

K. K. Harris

Vows of Deception



#12139057



Lies, betrayal, lust, love, karma,
drama, and worst of all deceit...

Vows
of
Deception

Something old, new, borrowed,
and BLUE...

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to the love of my life, my number one supporter, my rock and wonderful husband Antonio Harris. You believed in me when no one had a clue what I was capable of accomplishing. Thank you for always pushing me to the next level.

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Also to my growing fan base, I want to thank each one of you for purchasing my books and overall giving me a chance to live my dream.

I pray you enjoy and God Bless!

Prologue

“I now pronounce you husband and wife. Lamont, you may kiss your bride.” The pastor announced and the congregation went wild. St. Nichol’s Missionary Baptist church was filled to the brim with on-lookers. Lamont Graves III and Danielle Renee Graves exited the church hand in hand surrounded by their loved ones.

The driver was instructed to take the longest way possible to the venue where the reception would be held to give the couple some much needed time alone. Because of the extenuating circumstances, they would not be taking a honeymoon. Between a full-time job as a social worker at the area hospital, a full load in school, and Lamont’s entrance level position they didn’t have the time nor the finances. Thanks to some good credit during her college years they were afforded a reasonable wedding and reception. Afterwards adjourning to a suite that was discounted by his best friend who manages the most extravagant hotel in all of downtown Charlotte. Living on a budget was what they were subjected to but the plans for the future would be well worth the wait.

Having met during Danni’s senior year in college one faithful day on the campus of Harris University, Lamont, a graduate student, quickly turned up the charm trying to bag the face new to him. Danielle rejected his advances without a second glance. That alone pushed his like for her until it turned into an infatuation. Danielle turned down every attempt he made in trying to get to know her. Lamont made it a point to seek out the young lady who made a lasting impression at

first bump. He had practically stalked poor Danielle until she agreed to go out with him. Being the beginning of a beautiful relationship to surpass all other failed attempts. After two years of courtship, Lamont thought it was time to pop the question.

An engagement of two years plus a couple of loans, Lamont and Danielle were able to buy their first home. With the left over from buying a fixer-upper they paid for the extra things they wanted for their wedding and reception.

“How does it feel to be Mrs. Graves?” Lamont asked his blushing wife.

“It feels great. Are you happy?”

“The happiest man on Earth.” Lamont said with a smile. “The real question is...are you happy?”

“Is this the face of a woman that isn’t happy?” Danielle made a funny face making Lamont laugh at her goofiness. “No seriously, I love you so much. I can’t wait to spend the rest of our lives together. Grow old together.”

“I can’t either baby.” He stated kissing his new wife’s lips. “I’m sorry we couldn’t take a honeymoon but I promise as soon as I am making more money, I will take you wherever you want to go.”

“You know I don’t need material things.”

“I hear you but don’t nag too much when all we have is ramen noodles for the next three to five years.” He joked.

“Boy stop, as long as we got hot sauce, crackers, and cheese we are good to go.”

“You are priceless young lady.”

“That will work.” They laughed. “Seriously, all I need is you. Plus have a mini me and you. What more could a girl ask for?”

“You got me whenever you want girl but...”

“I know, we shouldn’t have kids until we are both stable within our career. I got you but I can at least dream right.”

“Yeah baby, dream all you want.”

The couple finally arrived at their reception where they indulged in food, dancing, and endless congratulations. Pictures were taken as the two embraced throughout the evening. This was the beginning to the happily ever after or at least that’s what it was supposed to be.

Chapter One

This day five years ago, Lamont and Danielle said their vows of to have and to hold in front of all their witnesses. Danielle was anticipating all day long over what was to come. All the while getting her hair done, manicure, pedicure, and facial the nerves of standing in front of a bunch of people was still a lot to take in. Personally she would have preferred having a simple dinner just the two of them but Lamont wanted to go all out with a huge shindig. The guest list consisted of high powered businessmen, lawyers, doctors, and other influential people in the community. Unfortunately for her she didn't have any friends of her own because Lamont was convinced that the ones she had were jealous of her. They were supposedly jealous because she had a good husband who loved her unconditionally. They were living the good life after all, his words not hers.

