignore her, friend. Everyone is not willing to be happy," Ash said from beside me. She had said a mouthful with that one. People were oblivious to how they contributed to their own unhappiness. No man would make me give up my dignity to satisfy his ego.

"Bitch." I ignored her outburst as normal. I never wanted her husband. I wanted mine. From the moment I encountered her in the mall, she held me responsible for her husband's infidelity. I didn't make vows with her. He did.

She always acted as if I deliberately slept with her husband. I didn't know they were married. I couldn't stress that fact enough.

I never had sex with him again after he left my house that night. I didn't even see him again. He continued to contact me regarding being with me, but not about being in our daughter's life. If he wasn't talking about our daughter, I wouldn't respond. Eventually, he stopped contacting me, and the papers to dissolve his parental right came in the mail.

After that, I blocked him from ever contacting me. I had nothing to do with him. She chose to stay with him. I didn't interfere in their marriage or deal with her husband, yet she hated the ground I walked on, but laid beside Rover every night. *The ignorance.*

I didn't do anything to her besides be a victim to her husband. She stood up from her table, making her way to me.

I frowned at him as he sat back in the seat like some creep, licking his lips thinking I was about to fight his wife over him or take part in her delusions. He was so damn comical. I had a man. There was nothing he could do for me. I wouldn't let him blow on my pussy if it was on fire.

“You can’t help yourself? Can you?” she asked me.

I assessed the woman in front of me without moving. It would make more sense for her to be an ugly woman behaving in this manner. It would even explain why she stayed with Steven, but she wasn’t. I wanted to tell her to do better so bad, but it wasn’t my place. Maybe, she would wake up one day and realize there was more dick in the sea. I could testify to that. They were bigger, better, and attached to men who were more deserving of her loyalty.

“Whores like you give all women a bad name.” She sneered at me. She was talking loud as hell, deliberately causing attention to us. People were slowing down, glancing at her and trying to see who she was talking to.

She was showing her insecurities. See, this was why I would have never stayed with Steven. He would have had me fucked up in the head too, wondering was I enough for him or rather there was someone else.

He would have had me questioning his ass too. Cheating opened the door to too much uncertainty. She may like it, but I lived by one of Black people’s favorite sayings: it couldn’t be me.

I pretended as if she weren’t standing there. I wanted to get back to my table. I bet my lobster was cold now. I was going to take it home and heat it back up.

“I know you hear me,” she called, walking behind us. Audacity was not something she wasn’t lacking. I forced myself to remain calm. Getting good dick on a regular had me feeling relaxed. I had a man who loved me and my daughter. We were his priority, and I trusted him to continue to make us his number one mission.

I wasn’t going to stoke the flames of her anger. I didn’t want Steven. He was all hers to question, stalk, cry, and fight over.

Our security watched our interactions. I shook my head. They were not necessary. I didn’t perceive her as a threat at all.

“You’re pathetic. You still want him. He told me how you asked him to come see you to talk about your bastard child. He didn’t want her then, and he doesn’t want her now. He signed those papers without any difficulty. He doesn’t want you either. You were simply a cum bucket when he wanted to play. Let him go, sis.”

Anger bubbled up inside me. She was delusional. He must have given her some dick he never gave me because there was no way I could be this ignorant over a man I knew for a fact was trash.

I wanted to beat her ass for calling my child a bastard, but I was pregnant. I wasn’t risking my child to whip a dumb hoe’s ass, but she better believe if she stepped to me that I was going to show her what she had been searching for these last few years.

I knew how to fight long before the Vasiliev honed my skills. It was street fighting, but it did the job. They made me more dangerous. They showed me the spots to locate to take someone down. They made me have the ability to bring a skank to her knees. If she kept talking, I was going to demonstrate those skills on her.

Ignoring her outburst, I was going to let God do a great work inside of me. I wasn’t mad at her. I would have been infuriated if someone was sleeping with Dimitri too.

The thought of sharing his dick was enough to make me want to beat an imaginary hoes ass too, so I got where she was coming from.

Before I could turn around to walk away, she spit in my face. For one second, I was stunned. Spitting on someone was the worst thing someone could do to another person. It was disrespectful and showed she felt the person was far beneath you. That shit was just nasty and uncalled for since I didn’t even want his ass.

She was reckless with her mouth by spitting and talking shit. She had written a check I was about to make her ass cash.

Before I could talk myself down, I throat punched her ass. I couldn't even lie. It felt good as hell. Regardless of all the kumbaya stuff I had been talking, I never forgot how she acted a fool when I was pregnant with Addy. And trust, her and her husband disowning my child was still engraved in my memory as I tried to take her damn head off. Add in the fact she had called Addy a bastard, I was on her ass.

I grabbed her by her silk pressed hair and wrapped it around my hand. After that, it was nothing but face shots. I didn't want to talk to her. This was a teachable moment. She was going to learn I wasn't a toy. She couldn't play with me.

When she dropped to her knees, I kned her in the face. There was satisfaction in seeing blood ooze from her nose.

From my peripheral vision, I saw Michail lift a gun. I didn't need to look to know he was pointing it at Steven. "You better not put your hands on her, or I am going to kill you. I'll get away with it too."

Ignoring their conversation, I released her hair, so I could choke the shit out of her. I was aware of other guns cocking.

"Do not kill her in public," I heard Michail say as he gripped my hands and prevented me from choking her to death. He lifted me around the waist and moved me a few steps away from Stephanie.

"We'll kill the bitch later, but not in front of all these people," he whispered in my ear.

I was breathing heavy but didn't want to register his words. I didn't want him to stop me, but he tightened his grip on me as I continued to fight against him.

I kicked her in the face because I was sick of looking at her. She had finally gotten what she wanted. She wanted a piece of me. She wanted to whip my ass for her no-good husband lying to me. Well, she got what she was looking for. I was positive it wasn't what she wanted.

"Ayanna," Ash called from beside me. "Think of your baby." My body instantly relaxed. I was ashamed. I really

forgot about my pregnant once she spit on me.

“I’m good,” I mumbled to Michail.

Customers in the restaurant were staring at us in shock. It didn’t matter how classy the place was. Some people even had their cameras out recording me act a damn fool.

I looked down at Stephanie and almost gasped. My eyes widened in shock. Had a really killed her? Shit, she wasn’t moving.

Both her eyes were swollen shut. Her nose was bleeding like a faucet, and her lips were two sizes too big.

“Is she dead?” Ash asked, sounding uninterested. I should have known. Her ass was just as crazy as her man, or the man she was denying she wanted.

“No, she’s alive, but if lil’ killer had her way, she would have killed her,” Michail said, walking quickly toward the restaurant’s exit. I looked longingly at our table where my lobster still sat, waiting on me. I wanted to go back and beat her ass again for making me waste my food.

“Don’t worry. I’ll tell Dimitri to order you another one,” Ash assured me, patting me on the back.

We trailed behind him as I continued to watch behind me to see if Stephanie woke up. I was relieved when she eased up on her elbows with help from some of the people in the restaurant. Steven’s dumb ass was gazing at me instead of taking care of his wife. He was sick. I should have snuck his ass while I was beating hers.

Turning back around, I ran right into Dimitri. Embarrassment immediately coated my body, and I didn’t want him to be mad at me.

Tears filled my eyes as I wrapped my arms around his chest. He held onto me, allowing my adrenaline to continue to come down because I wanted to turn back around and stomp her face in the ground.

“It’s okay, love.”

I nodded my head.



“Why did you allow her to fight?” he growled, staring daggers at Michail.

“I didn’t allow her to fight. Matter of fact, everything was going good until that crazy bitch spit in her face. After that, I almost didn’t care if she beat her to death.” He shrugged his shoulders.

“She’s pregnant,” he reminded Michail.

“I know, but she deserved to avenge everything that woman did to her. She called Addy a bastard and caused a scene. Ayanna is trained. She knows how to protect herself and your child. She was fine.”

Dimitri glared at him again.

I looked up at Dimitri. It wasn’t fair for him to blame Michail. I was an adult.

“It wasn’t his fault. It happened fast. She spit on me, and I tried to kill her.” It really was as simple as what I was saying. “I know I’m pregnant, Dimitri. I allowed her to word vomit all over me. She talked about my daughter like trash, and I even let that slide.”

Dimitri shook his head. “Our daughter,” he told me with a frown on his face.

“I’m sorry. Our daughter.” It saddened me to realize how dedicated Dimitri was to Addy where her biological father couldn’t give a damn about her at all.

“I still don’t want you fighting,” he rubbed my stomach.

“I didn’t want to fight either. I tried to avoid the situation. I didn’t want either one of them thinking I was fighting over him. I have my own man. One who I love dearly.”

I held his gaze. I needed him to believe I would never fight because of Steven’s wack ass.

“I could care less about her husband, but she wouldn’t leave it alone.” The last thing I wanted him to think was that I

wanted Steven in any way. I wanted to clear up all misconceptions.

“You would have killed Steven if he had spit on you,” I told him.

Dimitri’s gaze held mine. He refused to comment on what I said. “Yes, I would have.”

He kissed my lips.

Right. He couldn’t contradict my statement because he knew it was true. He would have never allowed Steven or any man to disrespect him in the manner she had disrespected me. It didn’t matter if I was a woman. I was serious about my respect too.

I shook my head no, holding onto his shirt. “I want my food. I’m still hungry,” I whined. I was pissed off. They ruined my favorite meal.

“Her greedy ass,” Ash called from beside me. I didn’t care what she said. I wanted my damn lobster. They didn’t deserve to mess up my good ass meal. The steak was aged for twenty-eight days. It was tender as hell.

“Do you want me to have them bag up your food?” Dimitri asked, rubbing my back.

“No,” I mumbled in his chest. “I want a fresh plate. They ruined the other one. I want two fried lobsters, a porterhouse steak, and some Cajun pasta.”

“You’re spoiled. You didn’t even have Cajun pasta.” Ash reminded. “That was my meal.”

“You can be spoiled too if you just say yes,” Michail told her.

I glanced over to see her expression. She gazed over at me. I raised my eyebrows at her, hoping she thought about the conversation we had in the bathroom.

“We’ll see,” she told him.

A smirk appeared on his face.

“Don’t fuck up,” I told him, so only he could hear me.

“I won’t. Thank you for talking to her.”

I don’t know how he knew I talked to her, but he must have figured it out when we were in the bathroom for so long. Or, his nosey ass brother heard us talking through our cell phones or watches. Who knew?

We sat in the front of the restaurant waiting on our order. Ash reordered her food too since neither one of us had the opportunity to finish.

People were staring at us. I was embarrassed, but not enough to walk out without my food.

I watched dispassionately as Steven and his wife made their way to the front of the restaurant.

Stephanie didn’t look my way. Let me rephrase it, she couldn’t look my way. Both of her eyes were swollen shut. Her hair was all over her head. She looked like she had gone twelve rounds with a heavyweight champion. *Me*. I was the heavyweight champion.

I leaned my head against Dimitri chest since I was sitting on his lap. From the moment we became a couple, he felt as if I couldn’t sit on my own behind.

I felt Steven’s eyes on me. I refused to give him the satisfaction of my attention. Him slithering back into my life was causing all type of headaches.

Smirking Dimitri calmly gazed at Steven. “I’ll be seeing you soon. You must have forgotten what I told you.”

His accent was heavy, indicating he was way pass angry. I shivered in response.

Steven didn’t respond as he moved as quickly as he could to get him and his wife out of the restaurant.

“He’s a problem,” Michail remarked, watching Steven and his wife exit.

“Not for long,” Dimitri responded. He wasn’t regarding them.

After we left the restaurant, the ride home was quiet. I was still wrapping my head around everything that had transpired between me and Stephanie.

I hated how delighted Steven looked when Stephanie started acting a fool with me. It was disturbing. It was as if he enjoyed her acting crazy over him.

We headed up the stairs without saying a word.

I walked to our bedroom drained after everything. I wanted my food, but my body was slightly achy. There was no way I would tell Dimitri. He would probably blow a fuse.

“Where’s Addy?” I asked him.

“She’s with Lauren, helping her with the boys.”

I nodded my head, walking into the closet to remove my clothes. Dimitri stood in the entrance of my walk-in closet.

His eyes traveled over my frame. This was one of the times I could admit it wasn’t in a sexual way.

“I’m running you some water. You need to soak. I’ll bring your food up here on a tray, so you can eat.”

“Thank you,” I whispered, appreciating his attentiveness.

I slowly undressed. A smile came to my face as I recalled the damage I caused to Stephanie. If she didn’t know before, she knew now. I was capable of doing some damage. She needed to tread carefully.

## Ayanna

It had been a minute since the restaurant foolishness. I hadn’t seen Stephanie or Steven. Quite frankly, I was happy. I waited for days wondering if something was going to come of the restaurant confrontation since I tried to beat her to a pulp.

I shouldn’t have been surprised since Sacha had most of the police department in his pocket. Security had tightened more in the family since Steven and Stephanie decided to show their ass. I didn’t know if they had planned their stupidity, or if they were simply in sync with one another.

“Mom, can I go with daddy?” Addy asked, barreling into the room. It caught me off-guard every time she called Dimitri daddy.

When he first discussed with me that she wanted to call him daddy, I was nervous. We weren’t married, and as much as I believed we would be together, it was still scary.

What if we didn’t make it? What if we never married? People would think I was crazy for allowing my baby to call my boyfriend daddy. However, talking to Dimitri really eased my fears. Thinking about our conversation brought a smile to my face.

*“We need to talk,” Dimitri told me walking into the kitchen.*

*Immediately, negative thoughts penetrated my mind. No one liked to hear we need to talk. It was usually a conversation which would cause the person they needed to talk to some angst.*

*Was he already tired of me? Did we move too fast? Had something else happened in the family I needed to be aware of?*

*Sweat tickled my neck.*

*“Is something wrong?” I asked him, turning around from the stove where I was trying to determine what we were going to eat later.*

*He pulled me into his body, giving me a tight hug.*

*“It’s nothing, baby. Relax.”*

*My body immediately unwound. Hearing those words reassured me everything was going to be okay.*

*I pulled away from him to gain some distance while we spoke. I hated having conversations when a person was in my space. I listened better without being wrapped in his arms.*

*“What’s going on?”*

*Dimitri was rarely nervous or uncomfortable, but I could see whatever he wanted to discuss wasn’t an easy topic.*

*“I was talking to Addy the other day,” he started.*

*Immediately, my heart started beating erratically. Anything dealing with my baby had me on edge. She wasn't a sensitive girl. Very few things bothered her.*

*Alarms went off in my head as my stomach dropped. Why would she talk to Dimitri about something before me? I knew they had a relationship, but I made sure my daughter felt comfortable talking to me about anything. I didn't want to be one of those mothers whose daughter couldn't talk to them because they overreacted. I wanted her to know I was here for her.*

*I didn't want to be my mother. I refused to ignore my daughter's concerns.*

*“What did she talk to you about?” I asked.*

*He raised both of his hands, causing me to intertwine both of our hands together. He pulled me close to him without us touching body parts. Only our hands connected us.*

*“It's not bad, Ayanna. She wants to call me daddy.”*

*I tried to look in his eyes to gauge how he was filling about my baby's request. I couldn't look in his eyes for long because I felt so emotional. This situation saddened my soul. I never wanted my baby to feel lost.*

*I dropped my head as tears pricked my eyes. I wanted to blame myself for choosing her no good daddy. I wanted to take on accountability I didn't deserve. It took me years to realize the only person to blame was Steven.*

*He lied to me. He led me on. He pursued me, knowing he wasn't free to do so. He cheated on his wife. He chose to walk away from his daughter. None of this was on me. I refused to take the burden of his actions.*

*My mouth had a dry feeling as I licked my lips, sniffing because my baby was hurting even if she didn't know she was. She was seeking acceptance and wanted to have someone to call her own. She wanted a daddy. I didn't doubt my love was enough. I would kill a bear for my baby. She knew it, but I couldn't be a father to her no matter what I did.*

*“What did you tell her?” My lips trembled as I waited on his response.*

*Dimitri was a good man. He was always supportive and attentive of Addy. He would make an excellent father. It still didn't mean he wanted to be a father to my baby. We hadn't been together all that long. Everything between us moved like the speed of light.*

*I knew he wouldn't hurt my baby, but I didn't want him to feel responsible for her either. Yes, we were in a relationship, so he did have a certain responsibility toward her.*

*He should be kind, respectful, concerned, and attentive to her because he was with me. Addy and I were a pair. No man could date me who didn't understand my child came first. He didn't have to be her daddy, but he did owe her a strong male role model because I was his woman.*

*“I told her yes.”*

*“Dimitri,” I sighed. “You didn't have to do that.” I sensed I could trust him, but my daughter's heart and sanity were on the line. Dimitri could damage her more than Steven. She didn't know Steven. He had never been in her life, so his loss was felt on a different level.*

*Dimitri, on the other hand, was around her constantly. We lived with him. She interacted with him on a constant basis. Still, it seemed too soon to allow her to call him daddy.*

*He squeezed my hands, soothing me because I was torn up about the situation. I didn't know how to respond, and it was critical I got this right. I didn't want to make the wrong decision and make the situation worse.*

*“I know I didn't have to do it. I love you. I love Addy. I'm devoted to make both of you happy. You know who I am as a man. I'm loyal. I don't say what I don't mean. I've told you numerous times how you both are my family. I want to marry you. She's going to be my daughter regardless. I already feel like I'm her father,” he told me staring in my eyes.*

*“Dimitri,” I choked out as tears fell from my eyes.*

*He released my hands, pulling me into his body. Holding me tightly, he wiped my tears away. "We're going to be a family. We are already a family. I'd marry you today. Her calling me daddy today or tomorrow will not change where we are going," he explained.*

*More tears rushed my face because I felt Dimitri's sincerity. "You know you don't have to do this. I can talk to Addy, so she won't be upset with you."*

*He kissed my lips. "I don't need you to talk to her. I've talked to her. She is my daughter. She knows it. I know it. We need you to know it."*

*He kissed my forehead.*

*"What if we don't make it?" I mumbled because my heart was already hurting from thinking about not being able to spend the rest of my life with this wonderful man.*

*"We're going to make it," he promised.*

*"How do you know?" I asked, trying to gather my emotions. I hated comparing him to Steven, but I would have sworn on a stack of Bibles we were going to be together forever. Forever ended so abruptly, it took me years to heal. One day, Steven and I were in love. We were having a baby together and planning on spending the rest of our lives together. The next day, he was a married man who abandoned me and his unborn child.*

*When they said life came at you fast, I didn't realize what they meant until I was trying to heal from the pain and hurt that he left behind.*

*He used his fingers to lift my chin. "Because what we have is forever." This man had me sprung. Wanting to love me and my daughter had me wanting to drop down to my knees and suck his soul and heart out through his dick. I wasn't ashamed to admit how much I loved him. He was mine, and he was making it understood I was his.*

Thinking about our conversation always brought a smile to my face. A man loving me was a beautiful thing. A man loving a child who didn't belong to him was heavenly.



Dimitri took his parenting seriously. The way he handled her made me think of Kobe Bryant. Dimitri was a girl dad. It warmed my whole heart. It made me adore him more than I already did.

It still didn't stop the anger I felt whenever I thought about Steven. Her wanting a father made me furious with Steven. She shouldn't have to search or want someone who should have already been in our life.

How could he leave my baby? Yes, he had a wife. I understood he owed her allegiance. I wasn't a dummy. I knew he wasn't going to leave her, but I didn't expect him to leave my baby either.

It wasn't fair how he handled the situation. He could have still been her father without being in my life. His every action after I found out about his wife proved what type of man he was.

He did an excellent job of camouflaging his true character. Sorry ass men should wear a scarlet letter branded on their chest, letting every woman know what she was getting into from the start.

Men left so many broken women behind. They left the women behind picking up pieces she never should have to deal with. I didn't deserve how Steven treated me. He knew I thought we were in a serious relationship. I had no clue he was married. I expected forever from him. Instead, his wife held papers on his forever. I couldn't have who belonged to someone else.

Then, men left daughters behind who thought they did something wrong since he refused stay in their life in any capacity. I couldn't comprehend leaving my child alone in the world not knowing what was going on with her. Not having any interaction with her. It was a cold ass man who could walk away from the seed he had in the world. Men didn't grasp the damage they created, nor did they care.

It was a sad cycle I hated my daughter ever had to be a part of. My dad not being a part of my life left a hole in my heart. Then, to have a mother like mine made things even

worse. All of those things made me go harder when it came to my daughter. I put that shit on everything.

“Mom, did you hear me?” Addy asked, looking up at me with a begging expression on her face.

Before she started calling Dimitri daddy, she loved being around him whether they were sparring in the gym, watching movies together, or going to the mall. She wanted a father so mad.

“Yes, Addy. I heard you. Where are you all going?” I asked her. She looked so cute in her black shirt, camo pants, and combat boots. She had her curly ponytail in her head. My baby was beautiful. She looked every bit like Steven. Her smooth chocolate skin and dimples were all courtesy of him.

“It’s a surprise. Uncle Maxim, Sacha, and Viktor are going to. Can I go, please?” she begged, placing both of her hands together in a prayer motion.

I shook my head as Dimitri walked into the room.

It took everything in me not to lick my lips in front of Addy. Dimitri was looking good enough to eat. Today, he was minus his normal suit he wore to his office every day. Today, he and Addy were twinning. He had on camo and a black shirt too.

“Yes, Addy, you can go.”

“Yes,” she screamed. “I have to go get my bag. I’ll be back, daddy.”

He nodded his head in response.

As soon as she left the room, he pulled me into his body, kissing me as if he hadn’t just almost sexed me into a coma this morning. Now that I was pregnant, he swore I felt wetter and tighter.

Kissing him back, my sex clinched. Her ass was spoiled. Every time he came around, she swore she was about to get fucked. It was ridiculous.

Pulling back, I gazed into his eyes. “Where are you going?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. Maxim told me he had a surprise for Addy.”

I raised my eyebrow. “What type of surprise?”

“I have no clue. He swore she would like it.”

“I guess.” Addy being part of this family was another benefit. She had honorary uncles and aunts who would do anything for her. The men spoiled her rotten, and I feared for whatever boy who wanted to be a part of her life. I was scared for him, and she wasn’t even ready to start dating.

He placed his hand on my stomach. Tingles raised down my body. Dimitri constantly touched me but having his baby made him even more sensitive to me.

He did an awesome job catering to my needs and making me feel loved. He was the best, and I felt proud to call him mine.

# Dimitri

Sacha, Maxim, Viktor, and I remained quiet as Addy talked our ear off about nothing.

“Daddy, you know what happened in school yesterday?” asked Addy as if I attended school with her.

My heart filled with unadulterated joy every time she called my daddy. I knew Ayanna was nervous about her using the term with me, but I wasn’t. I didn’t plan on going anywhere. They were my family, and I was her daddy. No, she wasn’t biologically mine, but she was the daughter of my heart.

“What?” I asked, glancing down at the two puffballs Ayanna had placed her hair in. Addy’s hair was gorgeous. I loved to look at the intricate styles Ayanna placed her hair in for school.

“Well, Susan said she was having a party, but I couldn’t come,” she rolled her eyes.

“Why?” I asked, trying to figure out how seven- and eight-year old girls kept up so much drama. Weren’t they supposed to be at school learning? However, according to Addy, there was always some new drama brewing every single day. There was no end to their conflicts.

“I don’t know, but Mommy told me not to worry about it,” she replied shrugging her shoulders.

“What did she say when she told you that you couldn’t come to her party?” Sacha asked, surprising me.

I wasn’t sure if it was because he had a daughter or not. Maybe, he was practicing how to handle his daughter when she was older.

“I told her I didn’t care, and that my daddy and uncles would throw me a huge party, and she wasn’t going to be invited.”

“Good, that’s exactly what we’re going to do. We’ll talk to your mom and daddy about throwing you a huge party,”

Maxim said with a smirk on his face.

I rolled my eyes.

“Yeah, I’m going to have a party. I want it to be superhero themed. I want to be a Dora Milaje.”

None of us even needed to ask who the Dora Milaje were. All of us had watched *Black Panther* enough to know they were the fictional special forces fighters from Wakanda.

“You know you can’t fight at school right, Addy?”

She rolled her eyes like her mother. “Yes, daddy. I know I can hurt them if I want to. My fighting skills are only to be used when someone attacks me and when my life is in danger,” she repeated for me as if we hadn’t all drilled this information into her head.

We were making Addy into a fighting machine. We knew it. All the kids would eventually be trained the same way. Addy was simply the oldest. She learned valuable techniques from all her honorary uncles.

She was going to be one dangerous girl.

“Good, sweetheart. We don’t want you getting kicked out of school.”

“I promise. I won’t,” she pouted. “But Auntie Nyah said if someone punches or hits me that I should try to knock their blocks off. Whatever that means.”

I cracked a smile.

“It means protect yourself, but do not deliberately hurt or injure anyone. They are not trained in the way you are,” Sacha told her.

“I know, Uncle Sacha. If Susan hits me, I’m going to slap her silly like Uncle Michail told me to do.” She folded her arms against her chest.

“Be careful with Uncle Michail’s advice,” I told her. Michail was reckless. He would have my baby kicked out of school and be home-schooled.

“Uncle Maxim, where did you say we were going again?” she asked, staring out of the window.

“It’s a surprise,” he said with a mischievous look that had me glaring at him.

I didn’t like surprises. A surprise that obviously had something to do with the little girl sitting next to me.

“What type of surprise?” I growled.

“You’ll see in just a moment.”

We had been driving for forty-five minutes. The further we got away from the compound, the more irritated I became. I didn’t like leaving Ayanna behind. Lately, I could tell she hadn’t been feeling well, but she was doing everything in her power to keep it hidden from me. If she thought I would be mad that she was pregnant, she was sadly mistaken. I was ready to grow our family. I was ready to marry her.

A sign reading *Second Chance Dog Training* made me throw daggers at Maxim who refused to look at any of us. He parked the car without saying anything and he quickly exited the car. My gaze glanced over at the woman who stood inside the door looking at us.

Her eyes took all of us in as if she were trying to determine whether we were here to do her any harm. Someone had done something to her. I could tell.

Grudgingly, I admitted she was cute. Not as beautiful as Ayanna, but she had her assets. She was tall, at least six feet. She was black, but it was easy to see she was mixed with some type of Asian or Japanese ancestry. The thing that stood out the most to me was the long scar on her face. It started at her hairline and came all the way down to her chin. It was obvious it happened when she was a child because it had healed over time, leaving a raised mark on her face.

There were two huge dogs standing on each side of her. They appeared ready to attack if either of us made one move.

My hand immediately went to my waist for my gun. I wouldn’t fight a dog, but I would damn sure shoot their asses if they attacked me or my family.

“I’m Maxim. Do you remember talking to me on Zoom, Cierra?” Maxim asked, remaining still. His behavior had all of us on alert.

