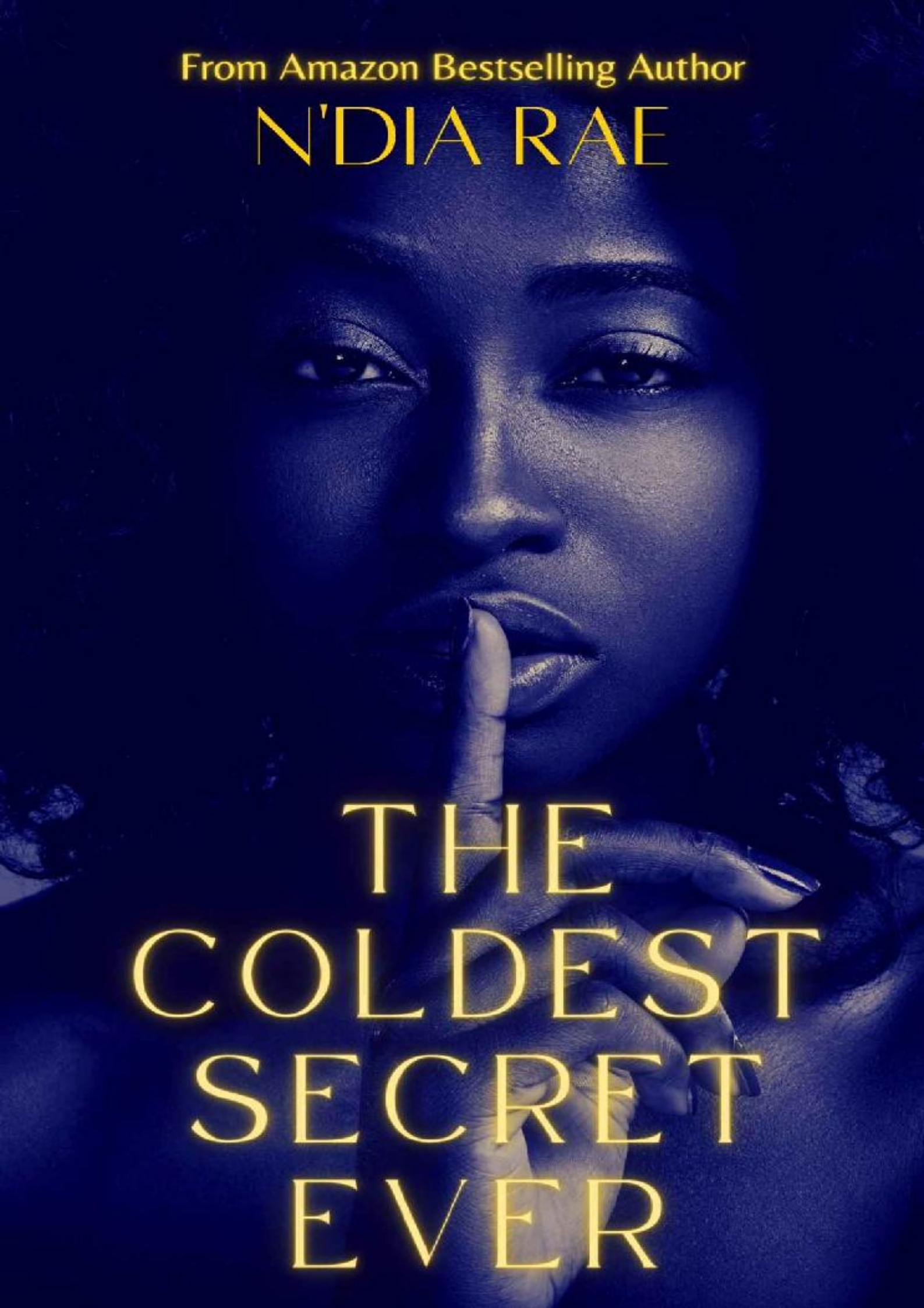


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contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Free Book Snippet](#)

[Also By N'Dia Rae](#)

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chapter
one

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Logan

IT WAS THURSDAY EVENING, the time of my weekly therapists' appointment. I glanced down at my watch to see that my time was running out while I paced the floor, explaining to Dr. Kara White all about my angst. Anxiety and depression had been running my life for the last 6 months and I couldn't shake it no matter how hard I tried. It came out of nowhere and now it was controlling my every move and thought.

On paper my life was perfect. I had a devoted wealthy husband, a nice well paid career of my own, a beautiful 9-year-old daughter and I could have anything that I wanted. Yet, I was still unhappy. The racing thoughts, wouldn't let me sleep at night, forcing me to toss and turn until the sun arose. The sadness made it difficult to enjoy those precious moments with my sweet daughter, Harlem. I hated living this way and I was still trying to avoid medication but I felt like it may be time to explore it.

"Logan, I know that you say you don't know where these thoughts and feelings are coming from but can I point out something to you?" Dr. White asked. She rearranged her legs, crossing them to reveal the bottom of her black patent leather Louboutin heels.

It was one of the reasons why I chose her. No, not her shoes, but that she was also a woman of money. Before I settled on her being my doctor, I had tried other psychiatrists but none of them could help me without being judgmental. Women with money aren't allowed to feel sad, discontent, or depressed, for money answers all things.

And for a long time, I believed that too. I'm rich, so what do I have to complain about. But as the old saying goes, 'money can't buy happiness.' As much as I wished that I could buy my way out of the debilitating anxiety that made it difficult to even eat every day. I couldn't shake this feeling that something wasn't right.

“Yeah, you can point it out,” I replied while turning around to face her.

“You’ve mentioned several times, that you feel this pressure to be perfect. That if you mess up you could lose everything. And you also mentioned that your daughter has been asking you to do pageants. Do you think the perfectionism from your pageantry days give you angst about allowing her to do pageants?” she asked, referring to the multiple crowns I had won between 9 and 22 years old.

“Maybe. I feel like all of my life, I’ve been under a microscope with someone watching my moves, every step of the way. Not a strand of hair could be out of place. Always have to watch what I eat. Every word out of my mouth had to be pronounced perfectly. Like, I’ve never wanted that for Harlem,” I said referring to my daughter.

“What happens if you say no to her?”

“I’m afraid she’ll hate me. And she sees what pageants have done for my life; the money, the prestige, the connections. It’s why I’m a television correspondent. Why I get paid the big bucks to do motivational speaking. It’s how I met her father. Why wouldn’t she want this?” I asked raising my hands and stretching them wide.

“What would be the harm in letting her try it for a season. And if she doesn’t like it...”

“That’s the thing, Harlem loves attention. She loves when all eyes are on her! She’s gorgeous and has an infectious personality. She would love it but it could still eat her up and swallow her whole.”

“What does your husband think?”

“He thinks I should allow her to do it. He feels like pageantry can open so many doors for her as it has me. But I came from a working-class family. Harlem comes from a family of money. She doesn’t need to do pageants.”

“But don’t you want her to have the opportunities you’ve had. You say she’s charismatic. What if she wants a career in television and film?”

“She might want it. But shit, I barely want it anymore. It’s too much pressure. You should see the crazy shit people write about me online. They act like they know me! They act like I’m not a person with feelings with the horrible things they say. They scrutinize everything about me, every single day. From my hair to my weight. To my marriage with my husband. Nothing is off the table. I don’t want that for my daughter,” I said while settling back into the comfortable sofa. It was so plush that I knew that she spent at least \$2k on it. It was one of those sofas that once you sank your body into it, leaving became impossible.

“I think you have to separate your identity from your daughter. She isn’t you and her experiences may not feel the way yours do. And also, I thought we discussed that you were going to stop reading online comments.”

“That’s damn near impossible. As soon as I open IG, I can see them. I can see the blog headlines even if I’m not looking for them. I turned off the Google Alerts for myself though.”

“That’s good. That’s a start.”

“Yeah, I hear you though. My situation is not my daughter’s. I may consider it but if I see it starting to affect her body image and mental health like it did mine, I’m pulling her out. Do you know my aunt went into debt to get me a nose job at 16?”

“You’ve never told me that before,” Dr. White responded while cocking her head to the side.

“Yeah, she suggested it when I was a little girl. And back then, I kept coming in third place but as soon as I got that nose job, I started taking the crown,” I answered while shaking my head.

“Wow. I can see how that affected you.”

“Can you see why I don’t want Harlem in this world? The minute someone scrutinizes her nose, I’m pulling her out.”

“That’s fair but you should let her experience it since she’s been asking.”

“I’ll talk to Xavier about it tonight. Sometimes, I wish that I could give all of this up, go move to North Carolina and start a candle-making business. I just wished my life was simpler and private,” I said as a tear eased down my face.

“That sounds like a plan. And as far as simplifying your life and making it private... why can’t you quit? Xavier makes enough for you to take a break and figure things out for a while,” Dr. White suggested.

“He does, but if I quit, I’d be disappointing him, my aunt, my uncle, and hell Harlem. Being a co-host on “The Scene” means more than just my dream. If I quit, I’d be disappointing everyone around me. Everyone is expecting me to be successful but...”

“But what do you want?” Dr. White asked.

“To be free and at peace.”

“Well, it’s time for you to start defining what that means for you. And that’s your homework until we meet next week,” she said while glancing up at the round analog clock on the wall.

Moments later, I was heading out of her office with my YSL bag over my shoulder. Dressed in a fitted Zebra print dress and a pair of black stilettos, I looked exquisite. I’d always been reminded of how pretty I was ever since I was a young girl.

“You look like a living doll baby!” My aunt would explain while staring into my big brown eyes with lashes that not even the finest lash tech could replicate. She emphasized my looks over and over, making it clear that my face and body were my money-maker. That I would get far on my looks alone.

And she was right. But it came at a price.

I spent my life trying to convince people that I was just as smart as I was pretty. Pageantry paid my way through NYU, where I received a degree in Mass Communications.

“You have a face for television,” my aunt would say. Therefore, I made it my life’s mission to get on television so that I could make her proud. Disappointing my aunt was not

an option, especially after she worked so hard to get me into her custody. I felt I owed it to her to make sure that I was accomplished, considering everything that I had been through as a baby. She didn't have to care for me, but she did. And I would forever be grateful.

As I walked towards my fire engine red G-Wagon, I took a breath and shook my head. This car was not my style at all. It was one of many the impulsive purchases I made over the last year. Sometimes, something takes over me and I lose all control and go on spending sprees. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, it results in shit like this.

This big ass garish whip confused my friends and family when I pulled up in with it. For the first few days, I was into it but then I realized that I was out of my mind. But because Harlem, loved it, I decided to keep it. I would do anything for my child.

On the way home, I turned on the radio to drown out my thoughts of the day. I didn't feel like thinking about therapy, Harlem being in pageants, or the other issues I was dealing with. Instead, I just wanted to relax and think about nothing.

However, that became impossible when I heard a news announcement about a missing girl. "12-year-old Rue Massey has gone missing yesterday. She was last seen in the Arbor Park neighborhood around 8 pm. Rue is medium brown-skinned, 5'2", and weighs about 120lbs and was last seen wearing a pink hoodie, blue jeans, and white sneakers..."

"What the fuck," I mumbled when I realized how close to home this news hit. My aunt and uncle lived in Arbor Park and it's a tight-knit community. I wonder if they know Rue's parents. I can't imagine that they didn't, considering how nosey everyone is. They all gossiped to one another about each other but they kept Arbor Park sparkling clean. It was the most manicured neighborhood on that side of town. It was pristine, prestigious, poised and it was costing me a lot of money to keep my aunt and uncle there. I didn't mind it because they made me the woman I am today.

However, hearing about that missing girl broke my heart. Even though things were starting to change, the media still didn't report missing black girls the way they did white girls. I was going to make note of this to bring this up with my producer and best friend Candace. She could help me get little Rue national attention on the show, *The Scene*.

Hearing about Rue being missing reminded me of my childhood best friend that went missing when I was only ten. Her name was Sabrina Weathers and she was as close to me as a sister could be. Even though we competed with one another in pageants we never fought. I was completely traumatized when she was kidnapped and murdered.

After 23 days of searching for her, she was found in the woods by the highway. I remember being devastated when hearing about my best friend being killed. At ten years old, I was scarred for life and haven't been the same since.

Now that I'm hearing about little Rue, it was bringing up all kinds of feelings for me. Things that I hadn't thought of in years were starting to surface to the top. But I decided to suppress it because Xavier hated when I was sad around him.

The only emotion that I could evoke around him was one of joy. If I even expressed an inkling of sadness or discontent, he took it personally as if I were ungrateful for the life that he afforded us to live.

While I made a multi-six figure salary, it was his money that bought our mansion and put our daughter in one of the best prep schools in the country.

My job at "The Scene," a program on a new cable network called Rhythm didn't pay the big bucks yet. We were only in our second season and we're still growing our fanbase. We were gaining new viewers every week but we had a long way to go.

Finally, I pulled up to the gorgeous home we owned in McClean, Virginia. I couldn't wait to see my baby even though she should be on her way to sleep. When I stepped into the house it was eerily quiet. I thought I would at least hear a television playing in the background but there was nothing. It

was shocking that Harlem didn't run downstairs to greet me either.

"Logan, come here," I heard Xavier call my name from down the hall. I could tell by the tone of his voice that it was serious. What the hell could be going on now?

"Hey, babe. Where's Harlem?" I said when I could sense that she wasn't in the house.

"She's at Olivia's," Xavier said referring to his sister.

"Why? What's wrong? Did someone die?" I asked.

"Bitch! What is wrong with you? Why would you do something like this?" Xavier asked before stepping away, revealing the screen on his laptop playing behind him.

"Why are you speaking to me like that?" I barked in shock at him calling me out my name. He had never called me bitch before. But before he could respond, I saw what was on the screen.

My heart stopped in my chest as my eyes laid on the most disturbing video I had ever seen in my life. There I was wearing a blonde wig, on all fours while fucking several men on camera. There was one man fucking me from behind while I sucked another one's dick. There were two other men in the background jerking their dicks and waiting for their turns. All of them were wearing ski masks so that I couldn't see their faces. My stomach begin to rumble and chunks formed, forcing me to deeply breathe so that I wouldn't vomit all over the floor.

The woman in the video looked exactly like me, except it wasn't me. I've never been in a gang bang. And why the hell would I film it? I was confused and disgusted by what I saw. That wasn't me but it looked so much like me.

"EXPLAIN THIS SHIT!" Xavier yelled.

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chapter
two

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Logan

TREMBLING from the crown on my head to the soles of my feet, I followed Xavier around the room, begging for him to listen to me. I was in utter disbelief by what I had just seen. Seeing myself in the throws of a raunchy gang bang wasn't something that I expected to come home to this evening. But it wasn't me. It couldn't be me. I had never done anything like that before and why the hell would I record and it send it to my husband?

“Please Xavier, you have to believe me... That's not me,” I begged as he marched up the stairs and went into our bedroom.

“Are you out of your fuckin' mind? You're going to look me in the eye and tell me that the woman on that video isn't you. Same body. Same face. How could you do something like this?” he barked at me.

“I swear I didn't. It's not me.”

“You must be smokin' crack like yo' mama!” Xavier shouted, the words ripping through me and forcing my heart to sink into the pit of my stomach.

He was fully aware of my past and all of my traumas, yet he never threw it in my face until now.

“That's not fair...” I whimpered.

“Not fair? Oh, but seeing your wife and the mother of your child bust it open for four niggas is fair? What the fuck were you thinking?”

“Why would I send that to you? Huh? Obviously, I've been set up!” I cried in disbelief as he paced around the bedroom packing his bags so that he can leave.

“Set up?! Were you drugged? Or maybe it's your long-lost twin sister.”

“That's not farfetched... I was found in the garbage...” I cried.

“Bitch, don’t use that shit on me. You’re being manipulative. How dare you throw that shit in my face?! You’re really sick, you know that? Sick in the fuckin’ head. After everything I’ve done for you, this is how you do me?!” He screamed at me, his eyes burning into mine.

“I would never do something like this. Ever. I love you. I love Harlem! I wouldn’t destroy my family. You have to believe me!” I screamed.

“I don’t have to believe shit except for what I saw with my own eyes. You’re disgusting to me and I will never be able to trust you again. If this got out, it could ruin my law firm. What about the parents at Harlem’s school? What the fuck were you thinking? I knew that you were unhappy but this is unforgivable. We’re getting divorced. I’m done with you.”

“This is a mistake...”

“You know what’s crazy? You won’t even let me touch you. I can’t remember the last time we had sex. Yet you let four men fuck you!” He said referring to our non-existent sex life.

“Please Xavier. Help me get to the bottom of it,” I cried as I tried to block him from leaving the room.

“If you don’t get the fuck out of my way, Logan, I swear to God!” He shouted while staring at me as if he would rip my body into two.

I stepped aside and watched as he shoved his way past me. Paralyzed, I stood in shock as I listened to him march down the stairs, then slam the front door. The slam caused me to jump even though I knew it was coming. Shivering from head to toe, tears poured down my face as I remembered his last words.

Xavier had never looked at me like that before. Disgust and rage shot from his eyes, burning into my chest. He looked as if he hated me, but I couldn’t blame him. It looked just like me. Except for that ridiculous-ass blonde wig. There was nothing like that in my possession. I kept my hair in a cute

pixie cut that framed my heart-shaped face. After years of extensions and wigs for my competitions, I was burnt out.

A couple of years ago, I cut my hair and haven't looked back. Xavier hated it because he preferred long hair but I didn't care. I wanted to separate myself from my beauty pageant look and having short hair was the quickest way to do that.

I swallowed the lump in my throat and walked downstairs to the kitchen to get a bottle of wine. My mind was racing while sweat poured from my pits and down my temples. I was so rattled that I couldn't think straight. As I made my way to get a drink that could calm my nerves, I took in the luxurious house that Xavier and I shared.

It was beautiful and decadent. The home of many women's dreams. Together my husband and I had worked hard to live in opulence but now he was talking about divorcing me. What would happen to Harlem? She loved her daddy. She loved our relationship. How would I explain this to her? I didn't even understand it myself.

I popped the cork on the Chardonnay and then poured a glass. As I brought the rim to my lips, I thought about what Xavier said about my mother being on crack. I thought of how he dismissed me when I mentioned being found in the garbage as a baby. I thought about how all of that pointed to me having a twin out there. That revelation alone was enough to have me shaken to my core.

Not much was known about my mom during the time she had me. According to my aunt Roni my mom got hooked on drugs when she was 18. The family had to cut her off because she would rob them to get high. For years she was living on the streets or couch surfing, completely out of the family's reach.

They didn't even know that she was pregnant. It wasn't until I was found near a garbage container behind a Chinese carryout restaurant that they knew about me. When I was found, they believed I was about one week old. I was crack dependent and going through withdrawals. The doctors

thought I wasn't going to make it. Placed in intensive care, I was there for weeks while fighting for my life.

Shortly after I was found, my mama was found dead. She had died from sepsis caused by pieces of the placenta being left inside of her. They figured she had given birth outside of a hospital and didn't want to go to one because she didn't want to be arrested. When her body was found, it took a while before the authorities were able to identify her.

I stayed in the hospital for about three months before the authorities were able to identify my mother and eventually me. As soon as my family found out about me, they came for me. The hospital had them take a DNA test to confirm that I was related before they could take me home.

Since my grandmother was too elderly to take care of me, my aunt Veronica also known as Roni, and uncle Charles took me in. They raised me as their daughter and I felt as if I owed my life to them. I had health issues and was a failure to thrive when they first took me home. They invested a lot of time and money to ensure that I got healthy. They were the reason I was alive today and I loved them dearly for what they provided me with.

Had they known about my twin sister, they would've taken her in too. It made me wonder what the hell happened to her and how could I find her? She had already found me. She sent that tape to my husband. Was she trying to get back at me for having a good life? Why hadn't she come forward years ago? The questions boggled my mind but obviously, I had a better life than she did. She was jealous.

After I washed the wine down my throat, I picked up the phone to call Olivia so that I could check on my daughter. It broke my heart that Xavier didn't believe me and decided to send her away. However, I understood. I probably would have done the same thing.

"Hey Logan, is everything okay over there?" Olivia asked when she answered the phone.

"We're just going through something. It's going to be okay," I replied realizing that Xavier hadn't told his sister why

he sent Olivia over there.

“Okay girl, I was worried. My brother was so angry when he dropped her off but wouldn’t tell me what was wrong. I’m sure whatever it is, you two will work through it,” she encouraged.

“Yeah... Let me speak to Harlem, please.”

“She’s knocked out. Do you want me to wake her?”

“No, don’t do that. I’ll call her tomorrow morning before school.”

“Do you want to tell me what’s going on between you and your brother?” she asked.

There was no way in hell I could tell her what happened and I understood why Xavier hadn’t said anything. It was embarrassing and impossible to explain. I was determined to get to the bottom of it and find my long-lost twin sister before she ruined my life. Perhaps, when I found her we could come to some agreement or get counseling. She must be hurting from our mother throwing us away. Why else would she be involved in a gang-bang?

“It’s personal but I have to go. Take care of my girl, please.”

“Of course,” Olivia replied before hanging up on me.

As soon as we got off the phone, I called my aunt. I wanted to know if she had ever heard any rumors about my mother having twins. Maybe she had forgotten a serious detail about my mother in an attempt to protect me.

“What are you calling so late for? Is everything okay?” Aunt Roni asked when I finally got through.

“Auntie... I was thinking about my mom.”

“Oh chiiiiile. What do you want to know and why couldn’t it wait until tomorrow?”

Too afraid to tell her about the video, I hesitated with asking her any questions.

“Well... Do you think she might have had other children? Could I be a twin?” I asked.

“Where in the world did that come from?”

“I just want to know...” I mumbled.

“Anything could be possible. When we found you it had been ten years since we had seen your mother. It wouldn’t surprise me if she had other children and dumped them into the trash too. That crack took her from us.”

“What about a twin?” I asked.

“A twin? I don’t know. It’s possible. There was so much confusion when we found you. And several babies had gone missing in that area which is why they had us take a DNA test. If you have a twin out there, I wouldn’t know it.”

“Do you know anyone who was friends with my mom? Maybe I could ask them?”

“We’ve been through this many times, Logan. I don’t know anything about your mother’s life. She was a complete mystery to me. The drugs, the homelessness, and her erratic behavior isolated her from us. She was sick and she hid instead of getting help. If she had friends, I’d be surprised if they were still alive,” Aunt Roni replied.

“Okay. You’re right.” My voice cracked as tears raced down my face.

“What’s wrong? Why are you asking about this?”

“Nothing. I’ll talk to you later,” I responded before hanging up.

Once we were off the phone, I pulled out the vanilla ice cream from the freezer. It was Harlem’s dessert that Xavier and I never touched. Xavier always gave me the side-eye when I ate fattening foods. He monitored everything that I put in my mouth because he didn’t want me to lose my beauty pageant figure.

Every once in a while I would sneak and eat a treat when he wasn’t around. And tonight, I felt like I deserved it. Wine and ice cream, while I thought about how to get to the bottom

of this long-lost twin situation. I had to find her before she caused more damage to my life. If she sent that video, she hated me and I needed to find out why.

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chapter
three

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Lola

LOOK at this bitch riding around in a candy apple red G-Wagon to attend therapy. What does a bitch like that need therapy for? I swear bougie hoes stay findin' reasons to complain and be unhappy with their lives.

“Boohoo, my life is so perfect and I’m so bored that it makes me miserable,” is what I imagined Logan was in there whining about.

What complaints do you have when your husband is rich, your house is huge and you are beautiful? What the fuck are you sad for? That cunt irritated my soul.

While she was riding around in the lap of luxury and getting help for her mental health, I was struggling to make ends meet and selling pussy to survive. Instead of a red Mercedes truck, I had a beat-up champagne-colored 2006 Camry. I was getting by in that bucket on a hope and a dream.

When she went home to her 5 bedroom mansion, I went home to a roach-infested apartment in the hood. While she had a wealthy husband who loved her, I had a string of Johns who were stingy about paying my rate. As she was growing up in the suburbs with *our* loving family, I was tortured and raped in foster homes.

The shit was not fair. If anyone needed therapy, it was my ass. But that shit is for rich women. The rest of us just had to get up and move on with our lives. And that’s what I was doing until I saw my face on television for the first time a couple of years ago.

While staying at a hotel with one of my well-paying clients, I was flipping through channels and landed on a show called, “The Scene.” It was a bougie bitch show similar to The View or The Reel on a cable network. There I was, sitting in the middle of other annoying bitches talking about celebrities and food.

It was the strangest thing and I couldn't believe my eyes. All this time I had been struggling in life when I had a twin sister who was thriving. But there she was on television, well-spoken and well-liked. Stunned, I did my best to get in touch with the foster agency that took me in so that I could get in contact with my family. It broke my heart when I learned the truth about those bitches.

The agency admitted that two babies were found in the garbage but my "aunt and uncle" only wanted to take home one. They couldn't afford to care for both of us. Not only had my crackhead mother rejected me but so did her sister and sister's husband.

When I realized that I was hated from the time I was born, I could no longer play nice. I was on a mission to make them regret choosing Logan over me. And I wanted her to suffer too. Just because she got to live the life that I never got to live.

While she was rescued, I was taken from one trash can to another. I wouldn't wish foster care on any child but it was my reality. I frequently abused my foster parents, I learned at a young age that I couldn't trust anyone and that no one gave a fuck about me. Knowing that no one loved me freed me from having to live up to any expectations.

I guess Logan can't say the same. Folks cared about her so much that they dressed her up like a doll and pimped her out in those pageants. She had to be perfect and impress people. Expectations were piled on her but in return, she got to live in a nice house and have nice friends.

Meanwhile, I ate stale cereal and befriended the roaches. When all along I could've been living in the lap of luxury if my trifling ass aunt and uncle had decided to take me in. Instead, they rejected me. Probably played eenie meanie miney mo' to choose which baby they wanted to take home. Bitches. Every single last one of them.

When I discovered Logan, I became obsessed. Hours upon hours were spent Googling her to learn everything there was to know. I learned she had taken home several crowns in beauty pageants. She went to Hampton University for broadcast

journalism and she ran a non-profit organization teaching at-risk youth self-esteem, etiquette, and personal development.

Her husband was Xavier Medford, son of Judge Donald Medford. He came from a well-off family that was doing much better than our aunt and uncle. She probably had to be extra perfect for them.

The Medfords were a part of the black upper class that possessed long old money. A rarity. The kind of negroes that only married other light-skinned negroes who were members of upper echelon fraternities and social clubs. Those niggas probably had a history of the slave trade in their background.

Xavier is a partner and owner of one of the premier law offices on the east coast. When I looked him up I saw that he had taken on several high-profile cases which included a few class-action suits. Those class-action suits turn lawyers into millionaires. Logan was lucky as hell. She had a rich husband and was making money independently.

Every time I thought about them, my jealousy went haywire. It just wasn't fair how we came from the same crackhead mama, yet had very different lives. I had to drop out of high school and run away because I couldn't take my foster dad and his friends raping me anymore.

But what was I qualified to do as a 16-year-old who had to live on the streets? I had to do what I've been used for my entire life. Sex. At 16 I hooked up with a pimp who took care of me until I decided to branch out on my own. It's been a rough life but I wanted to share that pain. I wanted to share it with Logan since she never experienced pain a day in her life.

That's why I had been stalking her and watching her every move. I found out where her cute daughter goes to school. I followed her to work and her therapist's office. I even followed Xavier around to see what he was up to, and boy if she knew what kind of bad boy he was she would probably leave him.

Finding out the secret life that Xavier was living is what prompted me to send him that disgusting tape. I wanted him to think that Logan was just as dirty as him. Shit, Logan should

be thanking me for breaking up that sham of a marriage. I'm saving her years of therapy.

To be honest I wasn't sure what she saw in him. Xavier was attractive if you're into that light-skinned, light-eyed pretty boy thing. But he looked like he had a weak stroke game attached to a three-inch penis. He didn't even look like he had a dick. He just had a penis. He gave off the vibe that it was so small that you could only call it by its scientific name.

However, I would probably stay with him too so that I could stack my coins. But best believe I would be cheating. Especially now that I know that he's cheating on her. I've followed him many nights to different hotels around the city. There are two bitches he cheats on Logan with. And to be honest, Logan and I looked much better than those hoers.

But Logan probably doesn't even like sex. That could be what her stuck-up ass is in therapy for. Trying to get over her hang-ups about sex. The bitch needed just one good dick in her life and that was way cheaper than therapy.

My thoughts continued to circulate on Logan as I drove to my apartment. Sending the tape to her little dick husband was just the first step in me ruining her life. I had a few other tricks in my bag. I was going to help sis see the light. I was going to destroy that perfect little life that she was no longer content with.

As I drove home, R. Kelly's *It Seems Like You're Ready* played on the radio. "UGH!!" I screamed as I violently changed the station. I don't know what it was, but there was something about that song that I hated. It didn't have shit to do with R. Kelly being a perverted pedophile, although that was good enough to hate his music. But honestly, I still listened to his music. There were songs of his I refused to give up.

But *It Seems Like You're Ready* makes me want to vomit. The notes of that song always traveled down my spine and twisted it until it was impossible to move. If I hadn't turned off the radio as soon as I heard it, I would've gone paralyzed for a few minutes. That's just how much I hated that damn song.

With the radio on silent, I traveled to my apartment where I need to get ready for the night. One of my clients was coming over for a rendezvous and I needed to straighten up and make sure no roaches were crawling about.

I bet Ms. Perfect Logan didn't have to rush home tonight and deal with roaches. She could walk into her perfect kitchen and pour a bowl of cereal without roaches joining in on her snack. Perfect Logan didn't have to fuck a stranger tonight to make ends meet. She had a well-paying job and could fuck that boring ass husband.

Well, not tonight. Not after the stunt I pulled. Sending that video is sure to ruin their marriage. And he won't believe her when she denies and pleads. He'll think she's an insane liar. She'll claim she must have a long-lost twin but he won't believe her. It'll sound completely insane.

Too bad I couldn't be a fly on the wall when it all goes down. That would certainly make my life. Seeing him confront her about that video and watching her have a breakdown. Shit like that could drive anyone crazy.