Currently they had remodeled their once simple two story family home on an acre of land for the third and final. Now the home was a plush three bedroom, three bathroom plus powder room, finished basement for his smoking room, and so many more amenities. Lamont had even insisted they have a wine cellar in the far corner of the basement for the good stuff to be stored. Lamont had changed over the years from the simple guy that grew up as a middle class citizen to an over the top trying to please the big wigs executive. In a few short years, he had moved up from the entrance level executive to the highest level executive before vice president.

Danielle was happy that he had reached his goals taking some of the pressure off of her to be the main source of income.

Danielle had applied for so many jobs to hopefully reach her goal of where she wanted to be in five years. When she finally finished her final course work just last year, she was officially a licensed psychotherapist not just a social worker. She loved what she did at Helping Hand but that wasn't where she wanted to remain the remainder of years. The fact that she could help the troubled kids that came into the facility was good and all but she wanted to broaden her scope of work. Increasing in income wasn't such a bad idea either, sadly no one has considered her for the positions she has sought out.

“Sweetheart are you ready?” Lamont sauntered into their bathroom as she sat at her vanity retouching her makeup. She couldn't help but to admire how sexy he looked in his Armani suit.

“Depends on what you mean by ready?” Danielle said seductively giving her husband the eye. The smirk on his face let her know he knew exactly where her mind had drifted off to.

“Maybe I should be asking you what exactly you are ready for.”

“I am ready for you to make love to me. It's been a little while since the last time we were together.”

“I know baby but we've both been really busy.”

“Well I got a surprise for you.”

“Oh yeah and what’s that?” Danielle removed her robe to reveal her clean shaven kitty with his name in beautiful script over the triangle.

“Is that a real tattoo?” Lamont asked with an appalled look on his face.

“No silly it’s airbrushed.”

“As good as you look half naked and all, you should probably get dressed so we can get out of here. We don’t want to keep our guests waiting.”

“I am standing here with this gift on display and all you can think about is our guests.”

“I promise after we get back from our party, I will gladly ravish every inch of my gift. How does that sound?” Lamont kissed Danielle on the nose before pulling her into a tight embrace. “You smell so good.”

“Thank you but I probably taste even better. Would you like a taste husband?”

“I will take your word for it. The limo is downstairs honey. Chop, chop we have to get going.”

“You have got to be kidding me.” Danielle exclaimed because she was big heaping coal of horny. It had been at least two months since they had sex lasting longer than a quickie. In the beginning he would make it last for quite some time but now he was always in a rush.

Danielle continued to dress in her floor length gown, scanning her body in the floor mirror at every angle. Perfection was Lamont’s motto. Her designer gown and red bottom heels, she was flawless. They looked like a million

dollar couple, everyone was envious of the love they had for one another. Compared to some of the other women around her whose husbands or boyfriends were some dirty dogs, Lamont was always so dedicated to her. Never has she had to worry about their being another with her man. He worships the ground she walks on, literally. They have their small disagreements every so often but what couple didn't. At the end of the day they were still one.

The party was beautifully decorated and the food was delicious. Soft music played throughout the venue serenading the lovers. Drinks flowed heavily causing some to cut loose. Their families were in attendance mingling with the other guests even though they didn't see the point in all the extras. She could tell that her parents felt a little out of place by all the established, well-to-do people in the building. If she were honest with herself, she was as well but it was what Lamont wanted. She would do just about anything for him. After all their vows were clear, to have and to hold, for better or for worst. He liked the extravagant life, she liked the simple life. The meaning of opposites attract held true to its definition when it came to their current state.

"Where is that husband of yours?" Her parents asked towards the end of the night.

"I'm not sure. I was just looking for him myself."

"We are about to head out. It's been a long night."

"I understand. I can't wait to leave myself."

"I suggest you track down Lamont and let him know."
Her mother Lena said with an all too knowing smile.

“Come on dear.” William whispered something to his wife causing her to giggle. Danielle just smiled at the love they shared and was thankful she found that in Lamont.

“See you later guys. Drive careful.”

“We will honey.” Her dad said kissing her on the cheek.

“Hopefully you two will start working on making me a grandmother.” Her mom said on the sly as they hugged.

“Bye mom.” After seeing her parents off she went in search for her husband or at least her sister so she wouldn’t be left alone.

“Hey Nat, what’s wrong?” Danielle asked her sister Natalie.

“Hey Danni, nothing girl just tired. I think I’m about to head out.”

“Where is Thomas?”

“He stormed out a while ago pissed about only God knows what.”

“Maybe you should go talk to him.”