Her eyes glanced over all of us, stopping when she landed on Addy, who was holding tightly to my leg.

Addy raised her hand, waving at Cierra. “Hi,” she called.

“Hi, sweetheart,” Cierra called finally relaxing her stance. However, the sentry still hadn’t relaxed one bit.

“Yes, I remember you Maxim,” she responded, nodding her head. She walked off the porch with her two guard dogs following in step beside her.

Guard dogs were all I could think to call them. These were not regular dogs. Neither dog barked when we exited the car, but it was easy to see they were ready to attack if she gave them the command.

They had to be at least seventy-five pounds of muscles. If they attacked, they would dominate you, hands down.

Their heads were large. They had an intimidating presence. Their rugged stance was enough of a deterrent for anyone thinking to approach without consent.

She stopped in front of us. Looking down, she said something to the dogs in another language. Both animals muttered under their breaths to whatever she said. She pointed to Addy, causing my body to tense again.

However, whatever she said finally had the animals sitting down next to her, waiting on her command.

I had to admit it was impressive as hell.

“I’m glad you agreed to see me.”

“I enjoyed talking to you on the phone.” She glanced over at Addy. “Is this the little one looking for a puppy?” she asked.

Addy’s eyes widened. “A puppy,” she whispered.

“Yes, actually, remember I talked to you about getting several puppies.”

“I remember. One for each of your nieces, and two for the twins, correct?”

“Yes, and eventually, we would want more for each of the children being born into the family.”

I glared over at Maxim. Ayanna and I had not discussed giving Addy a puppy. They were a lot of work and responsibility. Animals had to be walked, fed, and cared for. I didn't want this to turn into my dog.

“Daddy, you're getting me a puppy?” she asked with excitement written all over her face.

I glanced down at her, and my heart melted in my chest. How could I ever tell her no? Ayanna told me it would come a time when I had to. However, for now, I didn't see it.

“Yes,” I started to say, but before I could finish, she was squeezing my legs tighter.

“Lean down, daddy.” I bent down to her height as she wrapped her arms around my neck. “Thank you. Thank you. I promise I'm going to take care of it. You'll see.”

I hugged her back, letting her coco scent surround us. For some reason Ayanna kept her greased up with coco butter. She said it was good for her skin.

I nodded my head. I didn't know if what she was saying was true, but I guess I would find out soon enough.

*You're welcome,* Maxim mouthed, causing me to stick my middle finger at him. I was thanking his ass for something I hadn't asked for.

“What type of dogs do you have?” Viktor asked.

Immediately we all stared at him. Viktor never spoke. He was always silent. He was Sacha's personal guard. He was the only one not directly related to any of us, but he was family. He was raised beside us because his dad was once Sacha's father personal guard.



Cierra removed the smile from her face as she glanced at Viktor. Her dogs immediately crouched low to the ground without warning, ready to pounce.

We all pulled our guns out, ready to put both dogs down.

She said something to them in Japanese again that had them muttering under their breaths again. However, they sat back down at her feet.

“You have to excuse them. They respond to my body’s emotions. They misconstrued a response from my body,” she said darting her eyes away from Viktor, who was focused directly on her.

*Oh shit. Viktor was intrigued by her.*

“What did your body language give off?” he asked in a gruff voice.

She waved her hands. “Nothing,” she replied nervously.

“The dogs are called Akitas,” Maxim told him with an innocent look on his face.

“Akitas,” Viktor asked curiously, starting down at the dogs, then, back at their owner.

No one said a word as Viktor continued to regard Cierra and the dogs.

She nervously shifted from leg to leg. Was she attracted to him too? Was that what her two monsters were sensing?

“Do you know what Akitas are called?” Maxim goaded him for some reason.

“Yes,” Viktor called, still refusing to take his eyes off Cierra. Everything about this interaction was strange.

There were some underlining things happening that only Cierra, Viktor, and Maxim knew.

“What?” Sacha asked with his eyes on his bodyguard. Sacha’s body was relaxed, waiting on Maxim to answer.

“The Silent Hunter,” Viktor replied, instead of Maxim.

A grin spread across his face. I shook my head. I didn’t know when he turned into his messy brother, but he had.

“Damn,” I stated, gazing down at the dogs again. Their names fit them perfectly. They had stood silently other than their interaction with their owner.

“What?” Cierra asked, looking at all of us individually. The dogs were back at attention. She said one word, which had them planted back on the ground.

“That’s what I’m called,” Viktor told her gruffly.

Her eyes widened as she looked at him. Yes, this was going to be interesting to watch.

“Daddy, am I going to see the dogs now?” Addy asked next to me, obviously unable to sense the tension between Cierra and Viktor.

Cierra pulled her eyes from Viktor who hadn’t moved one inch since she walked to us.

Cierra cleared her throat. “Uhm, let me put my two babies up, and I’ll show you all the puppies. They are out back,” she told us, stepping away from the silent predator who now had her directly in his sights.

She turned and walked away with the dogs walking beside her muttering under their breaths.

“You knew? Didn’t you?” Sacha asked Maxim, shaking his head.

“Yes.”

“Why?” Viktor asked him without taking his eyes off Cierra’s retreating figure.

“I wanted all the kids to have guard dogs. Really, I plan on the kids taking them to school and calling them service dogs.”

“How are you going to do that?” I asked curiously.

“They are puppies now, but they can be trained. She has miniature Akitas, which will weigh around fifty pounds as adults.”

I nodded my head, listening to Maxim talk. “Why service dogs?” I inquired.

He shrugged his shoulders. “We can’t always be with our kids, but their dogs can. Did you see the way they responded to us when her body language shifted because of Viktor?” Maxim smoothly quizzed.

Viktor glanced at Maxim with a frown on his face.

“Those dogs are deadly. If trained correctly, they will be an asset to the children. They’ll be around when we can’t. They’ll kill anyone who tries to hurt them.”

“What about other children? We don’t want some innocent child injured.”

He nodded his head. “I know. That is why we’re getting them when they are puppies. That way they can be trained to respond to the kids commands early. Addy is responsible. She’ll use a command to call him or her off when necessary. I’ve researched these dogs. They are territorial, aggressive, and fierce. They don’t bark unnecessarily. They are wary of strangers, alert, intelligent, and courageous. They are even affectionate and loyal to their families.”

I listened attentively to everything he said. I was worried about the dogs’ aggression, but I could see the benefit of having them in our family.

We glanced behind us when Cierra said, “They are stubborn and willful, but if you can train them, they will give you unwavering loyalty.”

“And you can train them?” Viktor asked with the same aggression her dog’s had exhibited a few minutes ago.

“Yes, I can train them. All they need is love, respect, and socialization. If you can provide them with that, they’ll be attached to you for life.”

Nobody said a word as Viktor continued to focus on Cierra as she tried desperately to ignore him.

“Okay, Addy, why don’t we go pick out your puppy?” Cierra called, reaching for her hand.

Addy looked up at me, silently asking for permission to leave with Cierra.

My heart smiled. This was another thing we drilled into Addy. She didn’t walk away with strangers. Our lives weren’t safe, and she needed to be always aware of that.

I nodded my head, giving her permission to leave. She moved away from me and grabbed Cierra’s hand.

“I want a boy dog because I want to be the only princess in the house,” she told her walking away.

Maxim cleared his throat, looking directly at Viktor. “Part of training the dogs mean that they will be living on the compound so that they can become familiar with the families. If the dogs don’t know you, they can become very aggressive, so expect her to be living on the compound.”

Viktor walked away following behind Addy and Cierra.

“You’re not funny,” Sacha told him, shaking his head.

He shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. “I’m innocent. I was doing research, and she was the best.”

“Right, come on. Let’s go pick out these dogs.” Sacha patted me on the back as he followed behind Viktor.

I shook my head. Ayanna was going to be angry when I brought an aggressive and stubborn puppy into the house.

An hour later, Addy had picked out her puppy and was asleep with her head in my side.

“You know Yara, Lauren, and Ayanna are going to be pissed when we bring four puppies home,” I said fixing Addy’s head so she wouldn’t be uncomfortable.

“I know, but I plan on explaining it to her, and hopefully, she’ll agree with my decision,” Maxim called.

I snorted. “Good luck. At least we’re only bringing one puppy home. Your house will have two little deadly assassins.”

When we got back in the car, I immediately researched the dogs for myself. I was scared and impressed at the same time. I hoped Cierra was everything she claimed to be because those dogs could be little hellions if not trained appropriately.

“Don’t call them that. They were cute.”

“Cute, little killers. They are adorable now, but after looking at her *babies* those puppies are going to grow up and kill anyone who tries to touch the children inappropriately.”

“Good,” Viktor called from the front.

I glanced at his profile. He hadn’t said much after our initial conversation, but we all were aware of how interested he was in Cierra. The fact that she was going to be at the compound for months hadn’t escaped any of our notice.

I gently moved Addy from my body when the car stopped. I had the men take me to the dance studio so that I could ride home with Ayanna.

I kissed Addy on the forehead. “I’ll see you all at the compound. Tell Yara we’ll pick Addy up when we get home.”

“Ok.”

Closing the door softly behind me. I glanced around the area, checking my surroundings. Once I was sure everything appeared safe, I walked into the studio after buzzing myself in with the watch Maxim had specially made for us.

Ayanna was listening to soft music as she stretched.

I loved how sensual Ayanna was. She was always ready for me regardless of the time and place. Like now. With that in mind, I sent Maxim a text message.

**Me:** Turn the cameras off

**Maxim:** Why?

**Me:** I'm about to be with my woman. Don't make me beat your ass

**Maxim:** Fine. Clean up after yourself. Everybody uses that studio

**Me:** Fuck you. Send a cleaner when I'm done

**Maxim:** I'm keeping the cameras on outside of the studio

This was why I loved my family. We were going to make sure each other was safe no matter what. He knew I was only going to be concentrating on Ayanna.

**Me:** Thanks

“Hey.” Ayanna smiled when I put my phone away.

“Did you know I was here?” I questioned her. One of the most important ways to protect yourself was to always be aware.

She giggled, causing my dick to hardened further. “Yes, Dimitri. I smelled you as soon as you walked into the room,” her sultry voice rasped.

I nodded my head and accepted her statement. Smell was another indicator when things were off. People, homes, and cars had distinct smells that some people may not be aware of. Smelling someone else in your space was dangerous. Using that to your advantage could mean the difference between life or death.

Before I could reach for her, she pulled away. Wrinkling her nose at me, she said, “I'm sweaty.”

“I don't care,” I told her pulling her to me. Her body was a siren call for me. She lured me to her every single time she walked into a room.

Her body flushed at my response. “I do,” she whined. “Come shower with me.” Her face flushed with desire as her breast rose and fell.

“No, we're good where we're at,” I told her, removing my shirt.

Her gaze darted nervously up at the camera, as if she expected to see Maxim staring directly at us.

I shook my head. “Maxim already turned them off.”

Her eyes slammed into mine. “You told him you were about to sleep with me.”

I smirked. “No.”

She raised an eyebrow at me. “Well, why did he turn off the cameras then?”

“Because I told him I wanted to be alone with my woman.” I dropped my shirt and continued to walk toward her.

She held up her hands to hinder me from getting closer to her. “That’s like telling him we’re going to have sex.”

My hungry gaze moved over her body. “I don’t care if they know if we have sex. You belong to me.”

God, she was gorgeous. She enticed everything about my senses. After being denied her for a long period of time, I reveled in the pleasures her body offered me.

For months, the only sex I had was with my hand, and it was unsatisfactory. Now that she was mine, I was fucking her every chance I got even if I had to come to her job to get it.

She bit her lip. “Umm, I do?”

“Do you need a reminder?” I unbuckled my belt and unbuttoned my pants. Pushing her hands out the way, I squeezed her body into mine as I kissed her neck.

“No, I know who I belong to,” she told me breathlessly.

“Who?” I growled, waiting to hear her say my name. I lifted my head from her neck so that I could remove her sports shirt. I lightly caressed her breast. Ayanna’s skin was smooth as satin.

Her generous breast called to me, making me mark them deliberately. I leaned down and dipped my head, so I could capture her nipple in my mouth.

Ayanna made me want to put the world on notice. I wouldn't place marks on any part of her body the world could see, but any other area of her body was mine to torture, nibble, bite, and mark.

Her eyelids drooped. "Dimitri," she sighed, gripping the head of my erection, causing a drop of pre-cum to wet my boxers.

My erection strained against my boxers.

"Say it again," I demanded, popping one of her erect nipples into my mouth.

Her gaze never left my face. "Dimitri," she repeated in a soft voice, unzipping my slacks and pushing them pass my hips.

I was unable to resist her when she eased down to her knees. She licked her lips as she gazed at my erection.

Pre-cum seeped from the tiny slit, and my cock bobbed as she softly kissed the tip. She nuzzled the sensitive skin behind my balls. She slid the wet heat of her tongue back up my balls. Taking long lazy laps, she licked me as if she was tasting the finest cuisine. Unhurriedly, she tasted me on her way back up from my balls.

My hands immediately gravitated to her thick curls, running my fingers through them.

Her stunning brown eyes watched my response to her. Her breath was hot against my dick as she finally licked the tip of my dick, tracing the outline with her lips. She wrapped her free hand around my erection. My dick throbbed with anticipation. It took every bit of my control to prevent myself from stuffing my pole in her mouth.

She was so damn unbelievably sexy.

Her eyelids drifted close as she finally inserted me into her warm, waiting mouth. Spark of pleasure raised down my body.

"Umm," she hummed in a sexy rasp that scraped across my dick, making my toes curl inside my shoes.



She was a Throat Goddess as the muscles in her throat clenched around me. If you asked me, no other woman would ever be able to compare to what she was doing to me. My long, steel cock slid in and out of her mouth, making my nuts draw tight as a bowstring.

Her mouth milked my cock. My entire body throbbed with the need to release. I fisted her hair as I slid smoothly inside her silken lips.

Her eyes closed as she moaned in enjoyment. My dick plunged into her mouth with carnal pleasure. My balls slammed against her swollen lips. I moved my hands to her hair as I raked my fingers through it. I loved the soft texture of her curls. Her hands remained planted on the floor as she sucked me with no hands.

My blood sizzled as my vision grayed around the edges. Until finally, she broke me. Every nerve and muscle pulsed as my orgasm roared through my body and blasted into her mouth. Holding her against my groin, she swallowed me whole.

Lost in the euphoria of her mouth, I continued to softly slide in and out of her warmth. Glancing down, she held my gaze. My body spasmed as she slowly allowed me to pop from her warm mouth.

On shaky legs, I removed my pants, boxers, and shoes all the while she watched me intently.

“Lay down,” I commanded.

She seemed completely shocked by my statement, and I didn’t know why.

She blinked several times at me, looking around the studio again. “Dimitri, we can’t have sex in here.”

“Lay down, Ayanna.” I repeated. I didn’t want to hear it. My woman was going to be just as satisfied as she had just satisfied me.

“Dimitri,” she whined. “At least come to my office. You are *not* sleeping with me on this hard ass floor.”

I smirked, picking up my clothes as I watched her ass jiggle in front of me. It was as if she had a magnet on her ass because my dick was pointed directly to her as I followed behind her.

She stood by the door as I opened it for her. My actions brought a smile to my face as I thought about Ayanna. She made sure Addy waited by the door for me to open it for both of them every time we went out together. I appreciated her showing our daughter how a man was supposed to treat his daughter. I would hate to have to kill someone's son for mistreating my baby.

I closed and locked the door behind us.

She went directly to the coach. "If you mess up this coach, you are going to replace it."

"Da," was my only response as she laid down on the brown coach.

"No, turn around," I commanded.

She turned over, leaning down, I caressed her smooth ass with my tongue. Immediately, her scent permeated my nose. I didn't care what time of the day it was, my baby always smelled like mangos or some other fruits. From sleeping with her every night, I knew she had a cabinet full of scrubs and washes. She made me want to purchase a damn scrub shop to keep my baby smelling succulent.

Spreading her cheeks, I tongued-kissed her asshole. Her body jerked in response. When she started to move forward, I held her ass tightly with my hands, making sure she couldn't move. I flicked my tongue in and out of her faster and faster. Ayanna rode my tongue, struggling to hold onto anything.

I felt her hands playing in her swollen sex. I was focused on providing her pleasure.

"Dimitri," she mumbled into the coach.

"Da," I groaned, making my other hand available to play in her wetness. Moving her hands away, I pleased her with my fingers. Her knees dug into the coach. She

whimpered. I continued to assault her with my fingers, rubbing her g-spot. After a few minutes, her body shook before it gushed, wetting up my fingers.

Taking her wetness, I inserted my fingers inside her ass. Gripping my dick, I ran it through her wetness. Glancing down, I smiled in satisfaction. My baby was ready for me. Using my wet dick, I slowly entered her tight ass. This was the first time I had experienced her ass. Matter of fact, Ayanna enjoyed anal play.

I squeezed my eyes shut as I inched inside her tight hole.

“Oh God,” she whispered, pushing her ass slowly into my groin.

“This feels so good.” The longing in her voice had me wanting to tear her ass up.

Her wet channel wept for me as I worked my way inside. She stared at me from behind intently. I loved when she kept her eyes open during sex. It added another level of intimacy.

Her breathing became shallow, indicating she was about to orgasm. After months of making love to her, I was attuned to every hitch of her voice. I knew what all her sounds indicated.

Her body was sheened with sweat as I pounded inside her. Warmth surrounded my dick. It didn't take long before both of us was breathing hard and trembling.

Ayanna was inside of me, and I didn't think I would ever be able to let her go. She aroused all my senses. My cock throbbed as I continued to bring her satisfaction. When I was with her, I didn't have any concerns. It was simply just the two of us.

My muscle strained as she finally released all over me giving me the go ahead to let my mine go.

“This shit is forever,” I growled, knowing I told the truth.

There was no way I would ever allow any harm to come to her. She was my heart and soul. Nobody loved without their heart.

## Steven

In life we made mistakes. No one was immune to fuck ups. It made us human. Some mistakes were small, and you could fix them easily. For example, if you forgot to buy milk on your way home or even purchased the wrong milk, it was an easy remedy. However, some blunders were big and weren't easily fixed.

The biggest error I made was letting Ayanna go. It was true when someone said you didn't know what you had until it was gone. In the two years I was with Ayanna, I never thought about losing her. I knew I did a damn good job of making her happy. She never had to look at another man because I supplied all her needs. I was her man. It was my job.

Matter of fact, I never even thought about what would happen if my secret was ever discovered. I didn't care if Stephanie knew. She understood who her husband was. I wasn't ever going to be faithful to her.

Usually, I wasn't in the business of deluding myself. However, I must have done so when it came to her because when she walked up on my ass at the mall that day, I could have shitted a brick. Stephanie had caught me cheating a number of times, and I didn't feel as scared as I had when Ayanna saw me sitting there with my wife and son.

Going back to my wife was the last thing I had wanted. I wanted my Ayanna. She was my heart. I would go so far as to say she was my soulmate. Living without her was the hardest thing I ever done.

The worst feeling in the world was laying in the bed with someone else and wanting to be with a different person. It was a depressing feeling. A many of nights I laid in bed wishing Stephanie was Ayanna. If wishes were money, I would have been a rich ass negro.

I understood how men could be driven to the edge. My mind wouldn't let me rest. I wanted her so desperately. Thinking about how we ended, I blamed Ayanna to a certain extent. I wondered why she didn't fight for us. She let me go without trying to convince me to leave my wife. She had so many advantages over my wife.

Ayanna's pussy had my dick ensnared. Her throat sucked my dick like a Hoover vacuum cleaner when you first purchased it off the shelf at an expensive ass store. All those things meant, if she had forced the issue, I would have chosen her over Stephanie. However, she let my wife have me without any struggle.

She didn't even try to keep me around for the money. She wasn't employed, so in my head, I thought she would stay with me so that I could keep taking care of her.

She made me wonder how much she really loved me. Had she loved me enough, she would have been begging me to choose her. Some of my closest friends had a wife and a mistress too. The mistress knew her place and never stepped out of her lane. If she saw the wife walking by, she wouldn't even make contact. Why couldn't Ayanna be more like those women? Instead, after discovering my wife, she only wanted to talk about our daughter. A daughter I only gave her because I thought it would keep her with me.

I didn't understand how she could pretend as if what we had wasn't special. I spent an excessive amount of money on Ayanna, taking her on trips and shopping sprees. I gave her quality time. If she called, I didn't care if Stephanie was around. I was leaving the room to ensure she was fine. Ayanna came first. Stephanie only possessed the paperwork saying I was her husband.

Women didn't get it. We felt deeper than them. It didn't matter if we fucked up or not. They were supposed to forgive us and let it go. Instead of letting the hurt go, she let me go. I was so far in my feelings for Ayanna. I didn't see how to dig myself out of them. She had my heart in her hand. Sleeping with other women and my wife did nothing to alleviate the pain of losing her. I wanted her back. I wasn't sure if I would

be able to continue to keep my sanity if I didn't have her back in my life and my bed.

With every day, the rage I felt for her built until it was inferno building inside of me. I tried to talk myself down. I wanted to desperately let it go, but I couldn't. Seeing her smile and being happy with someone else pissed me off to no end.

She was supposed to continue to be miserable without me. She should have stayed alone or dated inconsistently like she had been doing.

My mind continued to go back to the past because it was where everything fell apart. After leaving Ayanna's house all those years ago, I tried to go back to Stephanie, knowing I didn't want her. In fact, I hated her even though I knew it wasn't her fault. Everything she did irritated me. Hearing her breathe grated on my nerves. It was amazing how she thought everything could be swept under the rug. She wanted to feign as if our marriage was good.

I don't know how she could. She had to know my heart wasn't in our marriage anymore. Shit, I don't know if it had ever been in our marriage.

I loved her in high school. After high school, those teenage feelings disappeared, but I kept her around. Now, I couldn't pretend anymore. We ignored each other in the house. The only time we communicated was when I wanted her to suck or fuck me. All these years later, I was comparing it to Ayanna, and Stephanie's ass couldn't measure up.

It was ridiculous how she made me make a million promises to change over the years, but I never did. She never even held me accountable when I didn't. She must have known what would have happened. I would have happily left her ass.

She accepted what I gave her even if it was the bare minimum. We were both unhappy, but she didn't care. I guess having me was the reward. Maybe, she felt as if she was the winner if she didn't allow another woman to have me, but it wasn't making her happy. Obviously, she was content with saying she still had my ring and last name. I didn't know how

she benefited from those two things when she was always miserable.

Then again, I was miserable too.

She knew what we had was gone. She was holding onto a dream, which ended back in high school. Now, I realized all the money in the world wasn't enough to stay where I wasn't happy. Unfortunately, I waited too late.

My temper was short every time I had to be around her. It wasn't fair because she wasn't holding me hostage. Sometimes, I acted out because I wanted to push her away. I wanted to do enough to make her leave me, but she never did. Matter of fact, she held on tighter.

We were a sad pair. All Stephanie wanted to do was repair us. All I wanted to do was gain Ayanna's forgiveness, so she would put me out of my misery and take me back.

Seeing her with him triggered me. I had gone years allowing her to lead her life. I knew she fucked other men, but they were like dust in the wind. They blew away after a short span of time.

Dimitri was here to stay. He was going to be living the life with her I should have lived. He stayed around her. There was no way I could even get close to her to talk to her about us.

I needed her to hear me out. It was vital she believed I could be a changed man. She loved me once before. I knew she could love me again. I just wanted a chance. Until she gave me that, I would never allow her to be happy with him. I was the one for her. I loved her with every fiber of my being, and I needed one opportunity.

If she gave me that, I would be everything she thought she ever needed. Cheating would be a thing of the past for me.

“She's never going to take you back.”

*There this bitch went talking to me again.*

I turned toward Stephanie. She was smirking at me as if her words didn't hurt her as much as they were hurting me.

Ayanna was the last person she wanted me with.

She wanted me to love her, and I couldn't. I loved Ayanna, and she wasn't giving me a chance. We were on the same side of the same coin.

Currently, neither one of us was getting what we wanted.

“It must hurt you to know I'm in love with someone else.” Two could play this game, except my words would hurt more because she loved me. I no longer loved her. It took me too many damn years to realize it. I wasted precious time on a sinking ship.

A sad smile played across her face. She was hurt, but I didn't care. She should watch the words that came out of her mouth.

“It must hurt you to know she is too. I don't know what makes her different than all the rest of them.”

She didn't need to know. I knew what made her different, and it wasn't simply her pussy.

I shrugged my shoulders. “It's probably because she never accepted all my shit.” It was a direct knock to her personality. It was a strike against the other women too. They were satisfied with getting part of my time, part of me. With them, I never bothered to hide I was married. They didn't care if I was married as long as I kept the money, gifts, and dick coming.

“So, if I left you, you would care about me?” she asked, sounding stupid.

I shook my head. “No, nothing could make me love you again.”

Immediately tears filled her eyes. I should have felt bad, but I couldn't dredge up any remorse. She pushed us to stay in this marriage. If she hated the way I treated her, she could have left. She could have gotten half of my money, which she was always threatening me with, and rode off in the fucking sunset. Obviously, she was content being cheated on and used. By now, she knew who I was as a man, and she was



willing to handle all the shit coming from being with a man like me.

“Why do you hate me?” Her voice was trembling. “I’ve been a good wife to you.”

I blew out a breath, trying to restrain my attitude. She didn’t deserve the full brunt of my hate. I deserved a portion too.

“We knew a long time ago this marriage was over. You deliberately got pregnant with SJ, knowing I was about to leave.” I hated her for it too. No children should have been bought into this shit show. Maybe, she was the reason I chose to get Ayanna pregnant. I stayed with her stupid ass when she told me she was pregnant with my son. I was hoping Ayanna had the same philosophy, but my strategy didn’t work with her.

“I didn’t deliberately get pregnant with him. It was an accident.” She couldn’t even look at me as she spewed her lies.

I snorted. “I’m not going to argue with you about it anymore. You know the truth, and I know the truth. You knew if you got pregnant that I would feel obligated to stay with you. I did. Now, both of us are miserable.”

“You could have left too,” she muttered.

I wanted to punch her in the face for her comment. I knew I could have left. Shit, I regretted I hadn’t left.

“Hence, the reason I’m mad with myself. I should have paid you whatever you wanted and got the hell on. Instead, I stayed hating you a little more each day.”

She sniffled. “You hate me, Steven? I’ve never done anything to you.”

I looked at Stephanie, trying to convince myself I didn’t despise her, but I did.

“I don’t hate you, Stephanie.” If there was a word stronger than hate, it was what I felt for her.

She smiled, showing me once again she was either in it for the money, or she loved me without reason.

“We can get through counseling Steven. Couples hit rough patches all the time. We have to try harder to stay together. We could go on a trip. Do something to bring back the fire in our marriage. I’m willing to do anything to save our marriage. All you have to do is tell me.”