You know damn well that you didn't record a sex tape but there you are getting fucked by multiple men. If this doesn't push her over the edge and has her entire life fall apart, I don't know what will. But that's what I wanted. I wanted all of her togetherness to be unraveled until there was nothing left but skin and bones.

For the first time in her precious life, she would know what it's like to live without comfort. To live with everyone hating her. Just as I've felt ever since I was born.

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chapter
four

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Logan

I WOKE up the next morning with a pounding headache from the bottle of wine that I consumed. My tongue was as dry as sandpaper and my body felt stiff as a board. My alarm blared, annoying me until I turn it off. When I extended my arm across the bed and I didn't feel Xavier's warmth, I realized that last night wasn't a dream. It was my nightmarish reality.

Slowly, I pulled my body out of bed and went to take a shower to rinse my wine induced coma off of me. I needed to be fresh for work today since I had an important interview on camera. It was going to be difficult considering my life was falling apart, but I had to pull through. This wouldn't have been the first time that I've had to perform when I didn't feel like it.

After the shower, I called Olivia so that I could speak to my daughter. I didn't care what Xavier thought, she was coming back home tonight. I hated her not being in the house with me. How could I protect her if she's out of my sight?

"Morn Logan, I just got off the phone with Xavier," Olivia spoke when she answered the phone.

"Good morning. Let me speak to Harlem," I requested.

"Sure, I'm about to take her to school. Xavier said he has to work late, so I can pick her up from school..."

"That's not necessary. I got her."

"Are you sure? Xavier still sounded really angry with you," she responded, still in the dark about why he was mad.

"Yeah, she's my child and she needs to be home with me," I responded.

"Okay. Harlem?!" she called out my daughter's name.

I adjusted while I waited for Harlem to come to the phone. Hopefully the shower refreshed me and I didn't look too scary to her. I wanted her to know that everything was okay and that

she would be home with me this evening. It didn't matter what Xavier thought.

"Hi Mommy," she greeted me with a bright smile on her face. She had no clue what was going on and that's how I wanted to keep it.

"Hey, baby. I just wanted to say good morning and that I'll be picking you up from school. I miss you, Butterfly."

"I miss you too, mommy. Daddy was really upset yesterday. Does he feel better now?"

"Yeah. How are you?" I asked trying to change the subject.

"I'm good. Aunt Olivia made chocolate chip pancakes for breakfast."

"Oh really? Was it good?"

"Delicious! How come you don't make them?"

"Too much sugar but it's okay if Aunt Olivia makes them," I responded.

"Harlem, we have to go!" I heard Olivia call out.

"I have to go mommy."

"Okay baby, I'll see you after school," I replied.

Once we were off the phone, I finished getting ready for work but my heart was so heavy. My family was about to be destroyed by a lie and a person I never even knew existed. If my sister had just come to me, I would've bonded with her instantly. If she needed help, she would've had it from me. How could she be so cruel to me when I would've done anything for her.

A tear escaped down my face but I quickly wiped it. No tears today. Crying was not an option because it would make my eyes puffy and I would look terrible on-screen. Expressing intense emotions weren't allowed in my life because I had to look perfect at all times. Even if I felt like dying.

As I slipped into a fitted houndstooth dress, I eyed my body, wondering how long I could live like this. Living for everyone but myself. Eventually, I would find a way out but

for now, I had to put on a brave face, go to work and then find the bitch who was trying to ruin my family. If I can prove to Xavier that I have a sister, he would take me back.

On the way to the office, the news played in the background, dragging me out of my reality for a while. That was until they touched on the topic of Rue Massey, the little girl who went missing. Thoughts of her took me back to when I was a little girl and my best friend had gone missing. Immediately my chest tightened and tears streamed down my face.

I had to bring Rue's story up today at work. When a little black girl goes missing she never receives as much attention as a missing white girl. There's no strong community outcry because people don't know about these stories. And since I was a host on a national show, it was my responsibility to make sure these stories were heard.

"I'm loving that dress," my best friend and producer, Candace complimented when I walked into the room.

"Thanks boo, I got it at a Barney's sample sale."

"When the hell did you go to New York without me?" she asked while smirking and placing her hand on her hip.

"This was two months ago when I went to the Miss US pageant. Remember, I hosted a workshop and while I was up there I did some shopping." I winked.

"Oh yeah, I remember. That was the weekend Kenny whisked me off to St. Tropez. That trumps NYC any day," she laughed which sparked a tinge of jealousy. She and Kenny had such a romantic and sensual relationship while Xavier and I had such a stiff one.

Xavier never did sweet things for me anymore. It had been years since we had a romantic getaway and he didn't seem to care. We'd stopped going on dinner dates a year ago and our sex life was dead in the water. I knew he loved me but I was trying to get the spark back in our relationship. He had needs and I wanted to be able to fulfill them.

“It does. I’d choose the clear blue water of Saint Tropez over the polluted air and rat infestation of New York,” I laughed in reply.

“Yeah but you deserve it, sis. Since you’ve been on this show the ratings have gone up...”

“That’s because of both of us. You bring out the best in me and this show wouldn’t be where it is without you,” I deflected the compliment.

“You’re the talent and the face. You’re the one out there getting beat up in the comment sections and blogs. You go home to a husband and a beautiful little girl, crushing it as a mom. Not to mention your community service. Teaching those little hood-rats about self-esteem and etiquette and doing speaking engagements...”

“Don’t call them that,” I rolled my eyes while she laughed.

“Why? It’s the truth.”

“You are so damn bougie. It’s not true. Not everyone is raised like you, in the lap of privilege,” I responded.

Candace and I met in college at Hampton University but she had grown up in George as a southern debutante. Her father is a prominent surgeon while my mother is a world-class pianist. She had no concept of the hood because of how sheltered she was raised.

“You were privileged too. Ms. Washington D.C., Little Miss Maryland, Baby Miss Alexandria...” she rattled off some of my titles.

“That’s not the same. I was adopted by my aunt and uncle who were working class. They sacrificed everything to put me in those pageants because they saw my potential. If it weren’t for them rescuing me from the trash, I could be one of those hood-rats you speak of. Or worse, I could be dead.”

“Damn girl, I’m sorry. I wasn’t trying to open up old wounds. All I’m saying is you work hard and you’re way too hard on yourself. You make too much money to not enjoy the perks of it. Go on vacation for once! Get a massage, preferably

one with a happy ending. Lord knows, you're overdue," she laughed which forced me to join in.

I rarely thought about sex and I couldn't remember ever truly loving it...

"Once the season is over, I'll think about it. Question..." I asked as my make-up artist, Rico, and hairstylist, Trenae, walked in.

"Morning boss-lady," Rico announced.

"Stop calling me that," I laughed while shaking my head as they set up to prepare to beautify me.

"What's your question?" Candace asked getting back on the subject.

"Are you still friends with that P.I.?" I asked. I had just remembered that she was friends with a private investigator who could possibly help me get to the bottom of long lost sister.

"Who, Gavin?"

"Yeah, that was his name?"

"Oooh what do you need a P.I. for? You think Xavier cheatin' on you. Me and my cousin will spy on that nigga for free *and* throw in an ass whoopin', bossy lady," Rico announced causing the entire room to erupt in laughter.

"No, it's nothing like that," I giggled.

"What do you need one for?" Candace poked while Trenae begin to style my short coif.

"I think I may have a sister, possibly a twin," I announced. I wasn't going to give out the details because it was far too embarrassing. They would all judge me if they heard about me being involved in a gang bang with four other men.

"Really?" Candace asked.

"Yeah. I just need for him to maybe do some research and go out to Norfolk and ask around."

“What makes you think you have a twin, Ms. Medford?” Trenae asked.

“I can’t go into details but I’m sure I have one. Or a sister who looks a lot like me,” I replied.

“Sure, I’ll send you his information. He’s expensive though. \$300 an hour,” she said with resistance in her voice.

“That’s fine. I really need to get to the bottom of this.”

“That would be crazy if you have a sister out there. Two bad bitches like y’all walking the earth. Whew, chile!” Rico joked.

But it wasn’t funny to me. This woman was on a mission to destroy me and take down everything I had built and I wasn’t sure how far she was willing to go. If she was okay with sending that disgusting video to my husband. Fuck that. If she were okay with recording something like that, who knew what else she was capable of.

“But to change the subject. Rue Massey,” I announced.

“Oh my God, that’s so sad! Every time it comes on the television my heart breaks. That poor little girl. I pray that they find her alive,” Trenae spoke.

“Yeah, it’s so sad. And didn’t she go missing from your aunt’s neighborhood?” Candace asked.

“Yep,” I replied while pulling up the address of where Rue lives. “Wow, she lives next door to my aunt and uncle.”

“So this is hitting pretty close to home.”

“Exactly which is why I want to dedicate an entire segment to her tomorrow. We have less than 24 hours to put everything together but we have to do it ASAP. We have to get the entire country interested and involved in finding her...”

“I don’t know, sis. I care just as much as you do but convincing the execs to do such a serious story. We do lifestyle and entertainment. This may be too heavy for our audience,” Candace winced. I rolled my eyes at her lack of spine when it came to the execs. Without us, they would have no show.

Sure, we had the reputation of speaking on lifestyle topics; cooking, decor, and wellness. We also reported on a lot of entertainment news but what's the point of having such a large platform if you're not going to make real change?

"It's just one segment and then we can get back to reporting on celebs wearing pastels in spring," I rolled my eyes.

"I'll take it to them," she replied.

"You have to be aggressive and assertive. It's one segment about a missing black girl in our backyard. The country needs to be looking for her. She needs to come back home," I stood my ground.

"I will do my absolute best. You know, I will," she responded.

Whether she got the job done or not, I was talking about Rue on my show tomorrow.

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five

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Logan

“HEY BABY,” I greeted Harlem when I pulled up to her school. My baby was full of life, love, and laughter. As soon as she walked out of the school I could see this heavenly glow surrounding her little body. Harlem was my anchor. The love of my life. And if anything were to ever happen to her, I would die.

That’s what bothered me most about this sex tape. If I couldn’t prove that it was my long-lost twin, Xavier would leave and he could take my daughter away from me. I couldn’t live with that. If my daughter wasn’t in my life, none of the hard work that I put into my life would be worth it. She was the reason I woke up every morning.

“Hi Mommy,” she replied when she crawled into the front seat.

“How was your day?” I asked as I leaned over and placed a kiss on her cheek.

“It was okay. Do I have to sleep at Aunt Olivia’s house tonight?”

“No, why do you ask?”

“She said that I might have to stay with her for a while when she dropped me off from school. She said that you and daddy had to work through something. What’s going on with you and daddy?” She asked.

I could hear the skepticism in her voice and it was stressing me out. Why would Olivia tell Harlem something like that after I already said that I was picking her up from school? It made me think that Xavier told her about the video. I prayed to God he kept it to himself until I got to the bottom of it.

“Nothing baby. We just needed to have an important conversation last night. That’s all. But how was school?” I asked trying to change the subject.

“It was good. I have a science project coming up! I want to make a solar system or a volcano,” she replied.

“That should be fun. We can go shopping for supplies this weekend.”

“Yay! Mommy?” Her voice’s tone shifted from excitement to curiosity. This shift in her voice made me feel nervous all over again. *Please don’t ask me any questions about daddy.* I thought to myself.

“Yes?”

“Did you hear about that girl? Rue?”

“I did,” I replied. As soon as the words left her mouth it made me think of my best friend Sabrina. Rue’s disappearance was eerily similar to Sabrina’s and it didn’t help that they looked similar. They were both brown-skinned girls with almond eyes and the most precious of smiles. I prayed that they found Rue but I knew I had to do my job of using my national platform to speak about it.

“Do you think they’re going to find her?”

“I hope so, sweetie.”

“Could that happen to me?” She asked with terror in her voice.

“Your father and I have always done our very best to make sure that nothing like that happens to you. We will always protect you,” I answered.

“Okay. Sooooo...” she changed the subject again.

“What?” I asked while smiling because I knew she was about to ask me for something. Would it be a new doll? iPad? McDonald’s for dinner?

“I really want to do a pageant.”

“Your father and I haven’t decided yet.”

“You keep saying that,” she whined.

She was right. I was supposed to talk to Xavier last night about her doing pageants but the sex tape got in the way of

that. To be honest, seeing that tape made me want to say hell no. Even though it was my long-lost twin, it reminded me of the exploitation women go through. I didn't want my daughter to be exploited, especially not by my hand.

"Honestly Harlem, I don't feel comfortable with you doing pageants. Not right now. There's just so much going on in the world and you have other things that you're focused on. You have tennis, swim, and you're playing the flute."

"I can quit those and do pageants."

"No. Why do you want to do pageants anyway?" I asked.

"Because you used to do them. You looked so pretty and I want to look pretty too."

"You are gorgeous whether you do pageants or not. And if you want to get dressed up and wear make-up, you can do that for your flute recitals. I can book a private photoshoot for you. Pageants are too much work and they aren't good for your self-esteem. Those judges will pick at you and criticize you. And I don't want that for you."

"But you did it," she whined as I drove towards our home.

"I didn't have a choice. They were my ticket to college. I won money. You don't need money because your father and I have it. Aunt Veronica and Uncle Charles struggled to raise me. They didn't have high-paying jobs like your father and I do. You don't have to do pageants. The answer is no. End of conversation," I stated sternly just as I pulled in front of the house.

"That's not fair. I'm asking daddy," she responded as she ran out of the car, slamming the door behind her.

"Ugh," I grumbled as I watched her make her way into the house. Frustrated I melted into the car's seat and laid my head back while rolling my eyes until they closed.

It was my job to protect her and to make sure that she had high self-esteem. Having her do pageants would go against all of that. Those competitions can rip young girls apart until there is nothing left but a shell of a woman. I wanted more for

my child. I saw more in her. She was talented and beautiful but there were other ways to express that.

Slowly, I blinked my eyes open and looked at the house. This was home but it didn't feel like it. Afraid of what else was on the other side of the door, I hesitated to leave the car. Though Xavier wasn't home yet, I feared for when he did come home. I feared his reaction to me. I feared what he would say in front of Harlem.

Inhaling deeply, I got out of the car and made my way to the front door. When I walked across the threshold, I damn near fell on my face as I tripped over her backpack.

"Harlem!" I yelled her name in frustration almost twisting my ankle. Kicking her bag out of the way, I marched into the kitchen heading straight for the bottle of wine in the fridge.

"Yes?!" She called out to me as if I were interrupting her life.

"Pick your bookbag up!" I replied while pouring the glass of wine.

I listened as her little feet stomped to the foyer to retrieve her bag. She'd have to get over it. One day she would fully understand why I had to protect her from a life of pageants.

The rest of the evening was silent and uncomfortable. I cooked spaghetti for Harlem but was too anxious to eat with her. While she slurped noodles and watched her iPad, I drank wine and worried about my future. Xavier hadn't spoken to me since he stormed out of the house last night. And I showed no restraint when it came to communicating with him. I texted him consistently hoping that he would respond but he never did.

After 10:30 pm, I finally heard the front door open. Harlem had been asleep for an hour and I was perched on the living room sofa clutching a glass of wine, hoping to ease my nerves.

"Xavier," I called his name as soon as he walked in.

I could hear him sigh and grumble something under his breath. I jumped to my feet to greet him, hoping that he would

hear my plea. I hoped he had calmed down and considered that I was telling the truth. That wasn't me in the video. It was my twin. A sister I didn't even know existed.

“What?” He asked while looking at me menacingly.

“I spoke to Aunt Ronnie and she says there's a possibility I could have a twin. You know records weren't tight back then in the 80s...” I plead my case.

“Logan, that's bullshit. It's you in that video! I don't know why you would do something like that and then blame it on a long-lost sister but you did. You're disgusting to me. I can't even look at you without wanting to kill you!”

“You know about my past. You know my mother was on drugs when she had me and she wasn't speaking to her family! Please, Xavier, you have to listen to me.”

“Why would she pop up all of a sudden? Where has she been all this time? Huh? I can't believe you expect me to believe this shit! You know what I think?” He asked while staring me up and down with a look of contempt shooting from his eyes.

“What?” I questioned.

“I think you recorded that freaky tape because this life bores you. You're in self-sabotage mode because things are too good for you. You don't know how to sit back and enjoy it. And that's okay because I'm done. I'm filing for divorce. But I'll be fair...”

“Wait no! Xavier, what if I can prove that I have a twin?”

“If you can prove it, wonderful. But I doubt you can. I'm leaving you but Harlem is staying with me. Since you were so brazen in your acts, I can't trust you to be a mother to her. You can only see her during supervised visitation with me or Olivia. You can have the condo downtown. It's paid for. And I'll fulfill my end of the prenup but you will not be a mother to my child!” He barked.

“NO!” I cried as I fell to my knees and grabbed at his pants leg.

“Get the fuck off of me. This is why we are done! Pull yourself together!” He shouted while jerking away from me, causing me to fall. I was shrouded in a satin robe, balling on the floor as he walked over me.

“You should’ve thought about that before you cheated on me,” he responded in annoyance.

“I didn’t cheat,” I sobbed as I tried to pull myself together.

“My bad. Your long-lost sister did it. Listen, if you can prove that you have a sister, I will apologize and we’ll work it out. But I know it’s you. I know your body very well and that was your body!” He responded.

Tears streamed down my face as I gathered my body off of the ground. With the wine coursing through my body, my footing was unstable as were my thoughts. I had to get to the bottom of this.

If I didn’t prove that I had a twin sister, my child could be taken away from me. To be honest, Xavier could go, but I couldn’t lose Harlem. I would do whatever it took to prove that the woman on the tape wasn’t me.

When I walked to the kitchen to get a glass of water, I could hear that Xavier was taking a shower. My body shuddered as the thoughts of losing my daughter ran rampant. I had half the mind to go into the shower and push him so that he would hit his head and die. But that was just the wine talking. I needed to remain sane and think everything all the way through.

Proving I had a sister, shouldn’t be too hard. Especially once I get Gavin, the P.I., involved. I texted Candace to remind her to give me his information so that I could call him first thing in the morning. Hopefully, he would be able to find her before my husband took my daughter away from me.

In a flash, Candace responded with his number. I held the phone close to my chest, praying that he could help me fix this mess my kin created for me. I wanted to find this bitch and kill her for the upheaval she had caused in my life. As soon as I found her, I was making her pay.

After downing two glasses of water, I staggered up the stairs to lay my weary body down in the bed that I shared with Xavier. I knew that he wasn't going to sleep with me because of his hatred for who he thought I was. However, I was shocked to see that he was packing his bag.

“Are you leaving?”

“Don't talk to me. Don't say shit to me if it isn't about Harlem or your “sister.” He responded as he moved past me and walked out the door.

Saddened and confused, I climbed into bed and listened as the front door closed behind me. It was amazing that just a few days ago, my life was normal and boring. Now, it was practically over.

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six

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Lola

STALKING XAVIER HAD BECOME one of my favorite past times. It was interesting to see where he went after hours. What opulent hotel rooms he crept in at night. The women that joined him. He had a type too. White.

None of them looked like *us*. The fact that he chose to cheat on Logan with white women to begin with made me question what he ever saw in her. What made him choose her cocoa brown skin when he had a preference while those that lacked melanin.

Men are such strange creatures. Walking contradictions. They could say they want one thing but their hearts yearn for another. I saw it all the time in the clients that I dealt with.

These men had “wholesome” lives. Lives that they chose because they were safe, boring, and commendable. The doting wife. The bucktoothed ugly-ass kids. The overweight dog. The picket fence that only seemed to be a container for their false ideals. They led fake lives in the day. But I got to see the real them at night.

It was their real side that came to my apartment and whined about how their wives don't listen to them. Their children don't respect them. Their jobs are so stressful.

They whined to me and then dug deep inside of me for comfort that no one else could provide. That's how I made my money. I became a safe place where these trifling ass men could be their raggedy selves and live their degenerate fantasies.

However, Xavier went to white women in upscale hotels to live out his fantasies. I wonder if Logan knew, how would she react? Would she be like those weak women that forgive and stay with their men because they want to keep their families together? Or would she grow a pair and walk out on his ass?

Even though I hated her for growing up with a better life, I couldn't help to feel a bit sorry for her. Clearly, her husband

never loved her. Why else would he cheat with women that look nothing like her? Luckily, because of the sex tape that I sent, he would leave her.

After watching Xavier disappear into the hotel with that white woman, I drove back to my side of town in my beat-up Camry. When I arrived, I walked up the piss-scented stairs and into my bare apartment. I didn't own much because I was always moving around. I had only been in the DC area for the last few months. I came up here with the sole intention of dismantling my sister's life until she felt as low as I did.

It was after midnight and I had a client coming over. It was some older man that I met online who wanted to pay me \$500 to pee on him. Men are so disgusting. But his little kink would take care of a portion of my rent, so I was down with it.

While I waited for him to arrive, I got undressed so that I could take a shower. As I eyed my body in the cloudy mirror, I ran my fingers over my c-section scar. The baby was gone but this shit still itched like a motherfucker.

Ten years ago, I gave birth to a little girl via-c section however she didn't survive. I fell into a deep depression when my daughter died because I felt like it was my fault. Since I wasn't living right, God took her away from me.

Perhaps it was for the better. I would've made a terrible mother because I had no skills and no way of getting a real job. We would've been on public assistance while I made money under the table as a stripper or a whore. Maybe God took her away from me because I wasn't ready to look after her. I couldn't give her the life that she deserved.

But then I thought, why would He give me to my mother. That bitch was much worse off than me! She was homeless and addicted to drugs. She threw me and Logan away in the garbage! I would've never thrown my baby away in the trash like my mother carelessly did.

It just made me realize that God hated me. He preferred Logan for some odd reason. She was the one that got rescued. She was the one that got to live the good life. She was the one that got to become a mother!

That was another reason I sent that tape. I knew that Xavier would be so upset that he would take custody of their daughter. That's what she deserved. If I couldn't be a mother, she couldn't either.

Once I got out of the shower, I dried myself off and put lotion on. I sprayed myself with my Michael Kors perfume that I had stolen from the store. I then settled on the sofa where I scrolled through my phone, waiting for my client to come through.

The apartment was about the size of a shoebox; no more than 550 square feet. Nothing compared to that massive castle-like domicile my twin was dwelling in. That bitch was so lucky and she probably didn't even realize it.

My obsession with her was running my life. Every day I thought of ways to ruin her. How could knock her down a peg? Was there more to do after sending her husband that sex tape? Of course there was. She still had her job. And for now, she was still living in that house. I wouldn't stop until she was left with nothing.

As I scrolled through her IG page, I noticed how hard she smiled in all of those pictures. Cheesing from ear to ear. But behind her eyes, I could see there was a glimpse of sadness and despair. I wondered what was there? That was the sadness that drove her ass to therapy. The therapy that I'm sure she didn't need. Her life was perfect, what did she have to be sad about?

Before I knew it, someone was knocking at my door. Quickly, I jumped to my feet and opened up for the man. He was an older white man with a huge bald spot in the center of his head. A pair of thin-silver framed glasses sat on his hook-shaped nose. Ugly. At least Logan's cheating husband was fine.

"Wow you're even more beautiful in person," he complimented while reaching his hand out to stroke my blonde wig.

"Uh-huh, honey. CashApp me first," I said as I jerked my body away.

“Of course,” he replied while whipping out his phone.

As soon as I heard the CashApp notification come through, I let him in where he looked around and took in my home.

“Cozy...” he lied, attempting to be polite.

“No, it ain’t. It’s a fucking dump,” I rolled my eyes.

“That doesn’t matter. I just need you, not ambiance,” he responded.

“So, you ordered a golden shower?” I asked, trying to hold my disdain in.

“Yes. Are you still comfortable with that?”

“Of course,” I lied. At least he wanted me to pee on him and not the other way around. Men had the sickest fetishes. All of them. Some wanted to be peed on. But some were much worse. Some liked children. I shook the thought off and focused my attention on my client.

Online he went by the name Roy George but I knew that wasn’t his real name. He was trying to protect himself from being Googled. As if I would waste my time. I had much bigger fish to fry, like taking down my twin sister.

“Do you have anything to drink?” He asked.

“Yes, where are my manners. Wine, tequila, or whiskey?” I offered.

“What kind of whiskey?”

“Jameson.”

“Perfect. I’m half Irish, you know?”

Why the fuck would I know that you’re half Irish? And why the fuck would I care? I made my way to the tiny kitchen where I poured him a cup of Jameson on the rocks. Thankfully there wasn’t a roach in sight.

“Here you go,” I said while handing the cup to him.

“Thank you. My nerves are tense. It’s been a long day for me. I’ve been gunning for this huge deal and I finally got it

approved. And I'm just ready to unwind," he said as he pulled the cup to his lips that were as thin as slips of paper.

I really don't give a fuck, I thought to myself. Let me piss on you so you can go and I can continue to take my sister down.

"How does me peeing on you help you unwind?" I asked with gentle curiosity. I didn't want him to think that I was judging him.

"For me, it's the ultimate submission. I have to be dominant in the office so that I can broker these large deals which causes a tremendous amount of tension. And submitting to a beautiful woman like you, helps relieve that tension."

"Ahhhh," I replied as if I understood what the fuck he was talking about but I didn't. Getting pissed on was nasty but for \$500 I would oblige and even act as I liked it.

"You're so gorgeous. I'm humbled that a beautiful woman like you would drown me with your essence."

"Thank you," I answered, fighting back laughter. This man was insane but if he liked it, I loved it.

"You know... You look familiar," he said as his eyes squinted. "I can't place it."

"I have one of those faces."

"Yeah, like a model or actress. So, where do we do this?" He asked.

"In the bathroom. You can lay down in the tub and we can get to it," I replied.

"Okay," he answered.

"Do you need music on or..." I asked trying to understand how he wanted this to go down.

"Nah. I want to hear you trickling down on me."

"Uh-huh... Well let's go," I responded while cringing internally.

When we got to the bathroom, he undressed unveiling his flabby body. Every part of his body sagged towards the ground. His ass looked like a deflated heart that was dripping towards hell. His pecks were reaching for the ground. Shit, even his belly button was looking like a stretched oval. So gross. I wanted to run out of the room but I had money to make.

Once he laid in the tub, he looked up at me with a big smile drawn on his face. His body reminded me of one of those shar-pei dogs; bound by rolls and wrinkles.

I took a deep breath and undressed, unveiling my curvy and supple body. I stood directly over his belly, ready to unleash my urine all over him. For the last hour, I had been downing water and wine in preparation for this.

“Can you stand over my face?” He asked.

“Sure...” you disgusting bastard, I thought to myself.

I scooted my feet further so that my pussy was hovering over his face.

“Let it rain, sexy,” he whispered.

“Whatever you say,” I responded as I gave my body the signal that it was okay to pee even though we weren’t sitting on a toilet.

Before I knew it I was trickling all over his face. His eyes were shut tight as he laid there enjoying the warmth

“Yes baby!” he moaned as some got in his mouth.

Disgusted, I turned my head away and continued the stream. It was the most disgusting thing I had ever done. All for \$500.

Once it was over, he continued to lay in the bathtub with his eyes closed with a look of bliss written over his face. I shook my head as I stepped out of the shower and began to wash my feet that had piss on them. When I got out of the shower, I noticed his dick was fully erect. All three inches of it was standing at attention.

“That was amazing. I wanna make love to you right now!” He said as he wiped his eyes with his hand before opening them.

“That’ll be an extra \$200 and you need to shower.”

“Anything for you Goddess,” he responded while attempting to stand on his feet.

“Here’s a washcloth and a towel,” I said before scooping up his clothes and my robe and making my way to the living room.

While he showered, I snooped through his pants pockets and discovered his wallet. Of course, I had to see what was in it.

“Sherman McLaughlin,” I whispered his name when I looked at his license. I knew that his name wasn’t no damned Roy! I chuckled to myself.

Quickly, I took a picture of his license as well as pictures of his credit cards. I had plans to shop all on his dime. Sure, he may be paying \$700 to pee on him but I had other plans for his credit cards.

When I heard that he was done showering, I quickly put his cards back in his wallet and shoved his clothes to the side.

Now, I had to go in the back and fuck this man that resembled a turtle. I hated my life but soon, I wasn’t going to be alone.

chapter
seven

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Logan

THE WEEKEND CAME and went so quickly that I wasn't sure if it were even real. Days faded into the night in a blur as I prayed my way out of this situation. My mind had been scattered the last few days and my memory was fuzzy. For Harlem's sake I tried to hold it together. I didn't want her to see me fall apart but I was slowly unraveling. This shit with this twin was driving me mad and the only way I was able to cope was with a bottle of wine.

Luckily, Harlem attended a sleepover this weekend which left me much time alone. Xavier hadn't been back to the house and only called to check in about Harlem. He wouldn't even tell me what hotel he was staying in and it was driving me crazy.

Despite his coldness, I was holding on to a shred of faith because I knew that it wasn't me in that video. I could never do something like that. I did as much research on my mother as possible, but of course, I couldn't find anything. The only thing I could find was the obituary that my grandmother paid to get into a newspaper. The obituary only mentioned me but no other children, and definitely not a husband.

The private investigator that Candace introduced me to wouldn't be able to speak to me until later in the week. For now, I was at a standstill with what I could do about this woman who was trying to ruin my life. I felt hopeless and depressed. And on top of those feelings, I was beginning to feel paranoid.

I knew that she was watching me. She was stalking me and waiting to make a move. I had no proof but my intuition was loud and clear. This bitch wasn't done with her antics. She had more tricks up her sleeve and I wanted to stop her before she made my life worse.

"Harlem! Come on, it's time to go to school," I announced as I stood at the counter sipping a cup of coffee with Bailey's Cream mixed in. As the days passed, I found myself drinking

much more than usual. It was the only thing that calmed my nerves.

“I’m ready,” she replied when she made her way downstairs.

I quickly tossed the rest of my coffee down my throat and made my way out of the house. Harlem settled into the backseat while I started the car. The morning news played in the background as I thought about where my twin sister could be. Was there any way I could reason with her once I finally found her? Could she be talked out of ruining my life.

“Police are still searching for Rue Massey...” Quickly I turned off the radio because I didn’t want Harlem going to school with that on her mind. She had already expressed fear about Rue being missing and I didn’t want to further traumatize her. Rue’s disappearance was disturbing enough for me, so I knew it was too much for a 9-year-old to handle.