“Girl please, I’m not kissing his ass. There are more men out there that would cherish a woman like me. Instead of jumping wrong every chance he got.” Nat said confidently.

“Where has my brother-in-law ran off too? I wanted to remind him that he needs to find me one of those executives that work in his office.”

“Maybe you should have come alone then you would have pulled you one.”

“Oh there will be other chances.”

“I bet.”

“There he is now. Hey brother-in-law, what corner were you hiding in?”

“Just chatting business with some colleagues. You would know how that was if you had a profession like normal grown-ups.”

“Oh it’s like that huh... I got you homeboy. Ole stick in the mud.”

“Homeboy? I see that thug has been rubbing off on you.”

“Lamont that’s rude.” Danielle chastised him.

“It’s okay Danni we all know that your husband has turned quite snooty.”

“Nat, this is not the place for the bickering.”

“You are right sis, I will see you later. Goodnight Lamont, take care of my sissy.”

“Always.” Lamont gave her a look as she walked away.

“Are you ready to leave?”

“Lamont, this was a wonderful party. I really enjoyed myself.” One of his female colleagues interrupted their moment. Danielle couldn’t help but admire how beautifully sculptured the snow white gem was. Pouty rosy lips, blush tented cheeks, and the brightest blue eyes.

“Thanks so much for coming. We really appreciate it.”
Lamont stated pulling Danielle impossibly close to him.

“Yes thanks for coming.” Danielle added.

“You’re quite welcome, thanks for inviting me. See you in the office next week.”

“Not next week, I’m taking my lovely wife here away for a much needed vacation.”

“Oh how sweet. I can’t wait to find a husband to spoil me that way. Anyway, you guys have a good night.”

“You too.” They said in unison.

“You were saying...” Lamont asked.

“I’m ready to go. It’s time for you to unwrap your present as promised.”

“What was it that I promised again?”

“Oh now you have amnesia?”

“One thing I will always remember is how much I love you.”

“Aww... I love you too.”

“Let’s get out of here.”

“Please...”

~

Danielle felt elated from the attention, affection, and intimacy that Lamont was paying her. Even though it still didn’t get any deeper than the regular missionary position, they still made love. There were no stars or overpowering feelings of reaching paradise but it felt good none the less.

Lamont was a nice size and could pack a powerful punch when motivated enough. She loved when they made love but she enjoyed it so much more when he would take it on the aggressive side. In the beginning he would take her there and back, as of late he is more on the reserve side. And she isn't going to mention how neglected she has become in the oral department. He didn't do that part at all anymore. For sure she thought by it being their anniversary he would give her some special attention. Sad to say she was indeed wrong.

What spoiled their time together was the fact that he still didn't want to have babies yet. He stated it still wasn't the right time to start a family so upon his request she remained on birth control pills. As a matter of fact he still practiced the pull out method and a time or two he's even used a condom. Since he went to such extremes to be sure she didn't get pregnant the thought of having a baby was not an option. It saddened her to an extent because she really wanted to have a little her or him running around the house. Having been married for the good part of five years and they both were working, the finance area had increased substantially. On the business side, they both were quite busy but she was willing to put her work on hold to bring a child into the world.

"I don't know what to do Nat. Lamont is so against having kids. I'm starting to think he will never come around."

"Just give him time girl. Pressuring him may not be the right way to go about it. You said it yourself, he is always busy with work."

"I know but..."

“But nothing girl, you know better than to nag a man. What did god mama always tell us coming up?”

“Don’t nag your husband or he will retreat to a less hostile environment.”

“Right. You wouldn’t want to push him into another woman’s arms.”

“Sometimes I wonder would he actually cheat on me. It seems he has so little time as is, I just don’t see it. Me personally instead of cheating I would prefer he just leaves.”

“Lamont cherishes you too much to leave.”

“You never know now a days but I do hope you’re right.”

“Of course I’m right. Speaking of leaving, that’s my cue for a rendezvous.” Nat stated excitedly as her phone beeped. Danielle rolled her eyes at her god-sister’s dramatics.

“I thought you were done with Thomas.” Danielle asked but didn’t miss the scowl on Nat’s face at the mention of his name.

“This is actually someone I see from time to time, nothing serious.” Nat said evasively.

“What are you not saying?”

“Nothing girl I have to get going.”

“Be careful girl, don’t do anything reckless.”