If I brought back the fire in this marriage, I was going to burn this bitch down with her in it. We were done.

I stood up from my seat. “There is no bringing us back. You should see an attorney and get the half you’ve been screaming about for the last few years. I’m done.”

Stephanie’s mouth dropped open in shock. She never thought I would say it. She didn’t realize it, but I’ve been saving money for years. I had money in offshore accounts. All my bonuses and raises went into another account. She had no clue how much I was worth, and I wanted it that way.

I ignored the look on her face, trying to figure out a way to get Ayanna to talk to me. All I needed was a little more of her time. He interrupted us before I could finish pleading my case. What could I get her to talk to me alone?

If I got her alone, she may see how our chemistry never left. My dick bricked up, thinking about having alone time with her.

Suddenly, a thought crossed my mind. It was risky, but what was ever gained without a little risk?

A wide smile crossed my face. I had a plan. I knew how to make her talk to me.

# Addy

Every single time mommy asked me what the best part of my day was I told her recess. It was because I was able to take Zeus outside and play with him.

The other kids tried to touch him, but he always shied away from them. Ms. Cierra was helping me train him. I loved to give him commands to see if he would follow them. When he did, I was so excited. He was like my best friend.

I liked Gavin. He reminded me of my daddy with his brown hair and blue eyes. He was always nice to me, and even when I didn't need him to protect me, he made sure no one talked mean to me. It was uncomfortable sometimes being one of only a handful of black kids at my school.

My mom constantly told me it was a good school. I did learn a lot here, but sometimes the girls weren't always nice, or maybe, they were. I simply felt like I didn't belong. They all had long, brown, black, or blond hair. My hair was either in puffy ponytails or braids. Whenever I wore braids, they would have a hundred questions about how it worked. It made me feel uncomfortable. I did have a few friends though, but I could be choosy when it came to picking them.

Auntie Yara told me to keep my circle small. When I asked her what it meant, she told me to watch who I let be my friends. Not all people were honest. They could smile in your face and stab you in the back. I gasped when she told me someone could stab me in the back. Then, I burst out laughing. I knew what she meant. It was an idiom, so I guess the school was doing a good job.

I looked around the playground and noticed another class coming out for recess. I pulled Zeus's play ball out of my bag. I wanted to play fetch with him. I enjoyed the way he could follow orders. Ms. Cierra told me how important it was he followed my directions. He needed to understand I was the boss.

"Zeus," I called, patting my leg, so he would walk toward me since he was sniffing a tree. Ms. Cierra told me it

meant he was marking his territory. I didn't understand why he needed to mark so many spots, but I wasn't a dog. I guess it wasn't for me to comprehend.

I felt the substitute for Mrs. French's class eyes gazing at me. I cocked my head to the side observing him. It was something weird about his constant staring at me. His gaze was making me uncomfortable. I remembered Auntie Yara would call it paranoid. My daddy called it suspicious, observant, and cautious. He informed it was at those times I needed to be careful and pay even closer attention.

The more I watched him. The more something about him seemed familiar, but I couldn't see him well enough to figure out how or why. I tilted my head to the side, trying to get a better look at him, but he was too far away from me. My brain was trying to remember, but I couldn't. It was like it wanted to come to me. Then, it disappeared.

When he noticed me looking at him, he gave me a big smile and turned back around.

I shrugged my shoulder. He was a teacher. I was at school, and I was sure everything was fine.

"Fetch." I threw the ball a little away from me, so Zeus could get it.

He quickly went and snatched the ball up and dropped it at my feet. Again, the substitute glanced back over at me quickly.

Ignoring the man, I tossed the ball to Zeus again and watched as he ran to pick it up. I tossed the ball to Zeus for a few more minutes. Whenever I looked up, the man remained still, looking at me with a queer expression on his face. Maybe, he knew *me*.

I frowned. I knew teachers were supposed to supervise children, but his stare made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

The bell went off for the students to begin reentering the school. I was a further away from the other students since I was playing fetch with Zeus.

I needed to hurry up, so I didn't get in trouble for being late. Mrs. James hated when we were late after recess. She would give us silent lunch or take our recess. I didn't want her to take mine. Maybe, I didn't have a lot of friends, but the ones I did have I loved eating with them. Now that I had Zeus, I gave him small snacks from my lunch.

Mrs. James's biggest words in our class were accountability and consequence. She told us we were responsible for all of our actions. Our actions had good and bad consequences. Being late from recess would give me a bad consequence, and I didn't want her to have to email my mom or dad.

Approaching footsteps caused my body to stiffen. I didn't like the sound his steps were making. They reminded me of how my daddy and uncles told me to walk when I was trying to use stealth.

His quick arrival caught me off guard. For some reason, my heart beat fast in my chest.

Zeus crouched silently in front of me. I glanced around the playground and noticed a lot of the students had already gone back inside the building.

I should be terrified, but my daddy had been training me for moments like this. Relaxing my body, I waited on him to say or do something.

He was silent for a minute, simply looking at me before he spoke.

I finally realized where I recognized him from. My daddy had shown me a picture of him before. He had the same brown skin as mine, the deep dimples, and the same curly hair. I was the girl version of him.

When I was younger, I wondered where my dad was. My mom would always tell me I didn't need him, and that she had enough love for both a mother and a father. She looked sad when she said it, so I stopped asking about him the older I became.

I didn't think I would ever meet him. There was no excitement from knowing who he was. He left me a long time ago, and my chosen dad told me that I could never trust the man standing in front of my face.

My biological dad or sperm donor, which was what Aunty Nyah called him when she thought I wasn't listening. There was no connection to him. He was somebody I used to want to know. Now, it was too late. I had a dad.

"Your mom wants you to come with me," his deep voice registered in my ears.

There was only a short space between us. He held out his hand for me with a smile on his face.

This reminded me of the skit my Uncle Michail practiced with me. I was too old to fall for this type of trap. This was a stranger danger moment.

It didn't matter who he was. My mother never would have sent him. If something were wrong my uncles or aunts would have come for me. Maybe even one of the Russian security guards who followed us around when we went to the mall and other locations, not him. He wasn't part of my family. I learned early on it was by choice.

"No, she doesn't," I replied, ignoring his outstretched hand.

My Uncle Maxim would have contacted me if there was a real problem. Besides, why would she send him since he never had anything to do with me in the past?

I was young, not stupid.

The bells my daddy told me about were going off in my head. I don't want to take my eyes off him to look around for a weapon. My daddy told me a big stick, rock, or anything could be used to protect me.

Besides, Uncle Sacha told me you have to trust your instincts and watch their eyes. His eyes told me he was a liar.

Immediately, my watch pinged, catching my attention.

Looking down, I tried to read the text from my Uncle Maxim, but the man grabbed me. I messed up. I should have never taken my eyes off of him. It was one of the many rules I learned in my training.

“Addy,” Mrs. James called, walking to where we were standing. I wanted to tell her to run. I didn’t have the chance because I froze when Zeus attacked.

Since he had been with us, I never heard him make such a sound. It was aggressive. It screamed beware.

He jumped on the man so fast that I could barely react. He started kicking Zeus to get him off of him, but I knew from Ms. Cierra that Zeus’s bite was strong.

I kicked the man in his groin area because I learned it was the easiest spot to hurt him. I put all my strength into the kick too. As Aunt Nyah said, I should always try to punch them, whatever they were, into his throat.

“Shit,” he screamed, using one of the no-no words my mom told me I couldn’t say, or she was going to punish me. When he tried to cover his groin, Zeus continued to grip his legs, trying to pull them from his body.

I started kicking and punching him because Zeus wouldn’t let go. We were a team.

“Zeus, let him go,” I commanded, but Zeus ignored me. The man jumped from the ground with Zeus firmly attached to his body.

“Get the fuck off me,” the man screamed, trying to get away from Zeus.

“Help,” Mrs. James screamed. “He’s trying to kidnap my student.”

Mrs. James jumped on the man’s back and wrapped her arms around him. He started turning around, dragging her and Zeus toward the gate of the school.

Ms. Chanel blew a whistle. By this time, the man punched Ms. James and kicked Zeus so hard Zeus let the man’s leg go.

He tried to reach for my hand, but I bit his hand and kicked him in the knee, causing his leg to buckle. The knees were another spot I was taught could help me get away. When his knee dropped, I poked him in his eye and chopped him directly in the throat.

“Fuck it, and fuck you bitch,” he screamed, pushing me to the ground and running toward a white van parked in the school parking lot.

The white van reminded me of a movie me and Uncle Michail watched. I would have never let him put me inside the van. Children who got in those vans never made it back out alive.

I looked down when I heard Zeus whimper. The van skidded out of the parking lot on two wheels as my mom would say.

I bent down and wrapped my arms around Zeus, immediately calming him down.

I checked his body to see if he was injured. He had blood on him, but it wasn't his.

“You did good, Zeus,” I praised him how Ms. Cierra told me. Reaching in the fanny pack attached to my waist, I gave him a snack.

“Are you okay?” Mrs. James asked, sounding out of breath.

“Yes,” I mumbled with my head laying on Zeus's furry neck. I was scared. He could have really hurt me and Zeus.

“Let's go back inside,” Mrs. James said, standing slowly to her feet.

I reached down and placed Zeus in my arms. “I love you,” I whispered as he slobbered on my face, giving me nasty dog kisses.

This time, I allowed it because he saved my life. He deserved to show me affection anyway he wanted to. He was a hero.



Ms. Cierra and daddy were going to be so proud of Zeus. My mom would probably give him snacks for the rest of his life. She may even allow him to lick her face.

Nah, she would still say it was nasty.

## Dimitri

Dread filled my body as I raced toward the school. My heart thudded against my chest. I knew they said she was safe, but I wouldn't be fine until I saw her for myself.

We were only a few minutes away, but it felt like hours. Maxim's computer went crazy when Addy's heartrate spiked. We didn't know if it was a medical issue or something else. Maxim tapped into her watch's camera and saw Steven's dumb ass at the school.

He must have had a death wish. There was no way he thought he would be allowed to get away with trying to snatch Addy.

He must have only been thinking about using her as a method to bring Ayanna to him because he had never reached out to be a part of Addy's life in the past. I should have known he had been too quiet.

What happened to Ayanna made me relive Addy's kidnapping. I hated recalling the awful time, and how I had to rescue her. I promised Ayanna I would keep her safe.

"She's fine, Dimitri. The school told us that the little hellhound did its job," Michail said, trying to assure me. His words weren't doing the job. I wasn't going to be content until I had her in my presence.

I felt helpless. I didn't want her to have to deal with any of this. It was our job to keep her safe from harm and to protect her innocence.

Stalking into the building, I tried to remain calm. Addy stood to her feet with her puppy in her arms when she saw me coming.

"Daddy," she yelled, racing to me.

I bent down and swooped her and Zeus into my arms. My heart was still beating hard against my chest.

“Daddy, you should have seen Zeus. He was like a Tasmanian devil when the man tried to snatch me off the playground,” she happily chirped as if her life wasn’t just in danger. Addy was testimony to the resilience of children. My heart was pounding out of my chest, and she was excited because her puppy had protected her.

I glanced down at the dog who was gazing at me as if he thought I could be Addy’s enemy too. It raised my respect for him even higher.

“You should have seen all the blood. He was kicking Zeus, but Zeus held on. Ms. Cierra said his grip was strong, and I could tell by how tight he gripped the man. He refused to let him go.” She took a deep breath and continued. “Then, he started trying to kick Zeus, which made me mad. So, I did what Uncle Michail told me to do.”

She waved me down, so she wasn’t so loud. “I kicked him in his grown man area as hard as I could. That caused him to stop kicking Zeus.”

She gripped Zeus tighter. “You were such a good boy. I’m proud of you,” she told him, snuggling him tighter into her body.

I glanced toward the door as Sacha and Michail stalked toward us.

“Uncle Michail, you should have seen Zeus,” she shouted before he could get close to us.

“What did he do?” Michail asked, keeping his eyes directed on Addy. He pulled one of her ponytails.

I held her in my arms as she retold her story to Sacha and Michail.

Michail’s jaw ticked. “Where was your teacher, Addy?”

It was the same thing I was wondering.

She shrugged her shoulders. “She was there. The bad man was the substitute in someone else’s class. She jumped on his back and started punching him in the back of his head. He was jumped by me, Mrs. James, and Zeus. He didn’t stand a chance daddy. When I bit his hand, poked him in the eye, and punched him in the throat, it was over.”

“You did good, Addy. I’m proud of you.”

“Thank you, daddy. You already know who it was. Don’t you?”

“Yes.”

We glanced up again when Maxim walked through the door with his computer already in his hands.

I was doing everything I could to remain calm. Didn’t they have to vet anyone who substituted in schools? Watching children had to warrant a basic ass background check. With all the school shootings happening in the United States, you would think they would know the last thing a substitute ate.

“Mommy,” Addy screamed, wiggling from my arms when Ayanna walked through the door.

Tears raced down Ayanna’s face. “Are you okay?” she asked as soon as she reached Addy. She wrapped her and Zeus in her arms.

Zeus licked all over Ayanna’s face. She pushed his face away, but he was insistent. He was proving to be every bit of the intelligent dog Cierra promised us.

He muttered under his voice in his doggy voice, talking to Ayanna.

“Ayanna, he needs you to assure him that you’re okay. He’s sensing your distress,” Cierra called walking into the school with Viktor behind her. “Give him the all-clear command.”

Ayanna nodded her head and repeated the command Cierra taught us to train Zeus that everything was alright.

Zeus stared at her deeply in her eyes as if he were determining her honesty. Eventually, he laid back in Addy’s

arms.

“I’m fine, mommy. Zeus did his job. He’s my protector service dog,” she told Ayanna innocently.

“What happened, sweetheart?” Ayanna asked, her voice trembling.

Before Addy could answer, someone cleared their throat, causing us all to glare at him. It was their responsibility to keep Addy safe. They had failed. Fuck him clearing his throat.

“I’m sorry. I’m Dr. Pete. Can we all please move to my office? There’s a bunch of children around here who are very distraught about what happened today.”

“I mean this as disrespectfully as possible. At this moment, I’m only worried about my niece. You almost allowed some psychotic substitute to kidnap her from this expensive ass school. You need to worry about what the fuck I’m going to do to you if I don’t like your explanation,” Michail growled.

“I understand, but if you all will follow me, I will explain what happened today,” the man replied, glancing from person to person with sweat beading his brow.

“Where do you want us to go?” Ayanna asked when no one else responded to his request. I wanted to beat his ass for not protecting my daughter. We paid them handsomely for their services. We specifically chose this school because celebrities, politicians, athletes, and dignitaries sent their children here.

They should have more security here protecting their students.

I didn’t bother to respond to his request. If I responded, I would take his ass out without worrying about the consequences.

We walked behind Mr. Pete as he led us into a huge conference room. We sat around the desk, waiting on him to provide us with an excuse to how Addy was almost taken.

“First, I need to say I am so sorry this happen to Addy today.”

We remained quiet as he nervously shuffled some papers in his hands. “Here at Primrose Academy, we pride ourselves on keeping our school staff and students safe.”

“Shit, I think your pride is overrated after what happened today. Maybe, you should try a little harder,” Ayanna remarked in a snarky tone.

“I know you’re upset, but as you can see, he did not get away with taking Addy.”

“What in the hell are you talking about? From what I hear, my daughter, her dog, and her teacher kept her from being kidnapped. Where was the security you promised us? I didn’t see any of them around when we walked into the building?” Ayanna barked each question.

“Uhhh, they were at lunch?” he told us, stretching the collar of his shirt.

“At lunch? So, all of your security goes to lunch at the same time?”

“Yes.”

“You sound stupid as hell. How many security guards do you have?” she quizzed.

“We have five security guards, and we have never had any problems in the past,” he told us sounding confident.

“Well, if they knew how easy it was to get into your establishment, you would have probably had more kids being snatched. You people are incompetent.”

“Ma’am you should calm down,” he told Ayanna.

I grabbed his ass up from the chair. “Don’t tell her to calm down. I’m trying everything I can to not kill you, but if you raise your voice again, I’m snatching your fucking vocal cords. You have fifteen minutes to get us every piece of information you have on this fake substitute. You have two weeks before my daughter returns to this school to patch any easy access you have people can use to get in this school. You

will also hire ten more security guards to patrol this school, and they better not fucking eat lunch at the same time. You need to install gates at every entrance and exit. I know you have the money. We know exactly how much funds your school takes in monthly.”

With every request I made, he shook his head as if he were a bobble-head doll.

“You know who my family is. Don’t you Mr. Pete?” I inquired. My family had a reputation. I wasn’t apprehensive to use it.

“Y-yes,” he stuttered, pissing me off further.

“Good. My daughter will be back, and you’re going to make sure none of this happens again, or I’m going to kill you slowly.”

“Dimitri,” Ayanna hissed. “I think he had an accident.”

I glanced down and urine covered his pants.

“No, love, he doesn’t know what an accident is yet. An accident is waking up in hell because he crossed the wrong family. Fix this shit,” I told him, slamming him back down in his pissy ass seat.

“We’re going to need the camera footage from today. You do have cameras in this building, right?” Maxim questioned.

He cleared his throat angering me all over again. “We don’t have cameras throughout the building.”

“Asshole,” Cierra muttered. “This is ridiculous.”

“Addy?” Sacha called.

“Yes.”

“Do you like this school?”

Mr. Pete gave her a beseeching look because one word from Addy, and I was shutting this shit down.

“Yes, I have some friends here. Gavin is my best friend.”

“Is Gavin a girl, Addy?” Michail inquired.

Addy smiled shyly at him. “No.”

“Well, Addy, we don’t have boys as friends. You’re too young for male friends.” He winked at her.

“No, I’m not.”

“We’ll talk when we get home.”

“Okay,” she giggled.

I was happy to see she wasn’t letting this moment get to her. Ayanna and I would make sure she saw her counselor three days for the next few weeks. We would have to ensure she was okay.

“My niece loves it here, so we’re going to have Michail inspect the changes you made two weeks from now. If you need anything, contact us. We’ll make it happen,” I told him.

I wasn’t playing about my daughter’s safety.

“Yes sir, Mr. Vasiliev.”

We stood up from our seat.

“Where is Mrs. James?” Ayanna asked.

“I sent her home, so she could get herself together.”

“Can you please thank her on our behalf? We’ll see her when she returns. If we don’t there will be problems,” Ayanna told him.

I knew what she was insinuating. Mr. Pete wanted someone to take responsibility for what happened here today, but it wouldn’t be Mrs. James. She did her job. She placed my daughter’s safety before her own. My family would make sure she was compensated for assisting because she didn’t have to.

Teachers were saints. They protected children every day. She didn’t deserve to lose her job because this establishment was too cheap to hire enough security to protect their students.

“I’ll make sure she’s here when you return.”

“She better be here,” Ayanna threatened.

“I’ll need the outside camera footage before we leave.”

“Give me a second. I’ll make sure you have it.” He scurried off from us.

We stood waiting for ten minutes before he returned. “Here is everything we have. Let us know if we can be of further assistance. I’m glad Ayanna is fine.” He quickly rushed from our presence.

We filed out of the school as a big group. Ayanna, Addy, Sacha, Viktor, and I went into one Yukon while the others walked to a different vehicle.

“Cierra,” Viktor called before she could enter the truck with her pets.

She turned her head questioningly at him. “Yes.”

“You need to ride with us.”

She stood gazing at him for a second. “There isn’t enough space for all of us.”

His eyes remained lasered focused on her. “We’ll make room. Come. Zeus may need you.”

Ayanna chuckled under her throat.

“He might need her,” she mumbled lowly.

“What did you say mommy? I couldn’t hear you,” Addy asked.

“Nothing. Let’s get into the back of the truck, so Ms. Cierra can ride with us.”

“You don’t have to make space for us. I can ride with Michail.”

“Yes, she can ride with us,” Michail called with a smirk on his lips.

“I insist,” Viktor stated without a trace of humor.

“Girl, get in this damn car, so we can go. You know he wants you to ride with us. Let’s just go,” Ayanna demanded when it looked as if Cierra was going to say no again.



Cierra nodded her head in response, walking toward the SUV.

Once we were inside, Addy started talking again.

“Mom, did you know my sperm donor was the one who tried to kidnap me?”

“What?” Ayanna bellowed, looking at Addy.

“Steven,” she said shrugging her shoulders. “He’s the one who tried to kidnap me.”

Ayanna glanced over at me.

“Don’t say sperm donor again. It’s inappropriate,” I told her.

“I’m sorry, daddy. I forgot I shouldn’t say those words.”

“Where did you even hear them at?” Ayanna asked.

“I don’t want you to be mad.” Addy looked sad.

“I’m not mad. I want to know who used the word sperm donor around you.”

“No one used it around me. I heard you, Aunty Addy, and Aunty Yara talking.”

Being around Addy made me watch words coming out of my mouth. She soaked up everything like a little sponge. She specifically paid more attention to things which had nothing to do with her.

“I’m sorry, Addy. We shouldn’t use those words anywhere near you. I’ll make sure we don’t talk inappropriately around you again, but you should make sure you’re not listening when adults are speaking. Stay in a child’s lane, Addy. It’s not cute when kids act as though they are adults.”

“I know, mommy. I’m sorry. I’ll make sure not to listen again. Next time, I’ll run into my room when you all are having girls’ night, or I’ll go hang out with daddy. We can have daddy daughter time.”

Cierra shook her head at Addy. I was learning how manipulative and cute my baby could be. She knew how to play both me and her mom, especially me. However, I was learning.

“How did you know who Steven was?” Ayanna asked her.

Addy shifted in her seat. “You’re not in trouble, Addy. I told her,” I admitted to Ayanna.

Ayanna glanced over at me. Questions were written all over her face, so I answered her unspoken inquiry.

“We teach Addy self-defense daily. She’s taught how to observe her surroundings and recognize threats when she notices them. Steven is a threat. It would have been irresponsible for her not to identify someone who does not have her best interest at heart.” My heart clenched realizing how my words hurt Ayanna. “I know you think he was threat. It didn’t make sense to you to show her his picture. You’re not accustomed to warfare. Acknowledging his presence never would have crossed your mind because he was out of sight. We breathe this lifestyle. Steven and Stephanie are a danger to our daughter.”

She swiped a tear from her eye. “Thank you. I never assumed he would do anything like this.”

“I know. It’s my job to handle this part of her training. I should have told you I had told her.”

“It’s fine.” She wiped another tear from her eye.

“Mommy, I’m fine. Steven didn’t get me. My training kicked in. It wasn’t like last time. Last time, I wasn’t prepared. This time, I didn’t freeze up. I fought back.”

More tears rushed down Ayanna’s face. Addy thought she was comforting her mother, but she was only making the situation worse. It reminded Ayanna how Addy had another brush with danger she couldn’t prevent.

“But, baby, I don’t want this for you. I want you to be safe.”

Addy smiled at her mother. “I am safe. Uncle Maxim gave me a watch, which went off as soon as the man was close. Ms. Cierra trained Zeus to protect me, and he did. I train daily, so I can defend myself. If my school wasn’t scary, I could carry the knife Aunty Ash is teaching me how to use. I’m not scared mommy.”

“I know,” Ayanna whispered, pulling Addy tight into her embrace. “You’re still my baby, and I want you protected at all times. I don’t want anyone harming you because my heart couldn’t take it.”

“I’ll promise I’ll always be careful. My therapist told me no matter how hard we try the world is not a good place. Good things happen to bad people. It’s how we deal with hard times.”

Addy sounded like an adult. It made sense she was with adults the majority of the time. She was the oldest of the children. She would be a great role model for the other children once they became older.

“Your therapist is a smart woman,” Cierra told her.

Addy smiled big. “She is. I like her. She makes me feel safe too, but I like the physical parts of safety. Her words help me, but my daddy’s training helps more.”

“Good.”

Hearing Addy talk reminded me how important it was the school got it right. They were going to add all of the necessary equipment to guarantee my baby’s safety. We couldn’t stop people from being reckless, but we could do everything in our power to assure my baby was safe at school.

I knew one thing. Steven was going to pay for disturbing Addy and Ayanna’s peace. I didn’t make promises. I killed threats.

# Ayanna

Dimitri's face was red. His nostrils flared with rage. His jaw was flexed, and I realized instantly it was taking everything in him to hold onto the normal calm he exhibits.

The ride to the house was silent. Addy had fallen asleep between me and Dimitri. Zeus was curled on her lap.

I didn't know what to say. It seemed like Steven and his wife had a death wish. After this, there was no way I wanted either one of them alive.

I wasn't even an evil person, but those two were pissing me off. I couldn't comprehend why they refused to go away.

"Dimitri," I called, trying to gain his attention.

"Not right now," he told me without looking at me. "Let's get Addy safely home."

I bit my lip and nodded my head.

I woke Addy up, so she could get into the house one we arrived.

"Are you okay, Addy?" I asked, guiding her to her room. In the car, she sounded confident. It didn't mean she wasn't troubled by everything that took place at her school. She could have been like me. She could hide her feelings, so she wouldn't worry me. It didn't matter what she did. She was my baby, and I was always going to be concerned.

"I'm fine. Zeus saved me, and I knew my daddy or one of my uncles would too."

Her faith in them was heartwarming. I had faith in them too, but I didn't want my daughter to have to worry about anything. She was a little girl. She shouldn't have to be concerned with anything other than being a little girl. This was the best time of her life. I didn't want to steal her innocence away from her.

"You have dirt all over your clothes. You need to take a shower. When you're done, we can eat and watch a movie

tonight,” I told her, following her into her room.

I sat on her bed as she pulled clothes from her drawer and walked into the bathroom was connected to her bedroom.

I rubbed my stomach as tears fell from my eyes. I hated Steven. He was such an asshole for pulling this stunt. He knew damn well he didn't care about my child. This stunt proved how selfish he was. Why ruin my daughter's peace?

I wasn't ever going to give him another opportunity to be in my life. He was delusional. He was going to be dead when Dimitri found him. We weren't the going to the police type of family. When you crossed the family, you were handled. I appreciated the justice this family handed out. Enemies didn't deserve to live to fight another day. They didn't live period.

I was positive Steven wouldn't return home. It would be one of the first places someone would look for him. I hoped he had a better plan of escape than the kidnapping. If not, he should enjoy his final days.

“I can't stand to see you cry,” I heard Dimitri say from the door.

I quickly swiped the tears from my eyes. As his woman, I didn't want to make things worse. For a man like Dimitri, this was hard for him to handle. He wanted to protect his family. Something happening like this would make him question whether he was doing his job.

I knew he felt awful that he hadn't been able to protect Addy. He took our safety seriously, and Steven had wrecked it with one stupid decision. Regardless of what *almost* happened with Addy today, I would still put all my faith and trust in Dimitri.

“I'm fine,” I told him, lying through my teeth. I wasn't fine. My baby could have been injured. He could have kidnapped her. He could have done anything to her to get to me. He didn't treasure me when he had me, so the effort he was putting into this was unfathomable.