And whenever I thought about Rue, I thought about Sabrina who went missing and was subsequently murdered. The fact that it happened in my Aunt’s neighborhood was even more unsettling.

I was already particular about Harlem not spending the night with my aunt because she can be too much of a disciplinarian but now she was never sleeping in that neighborhood again. It was obviously cursed for little girls.

“Have a good day at school,” I kissed her goodbye when we arrived at the school.

“You too, mommy,” she said before racing into the building.

I leaned against my truck and watched her disappear behind the doors. If anything were to happen to her, I would kill whoever did it with my bare hands. Inhaling deeply, I turned away to get back into my car but I was stopped by a familiar face before I could.

“Logan Dennis. Look at you,” Jasir McClain greeted me when he saw me. Jasir was a blast from the past. Someone I

knew before I met and married Xavier. We went to prom together but lost touch once I went away to school.

“It’s Medford now. Logan Medford,” I slyly smiled while holding up my 5-carat diamond ring.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Medford. You have a kid that goes here?” He asked nodding his head towards the school.

“I do. My daughter is in the fourth grade here. What about you?” I asked.

“No kids. The job doesn’t allow it,” he replied pointing to the police badge around his neck.

“You’re a cop. I don’t know how I missed the badge,” I responded, realizing that I was much tipsier than I thought.

“Detective. A couple of my coworkers were invited to speak to the kids about safety. You know... stranger danger.”

“Because of Rue Massey?” I asked.

“Yeah. This shit is sad. We’re doing our very best to bring her home safely but...”

“You think she’s dead?” I asked.

“I can’t say. We’re losing hope by the day though.”

“Is that your case?” I asked, hoping to pry him open for a quote for my show.

“It’s everyone’s case in the department at this point. All hands are on deck to bring her home,” he responded with a hint of sadness in his deep dark eyes.

As he continued to talk to me about the case, I sized him up and drank him in. Jasir had grown into a beautiful man since the last time I saw him. He was always attractive but now he packed on some grown man muscle weight. His sexy smile was no longer caged by braces and he had a pair of thick dark eyebrows that framed his inviting eyes.

Those old feelings begin to emerge and take over my body which felt odd. I hadn’t felt this way about Xavier in years but here I was lusting after this man that took me to prom when I was 17.

“Soooo... I’m thinking of bringing up her case to my show. Could I get a quote from you?” I asked as I stepped closer.

“I’m not allowed to speak to the press because we don’t want the kidnapper to know what we know. Which is nothing... But I meant to say this when I rolled up on you; congratulations on your show. When I saw the commercial I couldn’t help but smile. LoLo finally got herself on television.”

“Yeah, I feel like I’ve been trying to get on since I was a kid. All those damn pageants.”

“It paid off. I was hoping you hadn’t forgotten the little people,” he laughed, flashing his bright smile once more.

“I haven’t forgotten about you. How could I, you were the first boy I kissed,” I smiled.

“Back then... I also wanted to be the last,” he spoke, sending waves of fire down my spine.

“Wow... I, ugh, I...”

“You don’t have to say anything to that. I overstepped my boundaries. But I’m just happy that I got to see you in person after all this time. You look good.”

“You do too. Well, I have to head into the office and try to get Rue’s story heard. I really hope you all find her,” I said as I turned away to get into my car. I could sense that he wanted to speak a little bit longer but it was inappropriate. I was already in trouble with my husband and couldn’t afford to have someone seeing me talk to Jasir.

Besides, my twin could be lurking in the shadows somewhere ready to take pictures and send those to my husband. I couldn’t wait to get to the bottom of this so that I could clear my name and reputation with Xavier.

When I arrived in the office, Candace was behind her desk with the phone wedged between her ear and shoulder. Her hair was swept up into a ponytail, showing off a pair of small gold looped earrings. By the way she glanced at me then shifted her

eyes to her desk, let me know that she wasn't able to get the Rue story cleared.

Disappointed I shook my head and made my way into my office where I waited for Rico and Trenae to show up to get me ready for the show. While I sat in my chair, I gazed over my notes for the day and studied the show's topics. A chef was going to be demoing a few recipes and we were going to be reporting on all the upcoming award shows.

It was all fluffy shit. None of it was substantial or essential. We can talk about food and celebs but a child goes missing and we have to turn a blind eye? The entire country should be looking for Rue because if she's not looked for, it gives those kidnapers license to keep taking our children.

"Hey, sweetie. So, Chef Mase is fiiiiine. You're going to have fun interviewing him. I already met with him and he's very flirtatious. I think you two will have good chemistry," Candace said when she eased her way into my office.

"What about Rue Massey?" I asked, staring at her blankly. I didn't give a shit about Chef Mase and how good-looking he was.

"Girl, I tried. I told you I would try."

"And..."

"They said let network evening news handle this. We're an escape from the harsh realities of life. We do fun shit. If we start doing all the heavy shit, we'll lose our audience. And I can't lie Lo, I agree with them."

"Wow! Did you even really try?" My eyebrows collapsed towards one another as I eyed her intensely.

"Yes! I asked all the execs. Are you saying you don't believe me?"

"I'm just trying to figure out how you can say that you agree with them? What about that little girl and her family? And network news isn't reporting on it! I've only heard about it on the radio and on local news stations. We have a national platform..."

“What has gotten into you? You weren’t trying to do serious news a week ago. So what changed? Why is that little girl’s disappearance so upsetting to you?” She asked as she moved closer to me. She made me realize that I was speaking loudly by the way she began to speak between gritted teeth.

To be honest, I couldn’t put my finger on why I was so affected by Rue’s disappearance. It could be because it happened in the neighborhood where I grew up. It could be because she reminded me of Sabrina. Or perhaps I was tired of feeling powerless when it came to my own life. Every other decision I made all came back to me remaining beautiful and making money. But speaking out about Rue was a decision to help free another black girl.

Whatever it was, my mind nor my body would let me go of her. Whether the Rhythm Network liked it or not, I was using my airtime to draw attention to Rue. I’d deal with the consequences later. Besides, what could be worse than my husband leaving me over a gang-bang I wasn’t in. Rhythm couldn’t do anything to me that was worse than that.

Three hours later, I was on air with very attractive Chef Mase. Standing at 6’4”, his muscular build towered over me as I stood beside him in an apron as he explained his technique for his mac-n-cheese. My heart raced as he talked about béchamel and breadcrumbs. I was praying that he would pause so that I could interject.

Mase was the last segment of my show and I didn’t want to lose my nerve. If I let this show end without me speaking on Rue, I would hate myself.

“Wow, thank you, Chef Mase. That looks so delicious. I never make mine with smoked gouda,” I said as he pulled a pre-made mac-n-cheese out of the oven. After I forked some in my mouth, I quickly swallowed before turning to face the camera.

“Chef Mase’s Homegrown cookbook is available now. You have to get this book for this one recipe alone. I just know that the rest of the recipes are delicious.”

“Oh, you’re in for a treat. Wait until you try my recipe for ribs...”

“I can’t wait but before we cut to commercial, I want to take a moment to draw awareness to a very important subject,” I interrupted Chef Mase. I could care less about his ribs. But my interruption sent a wave of discomfort through the crew. I could see beyond the lights that their eyes were bulging out of their heads, wondering what I was going to say next.

“Every year about 100,000 black women and girls go missing. Most of which are never returned home. Recently a little girl has gone missing just 15 miles from the Rhythm Studios offices. Her name is Rue Massey and she’s only 12. There’s been little to no national media coverage about this young lady, despite the rise of human trafficking across state lines. I will be going live on my Facebook tonight to discuss ways in which you can help bring her home. Follow me at Logan Medford. Also, begin to demand that your local governments take the disappearance of young black girls seriously. Sex traffickers and kidnappers know that no one is looking for these girls which is why they choose them as their victims. This has to end. Again, keep your eyes open and help bring home Rue Massey,” I said before signing off.

As soon as the red light on the end of the camera went off, Candace marched onto the set with rage shooting from her eyes. But I stood my ground firmly.

“What the fuck were you thinking?” She asked while staring at me harshly.

“I was thinking... Rue should be found and her capturers need to be brought to justice.” I smirked while walking off.

Speaking Rue’s name on-air, gave me a wave of relief. It was as if a huge burden had been lifted off my shoulders. But I knew it was the beginning of new problems.

chapter
eight

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Logan

WE PACED my office while we waited for one of the execs to arrive and lay down the gauntlet. I was wrong for how I went about it but I didn't care. It needed to be said and if I lose my job over this, then oh well.

“Are you in sabotage mode?” Candace asked as she shook her head.

“No. I told you how I felt. It's our responsibility to push these stories forward. If we don't do it, then who will?” I asked.

“When the hell did you start caring about shit like this? For the past two years, you've shown up, collected your check, and went home. Now all of a sudden you're diving into activism? I don't get it? We already mentor young girls in our non-profit, what more do you need to offer the world?”

“You don't understand. Rue was snatched from her neighborhood and taken God knows where. We have a problem with sex trafficking in this country. And no one values little black girls.”

“So, go to the news stations. Talk about it on your platform! Not on The Scene! Your ass isn't the only one on the line. We're a package deal and if they suspend you, it falls on me!” She barked and I understood where she was coming from but I said my piece.

“Let's just see what they say on the top floor.”

“Yeah, let's,” she rolled her eyes.

When I pulled out my phone I saw that my notifications were blowing up on every app. Text messages, Tweets, IG, and Facebook were shooting message after message to me. As I read them, I smiled because they were overwhelmingly positive. Everyone was thanking me for drawing awareness to Rue.

The follows on all my accounts and The Scene's shot up by the tens of thousands. Seeing those numbers made me feel justified in my decision to speak about Rue on-air. I prayed that at least one of those people who saw it would recognize her somewhere and call the police. The more eyes looking for her, the fewer places the kidnapers can stash her.

"Look," I handed my phone to Candace. As her eyes scanned the messages and notifications her expression began to soften.

"Wow. The public loved it," she acknowledged.

"Yes because I spoke the truth. A white girl goes missing, the entire world stops to look for her. A black girl goes missing, no one cares."

"That's not true," Paul one of the execs said as he pushed his way into my office. Paul was an older white man who always seemed to be in a rush to get out of the office. I had only spoken to him a few times since I had been at the Rhythm network but he never said more than two words to me. Typically Candace was my liaison to communicate with him. So I know that I messed up if he came down here from the 15th floor.

"Hey Paul. Look, I'm sorry but..."

"Candace came to us and asked us about this story and we were adamantly opposed to this."

"I'm sorry..." I tried to apologize.

"But you followed your gut and decided to go forward with it anyway. I respect that," he spoke in my direction.

Candace and I both dropped our defenses because we weren't expecting him to say that. I was expecting him to tell me I was suspended or worse, fired. Perhaps, I was even hoping to be fired. Sometimes I desperately wanted to walk away from this life I created because of all of the pressure that came along with it.

"Sooooo... we're not suspended?" Candace asked.

“No. However, don’t let this happen again. I just got off the phone with Damond Jordan, and he wants you to go forward this week and interview the family on air. Going forward, please do not pull any more stunts like this. I am willing to have a bi-weekly meeting with you about stories that you’d like to run. In our meetings, we can fully vet them and may even be able to evolve this show into being more socially conscious. Alright, ladies. I have to go smooth things out with some of the other execs,” Paul said before leaving the office.

As soon as he left, I squealed. “Did you hear that Candace? Damond Jordan wants us to go forward with this story!” I exclaimed. Damond was the owner of Rhythm and had little to no involvement in the shows. In addition to owning the network, he owned a tech company and a few restaurants. He was super busy and was only concerned about making money. To hear him say he wanted us to go forward with the story meant that he could make money from it. Which I didn’t mind. Whatever got the attention on Rue.

“You lucked up,” she said as she sank into the chair on the opposite side of my desk.

“Come on, let me take you out for a drink,” I laughed.

“Yeah, that’s the least you could do for trying to give me a heart attack. Shit! I need some Xanax,” she complained as she rolled her eyes.

“Here, I have one in my desk,” I responded while pulling out the bottle of pills and handing it over to her.

An hour later we were at happy hour at a chic bar downtown called The Lair. It was Xavier’s day to pick Harlem up from school which gave me some time to catch up with my girl after work. Candace and I were extremely close but I couldn’t bring myself to tell her about that sex tape. She would probably judge me and not even believe that it was my long lost sister.

“Don’t ever pull that shit again,” she said, pulling a martini glass to her lips. I watched as her neck tightened as the burning alcohol washed down her throat.

“I promise I won’t. I just can’t stop thinking about that little girl. Like, if it made sense I would be out there with a flashlight looking for her.”

“Hmmm... Do you think that it has something to do with Sabrina? Have you talked to your therapist about that?”

“Nah. Not yet. I’ll bring it up to her when we meet next week. I’m sure it has everything to do with Sabrina.”

“Yeah, that was a traumatizing experience. Your best friend was raped and murdered when you two were only ten years old. I can’t imagine how that must have been for you.”

“Let’s drop it,” I spoke as I downed my glass of Riesling.

Thinking about Sabrina always stirred the emotions in my chest, making my heart thump harder and my entire body shake. They never found her murderer which always scared me to death. If that could happen to her, then it could happen to me. And now it may be happening to Rue.

“Fine. Did you get in contact with Gavin my PI?” She asked, changing the subject.

“I did, he’s not available to meet until the end of the week.”

“You really think you have a long-lost sister, huh?” Her eyes narrowed on me suspiciously.

“It’s farfetched but yeah I do.”

“If she’s out there Gavin will find her. But I think you’re lying to me,” she said before motioning the bartender over to pour her another drink.

“Lying about what?”

“The real reason that you want a P.I.”

“Why do you think I want one?”

“Because of Xavier. You want out of the marriage and you think he’s cheating on you. It’s clear as day. And I don’t blame you because he’s an asshole. I never liked his bougie ass. What kind of black man doesn’t like thick booties. He put you on that diet. Had you out here drinking spinach and strawberry

juice. Threw a fit when you cut your hair. I don't know how you've lasted this long."

"Ha!" I erupted into laughter. "Girl, I am not worried about him cheating. I promise I hired the P.I. because of my sister. However, Xavier has asked me for a divorce."

"Why?"

"It's a long story but I'll tell you one day," I responded.

"Girl, fuck him! I'm glad he wants to divorce you. Take half of his money and move on with a real man that can at least fuck you good. Xavier looks like the type of nigga that counts strokes while he's inside you. Ugh, I hate him."

"Stop!" I laughed. "I don't want to divorce him though. He's the father of my child."

"Okay and he'll still be Harlem's father. Why do you have to be married to him for that to happen?"

"I just... I'm not ready to be alone," I responded while taking another sip.

"I get it but wouldn't you rather be alone and at peace than to be married to a man that won't even allow you to be yourself?" She asked.

"I guess."

"Think about it. He won't let you pursue your candle-making business. He won't let you eat desserts. He can't fuck! He treats you like a prop to show off in front of his colleagues. You should want better for yourself and Harlem. She deserves a mother who is truly respected and loved," Candace encouraged.

"You got a lot of wisdom today Ms. Iyanla Vanzant," I said while laughing in her direction.

"Well after the near-death experience you gave me today, I've reached enlightenment," she chuckled.

For the rest of happy hour, we continued to talk about everything else under the sun but I couldn't bring myself to tell her about the sex tape. I would never be able to tell anyone

about it. It was too embarrassing to share with even my best friend.

Even though it wasn't me, I had no way to prove that it wasn't yet. Maybe when I track down my twin, I will share with Candace how the bitch tried to ruin my life. But for now, I wasn't saying a word. Instead, I would just pray that Gavin could help me with tracking her down.

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chapter
nine

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Logan

AS I DROVE HOME while listening to Summer Walker, I felt a sense of peace fall over me. The clouds opened up and rain began to pour washing away the angst of the day. There was something about going off on a tangent while filming live. It caused my thoughts about Rue, my twin, Xavier, and Sabrina to be put to rest. Maybe I released some pent-up energy by going rogue on-air. For once, I wasn't afraid to stand up for myself. Well, I stood up for Rue.

Perhaps being validated by Paul and Damond helped me relax. Everyone knew that I was good at what I did while being on-air but I never had the execs back me up in this way. This was the first time in a while that I felt like I was doing the right thing and I wanted to revel in it.

When I pulled up to the home that my husband and I had built together, that peace that was in my soul flew out the window. Anxiety began to creep into my body, tangling my guts and twisting my lungs. Barely able to breathe, I fought for air before I reached for the car handle. What was on the other side of my front door waiting for me? I used to know but ever since *that day*, I know nothing anymore.

Even though I was certain that it wasn't me in the sex tape, it didn't matter. Xavier was convinced it was me and I couldn't blame him. She looked a whole lot like me. I knew that if I were able to prove my innocence that it wouldn't change much. Our relationship was tainted beyond repair. Although, sometimes I'm not sure it was ever a good relationship. As bad as I wanted for us to stay together for the sake of our daughter, Candace made some very good points.

When I sat down and thought about it, we weren't compatible. That stress that I felt in my stomach and my chest was my body coming to the realization that Xavier didn't belong together. Our marriage was based on aesthetics. For him, I was a prop. A doll he could tote around. A beauty-

queen wife to show off at office parties and fundraising galas. I gave him a gorgeous daughter to make his family proud.

However, my needs and desires didn't matter to him. For years, I had been telling him I wanted to start a body care and candle business. And that I'd rather be out of the spotlight. Whenever I mentioned this, he shot me down saying that I wasn't business-minded. That I needed to focus on being a good example for Harlem. That he wasn't going to let me sit at home and make soap.

Even cutting my hair turned into a weeklong fiasco where he didn't speak to me unless it involved Harlem.

"Women's hair should be long. You look like a man. This isn't what I signed up for. You don't have the right head for that..." Those were his words when I came home with my pixie cut that fit my face better than my long hair. I kept my hair long for the pageants but that was no longer my life. I wanted a new look. A brand new identity.

Finally, I mustered the strength to get out of the car. The walk towards the front door felt like a million miles in a hot desert but there was no sun. That's just how bad my anxiety was about going home. Heat radiated from my core and spread throughout my limbs as I dragged my nervous body up the stairs to our front door. Sweat began to drip from my pits and palms in anticipation of what was on the other side. The rain couldn't cool me down. Instead, it seemed to sizzle on top of my skin.

If I could avoid speaking to Xavier and simply hug my child and then go to bed, I would be alright. There was nothing either of us had to say to one another. Not until I proved that my twin was the one who had made that sex tape.

As soon as I walked through the door, I noticed something odd. Several of my suitcases were sitting in the foyer as if they were waiting for me. Confused, I opened one and saw that it was stuffed with my clothes.

"What the hell? Harlem? Xavier?" I called out but no one responded. That wasn't like Harlem but I expected such behavior from Xavier. If Harlem were home she would've

responded to her name, so she must have been back at Olivia's.

I walked through the house until I got to Xavier's office where he was sitting at his desk. The lights were off in the room and it was completely silent. He was being extremely weird because I knew that he could hear me enter the room.

"Why is my stuff packed downstairs?" My voice broke. The room remained silent but he turned around in the swivel chair to face me. The blank look written across his mug was hard to read.

"Where's Harlem?" I questioned. Still more silence. What in the hell was going on, I wondered.

"Say something," I urged.

He stood up from his chair without his mouth opening and walked towards me. His stride was menacing as he stomped up to my body. Before I could get another word in, he cocked his hand back and slapped me across my face so hard that I fell to the ground.

Xavier had knocked the thoughts out of my head. I swore I could see them scrambling around the floor trying to make sense. Tears raced down my face as I held my sore cheek in disbelief that my husband had hit me.

He was a lot of things but he had never laid a hand on me. What the fuck had gotten into him? I sobbed as I tried to collect myself but I couldn't find the mental strength to stand to my two feet and confront him. I was in a state of shock and was paralyzed by the blow to my face and ego.

"You will never ever see Harlem again!" He barked.

"Why? What did I do? I told you I was looking for my sister."

"You have disgraced me and this family. You've embarrassed me and taken shit way too far today. What is it? You needed some more attention?!"

"What are you talking about? Are you talking about the show today? About what I did on-air?"

“Oh, did you have a gang-bang on-air today?” He questioned.

“No! I told you that wasn’t me!” I cried.

“Fuck you bitch! I gave you the world! And you disrespect me by sending that disgusting filth to the other partners at my law firm! Are you out of your fucking mind? Is this some early on-set mid-life crisis!?” He shouted as he stood over me. In fear that he would kick me, I curled into a tight ball and tucked my head.

“What are you talking about? I never sent anything,” I cried.

“You are insane. You sent that filth from your email address and now you want to play clueless. This has ruined my reputation. You and I are done. And I’m getting full custody of Harlem,” he replied before stepping over me and walking out of the office.

“No! Wait, Xavier,” I cried as I scrounged myself off the floor. The stinging of my face spread throughout my body, hitting me in my chest.

“Everything! I gave you everything. You could have anything you wanted. And you do this!? You are crazy. I wish I never met your ratchet ass. You ain’t shit but a cleaned-up garbage can!”

“Please, Xavier! Please! It wasn’t me. I never recorded that video. I would never do that to you nor our child!” I cried.

“You don’t have a child. You might as well forget her name! You will never see her again!” He reiterated.

“It wasn’t me! No, stop!” I screamed.

“Get your shit and get out. We are getting divorced and if you try to challenge me on custody, I will tell everyone about what you like to do when I’m not looking.”

“Xavier what do I have to do to prove that it wasn’t me. I have a sister out there. She is trying to ruin my life on purpose. Please listen to me,” I cried but he ignored me. He grabbed my bags and began to throw them outside in the rain.

My tears were like hot lava as they slid down my face but he didn't care. I begged and pleaded but he wouldn't listen.

"Get out!" I shouted while standing in the doorway pointing outside.

"I'm not leaving my home. I did not record this video. You have to believe me," I cried.

"You're getting the fuck out of here today!" He said as he grabbed me by my neck and threw me outside in the rain. Sobbing, I landed on my hands and knees. He quickly went back into the house and locked the door behind me. I stood to my feet and banged on the door since my keys were still inside.

"I need my keys!" I cried to Xavier. "Please!" My head was spinning as I screamed and knocked on the door like a madwoman. This couldn't be happening to me.

He said that I could never see my daughter again. My baby! He was out of his fucking mind. I was going to solve this mystery and I was getting custody of Harlem. While I had no plan, I was still determined.

"XAVIER! MY KEYS!" I screamed.

In a matter of moments, he opened the door but this time he had a handgun pointing at me. As I stared down the barrel of the gun, I slowly backed away from the door. This nigga wanted to kill me. All because of a lie. Seeing the gun ceased my tears from falling as I stood there in shock. The rain had picked up, washing out my hair and make-up. Luckily our closest neighbor was too far away to see any of this. One of the perks of living in this bougie neighborhood.

"Get the fuck off my property and never come here again," Xavier said as he threw my keys past me. They landed next to my car. He went back inside and locked the door while I gathered my suitcases and placed them in the back of my truck.

When I finally settled into the driver's seat, I grabbed onto the steering wheel and then hit my head against it a few times.

I didn't want to drive in the rain while I was still crying. That sounded like a recipe for a horrendous car accident.

Using the deep breathing tools I learned in therapy, I worked on getting myself together so that I could drive to a hotel. Eventually, I calmed down and made my way to the Ritz in Pentagon City. I chose it because it wasn't too far from the office and it was recently remodeled. After everything I've been through, I deserved some luxury.

As I drove with the windshield wipers moving back and forth quickly, I thought about how much I hated my long-lost sister. This bitch truly did wake up and chose violence. Sending the tape to my husband wasn't enough but she had to go embarrass me by sending it to his colleagues. It made no fucking sense.

I used to think, that once I got to the bottom of this I would attempt a relationship with her. Obviously, she is a very hurt and damaged woman. But now, when I meet her I'm going to beat her ass. It was one thing to fuck up my marriage but to get me banned from seeing my child was a different story. That shit warranted death. I'm no killer but she crossed the fucking line and I was going make her pay for what she did. No matter what, she was walking away with her life just as fucked as she did mine.

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chapter
ten

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Lola

AWWWWWW POOR LITTLE baby got kicked out of her mansion into the rain. Finally, my plan was working! I thought that her husband would've kicked her when he first saw the tape but nah, he kept her around. That's when I knew I needed to up the ante and get that tape in front of more eyes, starting with his colleagues.

That move was guaranteed to end their sham of a marriage. Now he was free to be with that bitch he was cheating on her with while she was free to do whatever she wanted. Which wouldn't be much because I wasn't done ruining her life. Having her husband kick her out wasn't enough. There needed to be more for me to feel vindicated for the life she got to live but I didn't.

I still think she should be thanking me for ending her marriage. That man was cheating and didn't fuck with her like that. I could just tell by looking at their pictures that she was just a plaything for him. I saved her from that but I was about really fuck her life up.

Since they took my daughter away from me, I was going to make sure she never saw that little girl again. I think she could benefit from spending some time in jail. I cackled to myself while sitting at the bar of a hotel in DC.

I was hanging outside of her neighborhood all evening waiting for her to come home. When I saw her pull through the gates, I knew that it was a matter of time before she would be driving right back out. She was probably too distraught to even notice that I followed her to the Ritz. And then posing as her, I went back up to the front desk and asked for the number just so I could know exactly where she would be.

I had to laugh at the fact that the hotel staff did a double-take when they saw the wig. "Oh you got ready quickly," the lady said to me.

The reality is, I stayed ready.

After I left the Ritz I went into the city to a bar inside another hotel. It was one of those bars, I frequented because there was always some lonely Capitol Hill staffer needing a pick me up before he goes back home to his boring family. Usually, I would put make-up on and something cute then sit here for about an hour or two. I've never left this bar without a client.

While I waited for someone to pick me up, I decided to make some purchases using "Roy" also known as Sherman McLaughlin's credit card. That was the John that paid me to piss on him the other night. He was so foul for that but that's okay, I was about to get double compensated. I had three credit card numbers and I was about to max those babies out! Men like him usually had high credit lines so I was going to take advantage.

I ordered a refrigerator, a stereo system, new Louis Vuitton purses, Balenciaga shoes, and a new wardrobe from Nordstrom. I had it all delivered to Logan Medford's house. I also had it addressed to her. The thought of all that shit arriving on her doorstep made me cackle out loud. Her husband was going to be so confused and he would waste no time telling the cops where she was.

Sherman was going to see the charges and report them in a heartbeat. They would lock Logan away for wire theft. This was going to be hilarious. Knowing Xavier, he was never going to let her see that child again.

"Logan?" I heard a man call me her name at the bar. When I turned to look at him, I saw that it was an older white man wearing a grey suit. Rather than tell him the truth, I took this as an opportunity to further ruin this bitches life.

"Yes but I'm so sorry, I've forgotten your name," I replied.

"Of course you did. We met a couple of years ago at a Medford, Lang & Johnson Christmas party. I'm Richard Shineback. Your husband is my attorney. You know for my corporation, Shineback Tech," he replied. Logan's husband was a corporate lawyer and here was one of his clients and colleagues. Oh, this was about to get interesting.

“Ohhhh right. I’m sorry. I meet so many people through my husband,” I laughed.

“No worries and I like what you’ve done with your hair. It’s different,” he said commenting on the blonde tresses that I sported.

“Thank you! I’m just trying something different.”

“It suits you. Can I buy you a drink?” He asked and I was wide open for the opportunity to do further damage to Logan’s life.”

“Sure, I’ll have whatever you’re drinking. I’ve been sipping on wine tonight but you look like you drink something stronger,” I commented.

“Oh, I do. Can you get me two LouisXIII on rocks?” he asked the bartender.

“Were you working late tonight?” I asked as I finished off the wine before the bartender gave us cognac.

“Yeah, I just closed a huge deal. I’m so happy that I ran into you so that I could celebrate. I can’t believe Xavier lets you out this late by yourself.”

“We’re separated. It’s rough but it’ll be okay,” I smiled while staring into his eyes.

“Wow, I’m so sorry to hear that you. You two looked so happy last year.”

“You know a lot can change in a year,” I said seductively. Since I was wearing a skin-tight red dress and a pair of fuck-me heels, I decided to take it further. I was on the prowl for a new client but why not make Xavier’s client my mark for the night. This would certainly seal Logan’s fate. Thank God we were identical twins.

“I’m sorry to hear that. Are you two still living together?” He asked as he brought the glass to his paper-thin lips.

“He threw me out. Isn’t that crazy?” I responded in an attempt to make him sympathetic.

“That’s no way to treat a beautiful woman like yourself. Do you need anything? Money?”

“Yeah, he locked me out of my bank accounts.”

“That bastard! I can send you some money right now. I always knew he didn’t appreciate you. Would like me to CashApp you?”

“Yes, please. And you’re right, he’s never fully appreciated me. I can’t believe it’s taken me until now to realize it,” I replied while pulling out my phone and showing him my CashApp QR code. To ensure that he gave me as much money as possible, I even mustered up a few tears.

A lone tear trickled down my face as he sent me \$1000 via CashApp. I was stunned at the amount which let me know that he had been lusting over Logan for a while. And I knew that he was going to be expecting pussy for his generosity.

“Wow, thank you. I think this is too much though. You didn’t have to do all of this,” I responded.

“Nonsense. You deserve much more than what Xavier has done for you. If I weren’t married I’d scoop you up in a heartbeat. You know what? Now that I think about it, I’m going to fire him. It’s about time I sought out new counsel,” he said while shaking his head.

“Oh, you don’t have to do that.” I wasn’t convincing. I truly didn’t care if Xavier lost business. He was cheating on my sister after all. Even though I didn’t like Logan, I hated that he got to walk all over her.

“Consider it done. With what he charges me, he should be taking care of you. But if you ever need anything don’t be afraid to ask.”

“Thank you, Richard. I wish there was some way that I could repay you,” I said as I stroked his hand.

“Oh you don’t have to...” he replied while turning red.

“I want to. How about you get us a room for a couple of hours,” I suggested.

“My wife is expecting me...”