“Never that sis. I will see you soon.”

Danielle and her god-sister had practically grown up in the same house. Natalie’s mom died in a car accident coming

home from the casino one night. She was hit by a drunk driver who crossed the median. Danielle's mom was a very close friend of hers ultimately being named the god mother of Natalie. No other family offered, so it was only logical for her to take her in after the accident. Even though Natalie was three years younger than her, she never treated her any different. Allowing her to hang with her group of friends as well, letting her tag along like a blood little sister would. They were so close that Lamont and Natalie grew close while they dated. Just like all brother and sister relationships they bickered often but it eventually went away. Nothing serious enough that Danielle ever suspected them not to love each other as family.

Natalie was the only female Lamont really approved of for her to hang out with but even that was only seldom. He claimed that it wasn't right for her to hang with a single woman seeing as though she is a happily married woman. *'Single women have no one they have to worry about questioning whether what they do is appropriate or not,'* he would constantly rant. All of her high school and college friends were scattered to the wind as well over time for one reason or another. Some female colleagues would invite her out for happy hour cocktails after work on the weekends but she would find herself declining their offers. Not really feeling comfortable making new friends for fear of getting attached to catty, fake women. Keeping it strictly professional is how she chose to keep it, sharing an occasional lunch with them during work hours.

Sometimes she thought maybe that was the reason why she wanted to have a baby so bad. So she wouldn't feel so lonely when Lamont was working late, out of town on

business, or just too stuck in his ways to try new things. She loved her husband no doubt but she was beginning to get bored. The one time she tried to explain her boredom to him, he took it in the wrong context. He assumed she was sick of him not just their situation. They were still young and if he wasn't going to make her a mother at least they could be more adventurous. Take more trips, do more outdoorsy things, or at least spice up their sex life. At the mere mention of spicing up their sex life, he accused her of saying he wasn't good enough. To smother the argument he was picking she in turn did something she hadn't done in a while as a form of submission. Although he hadn't reciprocated in the oral department in a long time she dropped and gave him a happy ending to sooth his fears that she wasn't happy. Vowing she would have to try another way to get to him she let her boredom and anxious feelings subside to keep the peace.

Lamont was straining so hard he was almost fearful that he would burst a blood vessel. The oral pleasure he was receiving was beyond magnificent. She hadn't gone down on him like that in a while. He wasn't complaining by a long shot because it had his toes curling. Bursting in her mouth, he was ready to put in some serious overtime. Standing to his feet, he helped her assume the position bending at the waist, hands planted on the bed for leverage. Lamont slid his chemically induced hard-on past her swollen nether lips, deep within her tunnel until he was in completely. The moan from his willing participant let him know she was more than ready. Seductively swaying her ass against his front letting him further no she was

anticipating further action. He didn't need any further coercion as he started to forcefully pump in and at.

“OH DADDY!”

“What did I tell you about that shit?” He rammed over and over.

“Daddy, I'm sorry.... Ahhh...” She always did this to get a rise out of him knowing he hated to be called daddy. Most men got off on being called by that name but not him, he became infuriated. Knowing full well she would get exactly the sexual beat down that she so desperately wanted. “Yes!”

“What's my name?” He demanded. She mentally rolled her eyes at his tired ass attempt at being forceful. “I said... WHAT'S. MY. NAME!”

“Da... Lamont!”

“You like the way I do you? Huh?”

“Yes, I love the way you do me Daddy.” She let that daddy slip again because she wanted him to shut up and beat it down. Getting the desired rise from him he put in the work she needed to climax. He neared his release as well she could tell. After all they have been together for so many years now. Every little move he made she had memorized. Pulling out in just enough time to ejaculate all over her backside with a groan of frustration.

“Seems like you had some pent up today. What's going on?”

“Nothing you should worry about.” He answered evasively.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.” Lamont reached for his phone to check the time.

“How much time do we have?”

“We have just enough time for another. You know what you need to do.”

“I always know what you need baby.”

“I know you do girl.” Lamont assumed the position for her to take him passed her lips and tongue for the second time that night. He needed to release some stress before returning to his more tedious life. “Lay back let me send you home with something to think about.”

“And what would that be?”

“Well...” She dragged out easing down on his now hardened member. “You could have this waiting for you morning... noon... night... and anytime in between.” Peppering kisses on his bare chest at each pause.