Men were hard to understand. He should have had this energy when I first found out about his wife. I still wouldn't have taken him back though.

Dimitri pulled me up from Addy's bed and sat me on his lap.

"I'm sorry," he told me in a solemn tone.

I placed my hands on his face and looked him directly in the eyes. "This is not your fault. This is Steven's fault. Addy is fine. That is what both of us need to remember. Zeus did his job by protecting her, and Addy did what she has been trained to do. She fought to make sure she was fine."

"He should have never gotten that close."

I kissed his lips. "I know, but we never thought he would go to her school. None of us would have suspected he would have applied to be a substitute teacher under an alias. Even with all of that, you guys were on your way to her. He was never getting away from that school with Addy," I told him, praying it was true.

The men hadn't been far behind, but it still could have ended in a totally different way.

"I'm giving her a knife."

I shook my head and gave him a small smile. "You can't give her a knife. You're going to get her kicked out of school."

"Viktor will make her something she can keep concealed."

I didn't want to argue with him, and I knew for a fact he was going to do what he wanted to do. Addy would be a knife happy fool like Ash when Viktor and Dimitri were finished with her.

"I'm going to kill both of them."

"Good." I don't know what he thought I was going to say, but I wanted both of them dead. I didn't want either one of them out there possibly plotting to hurt me or my children.

His hands caressed my stomach. “Let’s get married.”

I gazed at him. “Dimitri, we don’t have to get married.”

“Daddy, I thought you said you were going to ask her the right way this time,” Addy pouted, walking out of the bathroom with shorts and a t-shirt on.

“I am.” He tapped my leg, so I could stand up.

Nervously, I stood on my feet. I bit my lip as he stood from the bed. When he dropped to his knees, my eyes widened.

He was serious. When he pulled out a little blue box from his pocket and opened it, my eyes ballooned.

“Ayanna, will you marry me? Will you be the mother of my two children?” he asked.

Addy screamed in excitement and clapped behind Dimitri. “Say yes, mommy,” she begged.

“Yes,” I replied and watched silently as he slipped the ring on my finger.

He stood to his feet and kissed me on the lips. “Thank you.”

“Addy, come here,” he called her.

Addy ran over to him with a beautiful smile on her face. My baby was ecstatic. She loved Dimitri, and she has waited on this moment for a long time. She wanted him for me even before I was ready to acknowledge how much I wanted him for me.

“Yes, daddy.”

He pulled another box from his pocket. My eyes overflowed with tears because I knew what he was about to do. He and I had talked about it on numerous occasions.

“Would you do me the honor of being my daughter and allowing me to adopt you, so all of my children can have the same last name?”

Now, it was time for Addy's eyes to fill with tears.  
"Yes."

She turned around, so Dimitri could place the Tiffany necklace around her neck.

"I love you," she stated, turning around to give him a big hug. "Come on, momma. It's a group hug."

I walked over to them and wrapped my arms around both.

Dimitri picked the best time to ask both of us to be his family. The day was fraught with danger. Anything could have happened. However, Dimitri took a shitty day and turned it into something beautiful. Something memorable.

Since I committed myself to Dimitri, he had been replacing bad memories with new ones.

I loved him with everything inside of me.

I pulled away from him. "Let's get married tomorrow." I didn't want to wait. I didn't need a big fancy wedding.

I knew every girl dreamed of the big wedding dress, thousands of fresh flowers adorning every area of a church, and hundreds of wedding guests. I wanted that fairytale too. But with every fairytale, there was always a prince waiting for the bride.

I had my prince. I only wanted him, Addy, and the baby I was carrying.

Falling for Steven changed my outlook on so many things. He scarred me for the next man. It took me a long time to get to this moment, and I was fine simply keeping it an intimate moment.

Attending Lauren and Maxim's wedding was beautiful. I enjoyed myself immensely, but I didn't need all of that.

"Yes," Addy screamed, causing Zeus to raise his head up from the floor where he had been laying silently.

"Ayanna, you don't want a wedding? I thought that was something every woman wanted."



“I used to want that. Now, I just want you, Addy, and our child. I love our adopted family, but we’re our on family inside of our big family. I want to go tomorrow. Then, let’s go to Disney.”

“We’re going to Disney,” Addy screamed again.

She had only been once when she was younger. She probably didn’t even remember.

“It’ll be our honeymoon. We’re all we need along with security,” I told him before he could comment.

“Okay. I’m going to make plans. Don’t pack anything. I’m going to schedule the plane. We’re leaving right after the wedding.”

I nodded my head in response. I wanted to get away for a while. I wanted to pretend that Steven and his wife weren’t looking to fuck up my life. I wanted to take a moment and just enjoy my little family.

The next morning, I woke up having a slight case of cold feet. Yes, we lived with Dimitri. Marrying him after a few short months felt reckless, but I knew not to mention it to him. Dimitri had a way of alleviating all my doubts.

I was thankful he was gone when I woke up. It gave me time to quietly reflect on our relationship.

I went inside my closet to determine what I was going to wear for my wedding. I wanted to select something to reflect the moment.

I pushed dresses around until my eyes landed on a white dress that I had worn to an all-white party Yara and I had attended years ago. I had only worn it once, but it was gorgeous. It was a satin mini bodycon dress with a slit in the front of the dress. It had plunging neckline. The neckline of the dress had tiny glitters edging it. My Salvatore Ferragamo black and white glitter stiletto sandals completed the dress perfectly.

When I was done, I went into Addy’s room to select her dress too. She wasn’t in her room either, which made me assume they were training. After what happened yesterday, I

knew Dimitri would be even more obsessed with Addy's training.

I wouldn't even fight him on it. I wanted her safe too. Once I picked her dress and shoes, I placed everything on her bed and returned to our bedroom. She would get dressed once they got back.

When Dimitri walked into the room, he stopped in his tracks. I stood nervously as he studied every inch of me. My heart fluttered erratically inside my chest. This was what he did to me whenever I was in his presence. I wanted to burrow my way inside his body.

The fire in his eyes damn near singed the dress I had on. I felt exposed even though I was fully clothed.

"You look beautiful," he called, holding out his hand for me. When I reached him, he planted a kiss on my lips. It was so simple and sweet.

"Thank you," I whispered, sounding bashful. I didn't know why because Dimitri had flipped my ass every way but loose in our bedroom. I should be used to his intensity by now.

"Are you ready?"

I nodded my head.

Dimitri looked sexy in his black Tom Ford suit. If anyone every told me it didn't make a difference the price of the suit, I would tell them to their face they were a lie because Dimitri was wearing the hell out of his suit.

Once Addy was dressed, we all took one of their chauffeured SUVs to the courthouse. By now, I was more than aware it was bulletproof and had anti-shatter glass. The tinted windows kept us hidden from anyone who wanted to know who we were. The two drivers up front were armed and ready to fuck up anything in their path.

The ride to the courthouse was quiet. Even Addy was silent, watching one of her shows on her iPad.

Time flew by. The next thing I knew, I was standing next to him and I felt incredibly sexy. Taking a deep breath, I

promised to love him for richer or poorer and through sickness and health. I closed my eyes and prayed for forever.

# Dimitri

Listening to Addy gasp as she watched the Disney Castle emerge was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Ayanna started recording the minute our eyes landed on it.

I didn't show emotions around everyone, but for my family; they were going to receive the side of me no one else was allowed to see. They made me soft. I was mush when it came to making them happy, but this was why.

Seeing them smile and excited over something as simple as a castle made me happy that I was the one to give them this moment.

"Daddy," Addy called excitedly, "do you see the castle?"

"I do. It's beautiful, right?" She brought a small smirk to my face because I knew she understood I was seeing it, but in her excitement, she was asking me an obvious question.

"Come on ladies." I urged both of them off the vessel and took their hands in mine. I ignored the stares around us. Even though the world was a different place for interracial couples, people still found us fascinating.

Addy, in her innocence, never even registered the stares. She was content to bask in the happiness of the moment. I was glad. Children deserved to be happy and unrestricted. It was adults who exposed children to things they never should be involved in.

We walked toward the gate with her eyes trying to take in everything around her. Holding their hands reminded me how they now belonged to me. For months, I claimed them. Now, it was confirmed. Addy and Ayanna would bear my last name. I had Maxim working on the paperwork. Hopefully, by the time we arrived back home, they would officially be Vasiliev's.

“What do you want to do first?” I looked down at Addy.

“I don’t know. I want to do everything,” she admitted, causing Ayanna and I to smile.

We spent the rest of the day going from ride to ride. I rode all the rides with her since Ayanna was pregnant.

She spent most of our time at the park eating a huge turkey leg and a funnel cake. By the time the day was over, we were all exhausted and ready to shower and go to sleep.

The next day I chose to take them to The Mall at Millenia, which Ayanna admitted she always wanted to visit. Going inside the store, Ayanna looked at everything. I noticed she didn’t pick up one thing for me to purchase. She gazed at everything and ran her hand across the leather. She flipped over the price tags and scrunched her little nose up when she glimpsed the prices.

I shook my head. She didn’t need to concern herself with the prices. She knew I could afford whatever she wanted inside the store, so I don’t know why she was denying herself.

“Why aren’t you purchasing anything?” I asked her as she placed another purse back down on the display table.

“I’m looking, Dimitri. These prices are ridiculous for a purse. You are paying for the name,” she muttered, staring at a purse she viewed more than once.

I picked up the purse myself, shrugging my shoulders. “You want the purse. We’re here to have a good time. I want to spoil the both of you. Get what you want. Don’t look at another price,” I told her.

I glanced over at the sales woman, trying to pretend she wasn’t waiting on us to make a purchase.

“She’ll take this one,” I walked over to another purse she was gazing at. “She will take this one too. What color do you want it in?” I asked her.

“Dimitri,” she sighed.

I glanced at her patiently. “What color, love?”

“I want this one in pink,” Addy said, holding up a small purse in her hand.

I glanced down at the purse. It looked small enough for her.

“Addy, you do not need a Chanel purse. This is my first Chanel purse,” Ayanna told her.

I ignored her statement. “We’ll take this one in pink, and she’ll take this one in,” I peered over at Ayanna.

“If you don’t say something, I’m getting all of the colors,” I told her dispassionately. She would learn. It was my job to make her happy, and I took that seriously.

“I’ll take it in red,” she mumbled, glaring at me.

I ignored her gaze. She was my wife. She would become accustomed to me doing what I thought was best for us.

The associate walked away with a huge smile on her face.

“Daddy?” Addy asked with a small black purse in her hand.

“Yes.”

“Can I have this one too, please?”

“Yes, you can have that one too.”

“Dimitri,” Ayanna called in a harsh whisper, “that purse is \$5,000.”

I walked over to her because I had no intention of spending the whole day with her worrying about prices. The day would become unbearable. I needed to put a stop to her madness immediately.

I bent down toward her. I placed my lips close to her ear. “Your husband is rich, love. Money and prices are not your concern. Now, get what you want.”

I lowered my head and kissed her on the side of her neck, while pulling her into my body. “Don’t look at another price. If you want it, buy it.”

I sucked on her neck and smirked when I felt her body trembled underneath mine.

“Umm,” I heard the associate clear her throat behind us. “Do you all need anything else? I have the two purses you requested.”

I ignored her for the moment, kissing Ayanna’s neck one last time. Tonight, I couldn’t wait to get her back to the room. Addy’s room was connected to ours. I was ensuring the door was locked. I needed to be inside of my wife. Last night, she and Addy were too tired.

I moved away from Ayanna. “No, she wants that perfume over there.” I pointed to a bottle I saw her look at when we first entered the store. “She’ll also take those shades, shoes, and diaper bag.”

Her beautiful eyes became slits as she glared at my response. It took everything in me not to chuckle at her slight attitude.

Ayanna would eventually realize there were few things I didn’t notice about her. I was purchasing everything I noticed she was gazing at.

Ayanna tried to walk pass the expensive stores, but I stopped at every single one. She hesitantly purchased onesies for our baby at Burberry. She eventually relaxed and purchased Addy some expensive clothes too. She was insistent that the baby and Ayanna would grow out of everything fast, and that we were wasting money.

I assured her that I didn’t care. Money was the least of my concerns. Several long hours later, we left the mall with our guards carrying several bags.

“Remind me to never shop with you and Addy again.”

“Why?”

She rolled her eyes cutely. “You won’t allow me to put anything back. You were like the Russian Oprah. *You get a car. You get a car. You get a car.*”

I raised my eyebrows at her. I had no clue what she was referring to.

She shook her head. “Never mind, Dimitri.”

“I’m hungry,” Addy said next to us. “We’ve been here forever.”

“Let’s go eat. Then, we’ll watch a movie before we go back to the hotel.” I wanted her exhausted because I planned on spending the rest of the night between my wife’s thick thighs.



# Ayanna

Laying in the bed silently, I enjoyed the peace of the moment. I needed this break. I was glad Dimitri suggested it.

Gazing down at my room, it was unfathomable that I was really married. I went from running away from Dimitri to allowing him to impregnate me and marry me all within a few months. Our story was crazy as hell.

“It’s time to get up, heffah,” Yara shouted, walking into the room, catching me off guard. I hadn’t spoken to her the entire four days we had been here. I was caught up enjoying my new family and enjoying the time I had alone with my small family.

“What are you doing here?” I asked her, sitting up in the bed and pulling up the sheet around me. Last night, I slept without any clothes on because Dimitri refused to give me any peace. It was like every rumor I heard about pregnancy sex was true because I had to eventually squeeze my legs close and beg for mercy. If I didn’t, I think he still would have been trying to get between my thighs.

This was our last night here, and I thought we would spend it hanging out at a waterpark before we left.

“Well, we came here, Mrs. Vasiliev,” she exclaimed with a smirk on her face, “to plan a wedding.”

I sat up straighter in the bed. “I’m already married.” I wiggled my fingers in her face, so she could see the huge princess cut diamond on my finger.

She grasped my finger and closed one of her eyes. “I mean it’s cute or whatever.” She smiled hugely.

Then, she threw my hand down. “I can’t believe your ass didn’t tell us you were getting married.”

I rolled my eyes. “I *know* you’re not tripping. *You* went to Las Vegas and didn’t even invite your own sister,” I reminded her.

“Touché, you know I had my reasons.” She pouted. “If I didn’t have a reason, you know I would have invited you.”

I touched her leg. “Hey, I’m joking. I know you had your reason. You know I never would have begrudged you your happiness even if you didn’t know him.”

“Hush, hater. That’s water all under the bridge. Even with me running off to get married, I still had a wedding. I want that for you. You know you and I used to sit around and talk about our weddings. I told Dimitri that when he called Sacha. He wants you to have your heart’s desire. He planned your wedding personally with a wedding coordinator from Disney. It’s going to be beautiful.”

“We all wanted to be here,” Nyah called, walking into the room holding Nikki’s hand.

I watched with a silly grin on my face as every one of the girls walked into the room including Cierra and her humongous dogs.

I leaned back in the bed, trying to cover up my body. These females didn’t care that I didn’t have a stitch of clothing on.

“So,” I dragged the word out, “you all are going to just ignore the fact that I don’t have on any clothes, haven’t washed my face, or brushed my teeth?” I asked stared at each one of them.

“Nope,” Yara replied. “You didn’t care that we didn’t come to your wedding. So, you get what you get, and you can’t pitch a fit.”

I chuckled. “Girl, what are we two?”

“Yep, I’m feeling really salty like a two-year-old,” Yara stated, sitting on the bed. She immediately jumped back up.

We all burst out laughing. “We changed the sheets last night. You can sit down.” She was so stupid. I understood because Lord knew I was always careful about stepping into rooms with her and Sacha in the house.

“Good because I didn’t want to sit in any wet spots,” she muttered, sitting carefully on the bed.

“Shut up. Now, answer my question. Why are you all here? We were set to return tomorrow.”

“Well, your *husband*,” she emphasized the word husband. I shook my head at her antics. I didn’t regret marrying him without them. “He wanted to plan a wedding for you.”

“A wedding? We’re already married.”

“I know. Don’t remind me. However, he has a Disney wedding planned, so I need you to chop, chop. We only have thirty minutes for you to wash your body and get yourself together before the people start arriving.” Yara had a big smile on her face.

“Are you serious?” I asked, gripping the sheet to my chest. I couldn’t believe Dimitri planned a wedding for us. I didn’t need a wedding since we were already married. When I suggested on us going to the courthouse to get married, I thought we could plan a wedding at our tenth anniversary. I guess Dimitri had other plans for us, a better plan.

“Yes, ma’am. He has everything planned. All you need to do is pick your wedding dress, which the selection is beautiful. I picked them all out myself.” She dusted the imaginary dirt off her shoulders.

“And you can pick our dresses too. Dimitri has literally planned for everything.” Yara stood up from the bed, clapping her hands.

“Let’s go, ladies. Ayanna, you have thirty minutes to get yourself together. Your entourage awaits you. You’re going to be a beautiful bride today. Think of me as your Fairy godmother being sponsored by your husband. We’ll be outside. Love you, smooches,” she called, walking out the door.

She closed the door behind her and the other ladies, and I laid back down on the bed. Reaching for my phone, I dialed his number.

“Good morning, love.”

“Good morning,” I responded, trying to stop my cheeks from hiking any further. “You know you didn’t have to do this. I was happy with how we were married.”

“I know.” It was all he said.

“Then, why did you plan a wedding?” I asked him, rubbing my stomach.

“Every queen needs her day,” he told me simply.

Tears filled my eyes. I knew he loved me. He told me often. However, words only meant so much. Sometimes, it was important to put words to action. He was demonstrating how deep his love was for me.

“I love you too,” I told him, getting choked up.

“Stop crying,” he growled.

“Okay,” I whispered, not doing anything to restrain the tears coming down my face. I was happy. It was good to cry happy tears. Tears were a cleansing mechanism. They allowed you to purge built up emotions, good and bad.

“Get dressed. I’ll be waiting on you.”

“I love you,” I told him again because I felt as if I couldn’t say it enough. He deserved the words after I waited so long to say them.

“I know,” he told me before he hung up.

“Stop romancing the stone and get out of bed. You have twenty-five minutes now,” Nyah called through the door.

I eased from the bed, feeling sore from the night before. He should have told me we were getting married today. I would have saved all this good love for tonight.

Now, I was going to have to put in more work because my Prince Charming was making every dream that I ever had come true.

Once I exited the room, there were several people moving around setting up various stations. I saw my

beautician Sydney setting up her station to slay my hair.

I gazed over at the various wedding dresses hanging up along with another section filled with what I assumed were bridesmaid dresses.

There was so much activity going on in the room, I felt slightly overwhelmed. Yara must have sensed my distress because she walked over to me.

“Alright, we’re going to take this a step at a time. First, you’re going to get your hair washed and blow dried. Then, while she’s doing your hair, you’ll select the bridesmaids’ dresses, so they can go to the boutique and bring our dresses back to the house. Next, you’ll pick out Addy’s dress. The final step is you picking out your dress. All of them are your size. A seamstress is here to alter the dress where needed. Now, come on. We must be ready by six o’clock tonight. It’s only eight o’clock. We have more than enough time to get everything together. Relax, enjoy, and drink this boring as sparkling cider.”

I laughed at her. She had everything figured out. “Thanks, sissy. You know I couldn’t do this without you.”

“Umm, you already did it without me, but I’m not going to be petty. Let’s get this show on the road.”

I nodded my head, walking over to Sydney. “Girl, let’s give you the beauty treatment. My team is handling everyone else. However, I have you, boo. You’re going to be gorgeous.”

I brushed a tear from my eye. I believed her. I had my whole family behind me, so the night could only get better.

I looked toward the door when there was a knock. Yara opened the door.

My eyes widened when I saw my mom walk into the room. I hadn’t seen her in a year. We didn’t have the best relationship, but I was glad she was here.

“Hi, Ayanna. I’m so happy for you,” she told me, grabbing me to give me a hug.

“Hi, mom,” I told her, hugging her back.

“It’s good to see you.” It was good to see her even if I didn’t agree with the way my family lived their lives. That didn’t mean I didn’t love them. I simply knew how to handle them. Being blood didn’t mean you *had* to associate with their toxic energy. You could love them from a distance, which was what I did.

“Did anyone else come down with you?” I asked, urging her to walk with me to the kitchen, so Sydney could start on my hair.

“Your aunts came, and some of your cousins came to enjoy the wedding too.”

“Good, I haven’t seen everyone in a long time. It should be fun,” I told her.

I lowered my head underneath the sink to get my hair washed.

“Your uncle decided to come too. You know he loves a good time,” she said, almost causing me to drown underneath the water.

Why in the hell would she bring him? She knew how I felt about him. I didn’t give a damn if he loved to have a good time. His pedo ass could do that somewhere else on his own time.

When Sydney finished washing my hair, I stood up glancing at my mother. I was going to try to tell her as respectfully as possible that he was not allowed anywhere near my family. I couldn’t control who she allowed in her house. Hell, I couldn’t control who anyone let in their house, but as for me and my house, his ass wasn’t invited.

“Mom,” I started as calmly as possible. “Uncle Tim is not allowed at my wedding. You know how I feel about him.”

She blew out a breath as if I were doing too much. See, this was the reason I rarely went around her. She didn’t respect my feelings, and she pretended as if I didn’t have a right to feel the way I felt.

“Ayanna, that happened so many years ago, and nothing even happened. You made a big deal out of it.”

“Ah, I’ll give you two a minute,” Sydney said after she finished putting conditioner in my hair.

I shook my head. I looked over at her. “No, you’re fine. We’re on a timeline.”

“Mom, as I said, Uncle Tim is not allowed here. Either you can tell him, or I will. It’s up to you.” I refused to coddle her. She could deal with him all she liked. He was her brother, so it was her right. I didn’t have to do a damn thing.

“I just don’t understand why you must act this way. Uncle Tim has always been around.”

“Which is a damn problem. If you all choose to ignore the fact that he is a pedophile, that is on you. I don’t have to. So, once again, you can tell him, or I can.” I wasn’t backing down.

“Fine, I’ll tell him,” she stated, walking out of the kitchen as if I were wrong. My family really got on my damn nerves. They almost made me regret the fact Yara had told them about my wedding.

I turned back to Sydney once my mom walked out the room. “I’m sorry. You know how families are.”

She nodded her head. “I do. We can’t choose them, but we can choose how we deal with them. I respect you for speaking your mind. You know how some shit gets swept under the rug. I hate that. Families keep more secrets than a little bit. Then, everyone likes to pretend they don’t know how something happened. My mother is like that with my brothers. She has babied their big asses for so long. They aren’t worth a damn thing. They still live with her, and she gives them money, watches their children, and cooks their food. There was no way these women should find either one of them attractive, but women fall for their bullshit every day. Lord knows, it couldn’t be me.”

I agreed with her. Women accepted way too much bullshit from me. These men walked around with more arrogance than a little bit. If women demanded more, men wouldn’t have a choice but to step up to the plate. Their asses

got too many passes. It was probably why Steven thought I would have been willing to accept his lame excuse about why he lied to me for years.

“I hope you’re happy now. I told him. He’s irritated he drove this far for nothing,” my mother said, walking back in the room with an attitude.

It took everything in me not to tell her she could leave with him. I didn’t need her bringing her sour attitude to my wedding.

This was my day. If I didn’t want to deal with Pedo Tim, I didn’t have to.

“Yep, I’m happy now. How was your drive?” I asked, ignoring her little temper tantrum.

“It was fine. I still can’t believe you got married without telling me. I thought we were closer than that, Ayanna.”

I restrained myself from rolling my eyes. We were not closer than that. She was my mom, but she was messy. She kept drama going in the family, and I abhorred drama.

“I didn’t expect to get married so fast.” It was the truth. I thought Dimitri and I would date a minute before we made a huge decision like that.

“I mean first you get pregnant by someone I haven’t ever met. Now, you’re getting married. Don’t you think that’s a lot?” she asked, staring at my stomach.

*Lord, deliver me.*

“Hi, Ms. Williams, why don’t you come into the living room with me, so you can pick out your dress. We have someone here to get you slayed too.”

My mother stood up from her seat. I took a deep breath, thankful Yara had saved me from reading my own mother for her filth.

It irritated me how she could tell me how wrong she thought I was for living my life but allow a pedophile to try to defile the whole damn clan. Sometimes, I wondered if he had



touched her before because the way she defended him was sickening.

*Thank you* I mouthed to Yara as she led my mother out of the room. She irritated my soul. There was no way I would have a man around my daughter who tried to molest her. I don't care who the man was. It was like she chose him over me, and she continued to do it.

“Phew, girl, I'm going to pray for you. Let me do your hair. These mother and daughter relationships can be hard as hell. This reminds me of me and my mother's relationship. It's a whole mess too.”

I prayed my mother would relax. I wouldn't disrespect her, but I wouldn't allow her to speak ill on my child, marriage, or life. She gave up that right when she continued to allow my uncle to be in the house alone with me knowing what he tried to do to me. I slept with a knife under my pillow for years, scared he would try to visit my room late at night. For the life of me, I couldn't understand why he was her favorite brother.

A few short hours later, we were all dressed and ready to go to Cinderella's Castle.

“Addy, you look beautiful,” I told my daughter as I gazed down at her. Her hair was up in a ponytail with a small tiara pushed into her hair. She had on a beautiful long lace kids wedding dress. It had a little train in the back with a big bow.

“You look like a princess,” I told her honestly. My baby girl's beautiful skin was glowing.

“Thanks, mommy. You look like a princess too.”

I admired the dress I finally chose. There were so many options that it took me a minute to decide. Ultimately, I selected a dress that was fit for a princess.

It was a gorgeous sleeveless gown that had several thousand Swarovski crystals with a plunging neckline, which made me appear like a fairytale princess. I didn't know how Dimitri did it, but everything about this moment was beautiful.

“Alright friend, are you ready to do this again?” Yara asked, walking up to me with a candy apple red V-neck bridesmaid dress.

“Ladies, I can’t even lie. We look marvelous,” I told them honestly. Even little Nikki was adorable in her white puffy gown. Her hair was adorned with a flower crown in her hair.

“Thank you but come on. Your chariot awaits,” Nyah, said with a huge smile on her face.

We walked out of the condo, and I literally stopped in my tracks. There was an actual chariot in front being carried by two horses and a man wearing a top hat.

“Oh my God. He didn’t,” I screamed with my hand covering my mouth. Dimitri had really gone out to make this day everything I could have dreamed of. I never would have expected it from someone like him. He came off as not having a romantic bone in his body, but this surpassed everything in my wildest dreams.

“Come on, Princess Ayanna. Let’s go meet your prince,” Yara called, hooking our elbows together.

Silently, I walked toward the entrance of the chariot. A smiled graced my face as we drove to our destination. Nikki and Addy waved as we passed people. I knew they were enjoying everything about this moment. I couldn’t lie, so was I.