“It’s after 11. Is she still up?” I challenged him. I needed to fuck him so that I could destroy Logan’s reputation. And I intended on taking pictures and sending them to Xavier letting him know that two can play *that* game

“You’re right. I just... I’ve never done anything like this, Logan.”

“Me either but I could use the company. It’s been really hard for me ever since he kicked me out.” I forced more crocodile tears to flow from my eyes to accompany my lies.

“Let’s go get a room.” He winked, giving into me.

After he paid for the tab he booked a room on the top floor. To ensure that he became hooked and fixated on Logan, I pulled all of the tricks from my bag. I fucked and sucked Richard in ways that he never knew were possible. I made him tremble as he screamed out my name in ecstasy. Well, Logan’s name.

I intended to leave my imprint on his brain. I wanted him to be so obsessed with Logan that he stalked her and wouldn’t let her go. I knew that I achieved that after he came. He laid in bed, staring at the ceiling as if he had been resurrected from death. His whole aura had shifted. He was much more composed and serious when he first walked into the bar but now he was at ease.

“You. Are. Amazing,” he breathed heavily while looking upwards as if angels were dancing around him.

“Thank you. Too bad Xavier can’t see it.”

“He’s a fool. Tell me, what else do you need?” Richard sat up and looked at me with intensity.

“Not much right now.”

“You tell me the word and I’ll be there for you. I feel a spark with you that I’ve never felt. Not even with my wife. I have to see you again,” he spoke with fervor while cupping my hand.

“Sure, I’ll let you know when I’m available.”

“Where have you been staying?” He asked.

“At the Ritz until I find a place.”

“I’ll cover it. I’ll wire you more money tomorrow from my private account. I have to be careful because Janet still checks our accounts,” he said as he caressed my thigh.

“Wow, Richard. I do appreciate it. This is going to make a big difference in how I transition in my divorce.”

“No worries, darling. Now, I do have to leave. Feel free to stay here tonight. I’m busy over the next few days but I’ll be in touch about when we can spend time together again. Here’s my number...”

After I entered his number on my phone he got dressed and kissed me on my forehead before leaving.

“Fuck!” I thought to myself when I realized that I forgot to take pictures of us while fucking. I was going to have to use him in other ways to get back Logan and Xavier. At least Xavier would be losing a high-paying client. It’s what that cheating motherfucka’ deserves.

While I laid in bed I decided to push my destructive agenda further. I whipped out my phone and forwarded the gang-bang video to multiple news and blog sites. By the morning Logan would no longer have her job and probably not any friends. She would never see her daughter again either.

Smiling from ear to ear, I leaned back into the plush pillows and fell asleep knowing that my work was just about complete. I was finally succeeding in bringing Logan down to my level.

chapter
eleven

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Logan

WHEN I WOKE up the next morning, I could barely move due to how painful my head was banging. My mouth was so dry that I felt as if opening it too wide would cause the skin to split. It took several moments for my vision to become clear underneath the darkness of the room. Wiping the blurriness away, I got out of bed and pushed the sunblocking shades open.

Sunlight rushed through the room blinding me but unveiling the mess of a night I had. Several mini bottles of liquor rested on the bed with me. They were my lovers for the night. Apparently, I had gotten so drunk that I don't even remember falling asleep.

When I picked up my cell phone I saw that I had twenty missed calls and that I had called Olivia 10 times. I knew that I called her that many times in an attempt to speak with Harlem. I noticed that she sent me a text message telling me that she was blocking me and for me to stop calling her.

“Fuck!” I shouted. What in the hell else did I do?

Judging by the multiple missed calls from Candace and Aunt Veronica it was something huge. Before I addressed what they had to say, I decided to drink a bottle of water, wash my face and brush my teeth. I needed to attempt to look alive and alert even though I felt like shit.

First, I returned Candace's call. While I waited for her to pick up, I brewed a pot of coffee because it seemed like it was going to be one of those days where I needed an enormous amount of caffeine.

“GIRL! HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!” Candace shouted into the phone forcing me to wince.

“Why are you yelling at me?” I whined as I clutched my forehead.

“You are in fucking trouble! Where the hell are you?”

“I’m staying at the Ritz in Pentagon City. What happened?”

“I’m coming to you right now.”

“What the hell happened!?”

“Someone leaked a sex tape of you! It’s everywhere! I’ll forward it to you right now.”

My heart stopped beating in my chest and my knees trembled. The wind escaped my lungs as I stumbled to the tiny office chair in the hotel. I could feel that I was hyperventilating and about to have a panic attack. Tears burned a trail of fire down my face as I rocked back and forth. This bitch leaked the tape to the public?

I should’ve known that she would do some shit like that. She was on a mission to ruin my life. She was already escalating by sending it to Xavier’s partners but now this?! When I found that bitch, I was killing her! There was no room for reconciliation. I was ending that bitch’s life.

“Hello?! Are you there?!” Candace questioned.

“Yeah,” I responded dryly, too upset to respond properly.

“There is a sex tape of you getting fucked by four men! What were you thinking!?”

“I’ll explain when you get here.”

“So you knew this tape existed.”

“I’m at the Ritz in room 1215. Message me when you get here,” I responded before hanging up the phone.

I got up from the chair and then crashed onto the bed thinking about how this bitch I had never met was ruining my life. And for what? Jealousy? It was so stupid that she would go to such lengths to destroy me. Had she reached out to me I would’ve supported her in any way possible.

By now everyone knew about the tape. It was probably plastered all over the news and blog sites. If Candace had it

that meant Olivia knew. This probably made Xavier hate me even more than he did already.

For a split second, I thought that perhaps he was the one to release it but that doesn't make sense. Xavier was all about protecting his honor. Having the tape sent to his partners did enough damage. Maybe one of them spread it? It didn't matter, the tape was out there. I was never getting custody of my daughter. And I was probably going to lose my job.

My phone rang again, jolting me out of my thoughts. It was my aunt calling for the 7th time this morning.

"Hey, Auntie." My voice trembled in fear of what she was about to say to me.

"What were you thinking? You did this to your family? Your husband? Your child?" I could tell that she had been crying by the way her voice cracked.

"It's not me," I whimpered.

"What do you mean? It looks like you!"

"I put this on my daughter's life, I never engaged in a gang bang and recorded it. Never! It wasn't me. I asked you weeks ago if you thought I had a long-lost twin sister. And this is why. She sent that tape to Xavier first. Then his partners and now the world," I cried.

"What?"

"It's not me. I promise! I would never do this to you! I would never do this to myself! I would never risk losing my daughter! She's out there and she has it in for me!"

"You don't have a sister!"

"You don't know that! I was found in the garbage! They don't anything about my mother nor if she had more children. She could've given birth to twins. Hell, it could be an older sister who I look a lot alike. You don't know shit!" I screamed.

"You really think you have a sister?" I heard my aunt's voice calm down.

“Yes! Why would I do some trash like this? I’ve worked so hard to build this life I have. Why would I destroy it like that? That video was disgusting,” I protested.

“Okay... I’m sorry. It’s just so crazy. We’re going to get to the bottom of this. I promise. Where are you now?”

“Staying at the Ritz. Xavier put me out yesterday when the tape was sent to his partners.”

“Oh, this is bad. What did he say?”

“He wants a divorce and he never wants me to see Harlem again. I have to find this bitch. She’s ruining my life,” I whimpered.

Just as those words left my mouth, someone knocked on the door. As expected it was Candace. I let her in while the phone was pressed between my shoulder and my ear.

“Auntie I’m going to call you back. Candace just got here,” I said before hanging up.

“I’ve been on the phone with HR, Paul, and Damond all morning. This thing is everywhere! It’s even being talked about on the national news! It’s gone beyond just gossip blogs.”

“Isn’t that ironic. A sex tape makes national news but not the disappearance of a little girl?” I said with my voice full of snark while I poured a cup of coffee.

“Now is not the time to get cute!” Candace chastised me.

“Coffee?” I offered as I tried to collect my thoughts. I hated that I had to repeat myself about this not being me in the video. It was starting to make me feel crazy as if I were lying. But I wasn’t. It wasn’t me.

“Yeah even though I’ve already had red-eye. Listen, they are suspending you pending an investigation.”

“Why? It’s not even me!”

“The morality clause and it’s seen as distracting. And what do you mean it isn’t you?” She asked quizzically while retrieving the cup of coffee from me.

“Remember when I asked you about the P.I.? I said that I think I have a sister out there?”

“Uh-huh?” She responded while raising her eye in skepticism.

“This is why...”

I explained to her how long ago I had first seen the tape and the escalation of events. The more I spoke with passion, the more she began to believe me. At some point, I watched her eyes tear up as she listened to me break down and swear that it wasn't me. It made me feel less crazy that she believed me.

“I don't even know what to say?” Candace spoke while wiping her eyes.

“It's been the most frustrating thing ever. She's going out of her way to destroy my life. And for what? When Xavier told me that I couldn't see Harlem ever again I nearly lost my mind. I broke down! He threw me out in the rain yesterday.”

“Oh, that explains the bird's nest on your head. I've never seen you look so rough,” she smiled. Her playful insult forced me to giggle because it was true.

No one has ever caught me slipping and looking a mess before. Years of being in pageants made me perfect my beauty. Perfection was the standard and anything less meant that I was a failure. And right now I was the ultimate failure.

“We'll put out a statement that says we're taking some time to investigate this. But you can't go on the air right now. Not until we find this bitch and make her pay for attempting to ruin you. You aren't ruined. This is just a hiccup,” Candace stated firmly while looking into my eyes.

“Thank you for believing me.”

“Of course. Why wouldn't I? I'm sorry I ever thought you were capable of something like this. But it makes sense. Your mother was out there doing God knows what. Your family didn't adopt you until months after you were found in the garbage. We've been friends since college and you've never

had a hoe phase. I believe you because I know you,” she said sweetly.

“Go tell that to my husband. He thinks I’m the scum of the fuckin’ earth right now.”

“Perhaps this is a blessing in disguise. He’s never been the right one for you. He’s never seen you for who you truly are.” She spoke nothing but facts. I think it’s a stretch to say this was a blessing. I would’ve much rather had ended the relationship and gotten full custody of my daughter than to be ousted from my home. It was going to take a lot of work to prove that I was a fit mother but I was determined to do so. No one was going to love Harlem the way that I did and she deserved her mother’s love.

“I’m going to call Gavin right now so that he can get to the bottom of this. I’m shocked he hasn’t met with you yet.”

“He said he was very busy.”

“Fuck that. He’ll do anything for me,” she smiled before dialing his number.

I finished off the cup of coffee and scrolled through my phone while she waited to connect with Gavin. I received a barrage of texts and social media messages from old pageant friends, college colleagues, and previous co-workers telling me that I was disgusting and an awful human being for what I did to myself and my family.

But there was one message in my DMs that I received that shocked me. It was from Jasir, the cop that I ran into at my daughter’s school the other day.

“Hey, beautiful. I just heard the news and I wanted to reach out to you to let you know that I’m here if you need anything. This seems way out of character for you and I’m someone you can lean on if you need to talk. I’m truly sorry about this shit. You don’t deserve for your business to be spread out in the world to see. Hit me when you get a chance if that feels good to you. 301 343-7847”

Seeing his message brought a smile to my face because it was the only one that wasn’t ripping me a new asshole. He

was the only person who had something positive to say and didn't judge me. I was calling him once I spoke to Gavin.

"Hey, Gavin this is Candace Stevenson. My girl has been trying to get with you about some work she needs you to do but we need you now," she greeted after placing him on speakerphone.

"Hey Candy. I just got back in town from vacation with my wife. Is this your friend who believes she has long lost sister?"

"Yeah. Her name is Logan Medford. Her twin sister recorded a sex tape and released it to the world. She has to find this bitch so that she can clear her name," Candace spoke.

"That's awful. I'm free this afternoon. Is Logan available to meet for lunch? I can come to her,"

"I'm available this afternoon. Where do you want me to meet you, Logan?"

"We can meet at the bar at the Ritz. How is 1:00 pm?"

"Works for me. I'll see you then," he said before disconnecting the call.

"Thank you for calling him, Candace."

"No worries. I want this fixed just as badly as you do. You don't deserve this shit. Hopefully, we can get this bitch arrested for what she's pulling. I'm so disgusted," she said while shaking her head.

"Me too. It's just unbelievable that your flesh and blood would go out of her way and do something like this."

"Self-hatred is one helluva drug. That bitch is so damn miserable that she wants to make everyone around her miserable."

"Well, I have to go into the office and restructure the show since you won't be on for a while. I'll call you afterward to see how everything went with Gavin," she said before hugging me.

When she left I hopped in the shower to wash away the muck of the morning. I had to pull it together so that I could get my life back. One day soon everyone will know that I had a fucking twin and that bitch was a psycho.

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chapter
twelve

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Logan

DRESSED in a pair of high-waist skinny jeans, a white bodysuit, a black blazer, and a pair of black leopard print flats, I was ready to meet with Gavin. Fortunately, I managed to salvage my hair which had been ruined by the rain and I slept without a scarf. It wasn't perfect but it was much better than that cockatoo shit I had on my head this morning.

I smeared on some lip gloss and took one more glance in the mirror. Once I approved of my look, I headed downstairs to meet with Gavin. My hangover was slowly dissipating since I had been downing bottles of water, Gatorade, and had some Advil. However, my stomach still churned and twisted in discomfort. I needed to eat something.

When I arrived at the bar, I found a table that was off to the back. I preferred more privacy while talking to Gavin about this sensitive subject. At 1:00 pm, the bar was empty except for one other table. While waiting for him to arrive I ordered a chicken noodle soup and a Caesar salad to soothe my hangover hunger pains.

However, my nerves were shot. I was anxious about what he would say regarding my twin sister. On the phone, he seemed like he believed me but I was worried that he could have a change of heart. As I waited with anticipation, I responded to Jasir's message from earlier.

"Thank you for reaching out to me without judging me. This situation is a mess and this tape is a set-up. I know who did it. And I'm working on bringing her to justice," I responded.

In a flash, he wrote back, "Who set you up?"

"My twin sister."

"Do you need help finding her?"

"I'm meeting with a private investigator in a few."

“I can help in any way you need. Can I take you out to dinner?” He offered.

“Sure. I’m staying at the Ritz.”

“I’ll pick you up at 7.”

“That works for me.”

“Logan?” I heard a man’s voice say from above me. When I looked up I saw a tall older gentleman with a cabby hat fitted on his head. He was dark-skinned with a well-trimmed gray beard.

“Gavin?” I asked.

“Yes, nice to meet you,” he said while shaking my hand before sitting down.

“Likewise. I ordered something light. Is that okay with you?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. So tell me about yourself? Where are you from?” He asked as he pulled out his notepad and pen.

“I was born in Richmond, VA in 1986. My mother was named Leah Jefferson and she was originally from DC. She was born in 1958. When she was 18 she started doing drugs and eventually ran away to live in Richmond. She died from sepsis because leftover pieces of the placenta were in her body. She threw me in the garbage when I was a week old. And she was found not too long after that.”

“Wow,” he said while breaking from taking notes and looking up at me. Tears scrolled down my cheek as I recanted my origination story. I never got used to telling people that my mother threw me away at just 7 days old.

“Yeah... I was crack dependent and I was in the NICU for months. Eventually, the hospital was able to find Aunt Veronica and Uncle Charles. They came and adopted me.”

“Did the hospital mention the possibility of another child?”

“No, who knows if she threw my sister somewhere else.” My voice cracked.

“Did your aunt know any of your mother’s friends?”

“Nope. They didn’t know about any of her life since she cut them off. Nobody knows anything,” I sobbed.

“Do you remember where your mother’s body was found?”

“I can ask my aunt?” I replied, trying to soothe myself. But the tears wouldn’t stop rushing my face.

“Give her a call.”

My fingers trembled as I picked up the phone to dial my aunt. While I was calling her the server brought my soup and salad. She then asked Gavin if he wanted anything and he ordered a coke and French fries.

“Hey, Logan. What’s going on?”

“Do you know where they found my mother’s body?”

“Oh baby I don’t remember exactly but there was an article written in the Richmond Times about it. She was found at a crackhouse. If you look up mother found and house raided 1986 something should come up,” she suggested.

“Thanks.”

As soon as I ended the call I did some Googling and there it was. An article about my mother that I had never seen before. It mentioned a woman dying of sepsis inside a house that drug users occupied. Several arrests were made and it listed the names in the paper.

“Here, check this out,” I said to Gavin as I slid my phone to him.

He begins to read it and nods his head. “Can I send this to myself?”

“Go ahead.”

“This is good. I could get some solid leads from this. Is there anything else that you know about your mother?”

“No, that’s all,” I said as I swiped the tears away from my face.

“I’m going to find your sister. Your mother could’ve thrown you away and sold her. There are so many things that could have happened to your sister. The ‘80s was a crazy decade and we didn’t have technology the way that we do now. I’m going to be traveling to Richmond tomorrow. I’ll keep you posted.”

“I appreciate you.”

“I know this is going to seem awkward for you but can you send me the video. I have some ex CIA buddies that used to work in the tech department who may be able to trace where the video originated,” he said.

“The crazy thing is. I don’t even have the video,” I responded.

“No worries. It’s out there. I’ll find it. Listen, I know this is hard for you right now but you’re going to get through this. I’ve seen cases like this where long-lost family members enact some kind of revenge out of jealousy.”

“I know that’s what it is,” I responded while wiping the tears away.

We chatted and ate a bit more before he headed out to start working on my case. After I finished eating, I called my therapist for an emergency session. I needed it more now than I ever did before.

“Hello?” Dr. White greeted.

“Dr. White this is Logan Medford. I’m in a crisis and I need to meet with you today,” I said.

“Can you come right now?”

“Yes. On my way.”

In a flash, I was standing next to the valet stand waiting for my car. My throat and chest felt tight as I thought of all the damage that my twin was causing me. Suspended from work. Divorce. My child is being taken away from me. It was all too much but I was going to expose this bitch for trying to ruin my life.

When I neared Dr. White's office, I noticed my husband's car pulling away from the building. Thankfully, he didn't see me but it was still so painful to see him. He hated me for something I hadn't done. And even once I proved that he was wrong about me he still wouldn't respect me.

I wondered why was he at this office building but then I reminded myself he has clients all over the city. Finally, I found a parking space in the garage and made my way to Dr. White's office.

I hadn't spoken to her since right before I found out about the tape. I should've called her that night but there was so much going on that I forgot.

When I arrived at her office, she was waiting patiently behind her desk. "Come on in and get settled," she invited.

Kara was a beautiful brown-skinned woman with hair draping down her back. I could tell that we were about the same age which meant she was extremely intelligent to have become a psychiatrist while this young.

"What's going on?" She asked.

"Everything is fucked up...." I began to explain to her about my sister and how she was hell-bent on ruining my life. As I poured out my heart, I watched her take it all in with no judgment. When I was done she handed me a bottle of water

"Oh my. That's a lot. And you're trying to find your sister now?"

"Yes. I've hired a private investigator. I'm just so stressed out," I replied.

"This is a high-stress time. But you have to do the stress management techniques I taught you. And remember this shall pass. This is not you. You didn't do this. Your husband will eventually see that someone else is setting you up. You will be reunited with your daughter soon, okay?" She reassured me.

"It just feels so heavy. I'm not sleeping. I'm drinking too much. I'm exhausted."

“Tell me about your drinking. How often are you drinking and how much?”

“I’m having several drinks at night. Ever since this tape came out I’ve been drowning my sorrows. It’s too much to bear.”

“Do you think you would like to try rehab?” She asked.

“No, I can control it.”

“Have you had a drink today?” She asked.

“No.”

“Good. How about you refrain from drinking for 90 days. If you can’t go over 48 hours without a drink let me know. We’ll work on getting you outpatient treatment.”

“Wait, it’s not that bad,” I responded while jumping to my feet.

“You’ve already said that you’ve been drinking too much. And if I’m being honest, you look bad, Logan. I’ve never seen you look like this before and it’s concerning. Alcohol could be a gateway into something serious and we know that your mother was dependent on substances.”

“I am nothing like my mother! I didn’t throw my daughter in the trash!”

“I didn’t say you were like your mother. I simply said...”

“You know what. I don’t even know why I came here. You can’t help me with this,” I shouted before storming out.

“Logan!” She called out to me but I ignored her and rushed to the elevator so that I could get to the garage.

My entire body was flaming with anger for being compared to my raggedy ass mother. I never fully expressed my hatred for that bitch but I could feel it blazing through my body right now. Alcohol wasn’t my problem. My mother’s rotten pussy and her despicable crotch fruit were my problems.

Had my mother not been a crackhead and just put us up for adoption none of this would be happening! Outraged I texted Jasir and told him that I couldn’t meet him this evening. I’d

rather go back to my hotel room and drink while I waited for this to all be over.

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chapter
thirteen

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Lola

RIHANNA'S BITCH BETTA Have My Money played in the background as I ogled my body in the full-length mirror. I was sporting some sexy lingerie; a black lacy one-piece outfit that hugged my curves perfectly. I admired the way it clung to my breasts, giving them the perfect amount of support.

Even though I was looking very sexy, I had no intentions of meeting up with John tonight. After spending last night with Richard, I decided to cool out and make tonight a self-date night. No men, just me, myself and I.

I was feeling proud about the damage that I had reeked over Logan's life that I felt like I deserved time off. Now the world could see that Miss Prim and Perfect was a ratchet whore who liked to take multiple dicks at a time.

Just thinking of how her aunt, uncle, and husband must have reacted made me laugh from the depths of my soul. Xavier probably wanted to kill her for embarrassing him in front of the world. It was bad enough that it was sent to his colleagues but now everyone knew what kind of bitch he was married to.

Veronica and Charles were probably extremely disappointed in her after all the work they did to rescue her from the garbage can. All the debt they went in to buy her those pageant dresses and send her to finishing school. All the money they spent flying her all over the country so that they could show off their precious niece. It was all for nothing but she was just a common whore like her crackhead mama.

The thought of how upset they must have been delighted me beyond any other joys. That's what they get for not adopting us both. All they had to do was take care of both of us and everything would've been fine. Instead, they chose her and now I have to take all of them down.

I parted ways with my mirror and then slipped a black dress on over my lingerie. I slid my feet into a pair of leopard

stilettos and traced red lipstick over my mouth. Puckering up in the mirror, I walked away and grabbed my purse to head out for the night.

The first stop I went to was the Mayfair hotel because I was still keeping an eye on Xavier and that's the hotel he took his white hoes. Even though I felt like I had done a good job with messing up Logan's life there was something about her husband that I couldn't stand.

From afar I could tell he was a smug asshole. And I bet when she tried to tell him that it wasn't her in the video and he didn't bother to listen. He knew of her origin story and how her mother threw her away. Logan never knew her father or any of this family. He was completely insensitive without considering that there could be a twin out there. She deserved at least some sort of consideration. And maybe I'll help her get it.

When I arrived at the hotel, I adjusted my wig in the rearview mirror before stepping into the bar. But before I could even leave the car, I saw Xavier pull up. Where was their daughter? How could he be out and about even though he kicked his wife out of the house? That nigga is always out at night although he had a child at home to take care of.

That's what made me hate him even more. He threw my sister out and won't let her take care of the kid but he's not taking care of her either. It made my blood boil just thinking about how shitty of a father he was. I always felt that he was a terrible husband since he cheats on her but this takes the cake.

Your wife was just exposed as being a big fat whore and you are whoring in secrecy. Fuck that. I'm putting this nigga on blast as soon as I find a way to fuck up his life, just as I've fucked up Logan's.

Just as I was about to pull away to plot against Xavier, I saw Kara White pull up as well. That was Logan's therapist. Isn't this interesting. The two of them are at the same place at the same time. Something told me to linger around to see what would happen next.

And thank God I followed my intuition because in a matter of moments I saw Xavier kiss Kara on her mouth. Their tongues collided as his hands glided to her ass. They were more than familiar with one another. This looked even more romantic than the white bitches I see him with.

Xavier got around! I've caught him with at least three women total. And he has the nerve to judge Logan for getting her back blown out by multiple men at the same time. Is his sin better because he fucked one at a time? The double standards were ridiculous but I was going to be one that brought some balance to the situation.

After I watched Xavier make out with his wife's therapist, I shook my head and pulled out my phone. I took a few pictures of them before I drove off. Before I addressed the issue with Xavier, I wanted to fuck with her therapist. This bitch knew all about Xavier because I'm sure Logan poured her heart out to her.

How could she do this to her client? Her client trusted her with her problems so that she could get out of depression or whatever the fuck Logan was in there whining about. While I didn't agree with therapy because it sounded like some bullshit for rich white bitches, I still didn't think it was right that Kara did that to her.

Irritated, I drove towards Kara's office where I decided to break in and make it so that no other clients could ever see her again. This bitch didn't deserve to be a doctor. She's the reason bitches needed to see doctors.

I bet for months Logan has been feeling like something was off with Xavier and her therapist gaslighted her. Fucking bitch.

When I pulled up to her office building, I tapped my fingers against the steering wheel while staring ahead. I could see through the glass door that a security guard was sitting at a desk watching videos on his phone. This was going to make my job even more difficult but it had to be done. I needed to put that bitch in her place.

As I sat and thought about how I was going to break in, I received a text message from Richard. Rolling my eyes, I picked up the phone and read what he had to say.

Richard: Hey Beautiful. I just wanted you to know that today I fired Xavier as my attorney. Do you need anything else? I can't wait to see you.

Me: No, I don't need anything right now. I'm pretty busy but I'd like to see you soon too.

Richard: Okay. Let me know love.

I laughed because I knew that I was going to be using him soon to reek more havoc against Logan. I was in pure destruction mode and I loved it. It gave me purpose in life. For years, I've been wandering around hoping for someone to save me and set me free from the trauma I was born into.

No one ever came. No one ever cared. No one ever noticed me but I was going to make my presence known. I wasn't the prissy perfect bitch that Logan was. I didn't wow people when I walked into the room. I was the dark shadowy bitch. The kind that men wanted to fuck and no one wanted to claim. And now I didn't care. It was time to reclaim my throne as the Queen Bitch of Destruction.

After a while the security guard got up from his post, possibly to take a leak. I quickly jumped out of my car and made my way in. I was so glad that I waited for my moment of opportunity because this bitch had to be taken down a notch. She was a horrible doctor for sleeping with her patient's husband.

Quickly I made my way past the security desk and into Kara's office. Once inside, I made my way to her computer where I tried to guess the password but there was no luck. Of course, I wouldn't be able to guess something like that. However, when I clicked hint the word Healthymind appeared. I typed that into the password box and voila, I was in.

She's an idiot for not locking up her computer better than this. This is just another reason why she's a shitty doctor.

I went straight for her patient files, specifically the most recently updated files. I changed as many prescriptions as I could making them stronger or weaker than what she had typed in. This would reflect her pure incompetence. Hopefully, they would take her license away. Foul bitch!

Once I finished changing the prescriptions, I escaped out through the back stairwell and got back in my raggedy car. As soon as I got inside, I texted Logan a picture of her stank-ass therapist and husband from a Google Voice number. I figured I'd throw her a bone since she's been through so much already. Maybe this would make her feel a little better about her husband kicking her out.

Feeling satisfied with what I had accomplished this evening, I decided to take my ass home. Tomorrow would be another day of destruction. Another day where I would reclaim my throne.

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chapter
fourteen

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Logan

THE NEXT MORNING I woke up with the same headache as before. The same dry mouth. The same twisted stomach. The exact anxiety and depression over my life being ruined. It was like groundhog day, except I didn't know what to expect. What other tricks did my elusive sister have up her sleeves?

Tears rained down my face before I could even lift my head off my pillow. My body shivered with thoughts of how to approach this situation. On one hand, I felt great about hiring Gavin to look into my mother and sister. But I was riddled with fear thinking about how he might not be able to come up with anything.

Swiping the tears from my eyes, I found the strength to pull myself out of bed. Instead of checking my phone for more hate-filled messages about how I was a disappointment to the black community, I decided to take a shower.

The blogs and the news ripped me apart yesterday saying that I was reinforcing negative stereotypes about black women being whorish. My publicist, Khelani told me to lay low and not make any comments right now. It was so hard to not defend myself but I followed her advice. She said that once it's confirmed that I was being set up it would be easier to make an official statement.

“Look at this as a blessing in disguise. This is going to garner movie and book deals! It's just a little tough for you right now but I promise you will get through,” she said to me.

There was a part of me that knew she was right but I was still paralyzed by the fear that we would never find my sister. How hard it would be to locate this woman? She needed to be brought to justice for how she was ruining my life.

And not only was this ruining my life, I couldn't use my platform to talk about the disappearance of Rue Massey. This was the worst part of it. At this point, I didn't care about my job. I've been on the fence about being on-air for a while now.

Especially since I wasn't talking about subjects that truly mattered. I didn't feel as if I were making a difference by talking about cooking and travel.

This Rue story was important to me. I prayed they found her with or without my platform. But she needed the same national attention that *my* damn sex tape got.

As the shower water washed down my body, I began to feel calmer. I needed to stop drinking so much at night because it was causing me to look like shit. Perhaps Dr. Kara was right. Maybe I did need rehabilitation or outpatient therapy.

When I got out of the bathroom, I glanced at the bed and saw several tiny liquor bottles all over the place. I took a deep breath and told myself this was it. I was going to stop drinking ASAP. This was it for me. I scooped up the bottles and tossed them into the trash can and then grabbed my phone.

I needed to face the horrible messages of the day and see if there was anything good happening. Perhaps Gavin discovered something overnight.

To my surprise, there was a text message from an anonymous number with the most disturbing picture I've seen since my alleged sex tape. It was a picture of my hypocrite of a husband tonguing down the bitch who was supposed to be my therapist.

"What the fuck!?" I screamed. This bitch knew exactly who I was married to and he knew exactly who my therapist was. The entire time that she was treating me she's been screwing my husband? Who does that?

Outraged I quickly got dressed. I didn't even bother to read the other messages on my phone. Pissed that my husband was playing me all along, I had to confront him for how he's been treating me.

This nigga admonished me for a sex tape that wasn't even really me but was sleeping with the woman who was supposed to be treating me? It was the ultimate betrayal. I divulged all of my secrets to her over the past six months and used what she knew to get closer to Xavier.