“Shit, I got that now.”

“Wouldn’t it be nice to have me spread out on that huge dining room table of yours as you take me from behind?”

“I’ve already done that.” He groaned from the pleasure he was receiving from her. It was true, she has had his member lodged deep inside her all over his home.

“Not just on occasion though.”

“What are you getting at?” He forced the question out.

“Has it never crossed your mind?”

“Has what every crossed my mind?” He tried to concentrate through the fog of lust.

“You know?” She chose that moment to increase her riding pace while squeezing her internal muscle. “Me as a permanent fixture in your home. In your bed? Every night?” When he went to withdraw. The sneaky devil started pulling tricks from her hat hopping on Lamont like a pogo stick taking him to new heights. The sex was mind-blowing and she knew how to get what she wanted she had to pull a rabbit from a hat. Right now she wanted his wife’s life. She didn’t deserve it. Obviously she wasn’t keeping him satisfied so why was he with her? Why did he love her so much?

“Just think about it. I could be everything she isn’t and so much more. Let me take care of your every need, not just sexually.”

“Oh shit... raise up! Raise up!”

“Hold it just a minute longer. Let me at least get...” She moaned while increased her rock chasing the only thing she would be able to force out of him. He tensed up letting her know he couldn’t hold it any longer. Shooting a powerful stream into her core knocking her own climax through the ceiling. Milking him for every single drop, trying to regulate her breathing.

Removing her limp body from his, Lamont got started cleaning himself up. He needed to get a move on if he was going to get home at a reasonable hour. Danielle had asked earlier in the day what time he would arrive for dinner so she could have it ready. Checking his phone let him know he had just enough time to make it in. Busying himself with the task

at hand he didn't spare his companion another glance. The things she was spouting were beyond reckless. There was no way in hell he would leave his cushy life with his docile wife. She was everything any man could dream of in a wife; he just desired many other hidden things that kept him seeking other women. He had trained Danielle to be his perfect, almost trophy wife. She still had some personal appearance things she needed to work on and that's why he signed them up for a gym membership to rectify that.

"I think we should call it quits." Lamont stated coldly.

"What...what the hell do you mean call it quits?"

"Obviously you have gotten in your feelings."

"How many years have we been together?"

"Not together. Seeing each other. There's a difference."

"That's bullshit. You can't do this to me."

"Either you accept what we are or we end it. I'm dead ass right now."

"But why? You can't really love her."

"I love my wife very much."

"Not enough to remain faithful."

"I am assuming that's your answer."

"No. No. Wait. Fine."

"Fine what? I need to hear you say the words."

"I accept what we are."

"Good girl. I'll talk to you later." Lamont was oblivious to the scheming look on her face while exiting the

room. He didn't know it yet but he was in for a rude awakening.

If he were to be honest, even if Danielle ever found out about his infidelities he believed she wouldn't leave him. She would be angry and then beg him to go to counseling. That was her job, to suggest therapy. Even if she only counseled troubled children, she still believed in the therapy system. Anything and everything can be healed in a therapy session. Plus he had her trained, she knew he loved her and no one would ever love her as much as he did. Add that to the fact that she was madly in love with him and had been since they were in college further backs up his argument.

One day maybe he will stop his unfaithful ways and think about starting a family. So far that time hasn't come, he enjoys the company of different women. Danielle is trained to let him lead, making love to only her. The other women are his slam partners in crime. They get the beast that he refuses to show his timid wife. He always wants her to forever be his upstanding lady in every aspect and that's the way it will remain until death, says their vows. Deception is just an added perk to satisfy his other cravings. His father did it and still does it until this day. If ever caught, she will get over it just like his mother has. She has no other choice.

Chapter Two

Danielle had just arrived at her job where she has been in the same office since she started. Besides a few decorations, pictures, and office furniture everything is just how it was the first day she arrived. The one thing that had changed was her pay-grade, thankfully. Her excellent rapporteur with the staff and her supervisors helped her score great numbers on the grading scale. Unfortunately for her, she had topped out when she got her last raise a year ago. Now when the time comes she gets a small bonus in addition to her check, with more vacation days but that's about it. Most people would be happy with that but she knows she deserves so much more. Danielle's goal is to put her doctorate's degree to good use by becoming a full-fledged therapist.