When we arrived, I heard the murmurs and gasps as we passed people to enter the castle.

My mom walked toward me, “You look beautiful. I can’t wait to meet this man. He seems as though he really loves you.”

“He does,” I acknowledged. It wasn’t just about the money he spent on me. It was more so the quality time he spent with me and Addy. His need to keep us protected, cared for, and loved no matter the situation.

We stood anxiously outside the door, waiting for the music to begin. When Faith Evans’s wedding song *Never*

*Gonna Let You Go* dropped, all the bridesmaid walked through the door. I stood nervously waiting for the coordinator to call me. I didn't know why I was anxious. We were already married.

I kissed Addy on her forehead as she and Nikki walked through the doors of the castle. Finally, it was my time to walk down the aisle. Immediately, I froze. I forgot I didn't have anyone to walk down with. My dad had been pretty much missing in action my entire life, so he would have never been an option. Then, there was my uncle, but there was no way in hell I would allow him to walk down the aisle with me even if I had allowed him to attend my wedding.

"Are you ready?" I heard Sacha's heavy accented voice ask, standing next to me. My eyes immediately met his.

"Yes, thank you. I didn't even think about the fact I didn't have anyone to walk me down the aisle," I admitted.

"You and Addy are family. It's my pleasure to walk you down the aisle."

I swiped a tear from my eye. Sacha had been wonderful to me and Addy. He was like the big brother I wish I had. He had the traits of a big brother too: caring, kind, protective, and supportive. All the things a girl like me who grew up in a toxic environment appreciated.

"Thank you for caring for me and my daughter, and I love the way you love my friend. You all are my family, and I'm so glad you guys came into our lives."

He winked at me. "I'm glad we came into your lives too." He was so handsome in his black tuxedo. I was accustomed to seeing him wearing suits constantly. However, this was something different. He was looking like new money in this suit. My friend had really chosen well.

I requested *For You* by Kenny Lattimore. It was a beautiful song. When the doors to the castle opened, my heart beat heavy in my chest. There were flowers throughout the castle. It was absolutely beautiful. Tears filled my eyes again. I couldn't believe he had done all of this for me.

Everyone was standing waiting on me to enter. I grasped Sacha's arm and stepped inside the chapel. It didn't have a lot of guests, but I did notice a few of my cousins I hadn't seen in a long time recording me as I walked down the aisle.

My eyes immediately gravitated to my Prince Charming. He was the man who made all this possible in a short frame of time.

I kept my eyes on him as I allowed Sacha to escort me down the aisle. I was almost to the end of the aisle when I glanced over at all the women in my adopted family: Yara, Nyah, Lauren, and Ash. They were all smiling huge with tears on their face for me. My baby girl was even crying.

I made my way to my husband. He was so handsome. God, I loved this man.

Sacha handed my hand to Dimitri and stepped away. I turned around to thank him and froze in place.

*I knew good and damn well my eyes were deceiving me.*

My mother and my Uncle Tim sat on the front row of the church.

My mother sat next to him with tears in her eyes, holding a handkerchief in her hand as if this moment was everything, she ever dreamed of for me. My uncle sat smiling at me lecherously. This fool had enough audacity to lick his lips when he looked me up and down. I couldn't prevent the tremors of disgust from racing down my spine.

*I know damn well my mother didn't try me like this.*

I had a choice in this moment. I could treat my wedding like a Disney movie. I could ignore his presence and pretend I hadn't spoken to my mother about him not being invited to my wedding even though she deliberately ignored my request. Or I could do what I was about to do right now and let Dimitri's family know that this was about to be a Jerry Springer moment.

I moved toward my mother and uncle, ignoring all the stares I felt on my back. They were most likely wondering what I was about to do.

“You’re not invited,” I told him calmly, trying hard to not make a scene. I preferred he leave without incident.

“I need for you to leave.” I held my bouquet tightly in my hand. If I didn’t hold onto something, I was liable to get physical, and I was trying to avoid it at my wedding.

This was supposed to be a time of happiness, yet my mother and her ugly ass brother were trying to ruin it.

“Ayanna, I told you earlier how you were making a big deal out of nothing,” she tittered nervously, embarrassed I was causing a commotion. Too bad, it was her fault. She should have followed my directives, instead of doing whatever she wanted to do as usual. But today wasn’t the day.

She shifted apprehensively, patting his leg as if he needed reassurance.

Yeah, she better be nervous. I knew she thought I wouldn’t act a fool if she invited him to the wedding. She thought if he just showed up to the wedding that I would let it go. Well, she was sadly mistaken. I wasn’t let shit go.

“And I told you that I didn’t want him here,” I relayed to her through clenched teeth. It was taking Jesus, Joseph, and Mary for me not to snap on her too. She was getting off easy because she was mother. I was desperately trying to respect her place in my life.

*She’s your mother. She’s you mother. Don’t slap her.*

“He’s family,” she replied, stubbornly.

Once again, I had a decision to make. Disney or Jerry Springer. Peace or violence.

I glanced at his sick face. He was sitting comfortably in his seat, allowing my mother to fight his battles. He hadn’t defended himself. He knew she would. It sickened me. It made my decision easier. I chose violence.

Straightening my spine, I focused directly on him. I prepared to air out all of our family business. He wasn't going to hide behind my mother and family anymore. Someone needed to call a spade a spade. Me, I was the someone.

“Look, I do not want this pedophile at my wedding. I don't give a damn if the rest of you want to pretend that he's not a damn pervert. He touched me when I was a young child, and all of you fucking ignored it as if the shit was normal. News Flash: it is not normal. He was not invited, and if you don't like it, you can get the hell out too,” I directed my words at my mother because I was finished with trying to spare her feelings. She damn sure hadn't tried to spare mine.

My mother gasped at my statement. I couldn't believe she was sitting here looking as if I had offended her.

As much as I denied it, she had to be just as sick as him. Who condones this type of shit? It kept him from being accountable for his actions. It prevented his victims from receiving justice because no one sympathized with the victim, only the perpetrator. All the little comments they made through the years filtered through my head.

*We don't discuss family business.*

*What happens in this house needs to stay in the house.*

*We're not going to talk about this, Ayanna. He's your uncle.*

I jumped when I felt Dimitri beside me. Before I could respond, he punched Uncle Tim so damn hard teeth flew out of his mouth. Never in my life had I seen anything like it before. My man knew how to use those muscles.

“Shit,” I jumped back when Dimitri punched him in the face again, causing blood to instantly flow from his nose. The cracking sound was loud in the silent room.

“Somebody, do something, please” my mom begged, jumping up from her seat, trying to pull Dimitri's arm.

I snatched her up so fast she stumbled before she could catch herself. She irritated my soul sticking up for this piece of

shit. He was not innocent. He was not a victim. He was not misunderstood. He didn't deserve compassion or tears.

Today, she would have to deal with watching him receive the consequences of his actions because he was taking this ass whipping.

"Nope, nobody is doing a damn thing. This is something someone in the family should have done a long time ago," I told her honestly. She could be upset as if she wanted to be. I didn't care. I was distraught long ago too when she ignored me and my cousins.

If the family was going to allow a pedo to participate in family festivities, his ass should have been afraid to breathe near any of the females in the family. Instead, they protected him with their indifference and silence. Pathetically, I had protected him through the years too. I should have told someone outside the family what he was doing since no one inside the family would speak on the behalf of the females in our family. The adults should be ashamed. We were little girls, praying her parents would protect us. They let us down.

"That's right. Beat his ass," my cousin Cameron yelled, while clapping to each word.

I looked over at her, and she had tears in her eyes. I didn't need to ask her to know he had touched her in some way too. Uncle Tim needed to be stopped. If Dimitri broke his hands, I bet his ass wouldn't touch anyone else. We should have been like some of these other countries who cut off hands when you touched shit you weren't entitled to. His dick should have been gone years ago since he couldn't fathom why it didn't belong inside of his relatives.

"He's going to kill him," my mother cried, while crying a fucking river for this piece of trash.

"Dimitri don't kill him," I stated, not because he didn't deserve it. "I want him to live to feel every hurt and pain he's caused everyone."

Instead of Dimitri heeding my words, he continued. Eventually, Sacha walked up and stopped Dimitri from caving

Uncle Tim's face. Blood was all over Dimitri's shirt, and I couldn't even lie. I was aroused. Beating Uncle Tim's ass was like an aphrodisiac for me. No one had defended me when I was a little girl. My husband, the father of my children, was beating Uncle Tim's ass.

"That's enough," Sacha called, holding Dimitri's fist.

Dimitri glared at my uncle as he moved away from Sacha and fixed his suit jacket. I frowned in disgust as my mother ran to my uncle to ensure he was okay. She never ran to my defense. I wanted to slap some sense into her, but I knew from my family's history. It was already too late. Whatever happened in their childhood made them thick as thieves.

"You didn't even have to do all of this," she cried, scowling at me with hate-filled eyes.

I ignored her. I didn't give a damn how she felt. Obviously, our feelings were mutual.

Sacha snapped his fingers and security came and picked up my uncle and tossed him out of the castle as if he were Jazz on *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*.

My mother raced behind them with her purse clutched tightly in her hands.

I shook my head in irritation and revulsion. There was no way their relationship was a simple brother and sister one. They were giving me incestuous vibes. I wanted to throw-up in my mouth.

Before she passed through the door, she turned to me. "I'll never speak to you again if you don't apologize to your uncle. He is family, and family sticks together no matter what. Yes, your uncle may have done some things you don't approve up, but it didn't warrant your thug ass husband trying to kill him," she spit out, looking at Dimitri with distaste.

Dimitri appeared unconcerned. Hell, I was unperturbed by her little speech too, and she was my mother.

I frowned at her. "That's fine. I hope you have a good life," I told her, turning around. There was no way I was



asking for forgiveness from my violator. I was the victim even if she didn't want to acknowledge what happened to me and the other females in our family. I was done with this whole charade.

"No man is perfect," she continued. "I'm sure this man you're marrying is not squeaky clean. He looks like a damn criminal. He is not innocent," she yelled to try to get her point across.

I nodded my head in agreement. Tears stung my eyes. It was hard accepting my mother was this person, standing in front of me defending something so revolting.

I fought to keep my emotions together. I wasn't going to cry over this. I mentally prepared myself to say what I needed to say to end this farce.

I blinked, making sure a tear didn't fall. Scoffing at her, I replied, "You're right. Every man is not perfect, but they don't fuck little girls or try to destroy their innocence. Take her out too," I told the other guards who immediately ushered her from the room.

I couldn't lie. I was hurt, but I would do the same thing all over again. I wasn't missing anyone who couldn't realize it was a felony and a disgrace how my uncle behaved. Damn him and her too.

I cleared my throat, looking at everyone who was attending my wedding. "If there is anyone else who disagrees with what just happened here, you can leave too."

I waited half a second and noticed my cousin Cam's mother get up and leave the room. My cousin sucked her teeth and sat facing straight ahead.

"I'm sorry," I told Dimitri, turning back to him. Everything that happened at our wedding was ghetto as hell. If we weren't already married, he would have probably changed his mind about committing to me.

Dimitri lifted my chin, "If so many people weren't in the room, I would have killed him." He shrugged his

shoulders. “I’m going to still kill him, but I’ll wait until he has healed.”

A shudder ran through me because I knew he was speaking the truth.

I couldn’t even say anything, and I wasn’t going to do a damn thing when Dimitri killed him either. He should have kept his damn dick in his pants. There was no telling how many lives he had ruined. I knew several broken women in my family personally. Uncle Tim wasn’t the only molester in our family. He was the boldest. The women in our family had a history of alcoholism and drug abuse. He was a direct cause of the issues they faced and contributed to how they handled their daughters.

After everything was said and done, we restarted my entrance into the castle and proceeded to bond our lives together in front of our family.

At the reception, my cousin Cam walked up to me with a smile on her face.

“Hi, cousin, you look beautiful.”

“Thank you,” I told her, giving her a big hug.

“How have you been?” I asked her, staring at her face. It was registering to me how she had her face hidden with huge Chanel shades on her face. The glasses caught me off guard. We were inside of a building. They were unnecessary.

I continued looking at her, noticing how her make-up was caked up on her face. My cousin was a brown-skin natural beauty. She never needed a lot of make-up. Matter of fact, in the past, she hardly wore any make-up. She was effortlessly pretty.

My antennas immediately went up. I held both of her hands in mine, trying not to overact in case I was wrong. Maybe Uncle Tim and Steven had me on constant alertness. Past experiences controlled how I reacted to current experiences in my life. Danger and trauma made trust a little harder to obtain.

“Are you okay?” I asked her low enough, so only she could hear me. I didn’t want to embarrass her by talking loudly.

She smiled nervously, making my anxiety skyrocket. I didn’t like her body language.

“I’m fine, Ayanna. This day is about you, not me.” She glanced around the room as if she were searching for someone. I didn’t like her movements. They were suspicious as hell.

Immediately, I noticed a handsome Italian man walking up behind her. I couldn’t even lie. He was gorgeous. He was 6ft tall with gorgeous dark hair and green eyes. Physically, he looked as if she had chosen well. From the stiffening of her frame, I was evaluating everything about him.

His smile was wide, but it didn’t reach his eyes. The tick in his jaw had me prepared to reach for the knife I had tucked in my wedding dress. He was doing something to my cousin.

He walked behind her and pulled her body close to his. He kissed her on the neck. There was no indication she was enjoying him touching her. She didn’t look like a woman who was happy to see her man.

I nervously looked around for my husband. If he was doing something to her, I was going to need my husband to step in and support me in getting her away from him.

“This was a beautiful wedding. Thank you for inviting us. Cam, you’re not going to introduce me to your cousin?” his tone was playful but the look in his eyes as he stood behind her was anything but lighthearted. There was an underlining threat in how he spoke to her.

I knew men like him. Anything a woman did without permission was a sign of disrespect. He needed her to bend to his will at all times. He reminded me so much of Roshaun. It was eerie. They could have been twins.

“I’m sorry, baby,” Cam giggled anxiously. “Where are my manners? You know I can be so stupid sometimes.” she simpered.

“Matteo, this is my cousin Ayanna. Ayanna this is Matteo.”

“Nice to meet you, Ayanna.”

I watched as he squeezed Cam tightly. The slight grimace on her face had me wondering if she was injured somewhere I couldn't see. Abusers had a way of hiding bruises and blemishes from prying eyes.

“It's okay, bellissima. Just watch yourself next time,” he chuckled mirthlessly.

“Matteo, you know I wouldn't deliberately disrespect you. I forgot,” the cadence she used had the hairs on my arm standing up.

He kissed the side of her face. “I know babe. Stop being so serious. You'll have your cousin thinking I'm beating you.”

*Too late.*

“That's silly,” she giggled unnecessarily. “You would never put your hands on me,” she replied, not sounding believable at all to my ears.

He gave her an oily smile. “You know our love is forever. One day this is going to be us. You're going to be my wife, right?” he questioned, holding her even tighter.

She looked uncomfortable as another soulless smile crossed her face. “Yes.”

I cleared my throat because my mouth had become dry suddenly, watching them interact. I couldn't outright call him an abuser, but I damn sure felt as if he was one. If it looked like a duck, and quaked like a duck. He was a got damn duck abuser.

Needing to get my cousin alone. I thought of an excuse quickly. “Cam, could you go the bathroom with me for a moment.” I wiggled from side to side, trying to be dramatic. “It's difficult trying to get anything done with all of this material. I could really use your help.”

I smiled at Matteo, hoping he wouldn't see right through my façade. I wanted to get Cam away from him, so she would feel comfortable talking to me.

“Sure,” she responded.

He squeezed her again. “Babe, we really need to get going. You know we're supposed to be at my brother's house.”

She patted his hands, which were immovable as he had them tightly clasped around her waist. She appeared uncomfortable to me.

She glanced behind her with a slight smile. “It won't take long. I'll come right back.”

I hated how it sounded as if she were beseeching him to allow her to go to the restroom with her cousin.

He glanced down at her without an ounce of emotion on his face. Shit, he looked like the devil to me. He made my skin crawl.

“Bellissima, we don't have time.” He kissed the side of her head. There was nothing romantic about it.

“Okay,” she whispered.

I hated watching their interaction. He glanced over at me with an annoying smirk on his face as if he was proving to me who was in control.

She glanced around the room. “I'll get one of your friends to come help you.”

I needed her to help me, but how could I say it without causing unnecessary drama between her and her man.

Shifting from one foot to the next, I gazed at my cousin. “I really have to go now. Please,” I begged, wanting desperately to speak with her alone.

Glancing pleadingly at him, she spoke. “I'll just,” she started to say.

“Ah, here's one of her friends here,” Matteo remarked as Yara walked up to me holding Natasha's hand.

I wanted to scream. I didn't want Yara's assistance. I wanted my cousin.

"Are you ready?" he demanded as soon as Yara stood near me. She glanced between me and Cam. She sensed the tension between us.

Instead of saying anything, she stood closer to me.

"Yes, I'm ready." He finally released her. However, he kept his eyes centered on her as she walked over to me.

"It was a beautiful wedding. You were a beautiful bride. Thank you for inviting us. I love you, cousin." She had genuine smile on her face alerting me to the fact that all of the rest of her smiles were insincere.

She reached over to give me a hug.

I wrapped my arms around her. "Please come to me if you ever need to run. You see my family. We can protect you," I whispered quickly in her ear, so he couldn't hear me.

I let her go and moved away. With the fakest smile in America, I glanced at him. I didn't know how to pretend. I couldn't tell him thank you for coming. I couldn't even lie and say it was a pleasure meeting him because I was disgusted by him. He would hear the lie as soon as I spoke.

"Congratulations again," she called as he gripped her hand tightly. I recognized the grimace on her face.

I wanted to call my husband to me, so we could take her away from him. Her eyes begged me not to cause a scene.

I wanted to do something. I wanted to say something, but I understood these situations. People left when they were ready.

I hoped it would be soon. His actions in front of me proved he didn't care who knew he controlled her. He was a dangerous man. I wanted my cousin to be safe. I did everything I could. I told her I was here for her.

Time would tell if she was willing to take me up on my offer.

# Stephanie

When I was younger, my grandmother used to tell me not to say I hated someone. It was too strong of a word, but I couldn't lie. I hated Ayanna.

Was it fair? No. Did I realize I was being stupid for hating her? Yes. I knew everything my husband did was his own fault. He was accountable for his own actions. All of this was true, but she was the first woman who ever held his interest. In fact, I thought he was really in love with her, and this was what made me hate her.

I couldn't understand what it was about her that made him act a fool for her. She was pretty, but damn, she wasn't drop dead gorgeous. She had the typical stripper body: small waist, big behind, thick thighs, and full breast. Pass those things, I didn't know what else had him losing his mind over her.

Through the years, I put up with a lot of shit from him. He was a notorious cheater in college, but I saw potential in him. He was my Barack Obama minus the lack of fidelity. Steven was always intelligent, smart, and driven. I knew if I stayed with him my future would be bright. He proved it. My husband brought home \$3 million a year. Was I giving that up because he occasionally fucked someone else? No. Those hoes could get those little bags and whatnot. I had access to the money, and he always came home to me.

Yes, he slept with strippers occasionally. He used them to blow off steam. He admitted he slept with them because he could do whatever he wanted to do to them sexually. Shit, I didn't know what else he wanted them to do. I sucked dick like I was a damn professional dick guzzler. I even learned how to tolerate swallowing his semen because he wanted me too. We had sex anally. He loved trying new shit, and I allowed him to have his way with me. So, I didn't know what the hell they were doing if I was doing everything he fucking wanted.

All I could reason was that he was greedy. He was never satisfied. He lived by the philosophy that there wasn't anything better than pussy except new pussy. I learned how to tolerate him sleeping with every woman. Convincing myself I was okay with it made things easier to handle when I found out about another woman. It was a version of reverse physiology. How could something hurt that I willingly approved of him doing?

I stopped fussing and arguing with him years ago because I realized he was never going to stop. My tears never stopped him from doing what he wanted to do. My begging him to be faithful to me never moved him. I ended up looking like a fool with make-up running down my face while he continued to do whatever he wanted to do.

In the end, if he came home to me and took care of home, I wasn't going to say a word. I continued to suck and fuck my husband as if I were the only one. I kept my body in tip-top shape. I kept our home in order. He never had to worry about anything. I played my part. I was the perfect wife and mother to our son outside and inside our home. I attended events and never let the world see how dysfunctional my marriage really was. It wasn't anyone's business but ours. It was our marriage, and we did what worked best for us.

Then, she came along. It was as if she had a magical pussy. He purchased her a condo, which I was aware of. He laid up with her ass as if he was a single man. I could have burst her little bubble from the beginning of their relationship because I knew exactly when she came into the picture with her homewrecking ass.

I didn't because I knew he was coming back home to me. He liked to play. I understood my husband. He liked variety. Sleeping with various women made him feel powerful and sexy.

It was terrifying when I realized my husband was pulling away from me. At one point, he barely made it home to me since he was with her. He had never done that to me before. I drove by her condo and watched my husband tongue her down as if she were his whole world. I made myself sick



following them around, feeling like shit because he treated her as if she was the wife, and I was the side-piece. I couldn't remember the last time he had treated me how he treated her, and it ate at my soul and pride.

It was then I realized I needed to have a baby. It was another string holding us together. I didn't give a damn if I never wanted a child. I needed another advantage over her. When this bitch turned up pregnant, I spent days in bed damn near on suicide watch because I was devastated.

Her seeing us in the mall was the best thing to ever happen to me. The look in her eyes almost had me creaming my panties. It was her turn to feel the pain I felt watching him traipse her ass around as if he were a single man. The distress on her face was obvious, and I enjoyed seeing her heart shatter right before my eyes.

Steven was stuck on stupid, trying to come up with a lie to soothe her, but I knew she wasn't taking him back. If he hadn't seen the pain and dismay on her face, I did as a woman. It was the same look on my face the first time I realized he was cheating on me. Matter of fact, it was the same look on my face when I admitted to myself that he was never going to change or stop cheating on me.

It didn't matter to me how much he loved her. He didn't leave me. He kept our family together. Yes, he went to her after I had sucked and fucked him after we left the mall. I cried, begged, and screamed knowing he wasn't leaving me.

I made my decision to keep my husband. She couldn't make the same decision because he was mine. When he came back home to me with his tail tucked between his legs after leaving our condo because it damn sure didn't really belong to her broke ass, I took him back. Hell, I wasn't really taking him back. He belonged to me. I was the wife. She was the sidepiece, the whore, the homewrecker.

It gave me great joy to send her the papers terminating his parental rights. Yes, I knew he only agreed because she refused to fuck him any longer. I read the messages he sent to her. A small part of me was impressed when she refused to

entertain his lies. Another part of me hated how he begged her to give him another chance. In the end she refused, and I suggested he terminate his right. He agreed because he was narcissistic. If you didn't play by his rules, he picked up his toys and went home.

I really thought it was the end of her. Now, here he was again all up her ass, looking like a sad puppy, which brought me back to despising her.

I wanted her out of my life. I wanted her out of our lives. She had done enough damage. Unfortunately, there was only way I could think of to get rid of her ass. I tried to hire people to kill her. It was extreme, but I didn't see another option. It was fucked up that you couldn't even hire good help anymore. Those idiots ruined it. They managed to get themselves killed. Thank goodness they died before they could tell who hired them.

Now, I was left to handle everything myself.

Steven wasn't going to ever stop obsessing over her unless she was gone permanently.

I wasn't delusional enough to think it wasn't going to be other women. However, it wouldn't be her annoying ass, and at this point, I would take that.

"What are you doing?" Steven asked, walking into the bedroom.

My eyes gazed over his body. He was still sexy after all these years. He prided himself on staying fit. I assumed he was diligent about his weight because he used it as another way to win women over. His money was his other tool. Having a monster dick didn't hurt either.

"I'm about to take a shower," I told him, standing from the bed. I needed another plan. I thought best in the shower because it washed away all of my frustrations.

I had been sitting on the bed since he took his shower, thinking about what I needed to do to get my home back in order.

He dropped his towel to the floor. I watched as his tool sprung to attention. “Why don’t you take care of this before you go?”

I bit my tongue because I wanted to tell his disrespectful ass to find someone else to suck his dick. Since he had been back in touch with Ayanna, he had become more churlish. He didn’t even pretend to want me unless he was fucking me in some way. Even then, he no longer touched me intimately. I was something for him to do until he could get wherever he was trying to go.

I eased from the bed without a word. If I said anything, he would become even more of an asshole. It was easier to simply do what he wanted me to do and get it over with.

This was the reason her ass needed to go. He was angry because he swore it was my fault that she didn’t want him. He was the typical self-centered person who couldn’t see their own faults.

Dropping to my knees, being the obedient wife he needlessly took for granted, I eyed his erection, ignoring the fact I was sure so many other women had partaken of it more than I had through the years.

Yes, I was bitter, but I built this life with Steven. No bitch was going to enjoy the fruits of my labor. I put in the work. I deserved the prize. It didn’t matter if the prize was undeserving. I desired it.

Softly, I licked him like my favorite lollypop because it was how I knew he liked it. I had gotten well versed to everything my husband liked.

I sucked the head of his erection into my mouth, playing with the tip only. My lips formed a circle around the head.

“Stop playing with it,” he demanded. Ignoring his command, I gripped his penis and guided him into my mouth. He made sure it hit the back of my throat, causing me to gag and choke on his dick. I suctioned his dick, holding him tightly in my mouth. His hips pushed against my face aggressively.

He was punishing me with his dick, but this wasn't my first rodeo with him behaving in this manner. I could take his abuse.

I worked him in and out of my mouth, tasting his salty essence. Reaching under him, I massaged his balls the way he enjoyed it.

His hands gripped the side of my head, slamming his dick in my face. He pumped hard in my mouth. Tears prick my eyes. He continued to take his fury out on me from not being able to be with his beloved Ayanna. It wasn't my fault she no longer wanted him. He needed to blame himself for that. He shouldn't have lied to her. He should have stayed true to our marriage. Everyone wasn't as forgiving or weak as I was.

More spit slipped from my mouth as I continued to allow him to fuck my mouth furiously. He looked down at me with a smirk on his face.

If I were a different woman, I would bite his shit off for how he was handling me. Instead, I used my jaws to squeeze him tighter inside my mouth, showing him that I was the only woman who could please him.

I was in no position to leave him. My life was tied to his, and I wasn't letting him go. This was a bump in the road. We would have to get over it.

His hot seed spurted into the back of my throat. There was so much it seeped from the corners of my mouth and flowed down my chin.

His dick plopped from my mouth, but it was clean. Exactly, the way he desired.

He glared down at me with a snarl on his face. "Clean yourself up."

I knew what he wanted. He had become even more nasty over the years. I licked his cum from my lips and used my fingers to wipe the rest away as I placed my fingers in my mouth.