While waiting for the valet outside of the hotel, my body trembled with fury. Rage spread through my body making me hot. I swore I was going to erupt all over the place. There was some bullshit on every side of this fucking equation and I was tired of it. How much more could I take?

When I got into the car, I turned on the radio. And yet again there was something else to agitate me. R. Kelly's *It Seems Like You're Ready* was playing on the radio.

"Ugh Hell no!" I screamed. I hated that song with a passion. Every time I heard it made my stomach churn and my heartbeat so hard that I thought it was going to jump out of my chest. Quickly, I turned the station and took a deep breath.

I needed to compose myself because I was about to confront my lying ass husband for the shit he was doing. While I was trying my hardest to be the perfect wife for him, he was screwing someone behind my back.

Hell, I started therapy in the first place so that I could be a better wife and mother. For months I had been feeling off and discontent with life. I reached out to Xavier's sister, Olivia and she recommended that snake of a bitch to me. Did she know that her brother was fucking my husband?

Still fuming with anger, I arrived at Xavier's office building and prepared to give him a piece of my mind. If he thought I was going to walk away easily after he threw me out and slept with my therapist, he was out of his fucking mind.

I looked at the text message again and wondered who sent the picture? Who was following my husband around to catch him sleeping with this woman? Was it Gavin?

I sent Gavin a text message asking him was he also following Xavier but I didn't wait for his response. Adrenaline was pumping through my body and forcing me to get out of the car and march into the office.

"Mrs. Medford?" Xavier's assistant Crystal, called my name when I appeared.

"Is he in there?" I asked.

“He’s on a teleconference. Do you want to wait out here until he’s done? It should be over in 15 minutes.”

“Nope, I’m going in right now.”

“But Mrs. Medford!” She called me name while jumping to her feet.

I threw the door open and there he was on the phone with a smug smirk drawn across his face. He probably was in the middle of securing a new client but I didn’t care. Fuck him and his law firm.

“Just a second,” he said when he saw me. He placed the call on hold and stood to his feet. “What the fuck are you doing in here? Crystal!?”

“She couldn’t stop me.”

“Are you out of your mind? Why are you here? We have nothing to discuss. You disgust me for what you’ve done.”

“I disgust you? Yet you’re fucking my therapist,” I responded as I closed the door behind me.

“Get out now before I call security. You’re trespassing at this point.”

“How long has it been going on? Were you fucking her before I was her patient or after?”

“You are insane. I thought you were crazy for making a pornographic film and spreading it around the world but now I know you are. You’re accusing me of something egregious!”

“Oh yeah? Then what is this?” I asked brandishing my phone, showing him the picture of him tonguing Kara down.

“You’re following me?”

“You’re a hypocrite! You’re fake as fuck. I’m having that bitch’s license revoked too. This is gross misconduct and unethical! And you think I’mma just lay down and let you take my child?! Fuck that. I’m done playing small for you. I’m done rolling over and letting you dictate how I dress, what I eat, and how we raise our child.”

“Oh yeah? What are you gonna do about it? As far as I’m concerned you’re an alcoholic who does porn on the side. What judge is going to give you custody of Harlem?”

“I am not an alcoholic!” I screamed.

“You’ve been drinking for months. Hiding bottles here and there. I knew something was up when Harlem brought one to me and asked me about it. You’re an unfit mother and slut. So go ahead and do whatever it is that you feel like you have to do.”

“I will Xavier. And trust me it won’t be pretty. Your little girlfriend is going to need your help because I’m reporting for malpractice and misconduct. I’m suing that bitch for every red cent she owns. By the time this divorce is done, you’ll probably be taking care of her and me,” I said before turning and walking away.

“You’ve never been worth the drama.”

Before I walked out of the office I turned to him to respond. “You haven’t seen drama yet,” I said before closing the door behind me.

As I walked down the hall, I could feel the eyes of his associates and partners staring at me. Their whispers bounced off my back like ping pong balls. I wasn’t worried about what they had to say because when all is said and done, I would be taking half of everything that man owned.

When I got outside and checked my phone again, Gavin had called three times. I was wondering if he was calling about the picture of Kara and Xavier.

“Hey, Logan?” He answered when I called back.

“Did you see my text message?”

“I did and I was not the one who sent it. Not sure what that’s about.”

“Wow. So someone is following Xavier. And for what?”

“It could be your sister,” he replied.

“But why would she do that?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. But that’s not why I called you back.”

“Oh, what is it then?”

“I think you should come to Richmond with me today. I made some calls and there’s someone that wants to meet you,” he replied.

“Where are you now?”

“I’m at home. I live uptown. If you want I can drive.”

“Who wants to meet me?” I asked while leaning back into the car.

“Your father.”

My heart sank into my stomach. It had been less than 24 hours and Gavin had found my father. Tears erupted from the corners of my eyes as my breathing became labored. Overcome with confusion and excitement, I didn’t know what to say.

“It’s a three-hour drive and I know that it’s going to be emotional for you. How about I scoop you and we head out there?”

“Yeah,” I replied, my voice trembling.

After 35 years of being in the dark about who my father was, I was finally going to meet him. Maybe he knew where my sister was and if so why didn’t he try to fight for us?

chapter
fifteen

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Logan

WITH MY TEMPLE pressed against the window, I rode in silence while Gavin drove us to Richmond. I didn't know what to expect upon meeting my father. There was a part of me that was pissed at him and there was a part of me that was excited to meet him. I had so many questions. The first was, where the hell has he been this whole time?

"Tell me again, how you located him?" I asked as I stared out of the window watching the road disappear behind us.

"That article about your mother's death led me to him. There were a few people who were arrested at that time. One of them was a woman named Karen Lynn. When I reached out to her family, her brother specifically, it turned out he and your mother had a relationship."

"A relationship?"

"Yeah, he can explain more to you than I can."

"There's a chance he might not be my father?"

"He was pretty sure that he's your father."

"All this time..."

"Wait until you hear his story. I'd rather you hear it from him instead of me. He's excited to meet you."

"Yeah, me too," I responded.

While we drove, I texted Candace, relaying the updates. She told me the network wanted to uphold my suspension until there was proof of my sister setting me up, which I didn't mind. I was happy about not having to go on air. The pressure to be perfect on a live camera was taken off my shoulders.

However, I was hoping that she was able to push the Rue story forward. It didn't matter who was on it as long as they told the world that this little girl was missing.

"Have you ever heard of anything like this?" I asked

“A sibling setting another sibling up?”

“Yeah?”

“Not like this. I guess the thing that’s throwing me off the most is why she would send you a picture of your husband cheating with your therapist? That part doesn’t make any sense. But I wouldn’t trust it. It’s probably a trick on her part but I just don’t get the angle.”

“Me either,” I sighed.

After three hours of anticipation, we arrived in Richmond at a church called Mt. Calvary Baptist. My eyes adjusted to the older brick building that had a white cross on top of the precipice. Inhaling deeply, I stepped out of the car and took it all in.

“He’s in there, waiting for you.”

“What’s his name?”

“Terrence David. He sounded like a good guy...”

“Can’t be that good if he never came to look for me,” I replied before walking away.

My heart thumped in my chest as I pushed the door open which led to the lobby. It was completely quiet with no sign of Terrence or anyone else. I wandered around looking for Terrence but before I got too far someone emerged from an office to the left.

There he was, standing over 6 feet tall with a bald head and a goatee. He looked radiant and healthy which wasn’t what I was expecting. My eyes adjusted to the sight to see if I saw facial similarities. And they were there.

My eyes and nose were on his face. We had the same skin tone too. When he cracked a smile, it reminded me of the nervous smile I gave when I wasn’t sure about a situation.

“Logan?”

“Yeah.”

“Can you take a walk with me?”

“I don’t even know you.”

“I’m Terrence. I knew your mother very well. You are our child,” he admitted while looking me up and down.

“Where have you been?” I asked.

“I’ll explain everything but my God you are gorgeous.”

“I’m a mess,” I confessed with my throat choking as I stared at him.

“You’re perfect,” he said with sincerity before ushering me back outside.

Before we strolled around the block I told Gavin that we were taking a walk to get to know each other.

“So, what do you know about my mother?”

“Probably more than anyone...” he shook his head. “Hey Paco,” he greeted a homeless guy on the corner begging for change.

“Tell me something. Anything. I’m going crazy and my life is falling apart.”

“Leah was a troubled soul. We all were back in those days. She came out here after your family threw her out. She had been through so much and coke then crack made her feel better.”

“What had she been through?”

“All I know is that she was raped when she was about 13 or 14. She would never tell me who did it. Your mother and aunt were hard on her. She couldn’t get it together. We met while partying and started doing drugs together. Things got bad...”

“What do you mean got bad?”

“She started hooking. I was robbing folks. We were getting at this house on the corner,” he said pointing to a blue colonial-style home that looked like it had been renovated.

When we approached it there was a sign on the door that read “Leah’s House.” The home looked a lot like the house

where my mother was found but it had a fresh coat of paint and the yard had been rehabilitated.

“This is where she died?” I asked.

“Yes. She died while I was doing time in prison. She must have been pregnant when I got arrested for armed robbery in a liquor store. It wasn’t until I was released five years later that I knew that she died,” his voice choked as he talked about her to me.

“So you bought the house?”

“The church I started did. While I was in prison I got clean and found God. Got ordained and made it my life’s mission to help as many addicts as possible. Leah’s House is a halfway house that my church sponsors.”

“Your mother and I ran the streets. We were toxic to one another but I cared for her. She had something special in her and I’m saddened that she never got to share with the world her gifts. She was gorgeous and charismatic. You remind me a lot of her.”

“Did you know she was pregnant?” I asked uninterested in hearing what he thought of her.

“Not until I was released from prison.”

“Did you come for me?”

“Veronica and Charles told me you died. When I was released from prison they said that your mother threw you away because you were stillborn. That was that. I thought you were dead this entire time,” he said when he turned away from the house to look for me.

“Why the hell would they do that?”

“I have no idea but I hate them for keeping me away from you. I mean, I wouldn’t have been able to give you the life you had with them. It took me a while to get on my feet but I would’ve been there for you.”

“Do you know if my mother was pregnant with twins?”

“Baby girl, I didn’t even know if she was pregnant with you. There could be another child out there. If so, I hope to meet her too.”

“She’s evil...” I begin to cry.

“Why do you say that?”

“She filmed a sex tape and sent it to my husband. Then to the world. Everyone believes it was me but it wasn’t. I have to find her because this woman is ruining my life.”

“I wish there was something I could do for you but I just found out about you yesterday from that private investigator. You look like you turned out well...”

“Looks can be deceiving,” I responded before turning and walking away from Leah’s House. This trip didn’t get me any closer to my sister but it did get me closer to my mother. She was raped and kicked out by her family? Who raped her and why didn’t anyone protect her? I wondered as we walked back to the church.

My mother dealt with demons and no one was there to help her. Instead, they threw her out and she did the same to me. It’s no wonder she placed me in the garbage. She didn’t know how to love and was drugged out of her mind.

Tears eased down my cheek as I thought of how my evil twin sister may have been feeling. I’ve always felt rejected by my mother but my twin was rejected by our entire family. Lord knows what she had been through to turn her so cold. If she would only make herself known to me, I could probably forgive her.

If she told me her story, I would understand. I just needed her to admit what she did to the public so that I could get respect back. So that I could have my daughter back. That was the most important thing in the world to me was to be able to raise my child. Harlem deserves her mother despite what Xavier thought of me.

“You have a great job...” he continued.

“The job is not exactly all it’s cracked up to be. I’m under intense scrutiny by the public. People talk so much trash about

me. Things they would never say to my face, you know? Picking apart my appearance. Gossiping about me. And now with this sex tape, they are going in on me. I'm a horrible mother. Terrible role model. Somehow I've set black women back by hundreds of years. I'm a whore and an embarrassment to my family..."

"This too shall pass. Trust me. This is just your rock bottom but it's not the end. And as a crackhead who spent five years in prison, I know a lot about rock bottoms," he smiled as he draped his arm around me, pulling me in.

"I guess compared to that... it's not so bad. It's just my daughter..."

"Right. You're married. How old is your daughter?" He asked as I swiped tears away, trying to catch them before they fell.

"My husband wants nothing to do with me and he wants to keep me from her. She's 9 years old. Here's a picture of her," I said as I pulled out my phone.

"My granddaughter is beautiful," he said with tears filling the corner of his eyes. "Wow..."

"Thank you. She's amazing too. Smart, funny, and creative. And that's why I have to find my sister so I can prove what she did. It's all so that I can be a mother to my child. I don't want other people raising her as they raised me," I choked on my words.

"I understand. You know... I have two other children..." he said as he handed the phone back to me. I watched as he swiped a few years away from his eyes. "They're 9 and 11. A boy and a girl; Judah and Jordan."

"Are you married?" I wondered.

"Yeah, I got married about 15 years ago to a schoolteacher named Adina. She and the kids should be here at any moment," he said once we made it back to the church.

Just before we could make it inside, a blue Toyota pulled up. Inside were two women and two children. "There they are right now," he smiled.

Moments later they all emptied the car and made their way toward us. “That’s Adina on the right and Michelle on the left. Adina teaches and Michelle is an admin at the school. They’re best friends,” he spoke of the two heavy-set women.

“Hey Judah and Jordan,” he greeted when they run up to him and hugged him closely.

“Hey Pastor David,” Michelle spoke when she came along. His wife lingered behind, looking at us with a strange look in her eye.

“Hey Adina, babe come over here...” he instructed his wife.

“Aint you that pretty girl from The Scene?”

“Yeah, Logan Medford. Nice to meet you,” I greeted while extending my hand to shake hers.

“Mmmhmm,” she eyed me up and down. She had heard about the tape and was judging me right in front of my face. She began to eye Terrance and me in disgust as if I were his whore.

“Is everything okay Adina?” He asked once he noticed her attitude.

“Yeah, just remember that the church needs a new water heater and roof. Don’t spend the whole building fund,” she quipped before rolling her eyes and walking away.

“This is my daughter!” He called after her when she walked away.

“Your daughter?” His wife asked as she stepped closer to us.

“It’s a long story, Adina, this is Logan. Logan this here is Judah and Jordan...” he said as he introduced me to his family while telling them as much of the story as he could without calling my mother a crack whore.

His wife began to soften as she listened and no longer felt threatened. “So if you just give us a few more minutes to say goodbye,” he said to them.

“You have a beautiful family,” I commented.

“You do too. Logan, I’m sorry I couldn’t have been more help to you but I want to build a relationship with you. I’d love to spend more time getting to know you once you find the time.”

“I’d like that too, Terrance. I’m happy that you were able to get your life together and thrive.”

“I was only able to do it with God on my side. I’ll make sure I keep you in my prayers because if I can transform my life, I know that you can come out on the other side of this winning. Please let me know if there’s anything I can do for you,” he said before hugging me.

“I will. Guess, I’ll head back home and tell my aunt and uncle that I met you.”

“I can’t wait to get to know you under better circumstances,” he replied.

“Yeah...” I smiled and walked away towards Gavin’s car. Although I was relieved that I finally met my father, I was still pissed that I had no leads on my sister.

I settled in the passenger seat and slowly put my seatbelt on as I thought about her motives. If my mother threw me in the garbage, what awful place did she throw my twin?

As we rode back home, I received a call from Xavier. Shocked that he would even be speaking to me after the last time that I saw him in his office, I answered quickly.

“Hello?”

“What the hell were you thinking? What is with you?!” He barked.

“What are you talking about?” I asked in total confusion.

“You ordered all this shit! A refrigerator! Why?! Are you out of your mind?!”

“I did not order anything! Why would I?!”

“I swear to God, Logan! You’re just bolstering my case for this divorce! I’m sending this shit back,” he responded before

he hung up on me.

Confused, I checked my credit card and bank statements to see if there were any unapproved charges but there weren't any. It was a mistake. Perhaps someone sent it to me for promotions because that did happen sometimes. I would receive gifts and would be asked to wear them or post them on social media. A fridge was weird though.

Too exhausted about everything else that was going on, I shrugged it off and slid my phone away. A free fridge was the least of my worries. I needed to find my twin before she created any more problems for me.

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chapter
sixteen

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Lola

THIS BITCH HAS BEEN MISSING all damn day. Typically, I liked to stalk her throughout the day to see what moves she was making. To see if she were any closer to discovering my identity. I wanted to see if she was shopping or having lunch at a bistro. I just wanted to know her every move, but today she was nowhere to be found.

Bored and annoyed, I took a drive to clear my head. I needed to figure out my next moves for fucking up her life. There wasn't much more damage I could do. My actions had caused her to lose her job, her husband, her child, and now possibly be her freedom.

By now Xavier should've received all the products that I charged on *Roy's* cards. *Roy* should be able to see those charges and will be reporting them at any time. Once the investigation takes place they will come to Xavier who will turn in Logan. They'll call *Roy* to the police station and he will identify Logan as the prostitute that stole from him. My plan was genius.

I think once she's behind bars for credit card fraud, I will be a lot better. I may even completely let go. That's enough stress to make her snap. And that's what I wanted. I wanted her to snap and get over herself. When she gets over herself and becomes real with herself, then she can truly heal.

Once she gets real with herself, I can disappear and go back home. Tearing her life apart was my mission, but I had met my goal. There were a few loose ends to tie up and one of them was with *Veronica* and *Charles*. I wasn't sure what to do about them but they had to go. They were the ones that rejected me and left me to be abused while Logan lived the good life.

After getting something to eat, I stopped at the Ritz and hung out in my car while waiting to see if she showed up. What the hell was she doing all day?

As I glanced around the Ritz, I became enraged when I realized just how blessed she was. Even though she was kicked out of her home and forced out of her job, she was still able to live in luxury. This hotel looked even better than that McMansion she shared with her husband.

I rolled my eyes and leaned back in the car while I waited for her to show up. Meanwhile, I received a call from *Roy*. There was a part of me that didn't want to answer the phone but I figured why not. He was either calling me to confront me about stealing his cards or he wanted me to pee on him again. Either way, I was bored enough to indulge in convo with him.

"Hey baby," I greeted when I answered the phone.

"Don't hey baby me, you bitch! You stole money and made all of these erroneous charges!" He screamed in my ear, forcing me to turn the volume down on my phone.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"I know it was you. You charged over \$10,000 on my cards. You're the only one I left my wallet around! I should've never trusted a nigger whore!"

"That's not very nice. I'm going to go now and block you. You better hope that I don't send the pictures I took of me peeing on you, Sherman!" I laughed and called him by his real name. The truth is, I didn't have any pictures but he didn't know that.

"I'm going to the police!"

"Do that. I don't care. You're still a little dick bitch that likes to get pissed on. Bye hoe!" I cackled before I hung the phone up.

I leaned back in the car laughing at the top of my lungs because that meant that Logan would soon be arrested for credit card fraud. That's if Roy or Sherman, whatever he wanted to be called, would actually go to the police. I probably shouldn't have threatened him about having incriminating photos because he might want to keep that a secret. Someone like him might eat \$10k if it meant not having to go through a

divorce once his wife finds out that he's a cheating bastard. He'd lose far more than \$10k.

I prayed that he called the police on Logan. She should see what it feels like to be arrested as I have. She should know what it's like to be held against her will in a dark and grim place where she had no freedoms. She should be patted down and forced to bend over and cough. I wanted her to experience everything that I had experienced while growing up.

The aloneness, despair, and fear were all things she never had to deal with. But I've been dealing with them ever since our mother decided she didn't want us. I've been living with this pain my entire life. She can experience it for a few months. In the end, she still had money to her name while I had nothing.

While I waited for her to show up, I listened to the radio. And once again *It Seems Like You're Ready* played on the radio. As soon as the song came on, my heart began to pound in my chest. Immediately I turned it off before R. Kelly could get another word out. Tears eased down my face at the thought of that tune. I fucking hated that song with all of my passion.

Thankfully, something I enjoyed was on a different station. Jill Scott's *Golden* played in the background, which lifted my vibration, erasing the low frequency that damn R. Kelly song left.

As Jill's beautiful voice filled up my car, I noticed that Logan finally arrived. I watched as she made her way to the elevator before I decided to enact my plan. Once she was out of sight, I went to the front desk.

"Hey Mrs. Medford, what can I do for you?" The attendant asked.

"I'm having a guest come over tonight and I was hoping that he would be able to come up without me being there. I have to run a few errands and I want him to be able to let himself in. Can you do that for me?"

"Absolutely. What's your guests' name?"

"Richard Shineback."

“Wonderful. I’ll have that key ready for him.”

“I appreciate that. Toodles,” I smiled before walking away.

Once I was out of sight I texted Richard.

Me: Hey baby.

Richard: Hello Gorgeous.

Me: I miss you so much. We had so much fun the other day with one another, I was hoping that you would come through tonight, and maybe we could try something different.

Richard: What did you have in mind?

Me: I’m staying at the Ritz and I was wondering if you would come through. I want to role-play.

Richard: I’m all ears.

Me: I like it rough and I want to pretend that you’re breaking into my hotel room. I want you to choke me and throw me on the bed. Even if I scream ‘no’, I want you to keep going. Can you handle that?

Richard: Anything for you.

Me: The hotel has your name and they’ll give you the key and room number.

Richard: See you later tonight.

Smiling from ear to ear, I left the Ritz and headed in for the night. I couldn’t wait until shit hits the fan. Logan will finally feel what I’ve gone through all my life.

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chapter
seventeen

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Logan

THE HOT WATER washed over my body as I stood under the showerhead. I let it cleanse away the day, the stress and confusion I endured. Thoughts along with soap swirled around the drain as I tried to stop thinking about everything.

My twin was out there, dead set on ruining my life and there was nothing that I could do about it. My father didn't know of her existence. My aunt and uncle knew nothing. She was like a ghost! How was she able to hide so well.

After my trip with Gavin, he guaranteed to throw all of his muscles toward finding my sister. He said that locating the source of the sex tape would provide everything he needed to know. If he could identify at least one of the men, that would be even better.

Once I was out of the shower, I dried off and paced the floor. What else could I do at this moment but drink? Not being able to see Harlem was driving me crazy. Not being able to clear my name made me want to die. But I had to remain strong. Harlem needed her mother and I was going to find a way back to her.

Dressed in a terry-cloth robe, I decided to order room service. Two bottles of sauvignon blanc and cheeseburger with fries to soak it all up. Now that I wasn't with Xavier, I ate whatever I felt like eating. He was the one that monitored my diet. Always looking at me with judgment if I ordered anything other than soup and salad.

When we first got married, I appreciated that he encouraged me to eat healthy so that I could maintain my figure. However, when he watched my diet while I was pregnant, that's when I knew he had gone too far. I was a grown-ass woman and I had to practically beg for ice cream.

That was one of the perks of being away from him. I could eat whatever I wanted to eat. I could drink wine, have a cheeseburger, and fries which were unheard of when I was

with him. That's something I've been wanting for months, freedom. And oddly enough, my twin gave it to me.

Despite how she went about it, she freed me from work too. I can't even lie, I haven't missed the office since I've been out. I don't miss going on-air. I don't miss having to watch the ratings and being criticized every evening. And since the scandal about my sex tape broke, I deleted my social media apps. None of which I missed.

The only thing in this world that I missed was my daughter. I had to figure out a way to get close to her soon. Harlem probably thought that I abandoned her and I couldn't have her thinking that her mother didn't love her. Lord knows what Olivia and Xavier were telling her about me. I prayed that she was shielded from knowing about the sex tape but these days you never know. Kids have access to media in ways we never did before. Just a few months ago one of her classmates was suspended for sharing porn with the class at recess. I assumed by now she knew of the sex tape. Embarrassment flooded me as I thought of my child knowing something so disturbing about me.

But I had to keep the faith that I would find my sister. Once she was found everyone, especially Harlem would know that it wasn't me. Xavier would have to eat his words and will be forced to apologize. I would sue him for divorce and take as much from him as possible. I'm also going to sue Kara once all of this blows over. That bitch was going to pay for sleeping with my husband and for malpractice. She was my therapist but was directly contributing to my depression.

Irritated, I turned on the television so that I could stop thinking about everything wrong in my life. It wasn't going to last forever. This was a temporary blip and I would find a way to fix it. While scrolling through the channels, room service knocked on my door.

Quickly, I let them in so that I could crack the bottle of wine open.

"Here you go," I said as I passed the bellhop a \$10 bill for a tip.

“Thank you!” He replied before walking out of the room.

Once he was gone, I cracked open the bottle of wine and drank straight from it. I didn’t even feel like being cute and sipping from a glass. No one was there to witness me drinking like a savage. I was all alone with my thoughts, fear, and limited hotel cable.

When I began to feel inebriated, I called my aunt to tell her that I met my father. I don’t know why I waited so long to tell her but I figured she should know.

“Hey, how are you holding up?” Aunt Veronica asked when she answered the phone.

“I met my father today.”

“What?”

“Yeah. His name is Terrance David. Does that ring a bell?”

“No, never heard of the man. You know your mother was out there. She sold her body for a living. How do you know that’s your father?” She asked. I knew that she would be skeptical but I knew in my heart that Terrance was my father.

“They used to get high together. He said that I was definitely his daughter because of the times he was with her and when she was a pregnant match-up. Not to mention, I look exactly like him.”

“So you trust this crackhead? He probably told you that he’s your father because he knows you have money. How did you even find him?” She asked.

“He didn’t want any money. Why are you being so negative about this? I thought you would be happy that I found my father.”

“I’ll be happy once he takes a paternity test and proves that he’s your father.”

“You know what Aunt Veronica, I gotta go.”

“Wait before you go. I was wondering if you wanted me to speak with Xavier about allowing Harlem to spend time with

us. I know you don't love our neighborhood and you don't want her staying here..."

"She's fine with Olivia. Besides, I don't trust your neighborhood. First, my best friend goes missing over 20 years ago, and now Rue. I want my little girl to stay far away," I stated firmly.

"I can respect your wishes. Doesn't she have a recital coming up?" My aunt asked, reminding me of my daughter's flute recital in a couple of days.

"Yes, she does."

"Charles and I will be there. Do you think Xavier will have a problem with that?"

"He might. I think it's best we stay away for a while. Just until I find my sister. Okay?" I asked.

"I understand. I'll call you later."

Quickly, I hung up the phone and tossed it to the side. There was something about my aunt that got under my skin sometimes. You would think that she would be excited that I met my father but instead I was met with negativity.

Talking to her irritated me so much that I didn't bother to ask about what Terrance told me. I wanted to know more about why my mother left DC and went to Richmond. Why did she feel the need to get far from her family? What made her turn to drugs in the first place. Every time I asked Aunt Veronica those questions in the past she changed the subject. Next time, I won't let her.

My stomach rumbled, reminding me that I hadn't had enough to eat to be drinking as much as I was. To stop the hunger pains, I stuffed the burger in my mouth and watched the news. There was no mention of Rue on the local news despite that she hadn't been found yet. This was the only thing that I missed about my job. If I weren't suspended I would've had an entire segment dedicated to her.

It seems as though everyone has moved on and no one cares. Tears eased down my face as I shook my head, thinking about how she may never be found or worse. She could be

found like my best friend Sabrina; raped and murdered. I prayed that wasn't the case. Rue deserved so much more and I couldn't imagine what her mother was going through.

If my daughter went missing, I would be knocking on every door until I found her. No stone would be left unturned. There would be no sleep until she was back with me. At least I knew that she was with her father. And while he hated me, I knew that he loved her.

Shortly after I finished the second bottle of wine I began to drift to sleep. I was still wearing my robe with nothing on under it but I was too tipsy and tired to put on pajamas. I was too tired to even turn off the television. Perhaps when I wake up in the middle of the night I'll find the strength to turn it off.

Before I could get into a deep sleep I heard someone come into my room. "Excuse me! This room is occupied!" I hollered. Groggily, I got out of bed so that I could latch the door closed.

"Shut up!" The man shouted before charging over to me.

"What are you doing?! Get out! Help!" I shouted before he wrapped his hands around my neck, constricting my ability to yell. I scratched at his arms and tried to break free of his clutch but his grip was too tight.

In the light of the television, I could see who it was. It was one of Xavier's clients, Richard Shineback. I met him at a Christmas party a while back. We exchanged light conversation but that was about it. He never showed any interest in me, possibly because his wife was there.

But why was he attacking me now? Did Xavier send him? Why would he agree to that? Xavier's clients were all wealthy white-collar CEOs and entrepreneurs. None of this made any fucking sense.

I tried my best to fight him off, clawing at him but he flung me to the bed.

"This is what you like, bitch!" He said before releasing my neck and slapping me across my face.

"Why are you doing this!?"

“Wow! This is so real!” He smiled, lighting up with joy but I was horrified.

“HELP!” I screamed but he placed his hand over my mouth to muffle the sounds. I fought and kicked, trying to get him off of me but he wouldn’t let up.

He opened my robe and stared down at my body. “Just as I remember,” he spoke.

Once again he let go of my neck, which allowed me to gasp for air. I kicked him and kneed him in his dick before he could put it in me, causing him to stumble off the bed.

“What the hell! That was way too hard!”

“Fuck you!” I shouted before picking a lamp and smashing it across his head. He flew back and crashed into the desk, rendering him unconscious on the ground.

I wrapped myself in the robe tightly and hauled my ass out of the room while screaming for help. I couldn’t believe after everything that I’ve been through, I was also attacked. I was convinced that Xavier sent him to rape me.

Why would Xavier do such a thing? I knew that we weren’t on the best of terms but this was just ridiculous. I would have never done anything to physically hurt him. I was still the mother of his child. A woman that he once loved! Yet he would set me up to be raped.

What was even happening to my life? Nothing was going right and was dangling at the end of my rope.

chapter
eighteen

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Logan

AFTER I FOUGHT RICHARD OFF, I rushed to the lobby where I announced that I was almost raped. The guy at the front desk called the police and hid me in the back office until they arrived. Tears poured out of my eyes as I tried to make sense of what just happened.

Secretly, I pruned that Richard survived. Not because I would've felt bad for killing him but I needed him to admit why he attacked me. I needed him to tell the world that Xavier sent him to hurt me. If I could get Xavier arrested for setting me up, I wouldn't have to worry about fighting for custody of Harlem.