Currently she was working as just a counselor, also known as a social worker, even though she was officially a licensed psychotherapist. That title was not going to cut it for too much longer. At other establishments, with her degrees she could make up to six figures in some states. The hospital she worked in was a nice establishment with a comfortable environment but there wasn't any room for growth. The saying 'nowhere to go but up' didn't apply there unless the people that was already there retired. Once some got a hold of the top jobs, there was no leaving. So Danielle is faced with the tough decision to leave the hospital or stick it out until something better comes along. It would be even better if she could open up her own practice and she posed such an idea to Lamont. He

thought it was very outgoing of her to dream that idea up but he quickly shot it down.

Lamont wasn't a negative person as he was a realist. A realist who believed that all good things came to those who worked hard at making it to the top. His theory was that she should be grateful at where she is and just wait her turn to take over for the more seasoned folks in the building. However much logic as he made, Danielle found it hard to do just that. Always in the back of her mind she is trying to see a better a way. A clearer path for her to take to get to where she wants to be. In his face she agrees, when he isn't looking she is applying for better. So far no bites have even tickled her resume. She prayed that she wasn't being black-balled by the very people she thought were on the up and up. Amongst some of Lamont's most influential clients is the owner of one the top psychotherapy offices in the state but alas she has yet to get a call back.

Oftentimes she just gives up thinking maybe this is all there is to life. Being a wife of a top executive at a financial firm because technically that's all she is. Maybe that's all she will ever be if she never becomes a mother. That could be another reason why she is so desperate to have a baby. By now her goals were to have about two kids, the job she wanted, and maybe even a puppy. Danielle giggled to herself at her wayward thoughts. Who was she fooling? Lamont simply adored her and she should be happy with that. Some women don't even have that much going on in their lives and here she was complaining.

“Knock, knock...”

“Come in. Hey.” Danielle spoke to one of the therapist’s that works in their department. He was the only person of color that held that title so far.

“Hey sweetie. How are you?” Beejay spoke giving her a side hug.

“I’m doing pretty well. Another day, another dollar.”

“I know that’s right.”

“What’s going on with you? How was your weekend?”

“Not as good as your time off I’m sure but it was good. We missed you around here.”

“I wish I could say the same. I enjoyed my time off.”

“I bet you did. Y’all didn’t come back with any babies did you?”

“Nah, none of that. Anyway, what brings you by?” Danielle changed the subject in a hurry in order to keep her mood high.

“Besides to see my bucket of sunshine? I need a favor.”

“Figures.” She rolled her eyes in mock disappointment. “Seriously, what’s going on?”

“I have this patient that needs a softer approach type of treatment. She will be admitted in about an hour.”

“Why are you asking me? Just curious.”

“Well...”

“Quit beating around the bush.”

“She is already treated through the outpatient program but she’s had a setback of sorts.”

“What type of setback?”

“It would probably be best if you assessed her yourself. I brought her chart down with me if you wanted to take a peak.”

“That’s fine I will take a look at it. How bad is it?”

“I was making some progress with her but now... I don’t know what has happened honestly.”

“It won’t be until tomorrow that I will be allowed to see her but I will see what I can do.”

“Thanks honey bun. Do you want to do lunch? Are we doing our usual for lunch?”

“Of course.”

“Alright I’ll save you a seat young lady.”

“You better. Don’t work too hard.”

“I’ll try not to.” Beejay blew her a kiss before exiting. He was one of her well kept secrets. Beejay was a colleague who was a bit older than she was therefore seasoned in the business. No matter how cool he was, she still never brought him up to her husband. They were good friends but mainly in the workplace only. Beejay understood that Lamont didn’t trust many people and knew for a fact he wouldn’t trust a male as his wife’s friend.

Sadly everyone who was acquainted with Beejay personally knew Danielle or any other female was nowhere near his type. He preferred the male persuasion but he wasn’t the flamboyant type. One who is all out, flaunting his sexuality around so many judgmental people would be quick to judge. If

one male comes in complaining he had been touched inappropriately, it would be a wrap for an openly gay worker. The first finger pointing would start in his direction.

Danielle had been on vacation for their anniversary and just as other promises he made to her about spending more time together he magically had to rush back to work in the middle. The mythical vacation, romantic getaway they were supposed to go on turned out to be some time away for her to enjoy the spa while he golfed with some business associates. During dinner hours instead of wining and dining her, he was wooing other CEO's of other companies. Returning to their room at night, it was filled with his grunts and wasted lingerie that he admired for a few minutes, then demanding that she remove it. Claiming they were too slutty looking. She blamed herself for not knowing how to spice up her marriage and bring out the animal she so desired.