He nodded his head in satisfaction. *Asshole.*

I stood to my feet feeling bitter and hurt. I didn't deserve how he was treating me. I was a good wife to him, but that was okay.

My plan would humble his ass quick. I wasn't sure if the narcissist could love anyone, but if he was in love with her, losing her would tear his world apart. With a smile on my face, I would be on the sideline to watch every tear drop from his eyes.

At this moment, I wouldn't care if Ayanna's thug ass husband killed Steven. He was so stupid. He wasn't the only one who had researched Ayanna's husband. I read the research too. He was rich, rich. His family's money made Steven's look like a joke, and it didn't hurt that he was sexy as hell.

This whore stayed winning. Steven couldn't compete, but it was okay. She would be gone soon.

# Nyah

We had been back from the Ayanna's wedding for about a month. Everything that happened at the wedding ceremony was shocking. I was not expecting her wedding to be quite so entertaining.

The whole situation was wild. When Ayanna stopped the wedding, I didn't know what the hell was going on. I thought she was about to be a runaway bride the way she stopped in her tracks.

If Ayanna had been aware, she would have run from the stormy look that passed across Dimitri's eyes when she didn't join him at the altar.

The blank stare on his face had me shook, and I didn't have anything to do with the fiasco taking place before everyone's eyes. I was happy for Ayanna when I realized Dimitri wasn't going to have to kill her ass because we all knew she wasn't getting out that damn castle without marrying her crazy prince.

Then, it was a like a damn record scratch when she called out her uncle for sexually molesting their family members. I felt ill listening to the words coming out of her mouth. I never knew she had experienced something like that. Then again, no one wanted to air out their family's dirty laundry. It was a wonder she even felt comfortable with Addy being around all her "uncles".

I still couldn't believe her mother had chosen her pedophile brother over her own daughter. Somebody should have slapped that damn wig off her head for being so damn stupid. There was no way I would choose a man over my child.

Before the night ended, several females in her family had thanked Dimitri for beating his ass. None of the adults in the family had ever done one thing to prevent him from mentally and physically harming others. It was mind boggling how something like that could still happen in this day and age.

He deserved that ass whooping and a lot more. But none of them had to worry, I was pretty sure Dimitri would be visiting him soon. From what Ayanna told me, her uncle was still laid up in the hospital suffering from several broken bones and injuries.

I was sure no one would go to the police regarding what occurred at the wedding. If so, they would have had to explain how he was allowed to molest the girls in their family. I was positive they didn't want to talk to the police about that with their shady asses. Women like them pissed me off to no end. I hope he felt every broken bone Dimitri gave him.

I didn't know why my mind was all over the place thinking about the wedding. I needed to pay attention since we were walking toward our cars. I knew if any shit was going to happen this was the perfect opportunity. The men had us protected at all times. No one was getting close to us, and we were rarely out in the open. Going to and from locations were the only times.

Glancing around, the hairs on the back of my neck stood at attention. Immediately, my heartrate picked up. With a family like mine, it was vital I paid attention. I held Nikki's hand tighter to ensure she didn't try to run off. I had to pop her a few times for trying to snatch away from me and run off to do whatever the hell little kids thought they were doing when they ran off. I was *not* one of those parents who believed in timeout. Nikki was getting spanked when she became belligerent and difficult.

We were leaving Nikki's jazz class, which Ayanna taught. Ayanna did not believe in parking inside of a covered garage even if we had protection. I didn't blame her. If I had been shot inside a garage, I wouldn't go back into one either. Hell, she had me suspicious of parking under one too. I would search high and low for a parking spot out in the open where other people were. When I was with her, our ass would walk a mile just to avoid parking away from people.

I relaxed slightly when I recognized why I was uber aware of my surroundings. It was No. He was leaned up against the business near Ayanna's. I bit my lip. No had my

entire body on notice. He was handsome. Never in my life would I have thought I could be attracted to a Japanese man. By what I could tell, he was biracial because he held onto more of his Japanese side than his African American side. I had to observe him closely to even notice it.

Prior to encountering Sacha and his family, I thought I would only date Black men. Now, I was open to any race. Black men were ahead of Black women when it came to dating outside their race. They didn't limit themselves to any one race. Opening myself up to more men allowed me to have more options. Thinking about dating had me thinking about Nikki's dad. He was a handsome man too. I really thought he was going to be like the other men in his family: honorable and loyal. I would have dated Nikki's father if he hadn't been a traitorous asshole.

Seeing how attentive Sacha and the other men were to the women in my family made me rethink my long held immature thoughts. They were some damn good providers. They were faithful and wonderful father figures. They adored Addy and Nikki. They were big in stature, but they were teddy bears to the women in our family.

I knew white men had interest in Black women, but it wasn't every day an Asian man showed interest in black women, or at least, I assumed they rarely showed interest in us. Now, here was No, once again shifting everything I thought I knew once again. I was still trying to grasp the idea that I could be attracted to him and vice versa.

I watched in fascination as his eyes purposefully drifted down my body. My body became heated in response. He made me aware of the leggings and sports bra I was wearing. I dressed comfortably because while Nikki was in class, I played around on the dance pole for exercise.

I had become hot and sweaty, so I had removed my shirt. Now, I felt self-conscious as his eyes ate me up. No made my body feel alive without doing anything, his staring was powerful enough.



Today, No was wearing his casual clothes. He was dressed in black jeans and a hunter green short sleeve shirt. The color looked nice on him. I squinted, trying to get a good look at him. He had cut some of his hair. He was looking sexier than ever.

His eyes looked as though they were half-mast, but it could have been testament to his Japanese heritage. Unblinkingly, he continued to stare at me. A shudder gripped my body, imagining what it would feel like if he touched me. I was crazy. I didn't know anything about him except he was dangerous. He exuded power, and as much as I hated to admit it, power was addictive.

Whatever he did or whoever he was, he was a leader. He controlled the men around him. A man who could dominate other men was something to behold.

It should have been enough to run me away, but it pulled me closer. The women in my circle must be a glutton for punishment. Shaking my head, I tried to ignore the feelings he was giving me.

“Are you allowing Nikki to stay with us tonight?” Ayanna asked, oblivious to the fact my body was going haywire.

I broke eye contact with No to see Ayanna standing still while the guards locked up her dance studio.

She looked so cute in her leggings and big top. Her stomach was still small, and people who didn't know her would find it hard to believe she was even pregnant.

She was carrying small, but the doctor assured her everything was fine with the baby. Dimitri kept trying to feed her to make her gain weight, but her metabolism and dancing prevented her from gaining weight.

“Mommy,” Nikki called, tapping my legs.

“Yes, baby,” I answered, pushing her hair from out of her eyes. It amazed me every day how I ended up being her parent. Her daddy was a damn fool, but he left me with a treasure beyond measure.

“I want to stay,” she said in a cute little voice.

I smiled down at her. “I know. You can spend the night with your cousin Addy.”

“Yeah,” she screamed, causing me to shake my head. Nikki loved Addy. She wanted to be around her all the time. I tried to limit how often she spent the night with them, but she was an only child. She was lonely. Before she came into my life, I always said I would have my children one or two years apart, so they wouldn’t be lonely. Now, Nikki didn’t have a choice but to not have a sibling.

I didn’t have a man, so it was going to be even longer before she had someone to play with.

“Umm, do you see your man standing over there watching you,” Ayanna asked, tilting her head to the side. I thought she hadn’t seen him, but I should have known. She probably noticed him the same time I had.

I glanced back over to No. He was looking in our direction. Eventually, I was going to have to address our situation. No was popping up in random places. He knew my every move, and I didn’t understand how or why he was even interested. I wanted to call him harmless, but it wasn’t true. No was dangerous. I just didn’t think he was dangerous to me.

“I see him,” I responded, turning back to gaze at No again. “My dilemma is that I don’t know what he wants with me.”

She smiled mischievously, while looking at No. She waved her fingers hi at him. I shook my head at her antics.

She sucked her teeth. “Girl, stop playing. You are lying to yourself. Trust, I know what a man looks like when he wants a woman. He wants you.”

I rolled my eyes in response. “He hasn’t said a word to me. Matter of fact, the night he saved me he didn’t really speak to me. Then, when he showed up at the mall, he spoke to Sacha instead of me, so until he does, I’m going to keep saying I don’t know what he wants from me.”

“I understand. I’d wait on him to tell me something too. He’ll tell you what he wants when he is ready.”

I agreed with her, but it didn’t stop me from wondering what his intentions were. I had a child, and I wasn’t anyone’s plaything. I wanted a committed relationship. I believed in dating with a purpose. No, I didn’t expect marriage right off the bat, but I wanted to know if he believed in relationships and marriage. If not, I wasn’t the girl for him. I didn’t have Ciara’s Prayer. I had Nyah’s prayer. I prayed God would send me someone who took care of me mentally, spiritually, emotionally, physically, financially, and sexually. I needed him to be a good father to my daughter too. Those were the requirements I needed. If No couldn’t meet those criteria, I was uninterested.

As much drama as I had watched Ayanna and Yara go through, I didn’t have it in me to allow a man to handle me any type of way. The last thing I wanted was to find a man who wanted to cheat on me, beat my ass, or treat me like trash. I would rather be single than go through all of that. Sex toys would always be available. Settling for good peen that was attached to a sorry ass man was a no go.

I was accustomed to being single. I was happy with myself. I knew some people found it hard to believe, but it was true.

I went out with my family and friends. I enjoyed my daughter. I worked at the dance studio with Yara and Ayanna. I was willing to stay single and stress free. If a good man came along, I was good with that too. Simply put, I was unwilling to compromise on finding a man who I could trust with my heart and my daughter. My peace was worth everything to me. Granting a no-good man access to come and destroy that wasn’t an option. I wasn’t going to let anyone drag my heart through the mud.

I wasn’t in the business of catering to a man who didn’t belong to me. Women spoiled men so much that they were no longer willing to nourish a woman’s feelings. They wanted women to pamper and indulge them. All those things were fine if they were good to me, but they wanted those things from the

beginning when they hadn't done anything to warrant such treatment.

No hadn't done a damn thing either except be fine. It wasn't enough. I needed him to speak some words. Touch more than just my vajajay.

I refused to turn back around to eye stalk No. He needed to do something soon. This game we were playing was unbearable. He needed to place all his cards on the table, so I could decide if it was a game I wanted to play.

I started across the street with Nikki and Ayanna. We had parked our cars across the street when we were at the dance studio. I stepped onto the street, but I couldn't help but stare at No one last time before we got inside the bullet-proof Yukon, we were riding in.

When I gazed at him, No was animatedly pointing behind me. Immediately, I turned around to see what was happening when he began to run full speed toward me.

*What the fuck?*

I turned in time to see a car I swore was headed straight for us. It must have been what he saw too.

"Move," I screamed frantically, watching the car speed closer to us without stopping. My stomach dropped to my ass. Fear seized my body.

I only had time to throw Nikki to one of the guards and push Ayanna, who was five months pregnant, out of the way before the car could mow her down.

"Shit," I screamed as someone pushed me out of the way too, causing the car to run over my leg instead of my whole body like I originally thought it would.

There was ringing in my ears, and everything felt far away. There was too much happening at one time. The pain was prohibiting me from processing what was happening.

Bullets flew everywhere as the car drove recklessly. Muffled screams were all I heard. I watched in awe as No took a flying leap on top of the car's trunk before he flipped on the

other side. All the while he was shooting his gun, causing glass to shatter everywhere.

*Who was this damn man?*

No already had me researching Yakuza when he saved us at Lenox Mall. Now, I was ready to research ninjas because that was the only way to describe what he had just done. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it.

I grimaced as pain shot through my leg. I was frightened to look at it because I knew it was broken and damaged.

No made his way toward me with a look on his face I had never seen before. He was always serene. He was calm when he almost killed Nikita, Sacha's cousin. He was calm when he appeared at the mall and saved us.

In this moment, his face was anything but relaxed. He looked as if he was ready to tear someone's head off their shoulders. He had me shivering for a different reason this time. I was scared. Maybe not for me, but I was frightened for someone else.

Sacha's men were bent down, trying to determine the extent of my injury.

My heart beat erratically inside my chest as I watched No stalk closer to me. I didn't know No very well, but in this moment, I knew he was beyond reasoning with. He didn't even acknowledge my ass laying on the ground, bleeding like a stuck pig.

No placed his gun to one of the guard's head. My eyes ballooned witnessing this side of him.

The guard froze in place. Everyone remained still, trying to determine what No was about to do.

"Don't kill him," I screamed. Adrenaline propelled me to scramble to my feet. Even with my injury, I ignored the pain. I squeezed my body between No and the guard.

There was no doubt he would kill this man in front of everyone. I didn't want those problems.

“If you kill him, Sacha will avenge him. I can't have you as my family's enemy,” I begged, hoping he was the type of man who listened to reason. Men could be difficult when they were in their feelings. They swore they never got in their feelings, but I begged to differ. They were worse than us who they swore was emotional as hell.

The guards' guns were now pointed at No, while No's guards' guns were pointed toward Sacha's men.

This was a shitshow. I didn't even know that No had these men following him all the time. Was he a criminal? What else could explain his need for this much protection? Businessmen didn't require all of this.

*Sacha's family did, but they used to be criminals. Shit, No was a criminal.*

His face was a hard mask. “They aren't very good protectors,” he growled, sneering at the guards who remained steadfast in their positions. The tone of his voice was so deep. No one would suspect it could come from him.

Perspiration slid down my back.

“No, they are good men. They surrounded us immediately. They saved my daughter. Her life is the most important thing to me. I would prefer her safety than mine. Let's be honest, your men didn't stop the car either, and it is clear they were here too. Don't be a hypocrite. This wasn't avoidable. You and I both know this happened precipitously. If you kill them, you need to kill your own men too.”

He didn't budge as he continued to hold his gun at ready. His men shifted nervously, making me wonder if No would kill them too.

Good grief, was he this ruthless?

Finally, his eyes turned to mine. I gave him a direct look, hoping my little speech worked. I understood his anger. I was upset too, but we didn't need a war right now.

“They saved one of my closest friends too. I can’t live without Ayanna.” I glanced at Nikki, who had tears running down her little face. She was reaching for me, but I couldn’t pick her up because I was in pain, and I was too busy trying to convince this crazy ass man he didn’t need to react off of emotions.

No’s eyes didn’t leave mine as I realized he was contemplating my words. He was stubborn. He knew everything I told him was accurate.

My leg throbbed incessantly as I tried to convince No and his men to lower their weapons.

Tears spilled down my face from the pain and fear of what No might do. He was a wildcard. Maxim had been unable to find out anything about him. Everywhere he turned, the trail went cold. Anyone who was buried this deep had secrets to hide. I didn’t want them burning me, but he was insistent on dragging me into his life.

My eyes were blurry, and the pain was unbearable. However, I begged with everything in me. “I’ll give you whatever you want from me,” I bargained. I was getting to know No. He wanted something from me even though I didn’t know what it was. He wasn’t ready to spill it, but something kept him in my presence.

He didn’t blink as he gave me a strange intense look. The tension between us was thick as No studied my eyes.

“I promise.” I gulped, not knowing exactly what I was agreeing to. All I knew was that I wanted to avoid the blowback of what could happen if he pulled the trigger.

My legs began to shake as I crumbled back to the ground in pain. I didn’t know how I stood for so long. It must have been damn adrenaline because my leg felt as if it were about to fall off. All I wanted to do was take my ass to the hospital, so I could receive some good ass drugs. Not no damn 800 Motrin either. I wanted to alleviate the burning hot pain searing my leg.

There was utter silence as everyone waited to see what No would do. Neither No or his men lowered their weapons.

The copper scent of blood filled my nostrils. I was afraid to look down because I knew what I was going to see.

“You promise,” he asked in a deep voice. Somewhere in the recess of my mind, I knew it was dangerous and reckless to agree, but I didn’t have a choice.

My breath quickened from his question.

“I promise,” I confirmed, praying the price wouldn’t be too steep for me to pay.

No put his gun away as he reached down and picked me up, carrying me away from my family.

“Wait, where are you taking her?” Ayanna asked, trying to keep up with his long strides.

He ignored her question, so I pinched and rotated his skin to get his attention. “Nobody likes an asshole, No,” I sighed, holding on to consciousness by a thread.

He grinned at me as he cast a smirk my way. Lord, the sexy look on his face had my body creaming even as pain flooded my system.

“No, answer her. If you don’t answer her, she’s going to be worried,” I snarled in frustration, tired of his churlish behavior.

No chuckled with a smug look on his face. “I’m taking her to my physician. Don’t worry, Ayanna, your friend is safe with me.”

I leaned into his body, wrapping my arms around him to make sure he didn’t drop my ass. Yes, No was strong, but I wasn’t small. I was slim thick, but everyone knew pounds on black women were different than that on white women. We were solid as hell. I didn’t care what that little chart on the doctor’s wall said. We were not the same.

I tried to ignore the tone of his voice, but it was something about it that was providing me with comfort even through the excruciating pain I was experiencing.



“I’ll have her back at the compound tonight. Rest assured.”

He glanced to the man beside him. “Give her my card. Have your Sacha call me. He and I need to talk to get some things straight.”

“Mommy,” Nikki wailed.

“I’m fine, sweetie. Go with Auntie Ayanna. I’ll be back before you know it.”

“I don’t want Auntie Yanna,” she whined. My poor baby had been through so much. Losing her ignorant ass daddy left a mark on her.

He may have loved his daughter, but he obviously didn’t love her enough not to betray his family and bring about his own death.

Nikki had attachment issues. Subconsciously, she feared losing me, the only mother she has ever known.

“I promise. I’ll be fine.”

Ayanna walked over to us and leaned Nikki over to hug me. She gripped my neck tight with tears rushing down her face.

“Do you want her to come with you?” No asked, watching our interaction.

“Yes, mommy. I want to go with you,” she begged without letting my neck go.

My leg was now on fire, but I couldn’t deny Nikki even if I didn’t even know where the hell I was going.

“Okay,” I whispered, hoping I wasn’t endangering us both.

One of No’s men held Nikki’s hand as he walked quickly toward a blacked-out Lincoln Navigator.

With every step No took, I clenched my teeth, trying to refrain from screaming from the pain.

# Ayanna

My heart was beating outside my chest. I was on my knees, scrapped up watching No walk Nyah away.

Tears rushed out of my eyes. I didn't understand why I couldn't catch a fucking break. I didn't do anything to anyone. I stayed to myself. I raised my daughter, went to work, hung out with my friends, and loved on my husband. Yet, people didn't want me to prosper. Why? Once again, I hadn't done anything to Stephanie. Her car windows were tinted, but I still recognized her before she sped away.

It was ignorant how two bitter people could hold someone else responsible for their poor decisions. Stephanie chose to deal with her husband's infidelity. Now, she wanted to pretend as if I destroyed her marriage.

Dimitri came up to me and immediately wrapped his arms around me.

I blew out a breath. "I can't keep dealing with this," I told Dimitri honestly. Lord knew I didn't want to say the words. It felt blasphemous to say you wanted another person dead, but I did. I wanted her to pay for trying to kill me, my friends, and my unborn child. There was no way I wanted to spend the rest of my life looking behind me because her and Steven couldn't move on with their lives.

I wasn't going to risk them hurting Addy, me, or my baby.

I wiped tears from my eyes. "I want them dead. Both of them. I'm tired of both of them," I admitted to him. Saying the words out loud made me feel awful, but I knew what I wanted.

"The wife will be taken care of tonight. Her husband is on the run, but we have a location on him. He'll be handled soon."

I nodded my head. "I want to be there when you kill her."

“Love,” he started.

I shook my head. “No, I deserve to see it. My face needed to be the last one she saw since she blamed me for everything.”

Her first mistake was not keeping a tight leash on her dog. From previous conversations, it appeared all he did was roam away from home.

Her second mistake was allowing him back into her life time and time again. It was a mistake. She should have let him go. Now, she was about to lose her life over some community dick. It was quite sad because their son was about to lose both of his parents.

She probably thought she would continue to antagonize me over a man who was stalking me. He was the one consistently calling the dance studio asking to speak to me. He sent flowers to me without a note. I wasn't stupid I knew it was him. Ignoring him obviously wasn't enough.

“Let's get you home first before we go find her. You need to relax. She isn't getting away.”

I nodded my head.

“Are you okay?” Yara asked rushing up to us with tears in her eyes.

“I'm fine. How are you?” I saw No take Nyah away. She had to be worried about her sister. I would too. But I had faith No would take really good care of her. He wouldn't allow anything to happen to her.

“I'm worried about Nyah. They said her leg looked pretty bad. Then, I have to trust No to ensure she's safe. We don't even know him. He could be doing anything to her.”

I moved from Dimitri's arms. I wrapped my arms around her. “I'm sure she's fine. I really believe he likes her. He has been around every time she has been in danger. Yes, it's weird and stalkerish as hell,” I said trying to provoke her into smiling, “but he's kept me and Nyah safe each time. I know it doesn't mean much, but I have faith in him. He'll

make sure she is fine. Have you seen the resources this man has?”

I shook my head because he appeared to have more men than us. As observant as I was, I never noticed his men watching us. No was the only person I noticed, which means he wanted us to see him. It was scary the capabilities he had.

“I know. It concerns me we don’t know anything about him though.”

“He’s safe,” Dimitri interrupted us.

“How do you know?” Yara asked with curious eyes.

“He’s spoken to Sacha.”

“And?” Yara quizzed.

“He’s discussed what he wants with Nyah.”

Both of us stopped walking and stared at Dimitri in anticipation. “What does he want?” Shit, it had been the question of the day between me and Nyah today, so to know they knew and she didn’t’ was interesting.

“I can’t discuss it. Yara needs to talk to her husband.”

I sucked my teeth. “Her husband isn’t here,” I told him, placing my hands on my hips. Men got on my nerves. If it was Yara and I, we would have given up the tea in a blink of an eye. Men had this brotherhood where they held each other’s secrets close to heart.

He nodded his head toward Sacha’s approaching figure as if to say she could question her husband right now.

“Are you okay?” Sacha asked, reaching for Yara.

She nodded her head, allowing him to offer her assurance. “No took Nyah with him.”

He kissed her forehead. “I know. He contacted me.”

She pulled away from him. Once again, it felt as if the men were keeping secrets. No was contacting Sacha but leaving Nyah in the dark. “What did he say?”

“She’s going to be fine, lev. He has a personal physician who is going to take care of her. Once she has surgery, he’ll wait for her to recoup and bring her to the compound.”

“Do you trust him?” Yara asked, looking into her husband’s eyes.

Sacha remained quiet for a moment. “I trust him as much as I would any man who is not part of my family.”

“What does that even mean?” she asked in frustration. I would feel the same way if my sister was with some unknown man. It would worry me to know and wonder what he was doing to her. Personally, I would have felt better if we had taken her to a hospital to get help rather than trust No.

“It means I have someone watching over Nyah. I know where they are going. I trust he’ll keep his word when he told me he will protect her.”

“Fine, Sacha. If anything happens to my sister...” She didn’t need to finish the statement. We knew what she wanted Sacha to do if No hurt Nyah. She wanted his head, and if Sacha wanted any peace, he would bring it to her.

“What does he even want with her?” Yara quizzed in irritation.

Sacha looked at her sympathetically. “What does any man want with a woman?”

“Pussy,” Yara replied, causing me to chuckle before I could stop myself. I was thinking it, but I didn’t say it.

“Yara,” Sacha reprimanded her.

“What?” she shrugged her shoulders. “Isn’t it what men want?”

Right. Men lived and breathed pussy. They manipulated, conned, and lied to get it. Therefore, it was easy to assume No wanted the same thing from Nyah.

“Was it all I wanted from you?” he asked her, looking at her intently.

She smirked. “I don’t know. I came to you first.” She was being cute because she contacted Sacha first, which was crazy since women were always told they should wait for a man to pursue them. However, had she waited, Roshaun would have killed her.

He smiled innocently. “You offered me pussy first. I declined and asked for your hand in marriage, so I would say I definitely wanted more from you.”

She smiled. “Fine, Sacha. You are correct, but every man is not you. Some people aren’t looking for a lifetime commitment. They want to explore new pussy without commitment, so again, what does he want from my sister?”

“He wants her, lev. He wants her the same way I want you.”

*Oh shit. Nyah was never going to get rid of his ass. Men like the Vasiliev’s played for keeps. They fought for everything they want and didn’t know what the word no meant.*

“Okay. Well, how dangerous is he? Should we be worried?”

Yara had to be kidding. Of course, she should be worried. Dangerous men attracted trouble. You dated them at your own risk.

“He isn’t any more dangerous than we are.”

I sucked my teeth. “Well, that’s not saying much.”

Dimitri smiled smugly. “Let’s go. We’re going to let the police take care of this. We’re going home. Then, we’ll go take care of one of our problems. Stephanie won’t be allowed to live past today. Both of them have outworn their welcome.”

I agreed wholeheartedly. I wasn’t risking me and Addy’s safety playing with those two idiots. The honeymoon was over.

A few hours later I stood looking down at the woman who loved Steven more than her own life or the life of her son.

I didn’t get her. I loved Dimitri with all of my heart, but not to the detriment of me and my child. There wasn’t

enough money or dick to make me sacrifice my life.

Looking at her, I was proud I didn't allow him to ruin my life by staying with him and allowing him to prey on the love I felt for him.

The room was shrouded in silence as we both took each other in. She was a remarkably beautiful woman. Even in this particular moment, I know she could have moved on and found someone else.

Stephanie glared at me with a pinched brow.

My eyes remain on her. From all that I know about her, she is an educated Black woman who obtained her Bachelors in Accounting. It wasn't as though she couldn't have taken care of herself if she and Steven divorced.

I saw the hate she had for me, and I genuinely did not understand it. I can't imagine the hell he put her through putting up with his asinine behavior through the years. The pain she must feel knowing no matter how hard she sucked, fucked, begged, cried, and catered him that it would never make him love her. It couldn't have been me. I was not Apollo Creed from Rocky. My black ass would have thrown in the towel a long time ago.

Finally, I spoke to get everything off my chest. "I'm glad he covered your mouth. You've said enough already, and you don't listen. However, you're going to listen to me now."

"I really do hate everything is coming down to this. I hate contributing to black on black crime. You are my sister in arms, and if Steven wasn't involved, I wonder if I could have convinced you to let this go before it killed you literally and figuratively speaking."

Several emotions crossed her face before tears slipped down her eyes. I didn't not want to have any sympathy for her because she was a stupid woman who chose her husband's lies over her own happiness.

"First, I didn't know Steven was married. He lied to me for the entirety of our relationship, which was unforgivable in my eyes. I never wanted your husband. I didn't find out

Steven was married until the day I saw you, him, and your son in the mall. As soon as I realized he was married, I left your husband alone. I never had any contact with him again once he decided he was done with my daughter. As a woman, I would have thought you would have supported him being in his daughter's life. Instead, you were a selfish bitch.”