"Would you like some tea, ma'am?" The hotel's manager asked me. She was a younger Latina woman, with a kind smile. She clasped her hands in front of her black pencil skirt while she waited for me to respond but I could barely open my mouth.

"It's okay. I'll bring you some chamomile tea. It's very soothing. The cops are on their way," she said while giving me a worried smile.

I nodded my head and swallowed hard. Dehydrated from the salty burger and the wine, my tongue felt like sandpaper in my mouth. I was amazed that tears were still able to fall, considering how dry I felt inside.

"Here you go," she said when she returned. She handed me the cup and I took a few sips.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"Of course. I'm so sorry this happened to you. The police are upstairs in the room taking pictures. The man did survive. They're taking him to the hospital."

"Okay." I shuddered inside. Hopefully, I would know the truth in the morning about why Richard attacked me.

While I tried to compose myself, someone knocked on the door. Startled, I jumped and spilled hot tea on my robe.

“I’ll get you a towel. This is the detective,” she said before moving towards the door. I nodded, signaling that it was okay for her to let them in.

“Jasir,” I spoke when I stood to my feet.

“Hey, I’m so fuckin’ sorry. Come here,” he said while rushing to me and hugging me.

“Did you request to be on my case?” I asked.

“No, it’s a coincidence. I didn’t even know it was you until the front desk gave me the details about who was occupying the room. I need to take your statement. Then we have to get you to the hospital to do an exam.”

“He didn’t rape me. I fought him off,” I protested.

“You have bruises on your neck. You still need an exam.”

“I don’t want to get an exam. I just need some rest. I feel like I haven’t slept in days,” I began to cry again.

“Please, this will help your case. Go to the hospital and get the exam. We want to detail your injuries so that we can hit him with as many charges as possible,” Jasir urged me while sitting across from me.

“Fine.”

“Before my partner Kia takes you, I have to ask you some questions.”

“Sure,” I responded while hanging my head and covering my face in shame.

“Tell me everything that happened.”

“I was in bed watching TV. All of a sudden I hear someone come into my room. I yelled out loud, telling him that the room was occupied. He forced his way in and began to attack me. He choked and threw me on the bed...” I began to break down again as the memory resurfaced. It was awful to not have control over my body. It took tremendous strength to be able to fight him off.

“Did he say anything to you?”

“He said, *this is what you like, bitch!* And *This is so real.* I didn’t know what he meant by any of that. I was just shocked and terrified.”

“I understand. I know this is hard for you. And you know him?”

“Yeah, he’s one of Xavier’s clients. I met him at a holiday party last year. He seemed okay then. Never in a million years did I think he would attack me. A part of me thinks it was my husband who sent him but that doesn’t make sense,” I whimpered as I swiped tears away from my face.

“We’ll bring your husband in for questioning too. Is there anyone that I can call for you? Someone who could meet you at the hospital?”

“Yeah, my friend Candace...”

Two hours later, I had completed my examination and was waiting in an exam room for the Jasir to come.

“How are you feeling?” Candace asked when she stood next to me while I sat on the edge of the examination table. The room was sterile and cold, the complete opposite of what I needed. What I truly wanted was to be at home in bed with the covers pulled over my head. I wanted another bottle of wine to help me forget about this night. And as soon as I was able to leave, I was getting some.

“I feel like shit.”

“Do you think that Xavier set you up?”

“It’s the only thing that makes sense. Why else would Richard attack me? I’ve met the man once but Xavier works with him often.”

“I’m so sorry this happened to you. I just would’ve never thought Xavier would be capable of something like this,” she responded.

I wouldn’t have either but he did slap me the other day. No matter what he thought I did, I didn’t deserve to be hit for it.

“How else would he have gotten a key? Xavier knew where I was staying. He could easily tell the staff that I was his wife and he needed an extra key. I knew that he wanted to keep me away from Harlem but what was the goal here? Death?”

“You’re right. This shit is ridiculous. I know you’re going through it right now. Do you want to stay at my house for a while? Maybe being in a hotel isn’t safe,” she suggested.

“Nah, I’ll just go to a new hotel. I know you have your things going on. You got a new man and I don’t want to be in your space like that.”

“It’s no problem. I truly don’t mind. I’d rather you stay with me than get attacked again,” she responded before hugging me.

“Thank you for being there for me.”

As we embraced, we heard a gentle knock on the door. “It’s Jasir and my partner Kia. Is it okay if we come in?”

“Yes,” I announced.

“So... Do you mind if we speak alone?” Jasir asked once he entered the room. He had a disappointed look drawn across his face, while Kia simply looked annoyed and upset.

“You can say whatever in front of Candace.”

“This is a sensitive matter,” Jasir replied but Kia rolled her eyes.

“I want her here,” I reiterated.

“Fine...” Kia blurted out while rolling her eyes.

“Is everything okay?” I wondered. I was confused about why Kia was being hostile with a sexual assault victim.

“Richard is about to go into exploratory surgery. They don’t know why but he’s paralyzed right now. However, he was able to tell us to check his text messages before they took him in,” Jasir spoke.

“Okay and? You found proof that Xavier sent him?” I asked.

“No, we found proof *you* sent him,” Kia replied.

“Wait, what?”

“Chill Kia...” Jasir attempted to restrain him.

“There’s a text exchange between you and Richard where you instructed him to role-play. To pretend to break in and assault you.”

“Um, no. I never sent anything like that,” I protested.

“The text messages aren’t from your cell number but we have to do some investigation to find out where the texts originated.”

“Well, it surely wasn’t me. Why would I set myself up to be raped?!”

“You tell us that,” Kia interrupted. “We spoke with the guy at the front desk who turned the key over to Richard. He tells us that you came to him and asked him to do that.”

“What? No! Never! I came in from Richmond and I went up to the room. I never stopped at the front desk!” I shouted.

“That’s not what he said. He claimed you came up to him while wearing a blonde wig. You asked him to give Mr. Richard a key. And that correlates with those text messages between you and Richard.”

“This is a misunderstanding. I didn’t send those messages. And I didn’t leave him a key. This is some bullshit!” I screamed as jumped to my feet and began pacing the floor.

“We’re going to thoroughly investigate this but you might want to get a lawyer,” Jasir said to me. I could see the pity shooting from his eyes.

“A lawyer? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Richard may never walk again from you attacking him,” Kia responded.

Candace stood in the background, not saying a sound. Her eyes darted between the three of us while trying to make sense of what had happened. I could sense that her belief in me was starting to wane but I was telling the truth.

“It wasn’t me...” I whispered.

“Excuse me?” Kia asked.

“I have a twin sister out there who’s been trying to ruin my life,” I confessed.

“What?” Kia looked at Jasir who nodded his head. It was impossible to read his expression to know if he still believed me. I could tell that Kia thought I was lying by the way she rolled her eyes. I was starting to see that Candace didn’t believe me either. But I was telling the truth.

It wasn’t Xavier who set me up. It was my sister all along. This bitch was escalating, yet I had no way of finding her and bringing her to justice. Sending that sex tape to the world was one thing but having me assaulted was another.

“You have a twin?” Kia asked.

“Yes. She is trying to ruin my life. I hired a private investigator to find her. She’s the one behind this. I know she is,” I cried.

“Do you believe this?” Kia asked Jasir as he looked at me with disappointment.

“We’ll get to the bottom of this. For now, just get some legal counsel,” Jasir said before walking out of the room, with Kia following behind.

“Yeah, because of your accusation we have to get a statement from your husband,” Kia spoke. Moments later they were gone and I was alone with Candace who was looking at me with judgment spilling from her eyes.

“What the hell, Logan?” Candace asked once they were gone.

“What do you mean?”

“Twin? I believed you at first when you said that it was her behind the tape but now... This is just absurd! Why are you sabotaging your life like this? You had it all! And you’re throwing it all away in the worst way. I’ve never seen anything like this,” she said as she gathered her purse in preparation for leaving.

“Wait Candace, I’m not lying. I didn’t do any of this! I swear to God. I put that on my child’s name! I didn’t leave that man a key to rape me. I didn’t make that tape! You have to believe me. I have no one,” I cried even harder.

“I don’t know what to believe anymore. Just call me when you find your *twin*. When you find her, I’ll give you the sincerest apology but I don’t think that’s gonna happen,” she responded before heading out.

I sobbed to myself while I thought about how much trouble I was in if I didn’t find this bitch. She was on a mission to do irreparable damage. If I don’t find her, I could be looking at an attempted murder of Richard Shineback. Why the fuck is she doing this to me?!

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chapter
nineteen

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Lola

THERE ARE a few things in life as satisfying as getting pure revenge. Orgasms are wonderful. Making a lot of money probably feels good but I wouldn't know. Eating your favorite meal after you've been starving for hours is amazing but revenge takes the whole pie.

Revenge was all of that wrapped in one. Ever since I had gotten Logan attacked, I had been on cloud 9. I hadn't messed with her in days. Hadn't stalked her. Hadn't really even thought about how much I hated her. She was in the lowest spot that anyone could be in right now.

No job. No husband. No daughter. And probably no freedom. She lured that poor innocent man to her hotel room and viciously attacked him. That's what the news and blogs were saying. Late-night television shows would have psychiatrists trying to explain her thread of sabotage. How she possibly had Borderline Personality Disorder. She may have Schizophrenia. None of them knew for sure.

I wondered if she was starting to believe that she did those things. Maybe she was going crazy and in a state of psychosis. Or was she still denying it, which made her look even crazier. All of the evidence pointed to her. And now that I've brought her to her lowest moment, I could move on.

After all, I was only jealous of the life that she once had. And now she no longer had that life. She was just as fucked up as I was. My work with her was complete. I'd leave her to sort everything out because she was never going to find me. She even had a P.I. searching for me and I don't care how good he was. He wasn't going to locate me because I knew how to hide. I knew to cover my tracks. And I knew when to let up.

Now that I've knocked my sister down a few pegs. It was time to go after the people who left me for dead. Aunt Veronica and Uncle Charles. They could've taken care of both of us but they chose her and for that, they have to die.

Veronica was our mother's older sister by ten years. She had been married to Charles for about five years by the time my mother left the DC area and got hooked on drugs. Although they weren't wealthy, they were doing okay.

Veronica worked as a police dispatcher while Charles was an accountant for a small company. They had modest incomes but since they had no children of their own, it was enough to take on my sister and I. I wonder how they chose between the two of us. Did they play eenie meenie minie moe?

It doesn't matter what their motives are anymore. I don't give a shit. They had to die. And there was no going back on that. I wouldn't pin the death of them on Logan. She's already gotten what she deserves. She didn't force them to choose her. They did that all on their own. So they can die on their own.

I'd been stalking them since I arrived in the DC area a few months ago. Their lifestyles didn't match their income. They were both retired, yet had new luxury cars and they appeared to travel often. Which meant that Logan was probably funding them on some level. They probably guilt-tripped her into taking care of them by saying shit like "we took care of you like you were our child."

Fuck them. They deserved death for using her and discarding me like I was nothing. I'm guessing that's the same thing that they did to our mother. She was only 18 when she left and they didn't come looking for her. They didn't give a shit about her until she was dead. And even then they didn't care because they couldn't even be bothered to take in both of her children.

It was after 1:00 am and I sat in my car across the street from their house. The street was dead quiet as if time had stopped. In my backseat, I had a 5-pound bag of sugar and some potatoes. While it probably wouldn't kill them, I decided that I could start my revenge on them by fucking with their cars.

Quickly, I hopped out and poured half the bag of sugar into each gas tank while using a funnel. I then stuffed the exhaust pipes with potatoes. At least they wouldn't be able to drive

anymore. It would cost them thousands of dollars to get their cars fixed. More than likely they'll ask Logan for the money but since she's facing attempted murder charges, she'll probably say no. Baby girl is going to need her money to hire a good criminal defense lawyer.

Once I was finished, I got back in my car and as soon as I did, their front door opened. I ducked down out of fear that they saw me vandalizing their cars. However, when I heard one of the cars start, I realized that I wasn't seen. I got up to see the commotion and was shocked to see that Charles was pulling off. It would be a few minutes before his car stalled but where in the fuck was he going this late at night.

Curiously, I began to follow him but trailed far behind. It was way too suspicious since there were very few cars on the road. Eventually, I gave up at the next red light because he certainly could see me if he got suspicious. Where in the hell was he going?

Was he cheating on Veronica? If so, with who? What woman is allowing his old ass to come over for a booty call at 1:00 am? That shit didn't make any sense.

Once he drove through the red light, I eyed him until his car disappeared from my sight. Maybe I should put a GPS tracker on his car. But there was no point. I wanted him dead. Trailing him and following him around didn't serve me. His death did. I wanted him to pay for the years of abuse that I endured because he and Veronica wouldn't take care of me.

Confused about his late-night booty call, I decided to drive to Hawthorne Court, a housing project where I bought weed and Molly from a dealer named Keavon.

As I drove I couldn't shake the thought of Charles but I tried. It didn't matter where he was going if it weren't hell. And that's where I wanted to send him. That's where he belonged. Him and his trifling ass wife.

When I got to Hawthorne, I hung out in my car until I saw Keavon come out. Wearing a pair of grey sweatpants he came over to my car and settled in the front seat.

“What you need?”

“Have you seen Molly?”

“Nah... Just Mary,” he responded.

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah. Shit’s hot right now and I haven’t been able to score.”

“I can get weed from anywhere... I came here for...”

“Well, I ain’t got it. Sorry to disappoint you,” he said while looking ahead.

“I have another request,” I whispered, hoping he knew someone that could do the hit on my aunt and uncle.

“What is it?”

“I need help.”

“With what?”

“There are two people... I need them...”

“Dead?” He asked as he looked at me in astonishment.

“Yes. Can you help me or do you know someone?” I asked.

“Yeah, I do. Who you hittin’?”

“A couple. They’re older. My aunt and uncle. I need it done as soon as possible,” I replied because I was ready to get out of town. I was tired of DC and following my family around. I was ready to move on but not until they were dead.

“That’s cold. You need the insurance money?”

“It’s not about money.”

“What?! Then what is it about?”

“Can you do this for me or not?” I asked while looking at him intently.

“For \$2500, I can have it done.”

“That’s all?”

“Baby girl, I know niggas that just like to kill. They’ll be okay with \$2500,” he replied.

“So when can we make this happen?”

“Let me get your number and I’ll call you when we’re ready. It could be a few days. Is that cool?”

“The sooner the better,” I said as I reached for his phone to enter my number inside.

“Cool. I got you. Here you go,” he said while reaching into his pocket for a baggie of weed.

“How much?”

“It’s on the house for you tonight,” he winked before getting out of the car.

In a flash, he was out of my car and walking back towards the court. I took a deep breath and headed home to wait for his call over the next few days. I couldn’t wait to read the headlines about those two being murdered. Once they were dead, I’d go back to where I came from and never bother Logan again.

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chapter
twenty

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Logan

THE LORIEN HOTEL was smaller and less grandiose than the Ritz but it was warm. It had a charming quality to it and I liked that there was a garden in the courtyard. I had spent my morning in the garden praying that Gavin or even Jasir could find my twin. It had been a couple of days since my attack and I hadn't heard anything from Jasir. Gavin also said he had no leads.

Upon Jasir's suggestion, I did hire a criminal defense lawyer who said that he would try his best but I had to give him something. The thing is, I had nothing to give. I was an innocent victim of a vindictive bitch that no one could find.

Whenever I thought about the havoc she's reeked on my life, I cried hard. It was insane the amount of drama someone could create for you when they've never even met you. If it weren't for Harlem, I probably would've jumped off the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. But I had to remain strong for my daughter. I had to see this to the end. This bitch couldn't hide forever. And when I found her, I couldn't guarantee that I wouldn't kill her.

I inhaled deeply, taking in the sweet scent of the cherry blossoms and lilies. A bee buzzed in my ear, causing me to stand to my feet and finally leave the garden. Aside from the bees, it was the only place where I got peace and quiet. No eyeballs were staring at me and judging me for what they thought I did.

Exhausted from the night before, I made my way back to my hotel room to have a drink. There was no one on my side, not even Candace. After all the things we had been through I couldn't believe that she didn't want anything to do with me. It was insane to me that she didn't believe me. I've never lied to her before. Why would I start now?

When I arrived in my room, I poured a glass of vodka and mixed it with lemonade. Wine just didn't do it for me these days. With the amount of shit I had going on, I needed the

hard shit. A part of me considered taking a trip to southern VA and finding some authentic moonshine. I decided against driving around looking for liquor that was made in someone's bathtub.

After knocking back the drink, my phone rang. I jumped to pick it up, only to find that it was my aunt calling me. Annoyed, I answered, "Hey."

"How are you?" She asked even though I had called her two days ago about my assault. She wasn't available to even come to check on me, talking about she had Bible study.

"I'm as good as I can be. What's up?" I asked while pouring another drink.

"Someone vandalized my and Charles' cars. Put sugar in the tank and potatoes in the exhaust pipe. Our engines are done!"

"Oh wow. Who could've done that?" I asked as I took a sip.

"We have no idea. It happened the other night. I'm so pissed. They said it would cost \$6,000 for us to each get those Benz's engines rebuilt."

"That's a lot of money," I sighed.

"Yeah, it is. And I know that you're going through a lot right now but we can't get around with an engine," she said attempting to manipulate me into giving her money.

"Aunt Veronica, I may be facing attempted murder charges as well as a divorce. I'm no longer suspended from work. They've fired me. I can't give you that much money right now," I replied.

"But you have savings. It's not like you had to pay a lot of bills while living with Xavier."

"I have too much going on. I can't give away that amount of money."

"Are you serious?" She asked me with a hint of attitude wrapped around her voice.

“Yes, I am. What do you mean?”

“You know... Chuck and I went down to Richmond to adopt you. You were dependent on crack and you had some health issues. You cried a lot and you were jittery. Nothing could soothe you. You had to have heart surgery from what your mother did to you,” she spoke, piling on the baggage for my guilt trip.

“Aunt Veronica, this not the best time for me...”

“I’m not done. We brought you into our home and raised you as our own. We would take out private loans just to ensure you had those pretty dresses for those pageants. I’m not asking for much...”

“I appreciate everything you’ve done but you are asking for too much right now. I’m literally in hell right now. And Xavier and I just gave you \$50,000 6 months ago to remodel your kitchen. I don’t have money to give right now. Take it out of the house. I’m sorry,” I said right before hanging up.

“We should’ve left you in the garbage! Everything we’ve done for you and this is how you repay us?” She screamed at me. But I was too exhausted to fight. There were bigger fights at hand, like finding the bitch who was ruining my life.

Without defending myself, I ended the call and saw a notification. It was a reminder that tonight was Harlem’s flute recital. There was no way that I was missing it. She probably thought that I had abandoned her since I hadn’t seen her in a few weeks. I was going and I didn’t care what Xavier and Olivia thought about it.

As I showered, I thought about what my aunt said to me. It was so hurtful that she would even suggest that she should’ve left me in the trash. Who says that to someone that they raised? There was no excuse for it and I would never forgive her for that shit. She’s guilt-tripped me before but there was no going back from that. If this was just a tenth of what my twin felt, then I could understand why she hated me. But she didn’t know that being raised by them came with strings attached.

After I got out of the shower, I got dressed in a pair of black skinny jeans and a black bodysuit with a taupe blazer. On my feet were a pair of leopard mules. For the first time since I got fired, I beat my face.

Once I approved of my look, I headed out and made my way to Harlem's school. My heart raced with anticipation for seeing my baby girl's face. I couldn't wait to hug her and tell her how much I've been thinking about her. How much I've missed her and how no matter what happens, I will always be her mother.

When I arrived at the school, I took a glance at the parking lot to see if I saw Xavier's car. Fortunately, I hadn't seen it yet. However, I did see Olivia's car. I still decided to hold my head high and walk in with pride. Harlem had been rehearsing for this recital for months and I'd be damned if I missed it because of the judgmental glares of other parents.

And because Xavier wanted to keep a perfect image, he wouldn't say anything to me in public. He and Olivia will have to stand there and pretend to be happy that I'm there to witness my child in all her greatness.

With as much confidence as I could muster, I walked in and made my way down the aisle. I fully intended on sitting as close to the front as possible. Harlem needed to look out into the audience and see that I was there. I wanted to squash any doubt that she may have had about my love for her.

As I walked down the aisle, I could hear the whispers behind my back. I could feel their eyes burning into me, probably wondering why I had the nerve to show my face. Just because I had a twin out there who was determined to ruin my life, didn't mean that I needed to hide.

I sat in the middle of the third row from the stage. A woman who was sitting next to me got up and moved but I didn't care. They acted like I fucked their husbands. It didn't matter to me. By her moving, I now had more elbow room. I hadn't even noticed that Olivia was sitting right behind me.

It wasn't until she leaned forward and said, "please don't start any drama," that I knew she was even there.

I turned around and replied, “I’m just here to support my daughter.” Without allowing her to say anything back, I faced forward and prepared for the recital to start.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Xavier said when he sat next to Olivia.

“Let’s just keep it cool. We’re all here for Harlem,” Olivia said.

I didn’t bother turning around. I just shook my head because he was the one starting the drama. Just as the lights went off, he leaned forward and whispered to me, “nice job fucking my client and making him fire me. You are so pathetic.”

I fanned him away from my ear because I didn’t need to focus on that negativity tonight. I’d deal with that bullshit tomorrow. Today, I just wanted to be there for my kid and remind her that I loved her.

By the time Harlem came on for her solo, I had fully calmed down. The crowd forgot all about the town harlot that was sitting in the audience amongst them. Harlem played perfectly. She sounded even better than what I remembered.

And she smiled at me. I could tell she missed me and hadn’t been tainted by the rumors that were going around. She sounded beautiful as she blew into her flute. I couldn’t have been more proud. Smiling from ear to ear, I jumped to my feet when her solo was done and clapped harder than any parent in there. Tears of joy ran down my face as I watched my baby girl improve her art.

Once the recital was over, I waited for her to come out. Kids rushed from behind the stage to join their parents in celebration. I stood against the wall while Olivia and Xavier talked amongst themselves. They walked over to me as if they were about to threaten me. Menacing looks glared from their eyes as they approached me.

“You should leave,” Xavier stated firmly.

“Why? She’s my child and you don’t have an official custody agreement,” I replied.

“It’s coming and when it does you will never see her again.”

“Hey calm down, X. Look we’re just concerned that your presence is distracting. Everyone is staring at you. Everyone knows what you’ve done,” Olivia chimed in.

“I haven’t done anything,” I responded.

“Would you grow up? Your twin sister? It’s getting ridiculous!” Olivia spat.

“She refused to accept responsibility for what she’s done. It’s pointless but maybe some time in prison will get her straight,” Xavier continued.

“Who roots for the mother of their child to go to prison?” I spoke.

“Are you kidding me? You fucked my client. You fucked 4 men on camera. What is wrong with you? I wish you weren’t the mother of my child. You are a disgusting, vile, low-down bitch. I hate you. And one day Harlem’s gonna know the truth about you,” he spoke while standing close to me.

“Daddy?” Harlem said from behind Xavier. None of us heard her standing there or saw her walking up to us. We were too caught up in the drama and bullshit to realize that our child could hear our conversation.

“Harlem... um, what did you hear?” Xavier asked.

“I wanna go home with my mommy,” she ignored his question and ran to me. I knelt and scooped her up in my arms, hugging her closely. I sniffed her hair and took in her essence, remembering she was my motivation in finding my sister. Reuniting with my daughter was a top priority and I had half the mind to run out of the auditorium with her.

But I was still in danger. If my twin was capable of setting me up to be raped, then she could be capable of setting my daughter up to be harmed. As much as I hated to admit it, she was safest with her father. It broke my heart to leave her with him but it was temporary. I had a feeling that this would all be over very soon. I was going to find that bitch and make her pay for what she’s done to me and my family.

“I’m sorry baby but you can’t go home with me right now.”

“Why?” She asked with a crack in her voice. Gently, I placed her back down on the ground and kissed her cheek.

“A lot is going on that I can’t explain right now. You should stay with Aunt Olivia and your father right now.”

“But I miss you,” she whimpered.

“I miss you more than you can know. And trust me the only reason why I would ever be apart from you is to keep you safe. We will be together soon. Okay?”

“Noooo. I want to live with you now!” She cried.

“You can’t baby girl.”

“See this is what I was talking about! Why would you even come here?! You’ve turned this entire day into a shitshow!” Xavier barked.

“Watch your mouth. She is my child and I have every right to be here! We will be going to court very soon and I’m getting custody!” I replied before kissing Harlem.

“Excuse me...” we heard a voice from behind us.

When I turned around it, I saw that it was Mrs. Kimble, the vice principal. She stood there with a glare of concern and nervousness. I already knew what was coming later.

“We’re going to have to ask you all to leave because of the commotion. This isn’t the place for family squabbles,” she whispered between gritted teeth.

“No worries. I’m heading out. I’ll see you later baby,” I hugged Harlem and kissed her. If it weren’t for my psycho twin, I would absolutely take her with me.

“No mommy!” she cried and screamed. Xavier picked her up and held her back from running after me. The look on his face was marked with so much disgust that I knew that he hated me. And if I didn’t fix my situation right away, he would make Harlem hate me.

“I’m sorry,” I replied as I rushed out of the auditorium. Tears poured down my face as I hurried to my car. I could hear my daughter calling for me from the back but I couldn’t turn around. Keeping her safe was my priority as badly as I wanted her to be with me.

When I got in the car, I banged my head against the steering wheel and sobbed. This was the most hopeless I had felt in a long time. It was as if I had zero control over my life. There was nothing I could do until I found this bitch. And trust when I do, I was making her pay.

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chapter
twenty-one

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Lola

WHEN I WAS ten years old, I lived with the vilest foster parents. They were a couple who had only taken me in because they needed the extra cash. Back then you could make a lot of money caring for unwanted children. However, they never cared for me. They simply took the money and abused me in return.

Every night the husband would sneak into my room and touch me while his wife slept. No matter how much I begged and cried for him to stop, he wouldn't let up. I used to think the wife had no idea about what her husband was doing to me. However, she knew.

One night, I heard him creep back into bed with her and she responded, "don't try to sleep with me after you been touching on that little girl."

She knew and didn't even care. For days, I couldn't look her in the eye because I found her to be disgusting and evil. How could she lay next to a man that would do such a thing under her roof? As a woman, she was supposed to be on my side and protect me from him. But she didn't. She never cared.

Back then I was too young to do anything about the abuse. The husband had frightened me by saying that if I ever told anyone he would kill me and drop my body in the river. No one would be able to find me. Better yet, no one would come looking for me. He told me if my mama didn't want me, why would the cops bother looking for me.

And I believed him. I had spent my entire life feeling unworthy and unloved. I've always believed that no one would come looking for me if I disappeared because I wasn't worth being known.

So, I stayed hidden. Lived within the margins of society and didn't get real jobs. Wouldn't make real friends. Definitely wouldn't date anyone because no one could be trusted. The only person that had my back was me, myself, and I. After

living like that for years, I wanted to punish the people who should've loved me — my family.

Being discarded by my family; my mother, father, aunt, and uncle, was the reason I've lived a life of abuse. It's the reason I can't get a real job. It's the reason why I'm steadily used and betrayed. It's why I had no solid identity. And I wanted payback.

I've already knocked my twin down a peg, but now it was time to kill the people who should've saved me. They could've rescued me and protected me from hell but instead, they fed me to the wolves. But that's okay. I was coming to get what belonged to me tonight and after that, I will disappear. I'll leave Logan to pick up the pieces while I vanish, never to bother her again.

I slipped in a pair of black leggings and a Fashion Nova hoodie. I had my blonde wig secured to my head. Today I was rocking a bob with a part down the middle. I slicked the baby hairs down and then applied some light make-up.

Tonight, I was meeting with the hitman about killing Aunt Veronica and Uncle Charles. While I would've liked an apology or at least an explanation of why they decided to only adopt Logan, I didn't need one. Their death would be sufficient enough for me to move on with my life.

Before I walked out of the apartment, I received a call from Keavon. I hoped that he had some Molly today because I would love to take some once I celebrated Veronica and Charles's deaths. And once they're buried six feet under, I would visit their graves and dance on them. Fuck those two assholes. Logan should be happy they're gone. They would've eventually drained her pockets like they've done her whole life. I knew all about how they took her beauty pageant prize money and spent it without asking her.

"Hey Keavon," I interrupted my thoughts by answering the phone.

"Sup. Where you at?" He asked.

"I'm heading out in a few. Is your boy ready?"

“Yeah, I’m gonna be there too, to make the proper introductions. Do you have cash?”

“How much?”

“\$1000 for a deposit. Pay the rest once the job is done. Aight?”

“Cool. Where am I meeting you?”

“Behind Hawthorne Court. Be there at 1:00 am. Not a second late,” he said before hanging up.

When I looked at the clock, I saw that it was only 12:30 am which was plenty of time to get there. After I completed my look, I slipped on a black dad cap and a pair of black combat boots. I then went to the kitchen and pulled \$1000 in cash out of the cookie jar. I had been saving money for a moment like this. I was relieved at how easy it was to find someone to take care of my aunt and uncle.

With the money in my over-the-shoulder purse, I headed out of the front door. On the way to the meet-up, R. Kelly’s *It Seems Like You’re Ready* played on the radio, almost making me swerve my car off the road. That song always made me feel like I was having a heart attack. Quickly, I turned it off and decided to listen to the silence instead.

Thoughts about finally getting revenge on the people who made my life a living hell played in my head. It was as if I were finally going to be free of the hatred, contempt, and fear I had my entire life. There was a part of me that wanted to be there when they took their last breaths. I’d love to stand over them and look them in the eye so they could see what abandonment felt like. I would even tell them that it was Logan so they could feel the betrayal. They probably never thought in a million years that Logan would hurt them. That would be the highlight of watching them die. Dying at the hands of someone you thought loved you has to hurt like hell.

Moments later, I arrived at Hawthorne Court to meet with Keavon. Nervously, I sat in the car while I tried to get myself together. My heart raced in my chest as I anticipated what was going to happen next.

It made me laugh to myself because I had talked all that shit but now I was anxious. I was scared that something could go wrong. I was terrified of going all the way through with it. Ruining Logan's life was one thing but having someone killed was another. After taking a few deep breaths, I decided that it had to happen. There was no way that I was going to walk away from the opportunity to kill the two people that harmed me the most.