Suddenly an email arrived in her incredibly full inbox jarring her from her off-handed thoughts. She had been working hard since lunch to clean it out. Reading, responding, deleting, and printing some off for later retrieval left enough room for more to come through. The sender was an anonymous one and normally she wouldn't even dare to open it for fear of it being some spam or virus. That is all she needs, having her computer crash because of some cyber worm or Trojan virus. Something was nagging her to open it so she did against her better judgment. The title of the email simply stated FYI. Clicking the link to expand it, there were several attachments in picture form and one video. In the body of the text was one sentence.

EVERYTHING ISN'T ALWAYS AS IT SEEMS!

Danielle quickly closed the message not prepared to deal with anything of that magnitude. The message seemed to have a hidden meaning and she didn't want to find out just what it was so she stored it in a locked file. Choosing to deal with it at another time. Although she should have just deleted it, she saved it so that she could return to it another day. She had more taxing things to deal with than cryptic messages. Work was calling her name and she was going to answer happily.

The week had come to an end rather quickly with constant appointments, catching up on paperwork, and Lamont's constant absence. Her family was throwing a barbeque. She was looking forward to spending some much needed time with her husband. The family was an added bonus but her husband was her main concern. With his late nights in the office, they hadn't really had time to talk about anything. When he finally makes it home, she is normally laying down for the night. He jumps in the shower and they sleep, only to repeat the cycle the next day.

"That party last week was fabulous." Her Aunt Ruby gushed.

"Thank you. I enjoyed myself."

"Girl that man certainly loves you."

"Yeah, I love him as well."

"You better. I know so many women out here would kill to have a man like that."

“Mhm.” All the women nodded their heads in agreement. Danni was always thankful that she had such a thoughtful, compassionate, and loving husband. At least that was the front she had been getting when prying eyes and ears were around. Lately she had been feeling neglected when there wasn't an audience but she didn't want to be a nag.

“What's going on girl? You seem to be in another world.” Her god sister spoke lowly to her shaking her from her unruly thoughts. “Trouble in paradise?”

“Huh?” Danni pretended to not know where she was coming from.

“You and brother-in-law having issues?”

“Girl no. He has just been extremely busy with work. Honestly so have I. As soon as our caseloads lessen we will have more time.”

“Well that's good.” The distant look on her face caused Danni to look at her with a question of her own.

“What's going on with you and Thomas?”

“Girl he is old news. I'm done with him.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“Girl if you don't go ahead on with that therapy babble.” The sisters laughed it off because it just came natural for Danni to ask questions like those sometimes.

“Sorry, didn't mean to sound like a therapist.”

“I already know, it's your job. You can't help yourself.”

“What are you ladies going on about?” Lamont popped up out of thin air.

“Oh nothing honey. Do you want me to fix you a plate?”

“Yes please. Thank you honey.” Lamont kissed her so tenderly that put a bright smile on her face.

“You’re welcome.” She walked away feeling thankful for her husband even if he never had time for her. Reminding herself that she could have a bum for a husband and then what would she complain about?

Returning home from the barbeque, Danni had planned on seducing her husband. Her own needs hadn’t been met since their anniversary. Only a fragment of it was met then, now she craved a man’s touch. Her hormone level was atrocious. She was like a humping frou-frou dog. All she wanted was for her kitty to be petted. Lamont stated he had some business calls to return in his office so Danni went to their room to turn up her seduction.

Like so many times before she was soon doused with a cold bucket of reality. A bucket of ice cold water was dumped on her plans when Lamont came in claiming he had a business trip he needed to attend to. For the first time in a very long time, Danni blew up. She had been holding in her loneliness for far too long. He was going to feel her frustration, this she was sure of. How he reacted was not what she expected.

“Lamont this is bullshit!” Danni exclaimed.

“Who are you yelling at?” Lamont stopped what he was doing to face off with Danni.

“You are the only one in this room. I am sick and tired of you neglecting me.”

“Neglecting you. Woman I have work to do.”

“That’s all you ever do is work. Hell, work me for a change.” Danni countered. “Make love to me. Lick me. Fuck me. Screw me. Anything!”