“You would rather have him disown his daughter instead of him being in her life. It was a pathetic move on your behalf.”

I wanted to slap her for putting my baby through the heartbreak of searching for another man to fill the void of a father when in reality she had one who didn't feel like he should have stepped up to the plate to raise her.

I shook my head at her. “Now, you're going to die because you were money hungry and delusional. All you had to do was just walk away, and you were too silly to do that. Now, you don't have a choice.”

She stared daggers at me, confirming she would have never left this alone. I didn't care. I wasn't going to worry about her ever coming back into my life.

“Goodbye, I pray your son is raised by someone who is smarter than you. He didn't deserve you two dummies.”

Tears poured from her eyes. I hated she only thought of her son when it was too late, but I would ensure that he was financially stable for the rest of his life.

Alexei escorted me from the room. I wiped the tears from my eyes as Alexei walked me to the car.

“You didn't have another choice. There were so many ways she could have handled this situation.”

I nodded my head. People didn't fuck up their lives all at once. Most of the time, it was small decisions here and there that set them on the path of destruction. Her staying with Steven, her blaming everyone but him for his cheating, her trying to ruin my life, her trying to run me over, and her not being able to let a toxic love go.



There were so many times she could have jumped off the crazy train. Instead, she drove that bitch to her death.

“I know, but she had a child. I hate he’s going to have to grow up without both of his parents.”

“He wasn’t your responsibility to think about. He was their child. They should have placed his needs before their own. They were two selfish individuals.”

“I know,” I whispered. His words calmed me a little, but it still didn’t make me feel any better about the situation.

“If it makes you feel any better, we learned she was the one who paid the guys to try to kill you at the mall. You have every right to feel bad about leaving her child without his parents, but you have every right to stay alive to take care of your children. She was sick. She hated you.”

I couldn’t believe she went through so much trouble to get rid of me. It was sickening. She said it herself a long time ago. If Steven hadn’t cheated on her with me, it would have been someone else. It was who he was. She could have killed me, and he would have found someone else to replace me before my body was even cold.

I was positive after I left him alone, he hadn’t stopped cheating. Maybe, I was the one he was obsessed with. He could have even convinced himself he wanted to be with me, or he was going to be faithful to me. It was a lie. He would have tried it for a while. Then, he would have gotten tired. Steven was a dog. That was it. That was all.

“But, not her husband. She loved him to death,” I muttered sarcastically. He was the one who deserved all her hurt and anger.

“I’m positive she hated herself more,” Alexei responded, continuing to walk beside me, making me stop in my tracks.

Damn, that was deep. Alexei talked so rarely that it was shocking me he was participating in this conversation.

“Why do you say that?” I asked him curiously.

He shrugged his shoulders. “She took too much disrespect from him. He was an asshole to her. The only way you can love someone who treats you how he treats her is if you didn’t love yourself. The longer she stayed with him, the more self-respect she lost for herself. He broke her down, and she allowed it. Still, I don’t feel sorry for her. If I were her, I would have killed him.”

I smiled slightly. “I would have too.”

I turned when I heard the door close behind us. Dimitri walked out of the door. I didn’t need to ask. I knew he had taken care of everything. Anyone who harmed his family was going to be handled.

“Are you okay?” he asked, pulling me into his body.

I inhaled his scent, trying to calm my nerves. Dimitri always soothed me. He brought me a sense of peace I didn’t think I could find with anyone else.

Tears pricked my eyes again. I was crying because no one should die without having someone to mourn their death. I didn’t take my decision to have her killed lightly.

“I love you,” he murmured, kissing my head.

“I love you too,” I mumbled into his shirt.

“Let’s go home. My baby shouldn’t be out.”

I rolled my eyes. “Your baby isn’t even born yet. He or she doesn’t know what is going on.”

I decided to be one of those lame people and not find out the sex of our child. I wanted a surprise. Dimitri didn’t care either way. He was happy we were having a child.

He glanced down at me. “According to the book, at seven months, our baby is able to hear.”

I shook my head at him. I loved when he quoted something about what he read in the baby book. It was cute and annoying at the same time because he swore that he was a damn doctor or something.

“Whatever, let’s go home.” I intertwined my fingers with his as we walked toward our blacked-out Yukon.

Dimitri opened the door for me, and I scooted to the middle of the seat. I loved to sit under him when we were in the car.

He sat quietly next to me for ten minutes. I could tell something was on his mind, but I decided to wait for him to tell me what he was thinking.

“I allowed you to come here because you needed closure, and you were the one directly affected by Stephanie’s attacks. However, I don’t want you to go with me when I kill Steven. His death won’t be easy, and I don’t want you involved. You don’t have anything to say to him. You received your closure when he came to the studio. Whatever wasn’t said then, will never be said.”

*Well damn, husband. Just say you don’t want me to talk to him without saying you don’t want me to talk to him.*

I wasn’t going to argue with my husband. He said what he said, and thank goodness, I agreed. There was nothing Steven could say to me. Matter of fact, I was content with never seeing him again. He destroyed three lives: his, his wife, and son. He had done more than enough.

“Okay.”

He kissed my forehead again. I was satisfied allowing my husband to handle everything else. I wanted it over.

When we pulled into the compound, my heart immediately started beating hard in my chest. I immediately recognized my cousin’s car sitting at the gate. Dimitri grabbed me before I could jump out the car.

“I’ll see what’s going on. Sit here,” he demanded.

I nodded my head in response, but I was itching to get out the car. I scooted closer to the side of the door he had recently vacated, so as soon as he gave me the all clear I could jump out immediately.

He stood talking to my cousin through the car window for a moment. I couldn't see her face because Dimitri's big body blocked my visual.

Cameron or Cam for short had never visited me before. Something had to be wrong if she were coming to me. It made me think of our conversation at the wedding when I saw her face caked with make-up. I was never abused in a relationship, but I recognized all the signs. There were a few girls in the club we used to work with who were physically abused by their significant others. They all did a good job of camouflaging the bruises, but none of us were ever stupid. Some bruises couldn't be hidden.

As soon as I touched the handle to open the door because I refused to wait any longer, Dimitri opened up the car door.

He sighed as he sat inside the car, pushing me back inside, knowing I wanted to get out and see about my cousin.

"Is she okay?" I asked, trying to tone down my anxiety. I knew she was fine because she was here. It didn't mean she was genuinely okay.

"She's okay." He held my hand, which told me there was more happening than what he was saying.

"She's going to stay with us for a while."

"What happened, Dimitri?" I begged. He was too calm, while I was a ball of nerves. He didn't have to say anything because I already knew. I drew my own conclusion. It was Matteo. His ass was an Italian Ike Damn Turner, not knowing how to keep his fucking hands to himself.

"Do you know anything about her boyfriend?" he asked instead, causing me to want to punch his ass in the face. I wanted answers, instead his ass acted as if we were in a quiz bowl.

"No. Did he do something to her?" I remembered thinking he was slimy as hell when he attended my wedding with her.

“She’s going to be fine, Ayanna. When you see her, please don’t overreact.”

Shit. When someone says don’t overreact, it made you ready to overreact. “What did he do to her?” I demanded.

He squeezed my hands. “She is beat up bad, but she’s okay. Try not to breakdown. She doesn’t want that, nor does she need that right now. I’m sure it took a lot to come to you.”

I bit my lip to hold back my tears. Every word Dimitri was saying made my heart thump hard against my chest.

My cousin had been through enough. Knowing everything my uncle did to her made things ten times worst. In life, it felt as if when you weren’t born in a bubble life constantly handed you out shitty hands.

The gates opened allowing Cam to drive through. Our truck followed behind her. She stopped at the first house inside the compound, which happened to be mine and Dimitri’s.

When the truck stopped, I jumped out, ready to see with my eyes what was going on with Cam. I wanted to know what happening to her.

I bit my lip to keep the tears from rushing down my face.

“Cam,” I whispered as she slowly eased out of her car.

It took everything in me not to gasp like some dummy in a movie. Her face was so swollen and bruised she was barely recognizable.

It was as if he deliberately punched her in the face repeatedly to make sure he marked her beauty.

“You said I could come if I ever needed you,” she whispered through swollen lips.

I walked slowly toward her. “Yes, I know. You’re always welcome, Cam.”

“Thank you,” she mumbled. “I was so scared.”

She reached for me and practically fell in my arms. “I know,” I told her, running my hands soothingly in her hair. I

stopped for a second when I felt some missing chunks from her scalp.

“He tried to kill me,” she whispered into my neck. “If I hadn’t gotten away, he was going to kill me.”

“Shhh. Shhh. You’re safe here. It’s going to be okay,” I reassured her.

“I’m pregnant. I don’t know if the baby is okay.” She released a sob that felt like it came from the pit of despair. Her anguish caused the tears I was desperately holding back to fall from my eyes. That bastard.

“We’ll have a doctor come check you out. Come on. We should go inside, so I can get you settled.”

She pulled away from me slowly, wiping the tears from her eyes. It was obvious from her movements something was going on with her right hand. I wasn’t a doctor, but it looked broken or something to me. It was amazing she was able to make it far with all of the injuries she had sustained.

“Where’s he now?” I asked as I escorted her to the door. She limped beside me, causing me to glance down at her leg. What the fuck was wrong with him? He must have beat her ass like a man.

When we arrived at the door, I used my palm to enter the house.

“He was knocked out drunk when I left. It was the only way I was able to leave.”

“Okay. Well, you’re here now. It’s going to be fine.”

She shook her head at my statement. There was such sadness in her eyes. “It’s not, Ayanna. I’m so broken. I’ve been through too much,” she whimpered.

Oh God. Her pain was hurting me. I didn’t know what to say to her statement. Words at a time like this were meaningless.

I was silent for a moment, trying to find the right words. My cousin needed my strength, and I was going to allow her to lean on me until she could stand on her own.

“You’re fine, Cam. We’re going to get through this. My friends and I can help you. We’ve all been through some shit, but we’re standing. I consider them all my adopted family, but Cam, you’re my blood family. We grew up together. We beat up girls together. My friends are like us. We beat ass together too.”

A slight smile graced her battered face.

“They can be your friends too. Whenever I need them, they are here for me. You can talk to any of us. You don’t have to carry this burden alone. We have you, Cam. I promise.”

I was saying anything to keep her from breaking down and falling apart. Everyone was not strong, so they needed people to carry them until they could lift themselves. I didn’t mind doing the heavy lifting.

“He’s never going to let me go, Ayanna. He’s crazy as hell. You don’t know him like I know him. He knows about the baby,” she stated bitterly.

“Yes, the fuck he will,” I growled as Alexei interrupted any other words I might have spoken.

“He’ll let you go.”

Cam didn’t turn around, but I knew she heard Alexei because her body tensed. Before either of us could respond, Cam dropped, but Alexei was there to catch her.

“Cam,” I screamed, moving toward Alexei.

“I have her. She’ll be safe, Ayanna. I promise.”

*Lord, help us all if Alexei was speaking. He was the chemist in the family. He could probably burn Matteo’s ass inside out by blowing smoke in his face. Who the hell knew what he created in the laboratory he had built in his house?*

I already knew what that meant. If he brought his ass around here, he was going to be a dead ass. I hoped he remembered the way all the men looked in this family and kept his dumb ass away, but I knew men. They didn’t know how to walk away even when it was to their own detriment. Men could be hella stupid when they saw someone as a

possession. Add to the fact she might be carrying his child. His ass was going to have to be put down like the rabid dog he was.



# Ayanna

All the ladies were currently at Sacha and Yara's house. It seemed as if their house was the honorary house when we all wanted to hang out. I didn't know if it was because Sacha was the head of the family or because Yara was the most social out of the crew. Either way, we all found ourselves at their house frequently.

I laid across Yara's couch rubbing my stomach. Once again, things had calmed down. Nyah had another week in her cast, and no one wanted to go anywhere.

Cam had gotten settled in the house. Maxim had destroyed her phone and gave her a different one. Her swelling was finally going down, and she was looking more like herself. She was still hesitant to talk to the other girls, but I noticed her relaxing around them more and more.

She was embarrassed about her situation, but I reassured her no one was judging her. We wanted to support her.

She never left the house. She was scared Matteo was going to track her down and try to kidnap her. With all the foolishness I had been through, I didn't doubt he could do everything she thought he would do. I wouldn't ever underestimate a man or woman after Stephanie.

Cam would leave the house when she felt comfortable. She was relieved she hadn't lost her baby even though she didn't want a connection with him. Children were innocent, but I wouldn't have judged her if she had decided to terminate the pregnancy.

I didn't necessarily understand what she was going through. However, I provided a listening ear without censure. She needed someone to listen and not push their beliefs on her.

Addy was downstairs in Sacha's man cave with the rest of the kids watching movies.

"So, Cierra, how did you get into dog training?" I probed, curious how she started her business. Prior to the men

bringing the dogs home, I never thought about guard dogs. Zeus saving Addy's life made me think of dogs in a totally different light. Zeus's little begging tail constantly swindled snacks from me after what he did for my baby. He could damn near get anything from me.

Zeus had become Addy's shadow, and I couldn't even be mad at him. I went from being annoyed Dimitri brought him home to wondering whether or not the new baby would get a girl or boy dog.

Cierra was a beautiful girl. She reminded me of Keurche Tran, the girl Chris Brown used to date. Her Blasian heritage was evident.

She smiled softly. "My stepfather introduced me to training dogs. He gave me a dog because I was scared to sleep in my bedroom by myself when we first arrived to the United States. I kept sneaking into their beds and sleeping between them. He decided to get me a dog in hopes I would stay in my room. He thought a dog would make me feel safer. He was right."

"Why were you scared to sleep in your room?" Lauren's nosey butt asked.

She sat silently for a moment. Before she opened her mouth, I could tell she was about to tell us something that was going to shock us. It seemed I was surrounded by women who had experienced some type of trauma in life. It seemed no one could escape life without going through hardship. My situation was a living testimony.

"You don't have to tell us if you don't want to," I assured her. I understood the need for privacy. Some things in life didn't need to be shared.

Once again, she smiled softly. "It's fine. My biological father wasn't a very good man. Matter of fact, he was evil as hell. He's the reason I have this scar on my face." She touched the mark on her face that reached from her hairline to her chin.

"Whew, men really aren't shit," Ash sighed shaking her head.

“Nope, you know I disagree with that statement. It’s a bunch of men out here who are good men taking care of their families and keeping them safe,” Lauren replied, popping her sister on the arm.

“Said the girl whose husband is probably listening to every word coming out of our mouths right now. Your husband is a stalker, honey.” Ash raised her eyebrows after her statement.

None of us responded because we knew it was a strong possibility. Maxim and his cameras and other tech equipment were a constant in this family. It was necessary but intrusive at the same time.

“Whatever.” Lauren smirked.

Looking back at Cierra, I inquired, “Do you mind telling us what happened? You don’t have to if you don’t want too. We will understand.” I didn’t want to push. I knew some topics were sensitive for people, and it was never my desire to cause anyone undue stress.

“I don’t mind. There is truth in the statement of distance making things feel better the further away they are, no matter if they are traumatic or not.”

Wasn’t that the truth? Steven’s betrayal didn’t affect me as much as it did years ago. However, the remnants of how he handled the situation was still happening.

“I know you can tell that I’m biracial. My mother is African American. She attended Howard University. She received her Bachelor’s in Education. She wanted to experience the world, so she traveled to Japan to teach children English. She met and fell in love with my father. Honestly, her situation was like Ayanna’s,” she said looking over at me.

“How?” Nyah questioned before I could ask the question myself. Nyah shifted in her seat to get comfortable.

“My mother didn’t realize my father was married and had two children. He kept it a secret from her. She also didn’t realize he was the head of the Yakuza.”

“Oh, hell. I can already see where this story is going.” Nyah was shaking her head before Cierra could even finish.

“Right. My mother didn’t learn who my father was until she was already pregnant. She tried to leave him, but I’m sure you all know how things goes. He refused to let her go. He kept her imprisoned for years. At one point she did try to leave, but he found out. He snatched me from her hand and placed a knife to my face. He scarred me to prove to her that he was willing to kill me in order to make her stay.”

“You know what? I’m just going to keep using my toys. I do not have time for all these crazy men. The Vasiliev men are good men, but they are crazy as hell too. They are all happy so lucky since you three are content.” She pointed to Yara, Lauren, and me. “But, get a wild hair up your ass and think you’re going somewhere. Tuh, they’re going to act a fool too,” Ash muttered, sipping on a glass of wine.

I didn’t know who she was fooling. Michail wasn’t letting her ass get away either. She could run as fast as the roadrunner, but these men did not let up when they thought you belonged to them. This baby was a living testimony.

“Please. Michail isn’t leaving you alone, and you know you’re going to be just like Ayanna.” Lauren smirked over at her sister.

“No ma’am. I fight men. I will cut their ass too. If Michail ever hurt me, I would have to stab his ass. Play with my yoni, not my heart.”

Everyone burst into laughter at her stupid comment, but we knew there was truth in her statement. Ash was scary as hell with her knives. She stayed layered with blades, and I wouldn’t put it pass her killing him if he hurt her.

“Hush,” Yara stated. “I want to finish hearing Cierra’s story, not your crazy ass love affair. Now, how did you mother get away?” she asked, trying to get the conversation back on track.

Cierra smiled. “My father’s trusted bodyguard fell in love with her. He left them two alone when he went with his

other family. My step-father grew to hate how he treated my mother, so he helped her escape.”

We remained quiet again. Ash sipped some more of her wine as she looked around the room at each one of us.

I noticed her face’s mischievous expression as she gazed at us. “So, nobody is going to ask what happened to her father because I know for damn sure a possessive man doesn’t willingly let anything go?” Ash asked.

“Ash,” my attempts to warn her were ineffective. We were already in Cierra’s business. Maybe, she didn’t want to tell us what happened.

“Fine,” Nyah glared at her and sucked her teeth. “Where is your biological father? Did he ever come after your mother?” She frowned at Ash. “Are you happy now?”

Even though Nyah said it with an attitude, we were all curious about what happened with her father. The story she told us sounded almost like a novel. Nobody wanted it to end on cliffhanger.

“Yep, I’m happy now,” Ash responded, gulping down the rest of her wine and pouring another glass from the bottle sitting on the table.

Cierra sighed. “He’s still alive. My stepfather keeps track of him. We’ll know if he ever crosses into the United States. If he does, we’re prepared to do whatever we need to do to stay safe and make sure no harm comes to my mother.”

I read the threat of retribution in her eyes. Looking down at the two monsters sitting beside her, I knew she had every intention of killing her father.

“Well, as far as I’m concerned, you fit in quite nicely with this family. Some shit is always happening around here. At this point, I don’t think we’ll ever have peace,” I told her honestly.

“Don’t say that,” Nyah scoffed. “I want peace. The idea of being ran over by a car and shot at does not appeal to me for the rest of my life.”

“Mine neither, but it’s obvious we don’t get to pick our destiny. I’m willing to fight and do whatever I need to do to survive. My goal is to make sure my husband, my children, and my adopted family stays safe. Anything contrary to that, I’m fighting to my last breath,” Yara said.

“What children?” I asked.

My question gained everyone’s attention because I know she didn’t slip a plural at the end of her noun.

“You only have one child.” I glanced down at her stomach, waiting for her to say something. I glanced down at her glass and realized she had been drinking lemonade all night.

“Are you pregnant, Yara?”

“Yes,” she replied with a huge smile on her face.

I gasped. “Oh my God, Yara. I’m so happy for you.”

“Thank you. Sacha is so happy. Girl, I’m happy as hell too. You already know security is about to be tighter than hell around here.”

“I’m not even mad. I’m glad we have our little dogs running around here. The way Zeus tried to kill Steven’s ass has made me a dog lover. Lord knows, prior to Zeus, I wasn’t into taking care of animals. Now, I’m giving his spoiled ass treats and letting him sleep with Addy. She feels safe, and honestly, I feel safe too. So, thanks girl for being a kickass trainer,” I told Cierra.

She smiled bashfully. “You all are welcome. I love what I do, so it’s not a big deal.” She ran her hands through her *babies’* fur.

“I’m glad I met you ladies. Because of whom my father is, I never really had that many friends. I was homeschooled until high school because we feared he would find us. By then, most people in high school had their friend groups, and it was hard for me to fit in.”

“Well, we welcome you into our girl group. We love having you around, so you’re always welcome to hang out

with us,” I told her honestly.

“Thank you, ladies. I appreciate each one of you. I don’t know what I’m going to do when I return home to the quiet after being around everyone for so long.”

I smirked before I spoke. “Don’t worry. I think Viktor is smitten with you.”

“What? Who the hell says smitten?” Ash laughed.

“I do,” I replied, drinking my Arnold Palmer. I liked the way the word sounded.

“No, what you should have said was that he wants some of her good, good. Some yum, yum.”

Cierra blushed. “You’re a mess. Viktor doesn’t want me.”

“I have never seen so many women in denial in my whole life,” Cam finally spoke.

Her participating in the conversation made me happy. Normally, she listened while we had conversations. She was in her own world most likely contemplating her life. She had a lot of decisions to make.

“Fine, there could be some truth in your statement but Alexei is certainly nice to you.” Lauren sipped her drink slowly as she waited on Cam to say something.

Scoffing, Cam shook her head. “Nope, I’m good on men until infinity. The doors of the church are now closed,” she told her with a straight face.

Yara grinned. “Yep, as Sunshine Anderson said *I’ve heard it all before*. This heffa,” she pointed at me, “said the same thing. Now, look at her. Ready to pop at any moment.”

Immediately shaking her head, Cam let out a deep breath. “Well, me and my cousin are different. I need to heal, and I’m allowing myself time to do that. This baby is the only person I am currently concerned about.”

I understood her feelings. After Steven, Addy was my only focus too. The love I once had for her dad, I gave her. I

took time to heal even though in reality you never really get over hurt and pain. You learn to function with it. It becomes background noise, reminding you to be careful with whom you give your time, energy, love, and heart to. It was a hard lesson to learn. No one wanted pain to make them stronger.

My cousin may not have recognized it, but I perceived the changes in her. They were small, but they were there nonetheless.

“Good for you,” Cierra said sincerely.

Cierra was a sweetheart. She fit in with us nicely. If her father ever came around, being a part of this family would be a great asset. We protected our own, and we were willing to destroy anyone who decided they wanted to test our commitment to one another.



# Steven

I never planned on things snowballing in my life. If you had asked me months ago, I would have never believed I would be in this situation.

Prior to Ayanna, I never would have thought I would be the type of man who allowed pussy to bring me down this low. There was too much of it in the world for me to focus on one specific woman. On top of all that, I was a married man. I couldn't commit to anyone while out doing my dirt. Then again, this really wasn't about pussy. It was about me loving a woman who no longer loved me, so in reality, it was love wreaking havoc on my life.

I was antsy, nursing all of the wounds the dog had caused on my body.

“Shit!” I cursed every time I looked at the dog bites. If I had a gun, I would have shot his ass the first time he attacked me. Who the hell buys an almost ten-year-old girl a damn attack dog? The whole family was damn crazy, and I should have left them alone, but my pride wouldn't let me.

Ayanna refusing to talk to me pissed me off to no end. She apparently hadn't listened to one word I told her at the dance studio. Then, even after I left the studio, she always had some damn body monitoring her damn calls. They refused to allow me to speak to her.

I dialed Stephanie's number again. I had been trying to reach her for two damn days without success. She always came running when I called her.

“Where the fuck are you?” I growled into the phone. “Call me when you get this message. Don't piss me off, Stephanie.” I disconnected the phone in frustration. If it were an old-school phone, I would have slammed it down on the receiver.

Reluctantly, I went to the bathroom to get some more cotton balls and peroxide to clean my wounds.

I wasn't a fucking doctor, but I was trying to be safe and stay off the radar. I didn't need her crazy man looking for me. I hadn't been able to sleep since the whole fiasco at the school. When I left the school on two wheels, all I wanted to do was get out of dodge. I collected all the money from my safe at home and got the hell on the road.

I knew not to use credit cards, so I was staying in a hotel well beneath my means. No one would ever suspect someone of my status to be staying here. I knew her and her Russian would be looking for me, but I knew I hadn't left a trail. The van I used was somewhere in a junkyard where I had paid cash for an untraceable vehicle.

Limping out of the bathroom, I made my way back into the main portion of the bedroom.

"Shit," I muttered. I left my pain pills in the bathroom. Before I left my house, I snatched Stephanie's pills she used to numb herself from the pain she swore I caused her.

"Dumb bitch." I should have killed her since I was on the run. In the morning, I was going to drive to a private airport, pay cash to a pilot, and have him fly me to Bora Bora. I would return when the situation from the kidnapping died down. I was hoping after a little time they would forget about what happened.

Stepping into the bedroom with the pain pills in my hands, a scowl was on my face. A shiver raced down my spine.

My eyes scanned the room, sensing a presence. I didn't see anything initially. Finally, my eyes landed on him. Recognition was immediate. I had watched him and Ayanna interact on a number of occasions. There was no mistaking his big white ass. He was tall, taller than my six feet. He was dressed in an all-black suit and a pair of expensive ass dress shoes. I didn't have a pair, but I had looked into purchasing me a pair.

I walked further into the room. His eyes never left mine. His gaze was cold and unforgiving. They were glacial blue. I was a smart man, so I understood there was no talking

myself out of this situation. I annoyed he had caught me off-guard without a weapon in my possession, except I wasn't a man who owned weapons. I stayed in a safe neighborhood. It protected me from the riff raff of society, and I never felt as if I need one.

"How did you find me?" I asked, easing onto the bed to relieve the pain of my leg. I placed the pain pills down beside me because I knew for a fact I wouldn't be needing them.

Nonchalantly, he responded to my question. "I have always known where you were."

"If that were the case, how did I almost kidnap Addy?" I asked with a slight smirk on his face. He was going to kill me. I might as well talk my shit. It wasn't going to prevent what was going to happen tonight.

"True," he responded, irritating me with his response. I wanted to get a rise out of him. I needed this night to end. I wasn't a man who was good with pain.

"You do know she will never be your daughter?"

He stroked his chin with his hand, happy to remind me of my past decisions. "She was never yours. You didn't want her, remember?" His voice was calm.

My nerves were shot, but I thought I was doing a great job not appearing like a bitch and begging him to preserve my life. However, my stomach churned with nervousness and regret.

Not the regret where I hated getting back in contact with Ayanna. I didn't feel remorse for having reached back out to her. My self-condemnation came from not leaving my wife the day I realized Ayanna was the woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I could have walked away from Stephanie, paid her alimony, and married Ayanna. Instead, I strung Ayanna along and lost everything, including my life.

Shit was sad as hell. Now that the end was near, I could admit I wasn't proud of how I handled my wife, son, Ayanna, or my daughter.

Even knowing how much of an ass I behaved, I couldn't simply allow another man to kill me without putting up a fight. I knew I wasn't going to win, but I had fucking pride. He could have killed me as soon as he walked into this filthy ass hotel room. Instead, he was giving me a fighting chance.