Once I received the 'okay' from Keavon, I walked to the back of the apartment building where I saw him and a friend leaning against the brick wall. He motioned for me to walk over. With my hands in my pocket, I nervously made my way toward them.

"Sup. This my man Lucky," Keavon introduced us.

"Nice to meet you Lucky."

"Likewise. So Keavon says you need a hit on two folks?" Lucky asked after shaking my hand.

"Yeah. My aunt and uncle. Veronica and Charles Dennis. I want them dead A.S.A.P."

"True. Where do they live?"

"1476 Brookhill Ave, Kettering, MD. Can you make it look like a home invasion?"

"Yeah, that's how we typically do things. We can handle that this week. Did Keavon tell you how much it's gonna be?" He asked.

"Yes, he said it would cost \$2500. Is that still the price?"

"Yeah. You got the deposit?"

"I do. It's right here. I have a question though," I said as I reached into my purse to pull out the money.

Just as I pulled the cash out of my purse, a rat scurried across the concrete in our direction, forcing me to jump in shock.

"Disgusting!" I screeched.

"Yeah there are lots of rats back here," Lucky said.

“Ew. Let me hurry up and get home then. But my question... I’d like to know if I could be there. I want to stand over them as I watch them bleed to death,” I said flatly.

“Sure, I can make that happen. It’ll go down next Friday.”

“Okay, here’s the deposit,” I said while handing over the cash.

“Thanks. Aren’t you that woman from that show?” He asked as he squinted his eyes to see me better underneath the dim light.

“Um... yeah. Logan Medford,” I lied.

“Cool. Well, Logan Medford, you’re under arrest for solicitation of murder for hire,” Lucky said.

“That’s funny. Bye guys. Keep me in the loop,” I responded as I turned and walked away. But behind me were three other cops with their guns drawn and aimed at me.

“Put your hands behind your back,” Lucky commanded.

“Are you fuckin’ serious? You set me up! Keavon! You set me up!” I hollered.

“You have the right to remain silent...” Lucky began to read my rights.

“NO! This is entrapment! Get your hands off of me! Stop! Keavon, you rat! You bitch ass nigga! Fuck you! You set me up! Stop nooo! Don’t arrest me!” I protested and fought but it was no use. I tried to break away but Lucky slammed me to the concrete and wrestled my hands behind my back.

My face scraped against the ragged hard surface, just as another rat ran by. I screamed when I thought that it was going to jump on my face and attack me. I was disgusted by having my pretty face on the ground.

Eventually, Lucky cuffed me and then forced me to stand to my feet. “Put her in the car. I’ll meet you at central booking.”

“Fuck you Keavon! He sells drugs by the way. Did y’all know that? He sells Molly, weed, coke and heroin!” I cried as

they shoved me into the back of a squad car.

Outraged I kicked and screamed to the tops of my lungs. This was not how everything was supposed to go down. I did not have to spend time in prison on my to-do list. What the fuck? I should've known finding a hitman shouldn't have been that easy. As I cried and screamed, I wondered what was going to happen next.

The thing that pissed me off the most is the fact that Veronica and Charles will still be walking around as if nothing happened. They got away with giving me a fucked up life and because of them, I was going to be spending the rest of my life in prison.

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chapter
twenty-two

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Logan

THE NEXT MORNING I woke up with an excruciating headache. It felt as if someone had taken a bat and hit me upside my head. My mouth was dry as the Sahara and my stomach twisted and turned with nausea. I felt like I would throw up at any moment.

As I blinked my eyes open, I realized something was completely off. I woke up in a different place than where I went to sleep. Last night after I left the recital, I came back to my hotel room and got drunk then passed out.

So why was I waking up in a jail cell?

“Hello?!” I called out.

I was laying on a metal bench in a cell with one other woman. I wiped my eyes to clear the blurriness so that they could adjust to the unfamiliar sight. Why was I here? It wasn't like I was drunk in public. I drank myself into a stupor in my hotel room.

“Excuse me miss?” I called out to the other woman in the cell.

“What do you want Princess?” She asked sarcastically.

“How long have I been here?” I wondered.

“They put you in here with me around 3:00 am. You were going on and on about being set up. I almost punched you in your mouth because you wouldn't shut up and I need my beauty rest. She pursed her lips. She was anything but beautiful. Her skin was covered in sores and scars and she had a receding hairline that could rival Sherman Hemsley.

“I don't understand,” I muttered to myself. I scratched my head to discover that I was wearing a blonde wig. I was confused about why I was in jail.

If last night I kept mentioning being set up, then I could've been referring to my twin setting me up to get raped by Richard. Had they finally come to arrest me last night for

attempted murder? What the fuck was going on? And where did this wig come from?

“Guard! Guard!” I hollered to get some answers.

“They come around every 15 minutes. They’ll be back soon,” my bunkmate said.

“Why the hell am I here?” I asked rhetorically.

“From the looks of it, selling pussy down on Central Ave,” the bitch across from me laughed.

She was absurd and of no help. Panic spread throughout my core, tightening my chest and making it hard for me to breathe. I stood to my feet and began to pace the floor. What the hell was going on? How could they arrest someone out of their sleep? It made no damn sense!

“GUARD!” I squealed. Someone had to give me answers right now because this was unacceptable.

“Yes, Mrs. Medford?” A guard said my name when he came towards the gate.

“Why am I here? I need to speak to someone there’s been a mix-up,” I protested.

“You’re here under solicitation for murder charges. You don’t remember trying to hire someone to kill your aunt and uncle last night?” He asked while laughing.

“There must be some kind of mistake. I want to speak to my lawyer. Where’s the cop that charged me? This isn’t right,” I cried as I gripped the bars.

“Back up,” the guard instructed. Doing as he said, I backed away from the bars. My face was hot and wet from my feverish crying. My chest was so tight that I thought it would explode.

“I don’t know what’s going on? I went to bed in my hotel room and I woke up here. You have to tell me something. I’m losing my mind,” I cried.

“Listen, Detective William Thompson will be here in a couple of hours to interview you. You can call your lawyer in

a few,” the guard said before walking away.

I backed away from the bars until I settled on the bench. The tears were uncontrollable because somehow I knew I was fucked. Hearing the guard say that I was arrested for trying to hire a hitman for my aunt and uncle sent me into a frenzy. Why would I try to kill them? Something wasn't adding up. My twin had something to do with this but how did she manage to get me arrested?

“Medford,” the guard came back quickly.

“Yes?”

“Someone is here to see you,” he announced. In a flash, Jasir appeared with a look of confusion and disappointment written on his face.

“Jasir! Can you help me?”

“Let her out and get us an interview room,” he said to the guard while looking squarely at me.

Moments later I sat across from him with a cup of black coffee in my hands. The hot styrofoam cup kept my fingers warm since it was freezing in the precinct. I hated that Jasir was seeing me look like a hot funky mess. And what was with this damn wig? Ugh. I could taste the morning breath lingering on my tongue and it didn't help that I reeked of liquor from the pity party last night.

“Jasir, I don't know what's going on?”

“You lied to me. That's what's going on,” he said while pulling out a file.

“What's this?”

“Logan, I don't get you. You're gorgeous. Smart. Charismatic. Yet you're making up these lies about a twin sister and ruining your own life. And now this?! Murder for hire.”

“What are you talking about? I never hired anyone to kill!” I contested his accusations.

“Drop the act. They’re going to come in here with video proof of you giving money to an undercover officer! Some low-level dealing punk traded your ass in so that he wouldn’t get time. They popped him for possession and he told them he knew of a celebrity trying to hire a hitman.”

“What the fuck!?” I stood to my feet and grasped my forehead. I paced the floor as I tried to make sense of what he was saying to me but nothing registered.

“On top of that, you’re facing financial fraud charges. You stole money from one of your Johns and bought a lot of shit. He reported you when he saw that you were attacked by Richard Shineback. Who by the way has provided ample proof of an affair. The front desk assistant and text messages between the two of you corroborate that you asked him to come and attack you.”

“Wait what? None of that is true. None of it makes any sense!”

“Please stop lying. I have ample proof. There is no twin sister. It’s been you all along. They found this fake I.D. on you last night,” he said sliding over a driver’s license I had never seen before. The name read Lola Medford. Lola was what my uncle Charles used to call me when I was little and I always hated it.

“I don’t understand.”

“I don’t know why you did it either. You need to tell me something so that I can help you. You’re in serious trouble. What’s wrong with you?”

“It wasn’t me,” my voice cracked as I cried.

“My men are going to the address on this bogus license now. Why are you trying to kill your aunt and uncle?”

“I’m not! Jasir, you have to believe me. I don’t remember anything about last night. I went home, had some drinks then went to sleep. When I woke up I was here. That’s all I know.”

“So you blacked out?” He asked.

“I guess. It doesn’t make sense. I don’t know. Why is this happening?!” I hollered. Panic washed over my body and my chest tightened. My head felt light and my tongue went numb. Before I knew it, I had passed out.



When I woke up, I found myself handcuffed to a hospital bed. Still, in a state of disbelief, I couldn’t comprehend what was going on. How did this twin of mine become so crafty and clever that she set me up for solicitation of murder for hire?

“How are you feeling?” Jasir asked when I fluttered my eyes open.

“What happened?”

“Severe panic attack. The doctor will be back in a few to ask you some questions.”

“Are the handcuffs necessary?” I asked lifting my arm.

“Murder for hire is a serious charge.”

“Where’s my lawyer? I asked for one hours ago,” I replied.

“She’s on her way.”

“Well, I have nothing to say to you until she gets here,” I responded.

“That’s fine but I wanted to show you something.”

“What?” I asked.

“This is a picture of the trunk in your G-Wagon. Do you see that plastic bag? It has several blonde wigs inside, including the one worn in your sex tape. My men are tossing the apartment you rented in Southeast. The neighbors say they only see you late at night but at no other times. What’s that about?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about?”

“We’re going to dust for fingerprints and I’m willing to bet, the only ones we’ll find are yours.”

“I’ve never been to an apartment in Southeast,” I cried.

“You are insane if you think you can still tell the world that it’s your evil twin sister out here ruining your life. We can see clearly now that it was you all along. I really wanted to believe you and was willing to help you. But I think you need a psych evaluation because you’re off in the head,” he said before walking out of the room.

I banged my head against the pillows and shut my eyes but that didn’t stop the tears from falling. Nothing made sense anymore. It was as if I had woken up in a different dimension, one that was much darker than the one I thought I was living in.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of someone’s T.V. down the hall. I could hear the news report clearly. “It’s been three weeks since Rue Massey has gone missing but her mother hasn’t given up hope.”

Rue was still out there. Maybe there was a chance that she was still alive. But I couldn’t worry about her whereabouts. I was facing prison time. Real hard prison years for crimes I didn’t commit.

“Hi Mrs. Medford,” the doctor spoke after tapping on the door.

“Hi.”

“How are you feeling?”

I struggled to lift the arm that was cuffed to the bed and replied, “I’ve seen better days.”

“Yes, sorry about that. I’m Dr. Halpert and you’re in my care for now. I hate when they handcuff prisoners, especially when they’ve only committed non-violent crimes.”

“I’m not a prisoner. I don’t belong here,” I cried.

“That’s not for me to decide. But you were admitted for a severe panic attack. Have you had one before?”

“I used to get them often in college. I’d have a panic attack, blackout, and wake up either in the hospital or in my door room. My roommates would say that I walked back on

my own as if I were sleepwalking. I couldn't hear nor would I speak. That was years ago. I took anxiety meds but eventually got off of them. Haven't had a panic attack since."

"You said you would blackout?"

"Yeah and not remember anything. I apparently didn't speak until I slept it off," I responded.

"Was there liquor involved?"

"Oftentimes but not always."

"And it would leave you in a catatonic state?" He pried.

"I guess."

"And Detective Jasir says that you don't remember getting arrested last night."

"I don't remember any of the things they accused me of. It started with that damn sex tape that my twin sister made," I sniffled.

"Do you blackout often?"

"I drink but I do it in my room. I go to sleep and that's that."

"Tell me more about the sex tape and your twin sister?" He asked as he moved in closer.

I explained to him how I received the tape and all the events that happened after. I shared with him that I believed that I had a twin sister who was hellbent on ruining my life. Dr. Halpert never once judged me nor rolled his eyes because he thought I was lying. He listened intently as if he were trying to put the pieces together himself.

"Logan, I want you to do a thorough psych evaluation. My wife Shannon Halpert is one of the best psychiatrists in the world and she's teaching a residency here. Would you be open to having an evaluation from her?" He asked me while looking concerned.

"Sure but I already know that I'm depressed. That's why I was seeing the bitch who I eventually found out was sleeping with my husband."

“She doesn’t need to evaluate you based on your depression. I want her to diagnose your Dissociative Identity Disorder,” he said softly.

“Diagnose me with what?”

“I think you have split personality disorder.”

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chapter **twenty-three**

SPLIT PERSONALITY DISORDER. The words rang in my head like a church bell, loud and undeniable. I became flustered all over again because what did that mean for my future? Was I crazy? I was insane. There was no twin sister. It was just me. The entire time, running around committing crimes.

I thought of all the people I hurt. My daughter, Richard Shineback, and my aunt and uncle. I tried to have the people who raised me murdered. What was wrong with me? Why was I like this? Tears raced down my face as I tried to come to terms with the fact that I was a nutcase.

“Why are you saying I have split personality disorder? Why are we ruling out my twin?” I asked.

“My wife can explain it to you better. She’s an expert in the subject but based on what you’ve told me, you’re either a psychopath or you have a real Dissociative Identity Disorder. I don’t believe that you are a psychopath but based on the blackouts, the drinking, and the evidence; you’re not mentally well.”

“What does that mean? Why would I make up a twin?”

“You didn’t make her up. People with Dissociative Identity Disorder have personalities that take over to help them cope with stress and trauma. Your brain will create these personalities after a traumatic event that you couldn’t handle. It’s rare but we’ve seen it in traumatized people before.”

“Why would I have a personality who wants to ruin my life?! That makes no sense!”

“I promise my wife can help you get the answers you need. For now, I want you to get some rest until she gets here.”

“Dr. Halpert?” I called out his name as he walked away.

“Is my life over?” I wondered out loud.

“No. Now that you know the problem, your life can truly begin,” he said while smiling.

When he left me alone, I began to think about the events over the last few months. Five months ago I started seeing my therapist, Dr. Kara. Once I started seeing her, I found myself sneaking to drink more. There was something about our sessions that always left me feeling down. And now I knew it was because on some level I’ve probably suspected that she was sleeping with Xavier all along.

“Is there a way to retrieve those memories? The things I did like the sex tape?”

“My wife is an amazing hypnotherapist. She may be able to help you retrieve those thoughts,” he replied before smiling. “I’ll send her in soon.”

I eased back into the hospital bed while looking up at the ceiling. Shocked at how incredible the mind could be, I wondered what else had I done while I was Lola. I was disgusted that I fucked those men on tape. Why would I do that to myself? What kind of self-sabotage was that?

Most people self-sabotage by procrastinating, overeating, and causing fights in relationships. I went out and created a whole identity that was a whore. She fucked those men. And recorded. What was wrong with me? Why was I wired like this?

The tears wouldn’t stop pouring as I thought about all that I had been accused of. The credit card fraud, setting up Richard to be attacked and hiring a hitman to kill my aunt and uncle. Why would I want them dead? They sacrificed so much by bringing me into their home. And I repay them by killing them? Nothing was adding up.

At that moment, I began to accept that I shouldn’t be raising Harlem. It was in her best interest that I stayed out of

her life. She deserved a fit and sane parent. Xavier would be able to give her much more than I ever could. I was officially mentally unstable and no judge in their right mind would give me custody.

And I wouldn't want it. If I can easily snap and become someone so toxic, self-hating and destructive, was I capable of hurting her? Could that other personality come out and kill her? I needed my daughter to be protected from me. I was the problem all along. I'm a psychotic bitch on a rampage to destroy everything I've built.

"Mrs. Medford?" A woman called my name when she knocked on the door. When I looked up, I saw a petite Asian woman with an ear-length bob standing at the door. On her face was a pair of black-rimmed glasses and she held an iPad under her armpit.

"Yes," I called out.

"I'm Dr. Anna Halpert. My husband told me a bit about your case and wanted me to do an official psych evaluation. How does that sound?"

"You're going to do it right now?"

"It can take a few days to get to the heart of the matter. Your case may be very complex but today I'll start by asking you some questions. From the answers, I'll decide our next course of action."

"What do you wanna know?" I sniffed.

"Tell me about yourself. I want to know as much as you can remember. Tell me about your parents and how you grew up?"

I let out a sigh before shaking my head. I was tired of telling my story. The sad story of the little girl born to a crack-whore who left her child in the garbage. Who was raised by her aunt and uncle. They forced her to do beauty pageants and she became wildly successful because of it but also miserable.

"My mother was addicted to crack..." I started. I told her about everything that I could remember up until now; from being adopted to Sabrina getting kidnapped and killed down

the latest drama in my life. She listened intently while recording as well as taking notes.

The more I opened up to her, the less tense I became. There was something about her presence that made me open up and feel relaxed. By the time I was finished telling her my life story, I had stopped crying.

“You’ve essentially blacked out for every one of these self-destructive events,” she asked rhetorically.

“Does that mean I’m crazy?”

“No. Typically Dissociative Identity Disorder is caused by a traumatic event. Something occurred when you were a child and it caused you to create other identities to protect you. The trauma was too powerful for you to endure so your conscious mind checked out,” she spoke.

“I don’t know of any trauma,” I replied.

“Well, being placed in the garbage is traumatic. Although you were too young to remember, it was still recorded in your nervous system. Babies are highly susceptible to danger. Because you were born addicted to crack cocaine, your nervous system was already shot. It was deficient. Your mother didn’t properly bond with you and give you the love that you needed which made you feel rejected. Over time you begin to reject and fragment parts of yourself. You recognize that if your mother didn’t love you that you weren’t worthy of love. Which causes a loop of self-hate,” Dr. Anna explained.

“So I’ve had this disorder since I was a kid.”

“The building blocks for it started when you were a baby and rejected by your mother. This other identity goes by the name of Lola.”

“Yeah, my uncle used to call me that when I first started pageants. I hated it though.”

“Interesting. And this Lola identity hates you.”

“So, I hate myself?” I asked in confusion. I reached for the pale pink cup of water sitting on the table. As I took a sip of it,

I thought about what I had just asked. I hate myself? Did I? Is that why I ruined my life?

“You have a complicated relationship with yourself. Apart of you does hate yourself and then there’s a part of you that’s trying to protect yourself. I’d like to do some hypnosis around Lola. Would you be comfortable if I put you under and bring her out?”

I paused as I considered what she was asking me. I was afraid to let Lola out because what if she did or said something even crazier than before. I wasn’t ready to meet her but I knew that if I were going to solve this problem, she needed to come out. If there was a chance that I could get my life back then I was going to have to let her out.

“Will you record it?”

“Absolutely.”

“Excuse me, Logan.” We both heard a male’s voice from behind. It was Gavin standing in the doorway with an envelope.

“Hey, Gavin this is Dr. Halpert. Dr. Halpert is the private investigator that I hired to find my evil twin. But newsflash Gavin, I was the twin all along. I have split personality disorder,” I blurted out.

“Um, wow. Well, that would explain some things,” he replied.

“Like what?” I asked.

“Why Lola’s apartment has been empty. You rented it a few months ago and paid for the rent with money orders. You haven’t noticed missing cash from your bank account.”

“Her alter would have hidden that from her. The alters have a way of lying to you internally to help you ignore variances in your true day-to-day life.” Dr. Anna replied.

“Wow. I’m sorry that I couldn’t catch this for you sooner,” Gavin said.

“Me too,” I began to cry again.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” Gavin asked. I could tell that he pitied me and I didn’t blame him. Everything was fucked up and I had no way of fixing it.

“No,” I swallowed hard.

“I’ll be in touch. Please if there’s anything I can do for you.”

“There’s nothing right now. Fix my brain?” I sobbed.

“I’m so sorry,” he said again before tipping his head and walking out of the door. I was helpless and his sorries couldn’t fix that. Nothing could.

“Logan I’ll help you integrate your alter. But first, I need to find out more about her. I need to speak to her. Can I hypnotize you and speak to her? Please?”

“How does that work?” I asked.

“I talk you into a deep trance and then ask questions that would trigger her. It seems like she comes out when you’ve been drinking from what you’ve told me.”

“Can you bring her forth without me drinking alcohol? I never want to touch it again if it’s turning me into a psycho,” I replied.

“You won’t have to drink. I can lure her out with hypnotherapy techniques. By doing that we can control the situation and easily bring you back.”

“Can I get rid of her?”

“Rather than get rid of her, we’ll integrate her. You will understand her desires and her needs as your own. You’ll be able to control your actions rather than blackout,” Dr. Anna responded.

“Okay,” I replied, wiping a tear from my cheek.

“I’ll give you a few moments to mentally prepare. I’ll be back in an hour. How does that sound?” She asked.

“That’s fine.”

When Dr. Anna left, I reached for my phone and called Candace. I hated that I had to go through this alone. The last time I saw Candace, she believed that I was making it all up. Now I had proof that there was someone else ruining my life — an alternative personality.

“What is it now?” Candace asked when she picked up the phone.

“So you’ve heard?”

“About you trying to have Charles and Veronica killed? Yes. Girl, what the fuck is going on with you?”

“You’re not going to believe it but this psychiatrist thinks I have split personality disorder,” I blurted the words out quickly because I was tired of holding them in my mouth.

“What?” Candace asked, her tone switching from sarcastic to a serious one.

“Yeah. It’s a long story but I’m in the hospital right now. I’m about to get hypnotized...”

“Wait, you’re serious? Split personality disorder?” She asked again.

“I’m dead serious.”

“I’m coming up there in the morning. I can’t come tonight because I have to finish work...”

“That’s fine. I just wanted to tell you because the last time we spoke I felt like you stopped trusting me. I was so convinced that I had a twin sister out there ruining my life. The whole time she’s been living inside of me.”

“Jesus, Logan. I’m so sorry about this. I feel terrible. I really thought you were capable of doing those horrible things. Is there a cure for it?”

“The doctor says that I can integrate the alter but we won’t know much until we can bring her forward.”

“I’ll be there in the morning. Please, let me know if there’s anything that you need.”

“Thank you for believing me,” I said.

“I’m sorry for distrusting you in the first place. Love you, sis. I’ll call you before I go to bed.”

“Talk to you later.”

I leaned back and gazed towards the ceiling. If someone would’ve told me that they had split personality disorder, I wouldn’t have believed them. This shit was crazy and I prayed that it didn’t get worse.

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chapter
twenty-four

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Logan

BY THE TIME Dr. Anna came back to the room, I had calmed myself down. I was settled and ready for her to draw out the darkest part of me. I was prepared to relinquish control and consciously allow Lola to speak her truth hoping that she could give insight into why she was there and why she wanted to ruin my life. Most importantly, I wanted to know why she wanted to kill my aunt and uncle.

“How are you feeling?”

“Hopeful. I’m just hoping that you draw her out and find out her motives. I needed to understand why she would put my body through so much chaos. The gang-bang, sleeping with Richard Shineback, and lord knows what else.

“We’ll see if she is up for that convo. Right now I just want to see if she’ll emerge at all.”

“She can hide?” I asked.

“No. You can’t hide her. I need you to relax and focus on your breath. Breathe in and out of your nose slowly. Follow my voice...”

It was like I sank into the Caribbean ocean. Gentle warm seawater washed over me and took me under but I didn’t panic. It was like traveling to an underworld. Like sinking into the cozy fluid of the womb. Absolute safety and comfort. I never wanted to leave. I followed her voice to absolute peace.

While in the dark, I saw a flash of color in the distance. The flash began to flicker, like a light determined to turn on and brighten a room. Eventually, that light turned into a familiar form — my reflection. Only there was something different about me. This woman was bolder and sassier and she looked like she loved taking risks.

“Lola...” I heard echoing in the background. And then I extended my hand towards her, hoping she would grab it. I wanted to touch the woman who lived inside of me. I wanted

to touch the woman who was calling the shots. She was running the show and I had no control.

She grabbed my hand with a quickness while a sinister smile was written across her face.

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LOLA

“Lola???” Some Asian bitch was calling my name while standing next to what looked like a hospital bed.

What the hell was I in the hospital for? The last thing I remember was that I got arrested for trying to get Charles and Veronica killed. That bitch Keavon set me up! Ugh.

“Lola?” the woman asked again.

“Yes, damn! Stop saying my name! What the hell do you want?”

“I’m Dr. Anna Halpert. Do you know why you’re in the hospital?” She asked.

“I’m guessing when I was fighting the officer I got hurt?” I questioned, scanning my body for any bruises but there weren’t any.

“No, you had a panic attack. Well, Logan had a panic attack.”

“What does Logan have to do with anything. Is she here?!” Shit! She finally caught me. Then I’m done for. She can go back to living her prissy life because everyone will feel sorry for her. And then I’ll go to prison. Fuck that...

“I want a lawyer,” I stated flatly. I wasn’t about to talk to this bitch and get myself in more trouble.

“What? No. You’re not in trouble,” she said.

“I was just popped last night! I am in trouble and you tryna’ set me up. I want a lawyer!” I reiterated.

“This is not part of an investigation. I don’t work for the police. This is strictly confidential.”

“What? Why?” I barked.

“Lola, I need to know more about you. What’s your story?”

“Crack hoe mama threw me away when I was a baby. I got placed in foster care and was sexually abused by my foster dad. My foster mom knew and didn’t care. I ran away and became an escort. Then end,” I replied blankly.

“Interesting. Tell me what you did on Christmas 2019.”

“I can’t remember. I’m drawing a blank,” I replied

“What about New Years 2018?...” The Dr. started asking about other dates but I couldn’t remember a damn thing. It was as if someone had swiped my memories clean. She asked me all kinds of questions about my past that were starting to confuse me. It was as if I had amnesia. I couldn’t remember pockets of my life.

“Why are you asking me all of these questions?” I asked, pissed that I agreed to talk to this bitch.

“Do you find it interesting that you don’t remember much?”

“Did the cops give me a concussion?” I asked because I didn’t understand why I had very few memories.

“Where do you think Logan is right now?” She ignored my question.

“Well since I got caught, I’m assuming she’s back at home with her annoying husband who chooses her food for her.” How would I know where Logan is if I’m in the damn hospital?

“Logan is right here in this room. Look at the wristband,” she suggested. When I glanced down I could see that my medical band had Logan’s name instead of mine.

“Well, I told that rat and the undercover cop that I was Logan Medford.”

“You are Logan. You’re two identities sharing a body. But Logan is the dominant personality. You were triggered by an event. You seem to only get to take control when she’s drunk. What I want to know is why are you hurting Logan,” The Dr. asked but I was too confused and annoyed to answer.

“We are two different people. We are twins. Identical sisters from the same cursed womb. Why are you telling me that we are two identities? Huh?”

“There’s no proof that you exist outside of Logan. You only appear when she’s drunk. Just moments ago I placed Logan under hypnosis and asked you to come forward. You are a sub-personality who is dominating Logan’s life. I want to know why you’re so destructive?” She asked.

Stunned by what I had just learned, I replied, “Because, I’m doing Logan a favor.”

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LOGAN

“Lola? Where’d you go? Lola?” I heard Dr. Anna saying when I came to.

“No, it’s me. Logan,” I responded. “So she came forward?” I asked still remembering what it felt like to be comforted and safe. That hypnosis sent me to the softest place on earth. And if I’m honest, I never wanted to come back.

“She did come forward but I think she’s in shock that she’s just an altar,” Dr. Anna replied.

“What did she say?”

“She said that she’s doing you a favor by destroying your life,” she said.

“How? This is going to kill my chances of being a mother to my child.”

“She left before I could ask more questions. I think we should try again?” She suggested.

“Fine,” I replied.

Before I knew it I was drifting off again.

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TRUDY

“Lola?” Some Asian woman was standing over me calling me that little fast-tailed girl’s name.

“I am almost 70 years old, why are you calling me Lola? Do I look like that little girl?” I asked, vexed at the notion.

“I’m sorry. You have a Caribbean accent?”

“Well, I am from Trinidad.”

“How old are you?” I’m 69. I just told you I was almost 70! Now, why am I handcuffed to a hospital bed with you calling me Lola?”

“What’s your name? I’m Dr. Halpert,” the woman replied.

“I’m Trudy. Why am I here?” I asked waiting for her to respond.

“Who are you to Lola? And do you know Logan?”

“I know both dem likkle girls. I took care of dem. I was their babysitter. Them and the other little girl, Sabrina.”

“Sabring is Logan’s friend, right?”

“Right... Her friend. Oh my God!” I shouted.

“What is it?” Dr. Halpert replied.

“You have to help her!”

“Who? Sabrina?”

“No! The other little girl! The one on the news! I know where she is!” I shouted while pointing at the television that was hanging above Dr. Halpert.

“Trudy? What little girl?”

“That one right ‘dere!”

“Rue Massey?” She asked.

“Yes! I know where she is! We have to get her!”

“Wait. Do you know where Rue is? How?”

“Because that’s where he took Sabrina. I saw them kill her. He said that he would do the same to me. I ran away. I left Logan to fend for herself. Is she okay?”

“Who took Sabrina?” Dr. Halpert asked.

“CHARLES!”

“Are you saying he took Rue?”

“Yes. There’s a warehouse. He made me come with him and he told me if I weren’t good. If I weren’t good to him then the same thing would happen to me,” I answered. Just the memory alone caused me to faint.

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LOGAN

When I came to, Jasir and another cop were standing at my bed with Dr. Halpert. What the hell had happened now? Did they find more evidence of crimes I've committed? Did they come to take me back to prison?

"Logan, does the name Trudy sound familiar to you?" Dr. Halpert asked.

"Kind of... why?"

"You have another alter named Trudy. She just came forward."

"Why are the cops here?" I asked looking at Jasir who no longer looked like he was disturbed by me. There was a glimpse of sympathy on his face which let me know the game had changed. This alter named Trudy had said something that made Dr. Halpert call the police. Did I kill someone?