My eyes remained on him as he unbuttoned his suit jacket. My heartbeat sped up, fear shot through me, but I had to do something. I didn't move until he looked down for a moment to unclasp his dress shirt.

Quickly, ignoring the excruciating pain in my leg, I snatched up the lamp on the cheap ass nightstand and slammed it over his head. I worked out at the gym religiously. I even did a little boxing from time to time. I wasn't a weak ass man. There was some power behind me.

I punched his ass in the face with everything I had, and this motherfucker ate the lamp and my punch up like it wasn't shit.

He barely flinched. My heart dropped when I realized there was no way out of this. His fist connected with my eye, and I swore it was on some Tweety Bird shit when I literally saw stars dancing behind my eyelids. His Dolph Lundren ass punched me in the nose, and I heard it crack. Blood flowed from my nose like water spilling from a water hose. My head was spinning as I tried to gain my bearings and fight back like a man. His next blow had my neck snapping back.

Through blurry eyes I noticed not one expression crossed his face. I couldn't believe this was the type of man she chose over me. He was a fucking monster. Yes, I was a cheater, but I wasn't a damn killer.

"Kill me," I whispered through intolerable pain. Between the ass whipping and the dog bites, I didn't know which one was worse.

Instead of responding to my plea, he continued to beat my ass. Teeth flew from my mouth as his fist continued to crash into my face.

Visions of my Stephanie and my life flashed before my eyes. All the good times and the bad times. I didn't love her, but she had been a constant in my life. Glimpses of my son's birth crossed my mind too. I remembered the first time I held him and how proud I felt. It wasn't enough to make me a better father, but I did love him. In reality, I was always a self-involved man in his life. I had been a sad father to my son. Then, there was Addy. I never witnessed my own daughter's birth or been in her life at any level. I could have done right by her. I chose not to because her mother wouldn't continue to fuck me while I was married or allow me back into her life because of all of the lies I told. I had only seen my daughter one time in her whole life, and I had been an asshole to her.

Finally, my mind conjured up Ayanna. She was genuinely the love of my life. As her husband stomped me under his feet, I recalled the first time I fucked her and realized there was no letting her go. I remembered the feeling I received when she first told me she loved me, and I made a decision to ask her to have my child to hold her close. As blackness closed around me, I thought about the last time we made love as she tenderly kissed me as her tears trickled down her face. I lost her in that moment, and never found myself.

I had so many regrets as I closed my eyes for the final time, visualizing the love on Ayanna's face when I first told her I loved her.

# Ayanna

Being pregnant this time around was extremely different from my pregnancy with Addy. In the beginning, Steven was there with me every step of the way. He held me close as hell to him when I showed him the pregnancy test. I cried and laughed as he kissed all over my face and stomach and fucked me until I couldn't move. He was there for every single one of my doctor's appointments. He was even there when we learned Addy was a girl.

We went through all over the motions as proud parents to be. We talked for hours about what our daughter's future would be. We discussed marriage, and what we needed to do to keep our relationship fresh after the baby. We stayed up all night selecting baby names as he rubbed my stomach and fed me Sherbet Ice Cream.

It wasn't until I found out about his wife that everything changed between us. That was when he ignored my pregnancy. Thinking about how excited he acted with my stomach made me realize some men really weren't shit. It was terrifying to think he could hide something so critical from me. It was mind-blowing. After him, I was traumatized. Thank God for healing and peace because he really had me doubting everyone.

The night Dimitri came home after taking care of Steven I didn't ask him one question. My man obviously had cleaned up somewhere else. When he arrived in our room, he had on basketball shorts and a t-shirt.

I watched him under hooded eyes. My husband was so damn sexy. When he sat on the bed, I straddled his thighs and wrapped my arms around his neck.

Yes, my husband had killed other men before. He appeared fine with some of the deeds he performed because in his words *he would do anything for his family*. However, for me, I wanted to soothe my man's soul.

I planted kisses along his neck, marking him for the world to see. His big hands gripped my ass as my body

shivered from his touch. His tool bricked up beneath me, causing moisture to seep from my body. I couldn't wait to feel him inside of me.

Picking me up, he placed me on my feet, so he could remove his shorts. When he dropped his shorts, his dick was already at attention. Staring at him, I bit my lip. His dick was rock hard and pre-cum covered the tip. Before he could sit back on the bed, I dropped to my knees in front of him.

He deserved all the good loving I had to give at ridding the pests from my life. Yes, I hated they had to die. I wished things could have been different, but that was not what they wanted.

His dick bobbed in my face as I reached for it and inhaled him like I did the Lemon pound cake he bought me before he left home to handle Steven. He watched me through sexy lenses as I dipped my head and slid my tongue across his shaft.

“Fuck, babe,” he muttered.

I suctioned him into my mouth, making sure I took him all the way to the back of my throat. Gripping the back of my head, he pumped in and out of my mouth furiously.

My baby was almost at his breaking point, so I decided to play with his balls to help him along to his desired destination.

I used my hands to clasp and twist him as I continued to take him to the back of my throat. Apparently, Dimitri wanted to be inside me because he popped his dick out of my mouth and slammed me on his dick, taking my breath away.

“Lord,” I moaned as I rotated my hips, getting into a rhythm. My head fell back as Dimitri licked and sucked all over my breast and nipples, causing a hiss to release from my throat. They were sensitized from the pregnancy, so at this point, touching them was liable to set my body aflame.

His hands slid to my ass as he placed his fingers in my hole, filling me up in two spots. I couldn't lie, since being with

him I loved anal play. It added a level of intimacy I wasn't accustomed to receiving.

Dimitri licked up and down my neck, making me come more and more undone. Needing to feel more attached to him, I placed my hands on his face and pulled his lips toward mine, fusing our lips together.

We sucked on each other tongues as I moaned loudly as hell inside his mouth. Not once did he stop fingering my ass or pumping into me from the bottom. The death strokes he was giving me from below had me damn near vibrating. My center gripped him firmly causing a guttural moan to ease from his lips. His neck muscles strained as I rode him fiercely.

"Dimitri," I whimpered. My pussy loved this man. When we made love, he always understood the assignment. My legs shook as he pounded me from below. Tears raced from my eyes, and I lost control of my emotions.

"Ayanna," he grunted.

I absolutely loved when he called my name when we made love.

"I love you," I whispered, taking his tongue back into my mouth. The love we were making felt like the religious love Ne-yo sang about.

It felt spiritual when we orgasmed synchronously as he pulsed inside of me. Tears poured from my eyes as he kissed my face. I ran away from Dimitri, not knowing I should have been running toward him. He was everything I never knew I needed or wanted. He was good for my soul whereas Steven tried to destroy all the vulnerable sides of me. Men didn't realize they were the cause of the hardness they claimed they didn't want from me. They had no clue how devastating it was to give your heart away to a heartless man.

"I love you," he murmured in my ear, continuing to stroke my spot even though I knew he had reached his climax, his seed trickling down my thighs.

"I love you too."



“It’s over, love. I have it from here. It’s you, me, and our children from here.”

I hated two people had to die to achieve my happiness, but I was team us to infinity.

I shook my head to rid myself of all the negative thoughts. It was a new day and I felt another contraction, but I kept it to myself. Another change in this pregnancy was that I decided to use a doula. Cam was a registered nurse, so she became certified in order to assist me.

I felt as though her helping me through my pregnancy helped her with hers. She was great at her job too. I had already told her what was going on with me earlier today, and she had been checking on me throughout the morning.

Dimitri stayed calm my whole pregnancy. I hadn’t expected anything less from my husband. It was his serene personality that kept me sane through these last few weeks. Lord knows, I was ready for this child to vacate the premises.

I was impressed with my little one. My due date was tomorrow, and he or she was going to be born either tonight or by tomorrow.

“Did you know our uncle was dead?” Cam asked, walking into the room looking adorable as ever. She was currently four months pregnant. She was glowing and growing beautifully. Her face healed up nicely.

“Nope, how did you even find out?” First, I didn’t care if he was dead. No, I wasn’t becoming callous. I was sick of users and abusers. I gave my sympathy to people who deserved it like my cousin.

“Girl, I still have the news apps on my phone from our hometown. Apparently, someone came into his house beat his ass again and killed him.” She looked at me with a straight face.

I didn’t have anything to say about it. “Cam, I don’t know anything about it.” I didn’t either. Dimitri didn’t tell me he had done anything to my uncle, and I hadn’t asked.

“I’m sure our mothers are devastated by his loss,” I remarked snidely. I hadn’t talked to my mother since I kicked her out of my wedding. My uncle’s death explained why she was calling my phone. Instead of answering her calls, I blocked her ass. She needed to keep the same energy she had at my wedding.

“I wouldn’t know. I don’t talk to those people. I left them where they should have been a long time ago. In the past.”

She walked over, placing her hand on my stomach. My contractions were still spaced apart, so I knew this little baby wasn’t coming for a little minute, hence my hesitation in telling Dimitri. We were having a home birth. I didn’t need to rush to get to the hospital. Everything and everyone I needed was here.

“Do you want me to alert your husband yet?”

“No,” Dimitri said, alerting us with his presence. “I’ve been waiting on your selfish cousin to say something to me.”

I sucked my teeth. “I am not selfish. I knew nothing was going to happen for a minute. I didn’t want to worry you.”

He kissed my forehead. “I’m your husband. You can never worry me.”

I smirked at him. “You’re saying this now but wait until these contractions start hitting, and I start calling you every inappropriate name I can think of.”

“I’ll forgive because I know you’re bringing another one of our children in the world. I read it in a book how some women can behave when they are in labor.”

I rolled my head at his statement. If there was anything I really hated, it was those books and articles he read. He swore they knew what they were saying even though every woman’s pregnancy was different. How was some book going to tell me about me?

“Okay, Dimitri. I’m going to take a shower.”

He followed right behind me. I knew he was coming with me into the bathroom. In the last few days, he and Addy were my shadows. I could barely pee in private.

“I’ve set everything up downstairs. I’ll be downstairs when you’re finished. Once your water breaks, everything is going to move fast,” Cam told me as me and Dimitri made our way to our bedroom.

I nodded my head in response. I wasn’t feeling much pain, which was reminiscent of Addy. I hadn’t felt any pain until the very last minute. There was only slight discomfort. I was thankful for that.

“Are you nervous?” I asked him, turning on the showering once we were in the bathroom.

“No, I’m ready to see our child. Let me help you.” Dimitri moved toward me, assisting me as I slowly stepped toward the shower door. Before I could step fully onto the tile, I looked down in shock as my water suddenly broke.

I took a deep breathe because I knew everything was about to be a little chaotic. As long as I didn’t have any problems, my child would be born here at home.

Dimitri watched me like a hawk as I took a quick shower. After I was finished, I put on a sports bra, a loose gown, and my comfy socks.

“You ready?” he asked me.

“Ready as I’m ever going to be,” I admitted. Yes, I had one child, but it was years ago. It had been so many years ago, so I was just as nervous as if it were my first time all over again.

Dimitri helped me down the stairs slowly. When we arrived in his den, all the ladies were there waiting on me. It brought a smile to my face because even Addy was nervously waiting on my arrival.

“Auntie Cam said the baby is about to come,” I heard the excitement in her voice. Addy had taken to calling Cam her aunt because in African American families we gave the title to adults we loved and who were part of our village.

Addy couldn't wait to meet her sibling. She participated in all the appointments. The entire time I was pregnant, Addy rubbed all over my stomach feeling her sibling kick constantly.

My heart couldn't take it when Dimitri sat Addy down two months ago to let her know that it didn't matter if he was her biological father or not. She was his first baby, and a new baby wouldn't change it. He proceeded to give us paperwork that would allow him to adopt her and change her last name. Lord knew I cried as if I was going to fill a small lake at him wanting to ensure he didn't hurt my first love. Addy cried as she threw her arms over his neck and proceeded to immediately call herself a Vasiliev. It was a touching moment, and if I didn't already love him with everything in me, I surely would have in that particular moment.

We even allowed her to design the baby's nursery. We went with animal print themes since we didn't know the gender of our baby. The room was plastered with pictures of animals, giraffes, tigers, and bears as babies. It was adorable.

"Yes, you are about to meet your new brother or sister."

"I am so nervous. My baby is coming," Addy proclaimed dramatically, causing me to smile.

"I can tell," Yara told her, walking up with her four-month belly on display.

"Sissy, are you ready to have this baby?" she asked, rubbing on me soothingly.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm ready to have my body back." My pregnancy was cute in the beginning. I enjoyed all the firsts with Dimitri: the first sounds of our baby's heartbeat, the first kick, the first ultrasound, etc. Now, I was over it. My feet were swollen. My back and ass hurt. Walking was damn uncomfortable. The only thing soothing to me was Dimitri's dick and tongue. Since those two couldn't be inside me every second of the day, this baby needed to make its grand entrance into the world.

I removed the gown I was wearing and allowed Dimitri to help me into the birthing pool.

“You new age women are really on something different. If I ever have a baby, I’m going right to the hospital. I will not be giving any home deliveries. I need you all to stop watching so much damn television,” Ash said, watching me gingerly sit down.

“Hush, when you have your baby do whatever you like, and I’m going to support you,” I told her as a contraction immediately caused me to let out a groan.

Once it was over, Dimitri gazed down at me, frowning at the birthing pool. He shook his head and rolled his eyes. Instead of saying anything, he removed his socks and shoes.

“Lift up, love.”

I sat up and scooted up some so he could get into the birthing pool behind me.

“Ah, you two look so cute. Look at my mommy and daddy,” Addy gushed again. She held her phone and took a picture.

“Don’t send that to your uncles,” he groaned.

“Too late. I already have it.” Maxim voice came through the speakers of the den.

“I should have known your stalker husband was watching somewhere,” I told Lauren.

“Whatever.” She waved me off. “You’ll thank him later when you have footage of your labor and delivery.”

“Ehh, don’t nobody want to watch this again. I barely survived Lauren having my two bad ass nephews. You’re about to traumatize my poor niece,” Ash complained.

I shook my head at her nonsense. “Addy is not staying for the birth. She’s going to leave the room and come back when it’s over. You can do the same, missy,” I told her.

“No thank you. I’m staying. It’s going to be the lesson I use to remind me to either not have a baby or only have one.”

“We’re having a baby. Matter of fact, we’re going to have at least four,” Michail called through the speaker.

“Boy, go to hell. I ain’t popping out four babies, nor do you even know if you’re going to be my children’s father.”

“I better be your children’s father, or I’m killing you and his ass.”

“See, this is why I don’t want one of you. You’re possessive without a cause,” she said with a frown on her face. “I’m not even your girl.”

“You’re my girl. You weren’t saying that…” Michail started to say.

“La, La, La,” Ash sang loud as hell to tune out Michail’s words, but we heard what he said. I knew there was something going on between those two.

Before anyone could say anything, a pain ripped through my back causing me to scream out in pain and catching everyone by surprise.

“You’re doing good, love,” Dimitri said, massaging the pain away. Tears pricked my eyes. I didn’t know what possessed me to try to do this without medicine. That contraction was worse than anything I ever felt with Addy.

“You’re okay, mom,” Addy asked, wiping the sweat from my brow.

I closed my eyes, leaned back on Dimitri, and took a calming breathe. “I’m good. The pain caught me by surprise,” I admitted.

The next few hours were filled with pain, Dimitri’s massages, a cool cloth, and my husband’s words of encouragement.

Cam turned on soft classical music. My entire pregnancy I placed headphones on my stomach and allowed the baby to listen to music since I read somewhere classical music helps to improve memory retention during the first stages of pregnancy and made babies smarter. I didn’t know if it was true or not, but it was a try. I was sure it wouldn’t hurt

the baby. I even had a bear in the baby's room that played classical music. If nothing else, the music was soothing.

“Are you okay?” Dimitri asked, kissing me on the neck.

I relaxed more into his body. “I'm tired,” I managed to get out. Cam had just checked me, and I was eight centimeters. It wasn't going to be much longer. I hoped.

Another pain ripped through my body, causing me to tilt my head down. I was breathing heavy and hard. Dimitri wrapped his arms around my waist, rubbing out the knot our baby had created.

“I love you, Ayanna. Thank you for giving me another child. There is no other woman I would want to share this moment with. From the moment I saw you, I knew you were going to be my wife and the mother of my children. You've been everything I've ever wanted. You're my soul, my mate, my love, my everything,” Dimitri whispered into my ear.

Even through the pain, his words were lifting me. The reverence in his voice was giving me life. I was tired and ready for this to be over, but his words gave me more strength.

Dimitri continued to speak life into me as I continued to fight to bring our bundle of joy into the world. Tears flowed down my cheeks. My husband wiped each one of them away.

“I think it's time,” Cam called, getting everyone's attention. The only people staying in the room with me were Dimitri, Cam, and Yara.

“Alright, sister cousin. It's time to begin to push. On the next contraction, I need you to push for me, Ayanna.”

I nodded my head in acknowledgement of her statement.

“You're doing great, love,” Dimitri told me, kissing me again.

I felt a concentration coming. Mentally, I prepared myself to push our baby into the world. When the contraction hit, I heard my husband in my ear.

“Push,” Cam demanded from between my legs. I pushed with everything I had because Lord knew I didn’t know how much more I had to give.

“You’re good. The head is out, Ayanna. Your little one has a head full of beautiful silky brown hair.”

I blew out a breath and leaned back onto my husband, waiting for the next one. I didn’t have to wait long.

“Push, we’re almost there,” Cam told me.

“Dimitri! Oh my God,” I screamed, putting everything into this moment.

“I’m here. I’m never leaving you.”

I nodded my head as I pushed through the pain slicing through my body. Immediately there was a release as I pushed my baby out into the world full of people waiting for his or her arrival.

“It’s a girl,” Cam shrieked as my little girl screeched her discontent at the top of her lungs. Cam did a few things before placing her on my chest.

Tears rushed my eyes. My little girl was beautiful. I felt Dimitri ease from behind me as he stood to his feet. He came around and observed his daughter as Cam gave him the scissors to cut the umbilical cord.

“Thank you, God, for another beautiful blessing. I promise to make sure she knows you and understand she is your child. I pray you continue to bless me and my family. Keep us all safe,” I whispered in shaky voice.

“Amen,” Cam, Yara, and Dimitri affirmed with me.

“She’s adorable, Ayanna,” Yara whispered with tears in her eyes. “She looks like her dad.”

I leaned back in the high back birthing pool as Dimitri carefully reached for our daughter. I noticed her eyes were wide open as she stared at her father. I watched as he looked her over, assuring himself she was healthy and safe.



“No, she’s beautiful but she looks like her mother. Hello, Katiya Adelyne Vasiliev.” He kissed her forehead as she blinked up at him. I thought the meaning of her name fit her perfect. She was perfect and pure.

My center melted watching Dimitri interact with his daughter for the first time. A smile graced my face remembering how I fought so hard to keep us from this moment, but my husband fought for us. In fact, there was no doubt in my mind he wouldn’t continue to fight for me, Addy, and Katiya. My man was a born protector, and we were the center of his world.

# Nyah

As usual, we were all at Yara and Sacha's house. It was started to feel like a small little nursery with all of these damn children running around the place.

We were outside on the patio watching Maxim run around with the twins. They were almost two and busy as all out doors. Nikki was right out there with the boys tearing up the backyard too. My baby girl was growing into a beautiful little girl.

They even had all the dogs outside running around playing with the kids. I could admit they had grown on me. Even Nikki had a dog trained to protect her, which I had to take out and handle since she was too young to do it herself.

See, that was how parents got setup.

*Get a dog they said. He will be good for Nikki they said. Except, I was the one caring for Nico.*

"Are you going to join them out there?" Cierra asked, sitting beside me on the patio chairs.

"Nope, I play with Nikki all the time. I'm perfectly content to let her play with her uncles." I was not ashamed to say as a single mother I took my Me Time serious.

I dedicated my life to her, but I wasn't afraid to take some time for me. Even though she was near me, I was allowing her to be great with her cousins. Matter of fact, I hoped she tired herself out today. Then, she could go home and go right to sleep.

"I understand." Her dogs sat by her quietly watching everything around them. They still made me a little nervous because I understood what they were capable of, which meant I kept my guard up constantly around them.

Abruptly, they stood to their feet, causing my heart to explode within my chest.

*What in the hell was going on?*

All the months I had been around them, I had never seen them do anything like it before. I was on high alert, ready to swoop my daughter up if necessary.

Cierra stood to her feet quickly too, eyes searching around the yard. Shit, I reached for my gun, sitting comfortably in Nikki's backpack. I learned my lesson. It was like my American Express Gun. I was going nowhere without it.

Everyone was looking toward the patio door entrance. My eyes widened as No stood silently watching me.

Sweat dotted my brow because I hadn't seen him since he dropped me back off at the compound after his doctor operated on my leg.

I tried not to feel bitter about how he never contacted me to check on my progress. He dropped me off like hot trash on a sweltering summer day.

My mouth dropped open when Cierra ran toward No like a long-lost lover and tossed her legs around his waist.

*I know damn well...*

I couldn't even finish the thought because she was giggling, laughing, and crying while she hugged him tight.

Ash smacked her teeth. "Oh hell no. I'm sick of men. This is some bullshit."

"I thought you said he wanted Nyah," Yara's loud mouth bellowed as her six-month pregnant ass punched Sacha in the arm.

When another male walked out the door looking similar to No, I blinked. Cierra must have registered him at the same time I did because she jumped out of No's arms and ran to him.

"Ro," she screamed, jumping into his arms too.

"I am so lost right now," Ash remarked. "Is No her man or is No twin her man because I can't keep up" Ash stated.

No walked toward me. Normally when he was around, butterflies fluttered in my midsection. At this moment, they were quiet as hell. I had to refrain from rolling my eyes because it would give him the impression, I cared about what he did. I did care, but his ass didn't need to know. A woman needed to have some damn pride in a situation such as this. There was no manual for seeing a man you were interested in gushing all over the next female.

I was irritated with him for so many reasons. I felt disrespected by him even though he wasn't my man. Somehow, I had claimed him as mine without verbally speaking a word. This man went out of his way to prove to me that he cared about my safety. Him always being around gave me a false sense of affection because No had never responded to me in the way he had responded to Cierra.

Watching their interaction was hurtful.

"Hello, Nyah."

Hell no. Here those annoying as butterflies went fluttering as if they hadn't just witnessed him being lovey dovey with someone else other than me. They needed to simmer the hell down.

"Hi," I responded, sounding short as possible. He wasn't getting any conversation out of me.

No smirked sensing my irritation.

"Cierra," No called, "come here."

I tensed from him calling her to us. I was not built for foolishness. I didn't want to snap on him or her. Hell, I liked her. I adopted her into my family not knowing she was associated to a man I was slowly considering mine.

Cierra walked up to us with a big smile on her face.

He held out his hands to her.

*So, Japanese men were disrespectful too. Got it.*

"Nyah," No began.

I sucked my teeth before I could stop myself.

“I’m sorry something was in my teeth,” I lied with a straight face. Cierra hadn’t done a damn thing to me. I wouldn’t deliberately be rude to her. Now, him, he was a damn different story.

“Nyah, I would like you to meet my sister Cierra and my brother Ronin.”

All I heard was sister. My eyes widened. “Sister,” I repeated, sounding like a damn fool and feeling like one too. I had shown my hand to No. He knew I was jealous, and he was enjoying my embarrassment.

“Yes, my sister.”

“I had no idea,” I admitted, feeling a little. Everyone in the family was standing near us, pretending as if they weren’t listening.

“His sister? Why didn’t we know this? Sacha, did you know she was his sister?”

“Yes,” he admitted.

My head swung toward him. “Why didn’t you tell us?” I demanded.

“It wasn’t important.”

“Oh, it was important. You all could have told us.” Sacha could have saved me some embarrassment if he had told me Cierra was No’s sister.

“Why are you here, No?” Cierra suddenly asked out of the blue.

He remained silent for a moment, causing all the women to shift nervously.

He stared into her eyes. “Father contacted me. Daichi is on his way to America.”

Cierra’s big dogs stood at damn attention as if they were ready to attack at any moment, making all of the puppies come to attention too.

Shit, I looked around the yard as if Daichi was already here.

“Who is Daichi?” Addy had asked the billion-dollar question. For some reason, I felt I already knew the answer.

“Our biological father,” Cierra whispered. “He’s a very bad man.”

Dammit, I should have known peace wasn’t in our future. This family didn’t know what the word meant.

“Oh, like mine,” Addy said. “It’s okay. My daddy and uncles take care of bad men every day. We’ll protect you. Won’t we, daddy?” she asked, looking at Dimitri as if he toppled kingdoms with his bare hands.

“Yes, baby. We plan on helping No, Cierra, and Ronin against the bad man.”

“See, I told you my daddy would help. Come on Micah and Mav.”

God, I wished everything was that simple and innocent in my life. I knew whatever was going to happen after this day would be a lot. We still had Cam and Matteo’s situation to handle. Then, we had the Vasiliev’s uncle somewhere out there pissed because Maxim killed his son. Now, we were dealing with No’s problem.

We couldn’t do anything but wait to see how everything would pan out. However, I knew one thing. A family that fought together stayed together. There was strength in numbers, and we didn’t plan to fail at a damn thing we did. All of our enemies had better be ready because they were going to feel the wrath of hell messing around with us.

# Books In This Series

## *Russian Nights*

### **The Whisperer**

Bad Guys. I couldn't explain the allure. Maybe, it was the way they walked. They stepped into a room, and everybody felt their presence. Hell, it could have been the way they knew how to handle my body. They knew which strings to pluck to make me come undone. Or, it could have been the way they whispered to me. They knew what to say and how to say it. Whatever it was, they had a hold on me.

It took me years of mental and physical abuse to realize that I needed to reform. I needed to realize that just because they were good to my body didn't mean they were good for my body. Fast forward a few years, I was a changed woman. I had sworn off bad men until my ex, Roshaun, pushed my hand. That was the thing about bad men. They refused to let you go until they were ready. I was ready. He wasn't a believer, so I needed a man to make him understand.

They say the best way to get rid of one bad man was to find a badder man. I found mine. Sasha, head of the Valliev family, knew just the right words to whisper to Roshaun to make him disappear. Permanently.

### **The Watcher**

Lauren

All I wanted to do was become a mom. My biological clock had gone beyond ticking. It was screaming. But, I didn't want the responsibilities of a man trying to make decisions about my life. However, meeting Maxim changes things. He has me thinking about forever and wishing on falling stars. I thought we were building a future, working on forever until he

disappears without a trace leaving me for months. Now, he is back. Explaining that someone is after me and wants me dead. But, I shouldn't worry, right. I don't know what to believe, but he promises to bend, break, destroy everything to protect me. Oh yeah, he also says that he's ready to give his heart to me. The problem is that's what he says, but did he really mean it?