"It's about Rue Massey. Your alter said that she knew where Rue was," Jasir said while staring at me, hoping I could tell him where she was located.

"I have no idea where Rue is. You of all people know that. I've been trying to get her story heard on a national stage," I defended myself.

"I'm not accusing you of doing something wrong. Dr. Halpert told me about your disorder and I'm sorry for not believing you. I'm sorry for judging you. But one of your alters seemed convinced that she knew where Rue is. She mentioned your Uncle Charles and Sabrina. She said Rue is wherever he took Sabrina. Now the police found Sabrina in the woods but where was she before that? Do you know?" Jasir asked.

As I processed his words, snapshots of the past began to form. Scenes that I barely recognized or knew were in my head came to play. One by one, I regained my memory of things that happened to me as a child. Unable to contain my emotions, I began to cry. What was this shit in my head?

“Logan...” What’s happening? Dr. Halpert asked.
Too much was happening and I couldn’t make it stop.

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chapter
twenty-five

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Logan 25 Five Years Ago

“ARE you doing the Miss PG County pageant?” Sabrina asked me as hung out in my bedroom after school.

I began to remember that day like it was yesterday. Sabrina’s school uniform was pressed perfectly and she didn’t have a hair out of place.

Even though we were best friends we competed against each other in pageants quite often. Her parents had more money than mine, so it was easy for her to afford all of those pretty costumes.

Meanwhile, my aunt and uncle struggled to pay for mine. Charles was a gambler who had frequent winning streaks. He would give my aunt money for my costumes when he hit big.

Aunt Veronica wanted me to do pageants simply because Sabrina was doing them. And my aunt and Sabrina’s mom had one of those rivalry friendships. They were frenemies who didn’t truly like each other but they liked to compete. So they did it vicariously through their daughters.

Sabrina and I didn’t mind because we loved getting dressed up. We didn’t take the competitions seriously as the adults did. We were too busy being kids.

“I think so. If Aunt Ronnie can get me a dress. Then yes,” I replied.

“How do you like living with your aunt and uncle? Is it weird to not have your mom and dad?” Sabrina questioned when she rolled over to her back while play-punching my stuffed animal.

“They’re okay. I mean I’ve never met my mom and dad. I don’t have anything to compare it to,” I responded.

“True. They kinda scare me,” Sabrina admitted.

“Why?” I wondered but they scared me too. Aunt Veronica was always saying mean shit to me like ‘I better not turn out like my mother after all the money they spent on me.’ She

would tell me that I looked just like my mother but it wasn't a compliment. There have been several times, she's said that I better be careful so that I don't become a whore like my mother.

"Well, Ms. Veronica is always looking at me funny. And so is Uncle Charles but he is a different kind of funny," she confessed.

I sat up and looked over with my big brown eyes. I needed to tell her the truth because I was tired of holding it in. And since she saw that Uncle Charles looked at her 'funny' then I knew she would keep my secret safe.

"What is it?" She asked when she noticed my expression change.

I took a deep breath then whispered, "every night Uncle Charles comes to my room and..."

"And what?" She asked.

"Hey, ladies what are y'all doing with the door closed?" Uncle Charles announced when he thrashed the door open. Did he hear what I just said to Sabrina? If so, how? Was he spying on me?

"Just talking, Uncle Charles," I replied.

"Well, it's getting late. Sabrina, I think it's time you head home," he spoke. Sabrina lives a few doors down from us but it was only 5:00 pm in the spring. The sun was still shining brightly. It made no sense that she had to leave.

"I'll see you tomorrow at school," Sabrina smiled before hurrying out of my room. I listened as she ran down the stairs and slammed the front door behind her. The entire time Uncle Charles stood in my room, staring at me with the creepiest glare.

"Uncle Charles..." I called out his name because I knew I was in trouble.

"I thought I told you what happens in this house stays in the house," he spoke in a low tone while folding his eyebrows.

"What do you mean?"

“You said ‘every night Uncle Charles comes into my room...’,” he said mockingly.

“I wasn’t going to say anything,” I protested as tears ran down my face.

“I truly wished you hadn’t. I told you what would happen if you ever told, right?” He asked while stepping closer to me, I was afraid of what he was going to do next.

I was sitting on the edge of my bed when he came and placed his hands on my shoulders. He never touched me in the daytime. It was always at night when Aunt Veronica was sleeping. Please, I hoped he didn’t do it tonight. Immediately tears rolled down my face.

“Charles?! What are you doing?” Aunt Veronica asked when she walked past my room. She looked at us suspiciously; her eyes darting back and forth.

“Just having a conversation with my niece,” he replied slyly before releasing his hands from my shoulders.

“Uh-huh. Well, dinner is about to be done. You sent that other little fast-tailed heffa home?” Aunt Veronica asked.

“Yeah. She’s gone,” he answered.

“I don’t like them two being friends. That little girl ain’t right and she’s the wrong influence on you, Logan,” Aunt Veronica said.

“I agree,” Uncle Charles said as he walked out of the room.

“She is just like her mother. She used to be the biggest hoe back in the day...” Aunt Veronica ranted when she walked away.

It was so weird to hear her talk behind Sabrina’s mom’s back like that but to her face, she said the complete opposite things.

Aunt Veronica was such a fake bitch and she was male-identified. Who calls ten-year-olds fast? Who says that in front of their niece? And more importantly what type of woman turns a blind eye to her husband sexually abusing her niece?

Those were answers to questions I never got to ask because I was forced to forget what happened next. My mind and body couldn't hold it together, so I forgot about it and the memory became distorted.

Because that was the night, my best friend went missing.

"Wake up!" Uncle Charles said while shaking me out of my sleep. Groggily, I allowed him to pull me out of bed and place me in his car.

"Where are we going?" I asked him

"You'll see." Instantly, I became afraid. He had taken me away in the middle of the night which was a sign something terrible was about to happen.

"I'll be good. I won't say anything again. I promise."

"I thought you weren't going to say anything before. You've truly disappointed me. This is what happens when you make me upset," he said as he sped down the street.

Before I knew it, we were at a warehouse. He took me inside where he brought me in front of my best friend who was tied to a chair. She was unconscious and completely still. I figured she was dead but the police didn't find her for 23 days after she went missing. And she was found they said that her body had only been there for a day. Meaning, he kept her somewhere to abuse and torture until he was done with her.

"If you keep running your damn mouth, you'll end up like her. And I'll throw you right back in the garbage where you came from. You understand?" He said through clenched teeth.

"Yes," I replied robotically. When I woke up the next morning, I felt like it was a dream. And like most dreams, I began to forget. I was never there and never saw my friend.

That's where it began. The dissociation. It's what's kept me safe all these years. I had to forget because if I remembered, I'd tell. And telling meant death. So to keep me alive, I created these alters. I chopped and divide the secret until it was completely distorted and didn't match reality. I then fed that distortion to the alters to keep because it was too much for me.

It was all coming back to me. Everything that I did and the reasons I did them. For the first time, I had clarity.

I created Lola to dismantle my life because it was one built on lies. I didn't love Xavier, I married him to put distance between my family and me. He was wealthy and his family was from the upper echelon of society. It was miles apart from who I grew up with.

Lola tried to destroy my career because, at the end of the day, I hated it. I hated being in the spotlight ever since Sabrina was kidnapped. I only did it to appease Aunt Veronica and Uncle Charles because somewhere in the back of my mind I still feared that they could kill me.

All of the suppressed memories were returning to me as the ocean returns to the sand. It was overwhelming as it flooded my mind, leaving me no room to escape. As I began to recall everything that happened in my past, I broke down in tears. I could feel my uncle's hands crawling over my body. I could sense the detest glaring from my aunt's eyes.

They never loved me. Lola wasn't abused in foster care. It was something my mind made up because it couldn't conceive of family members mistreating a child in such a horrific manner. I knew that my uncle killed Sabrina and I hid that secret from myself to save myself.

"Logan?" Jasir called my name, luring me out of my thoughts. Dr. Anna sat next to me, waiting to see if I had more to share but all I could think about was Rue.

"You have to go get her," I said out loud.

"Do you remember where the warehouse is?" Jasir asked.

"I'll know it when I see it. I need to be in the car. It's not too far from Oak Mill Road," I responded.

"Get her out of these cuffs. She should've never been in them!" Dr. Anna shouted.

Immediately I was released and before I knew it, I was walking out of the hospital with Jasir and his partner, Kia. Still, in a state of shock by the information I had just learned, I tried my best to put it aside so that we could find Rue. If we

could rescue Rue from my uncle, that would make everything that I had been through worth it.

“How are you holding up?” Jasir asked as we rushed towards the car.

“I don’t know,” I replied.

It didn’t matter how I was holding up. The only thing that mattered was finding Rue. Once she was safe at home, then I could focus on my life. I could begin the healing process and work towards being the best mother I can be for Harlem.

Once we were in the car, Jasir called for backup. As we raced towards Oak Mill Road, the area began to look familiar to me. I was able to direct them to the exact warehouse where I last saw Sabrina. Then I began to think, what if she’s not there? What if he stashed her somewhere new?

But then it dawned on me that because he got away with it, he wouldn’t have switched up his plans. That’s what arrogant sociopathic narcs do. He probably felt so assured that no one would ever know his dark secret that he didn’t bother switching up his plan.

“Make a right,” I announced.

“Which door?” He asked.

“327,” I said remembering that I saw the address when I was a little girl. I could recall how scared I was that he was going to kill me when he brought me to the warehouse door. It had stayed firmly planted in my memory buried under lies to keep me alive.

“There that motherfucka’ is,” Kia shouted as we moved closer. We saw my uncle park his car and walk towards the door, looking over his shoulder. He didn’t even notice the unmarked cop car.

“Back up should be on their way,” Jasir said. “Let’s go get him now,” he continued.

“I’m coming with you!” I said as I tried to unlock the door.

“No, it’s unsafe for you,” Jasir replied before he and Kia hopped out of the car. They closed and locked the doors

behind them, including putting a child lock on my door. I tried as hard as I could to get out because I wanted to kill him.

He was supposed to protect me but he raped me instead. He was supposed to make me feel safe but killed my best friend to spite me. He was supposed to provide for me but I was the one who was forced into pageants so that they could leech my prize money.

I watched as Jasir held the gun to him while Kia rushed inside to check on Rue. Everything happened so quickly that it felt like a dream. The backup police arrived on the scene while Jasir handcuffed Charles and sat him on the curb. An ambulance arrived and before I knew it, they were ushering Rue out on a gurney.

But she was still alive! Kia stayed at her side and piled into the ambulance with her. She was finally safe from Charles. Tears ran down my face as I rejoiced. They caught him before he killed her like he did Sabrina.

It was over. The nightmare was finally complete and now it was time to rebuild my life and get my daughter back.

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chapter
twenty-six

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Logan

DAYS after Rue was found and my uncle was taken into custody, I was still in the hospital under psychiatric care. Every day Dr. Anna came to work with me on integrating my alters so that I could live a normal and healthy life.

I learned that liquor was what made me switch but I was originally triggered by my husband's cheating. Apparently, I followed him one day and discovered he was sleeping with Dr. Kara White. It was then that I hired her to be my psychiatrist. From there, Lola began to take shape.

Lola represented my deep-seated self-hatred. Being thrown in the garbage and later raped by my uncle had caused me to develop severe unworthiness. That feeling of depression was because I didn't think I deserved my life nor did I want to live it.

To make matters worse, I chose a husband who was just as critical as my aunt and uncle. Xavier picked me apart almost every day, pointing out if I gained a pound or if a stray hair was out of place. That cemented my self-hatred.

Lola came to disrupt that life and act out in ways I would've never thought to do. And she tried to have my aunt and uncle killed because of the abuse they inflicted upon my body. I'd be forever grateful that she came into my life, but I'm strong enough to take the lead now.

Dr. Anna said it could take years to fully integrate her into my psyche and that in the meantime I should avoid alcohol since it was a trigger for me to blackout. I'd do anything to get my life back and if that meant not drinking, I was fine with that.

"Are you ready?" Jasir asked when he came into my hospital room.

I took a deep breath and exhaled before responding, "Yeah, I'm ready."

“You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to,” he said while looking at me with compassion. He had been visiting me every day since the arrest to check on me. Several friends had stopped by, including Candace, who felt remorseful about not believing me.

From the outside looking in, I wouldn’t have believed me either. It was easy to forgive her because it was a difficult pill to swallow. Because of my trauma, I was mentally unwell but I was determined to get better.

“I need to do this,” I replied to him.

“Then let’s go.”

Together we walked out of the hospital and made our way to the precinct. The fresh air hit my nostrils and brought me back to life. The tension and sadness I had been feeling over the last few months had dissipated now that I knew the source of the problem.

And today, I was going to confront my aunt and find out why she allowed this shit to happen to me. They were still investigating to see if she was involved in Rue’s and Sabrina’s disappearance. She swore she had no idea but they were still holding her while they searched her place.

When we arrived at the precinct, Jasir walked me to a back room where she sat staring straight ahead. There was a part of me that wanted to walk in and attack her. Beat her savagely for what she allowed to happen to me but it was no use. I had to remain calm because, at the end of the day, I still needed to get my daughter back.

“Veronica,” I said her name when I entered the room.

“I’m still your elder. You will not call me by my first name. I am Aunt Veronica. It’s about respect,” she demanded.

“I have zero respect for you. You let your husband abuse me all those years!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she denied.

“Is that how you want to play it?”

“That’s the truth. I didn’t know anything about it!”

“You are so full of shit. All of these years I’ve been giving you money. I let you talk to me in any kind of way. And you let him touch me! He killed a little girl and kidnapped another!” I screamed.

“I didn’t have anything to do with that.” She shrugged her shoulders and rolled her eyes.

“What happened to my mother?” I asked her, hoping she would at least tell the truth about that.

“What do you mean?”

“My father said she ran away because she was raped. Who raped her!?” I asked.

“Your mother was a fast assed little girl. Always smiling in some man’s face. She was too friendly. She ain’t get raped. She was sleeping around and got hooked on drugs. That’s why my Mama kicked her out.”

“You’re lying. It was your husband, wasn’t it? Huh?!” I slammed my hands on the table causing her to jump but she didn’t reply.

She sat there quietly to deny what I figured out. I knew that it was Charles that raped her because he said something to me once when he was molesting me. He said that I was just like my mother. It was another memory I had suppressed.

“Your mother was trouble. She threw herself at my husband when she was about 15 and years later got hooked on drugs. We threw her out because she was stealing money to get high. We tried to do right by you. We raised you and you turned out to be crazy! We should’ve let the hospital keep your ungrateful ass. Now my husband is going to prison for the rest of his life...”

“I honestly wish you would’ve left me. I don’t even know why I bothered to come here. You will rot in hell for what you did to my mother and I. All of these years I was mad at her for abandoning me. But you were the reason she did it. You chose that pedophile over your flesh and blood. You’re disgusting and deserve whatever is coming your way,” I said before walking out of the room.

There was nothing left to say. The bitch was heartless and cold. She no longer deserved my energy or time. I needed to move on so that I could heal and become the best mother I can to Harlem. She will never experience what I've experienced. She will never feel the way that I did ever again.

“Are you okay?” Jasir asked when I walked outside.

“I feel free,” I replied.

“I'm going to do my best to find something to charge her with,” he stated firmly while looking me in my eyes.

“It doesn't matter. She will never rest another night again. Her soul will forever be tortured by what she did.”

“I'm still going to try.”

“Go get her then. I'm tired and going home. Well, to Candace's house until I find a condo.”

“I'll be in touch. Again, I'm sorry about everything that's happened.

“It's okay. It all worked out. We found Rue and they dropped all charges against me.”

“What's next for you?” He asked as I walked away.

“Anything I want because I'm finally free.”

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epilogue

I SCROLLED through the book cover designs that my literary agent sent me for my upcoming memoir *The Split*. It was difficult to choose the perfect cover because they were all so good. She had been working hard to get my book out in time for the summer when NYT Bestsellers typically sold the most copies. After spending a year writing the book, I was finally ready to release it.

Thankfully, we also sold the movie rights as well. My story would be going to the big screen by next year and I couldn't wait. Although the events that led to me writing the book were awful, I still managed to turn lemons into lemonade.

"I have to go, Ariana. My daughter's about to come out."

"Okay fine! But please let me know which one you like the most by 9:00 pm!"

"I got you," I laughed before hanging up.

Ever since I had my mental episode, things were getting better. Uncle Charles was sentenced to prison for murder and kidnapping for triple life. However, he would never see the end of his sentence because he was killed three weeks after he arrived. The men inside didn't take kindly to a pedophile. Rumor has it, one of Rue's cousins did the hit.

Because Uncle Charles was the breadwinner, Aunt Veronica's home was foreclosed on. No one in the family or her community would help her because I made it clear that she was in cahoots with my uncle.

After I got out of the hospital, I did as many interviews as possible to clear my name. From *The View* to *Red Table Talk*, I told the world about what happened to me and how it gave me Dissociative Identity Disorder. I was met with compassion, acceptance, and empathy.

Of course, a few people said that I was faking it but they don't matter. I wouldn't wish split identity disorder on anyone. Blacking out and having reckless sex was nothing something I would fake.

To my surprise, Xavier believed me. I thought he would be one of the people who said I was faking it but he didn't. He granted me a divorce and gave me all the money I asked for. I figured he didn't want to be on the wrong side of the story. We agreed on a custody arrangement where Harlem would live with me as long as I remained in therapy for the foreseeable future.

I had no plans of quitting therapy any time soon. It was helping me untangle a lifetime of trauma and I was better for it. Finally, I was living my life on my terms. I quit working in television so that I could work behind the scenes. My book and movie were projected to rake in a lot of cash. And Candace and I would be starting a lifestyle brand soon. Things were looking up for me.

In the last two years, I began to build a relationship with my father that was developing nicely. He invited Harlem and I to his home for Thanksgiving. It was a blessing that our relationship turned out well.

The cherry on top of all the good that was coming my way was that Jasir and I became close. He stuck by my side as I healed my disorder and eventually we started dating. We're taking things slowly but I'm in love with him. This is the healthiest and safest relationship I've ever been in.

Now that all the secrets were out in the open, I was able to live my life the way I've always wanted to live it — free and joyous. With that freedom and joy, I can be the best mother to Harlem and she was flourishing because of it.

“Mommy! I got an A on my science project,” she said to me when she ran towards the car.

“I knew you would. Congratulations! How do you wanna celebrate?”

“Coldstone,” she replied.

“Let’s get you some,” I said as I pulled her in for a hug.

This was the life I was made for. I was going to shine bright and do my best with Harlem. It was one way I could honor my mother. She was so broken but through my efforts, I can help her soul rest in peace.

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The end.

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free book snippet

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The Coldest Karma Ever

They say that God looks out for babies and fools. Well, I've known from infancy that was a bold-face lie. If it were true, God would not give babies to bitches who were abusive to children. No, God would make these vain psychotic hoes barren. Hell, he wouldn't have even given them wombs. What would an evil bitch need with a uterus? Being a mother was a privilege that bitches like my mother didn't deserve.

It was for that reason alone, that I struggled with even believing in God. Why would he give me a mother like Kimberly Whitehead? A woman who's blamed me for everything wrong in her life even though she was the one who made those choices. She chose to have me. She could've aborted me. And I truly wished she did because I was miserable in this skin.

This scarred, flaky, inflamed, and itchy skin. My poor tortured soul was being contained by skin that made people recoil when they walked by. It even caused me to turn my head away when I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My own reflection taunted me to no end. Take away my verbally abusive mother and the bullies at school, my reflection would still torment me.

Why did I have to be cursed with psoriasis and a hateful mother? It just wasn't fair. God looks out for babies? Not this one. Sure, I hadn't died in a freak accident, been kidnapped, or had cancer. But I was still tortured. Tortured by my mere existence.

And today was picture day at school. We were nearing the end of the school year and it was time to take photos for the

yearbook. Last year, I was blessed to not have a psoriasis flare-up, so my pic came out fine. But this year was a different story. My skin had been in crisis for almost a year now and nothing seemed to help.

Mama stopped dragging me back and forth to the clinic because none of the treatments were making a difference. “I ain’t gon keep wasting my motherfuckin’ time and money on your shit. You just gon’ have to deal with it. Just like I got to deal with these stretch marks you gave me!” She said after my last stint at the clinic.

At 15, I was left to deal with my scaly, dry, and crusty skin on my own. And the more stressed I became, the worst my skin got. And unluckily for me, I lived in the most stressful environments one could imagine.

It was 7:30 am, and I was rushing to get ready for school that started at 8:15 am. It was about 70 degrees outside already and by noon it would be in the 80s. For most people, warm spring days were heaven-sent. But for me, they were a sliver of hell.

In an attempt to shield my diseased arms, I was going to wear a long sleeve black shirt. However, that did nothing for the scaly patches that framed my mahogany face. The scabby skin caged my facial features, taking away from the fact that I wasn’t completely ugly.

My features were nice, symmetrical, possibly cute if you look past the disease. I had a pair of hooded and slanted brown eyes, with a beauty mark right underneath my left eye. A pair of full heart-shaped lips. And a button nose. But it didn’t matter. No one could ever see anything but crusted skin.

As I rummaged through my closet on the search for my long sleeve black shirt, my heart raced. It was the typical anxiety I felt every morning for school. I never knew what version of my mother I was going to get. I never knew what asshole at school would tease me.

Eventually, I spotted my shirt on the floor of my tiny closet. It must have fallen off the hanger. And from the looks of it, it was covered in dust.

I kneeled down to grab the shirt and as soon as I did a mouse scurried across the floor. “Ahhh!” I shrieked as my heart sank to my gut.

“Shit...” I groaned. It was the second mouse I had seen this month. No matter how many times, Mama called the exterminators for these rats and roaches, they never completely disappeared.

All my other long sleeve shirts were in the dirty clothes, waiting to be washed. Tonight, I had decided that I would wash my clothes out by hand since Mama refused to get quarters for the laundromat. She was so damn lazy and useless.

I inspected the shirt, and aside from lent, it was okay enough to wear. I shook it thoroughly and used some scotch tape to pick the lent off of it.

While I continued to get dressed, I turned on the news in the background. I just needed some background noise to calm my anxiety about the day. I slipped on a pair of Express jeans that I stole from Ross a few weeks ago. Mama refused to take me shopping even though, I desperately needed new clothes.

“You need to get a damn job. When I was your age, I was already getting modeling bookings!” she shouted at me when I asked her for some new clothes.

I’d love to get a job. Nothing would make me happier than to be able to get my hair done every week. To be able to buy new clothes from H&M and Forever 21 would be amazing. Brand new Jordans or even some heels from Steve Madden would be cool. The problem is, it’s difficult to get a job at 15. And it’s even harder to get a job when you resemble a leper.

Who the fuck wants to receive their Big Mac from a bitch who looks like a zombie? Nobody wants their dressing room opened by a girl whose skin looks like she has flesh-eating bacteria. There was no job for me and until I got my skin fixed, there never will be.

I reached under my bed to retrieve my Jam hair gel that I’d swiped at the local beauty supply store. My hair was probably

my best feature. Mama would say that I had good hair like my father. She said it was the only thing I had going for me. It was wavy, dark and bra-strap length. But it wasn't good hair to me. Good hair meant nothing if it was on top of bad skin. I'd rather be bald with pretty skin, to be honest.

I've seen some pretty woman rock a bald head. I ain't never see a girl rock snakeskin and look cute. As I slicked my hair into my ponytail, I overheard the news.

"The Beltway Rapist strikes again. A 17 year old girl has just reported that she was sexually assaulted after walking home from her friends house in Del Rey yesterday evening. She's reporting that her attacker was a white male. However, he was masked..."

"KARMINA!" my mother hollered my name, tearing my attention away from the television.

Ugh, I made my way to the front of our tiny apartment, passing a roach on the paint-peeling wall.

"Yes, Ma'am," I responded when I followed her dark presence into the kitchen.

"Bitch, what the fuck is this?" she asked pointing to the kitchen sink.

I glanced over to see last night's cereal bowl, with a few pieces of off-brand frosted flakes swimming in milk. They weren't the only things swimming in milk, there were also a few roaches that had drowned.

Shit. I got caught up with my English homework last night and forgot to do the dishes. Mama was out late, doing God knows what. I didn't even hear her come in. And she always got outrageously pissed if I left even a single fork in the sink.

"I'm sorry. I had a paper to write..."

Smack! Her open hand landed across my face. The stinging vibrated across my cheek, drawing a single tear from the corner of my eye.

"I don't give a fuck what you had to do! I told yo' ugly ass to never leave any fuckin' dishes in my sink! You know we

got roaches and shit! Look at them. Shit is disgusting! I got half the mind to make you eat what's left in that god damn bowl. I don't have the funds for you to be throwin' away food, Karmina!"

I held my face, shivering in my shoes. I fought to keep the tears from falling. It was bad enough that day in and day out all I was cereal. But for her to berate me over a few cornflakes was ridiculous.

"Oh you ain't got shit to say?" she barked.

"I'm sorry. It won't happen again." My bottom lip trembled.

"You damn right it won't fuckin' happen again. Wastin' my motherfuckin' money. You da reason, I ain't got no gawd damn money now! If it wasn't for you coming into my life, ruining my fuckin' body, I would be rich, bitch!" she screamed at me.

A droplet of spit flew from her black blunt-smoking lips, onto mine. I cringed and felt tainted as soon as it landed. My eyes wandered her body up and down. She was right. Giving birth to me had taken a toll on her figure.

You see, before I came along Miss Kimberly Whitehead was a brown bombshell model on her way to gracing high-end magazines around the world. In the late 80's she was just as coveted as Tyra, Naomi, and Iman. However, she had a coke habit and a thing for bad boys.

But before the coke and dick. She was thin, leggy, and gorgeous. She liked to throw those old magazines in my face often. I'd seen pictures of her in Calvin Klein, Donna Karan and Victoria's Secrets spreads with her skin glistening in each photo.

As she was making her rise in the model world, she got involved with an up-and-coming rapper, Ace Hill. Ace was signed to Def Jam but right before his debut album and my birth he was murdered outside of a club in New York City.

Unfortunately Ace had five other children before me, so any money from social security was already really thin. And

mama's previously thin body was no longer model material. Her perky breasts had deflated to balloons. Her taut waist became a potbelly riddled with scaly stretch marks that couldn't be covered with make-up.

With her modeling days over and no way of attracting another rapper, she moved back to the DC area from New York to raise me. And it's been a struggle ever since.

"Can I be excused, please?" I needed to get my shit together so that I could get to school on time.

"Oh, you can't handle the truth about what a pain in my ass you are, huh? Can't get no fuckin' job no where. I used to make tens of thousands of dollars just to show up looking pretty. Now, I'm out here working the graveyard shift, wipin' old people's asses. And you got the audacity to be wastin' cereal. Got my fuckin' chest all tight!" she hollered while scrambling in the kitchen drawer for an inhaler.

Mama had really bad asthma that was worsened by her smoking and the fact that we lived in this old dusty ass apartment.

I waited impatiently until she retrieved it and began sucking on it. I lowered my eyes so that I didn't cut them at her. That's all I needed was for her to get angered because I was giving her attitude by looking at her funny.

"Bitch, look at me when I'm talkin' to you."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You tryna' be funny? Huh?" she asked shifting her weight in her black rubber clogs. She was wearing purple scrubs and had her hair in straight back cornrows.

I shook my head "no."

"Get yo' ugly ass out of my face. Tired of looking at that shit on your skin. And if I see you wasting my food again, Imma whoop yo motherfuckin' ass. And make you eat these damn roaches for protein."

"Crazy bitch..." I muttered when I turned and walked away.

“What bitch?! What the fuck you call me?”

“Nothin’ mama,” I called back as I walked away.

“I heard you bitch! I heard what the fuck you said!”

I didn’t even bother responding, I kept walking away but before I could get out of her line of sight, I felt something hit me in the back.

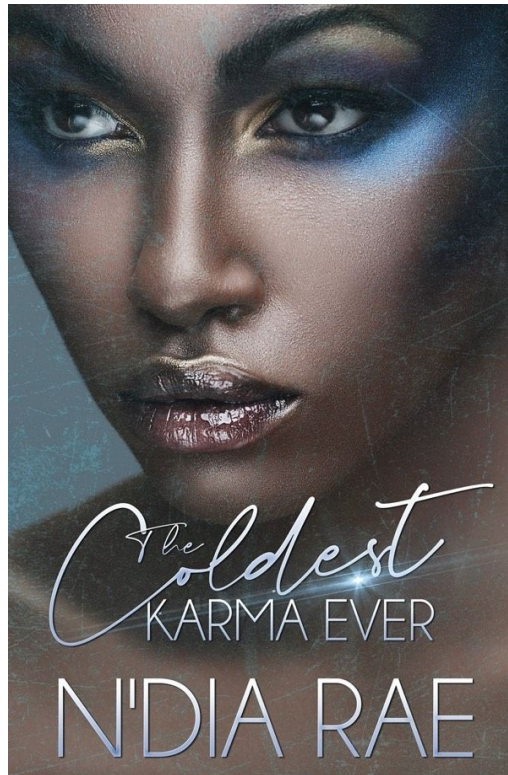
“MA!” I shrieked when I saw what she threw. It was the bowl of cereal with the roaches in it. “WHY!” I screamed as I jumped up and down, hoping there were no roaches on me. I was beyond disgusted that she would throw that shit at me. I wished I could’ve thrown it at her. I didn’t deserve it. God, I hated her. I hated the way she treated me. I hated this rundown apartment. I fuckin’ hated my skin. I hated everything!

“Stupid bitch,” she huffed as I hurried into the bathroom. I stripped out of my shirt and tossed it to the side since it was covered with milk. Angered, I wiped my skin down then went to retrieve another shirt. But unfortunately, all I had left her short-sleeved tops.

So that I wouldn’t be late, I slipped on a pink t-shirt and grabbed my denim jacket. With my bookbag on my shoulder, I ran out of the house.

“And don’t you eva leave a God damn dish in the sink again!” she shouted as I closed the door behind me. I walked down the stairs of our apartment and inhaled the fresh air. Would this day get any worse?

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