“You know how much I despise that vulgar language. What has gotten into you? I can’t believe you are throwing a temper tantrum because I have business to handle. We have the rest of our lives to make love. I need to be on the road soon, we can make love when I return.”

“Making love sounds all fine and dandy but how long does it take to fuck me? We used to grab quickies all of the time. Are you not attracted to me anymore? What is it? You couldn’t keep your hands off of me in the beginning.”

“That’s what this is about. That I won’t screw you like some common whore?” Danni remained silent. “Are you a common whore?”

“Of course not.”

“Why would I screw you like one?” Lamont didn’t even give her a chance to reply as he was steadily packing as they bickered. “I don’t have time for this. I have a plane to catch.”

“You’re just going to leave in the middle of this.”

“Yes because this is silly. I love you. Committed to you. Most women would be overjoyed to have a hard working man like me and here you are complaining.”

“Lamont...”

“Save it. Use this time to think about the mess you have caused.” He left Danni questioning herself on whether she was being too hard on him. Now she was confused about what her true argument really was.

Currently she was finishing up with a client when she got another anonymous email. Choosing to ignore it for the time being and focus on the little girl in her presence. It was the same girl that Beejay wanted her to counsel. In the beginning she came off as a hard case. Angry with everyone that got near her but she was slowly warming up to Danielle. By allowing the little girl to call her Danni it seemed to get her to come around a little better. It didn't go unnoticed the sympathetic look that crossed her baby face when Beejay stuck his head in to let her know he was around. Even the mention of her father sparked some emotions that Danni hoped to delve into over a period of time.

Shaniece Jones, deep down was just a misunderstood teen going through some issues that she didn't know how to react to. After several attempts the one thing that seemed to be a sore spot for her was that her mother was a flaker. She disappeared when she was four years old leaving her with her maternal grandmother. Her father only gets to spend time with her every other weekend. According to her he has never married nor had a steady girlfriend that Shaniece has known

about. Recently some girls had started to tease her because she didn't have a mother. Picking at her because she is what most would call a tom-boy because of how she dressed. When she only wears what she is given. Since the picking started it has escalated to them referring to her as being gay. Spreading vicious rumors that has everyone in the school whispering about her.

Shaniece retaliating with violence is what landed her in the children's wing of the behavioral hospital. She refuses to be a snitch so instead of going to the officials over the school she fights instead. Her father didn't have a clue of what was going on with her so her grandmother checked her in. Mainly because the school suggested it. The family claims they want to see her get some kind of assistance for her anger issues. Beejay says that's why he has been seeing her to help with those issues and recently her explosions have gotten worst. Danielle couldn't imagine not having a mother around and the kids at school to start picking fights too. The thought alone of going through that much at such an early age sounded extremely tiring.

“Shaniece, I think we have made some great progress with our sessions. What do you think?”

“I guess so.”

“You don't think we have?”

“I mean, we talked but that still doesn't stop what goes on when I leave here.”

“Is there anything else besides school that bothers you?”

“No. I just wish I had a mother in the picture. You know?” Danni nodded her head in encouragement for her to continue. “Never mind, that’s stupid.”

“That’s not stupid Shaniece. That’s natural to want your mother around.”

“I don’t want her. I wish I was never born.”

“If you were never born we wouldn’t have met. And I like you already. You remind me of myself when I was coming up. I know your father wouldn’t want to hear things like that. As well as other family members who care about you. You can’t mean any of that Shaniece.”

“...” She shrugged her shoulders. Danni’s heart clenched at the sight of the girls silent tears in her office. Her problems didn’t mean squat when a young girl was suffering tremendously over feeling unwanted. Much like herself in her marriage. She couldn’t help the natural motherly instinct to wrap her arms around Shaniece and rock her like she was her very own.

“Shh, it’s okay sweetie. Everything is going to be alright.” Danni cooed. Even though it was against all the rules to get so attached to a patient, she couldn’t help herself. Before long the time had come for her to get her things together to be discharged. They had embraced for the remainder of the session not saying anything else.

“Can I see you when I come back?” Shaniece asked in an innocent voice that further tugged at her heartstrings. Her own deeply rooted issues with feeling wanted or needed moved her to comply.

“Sure you can sweetie. In fact, I am going to do you one better. Here is my card with my office number on the front and my personal cell on the back. I will get with Mr. Beejay to see if it’s alright if I see you from time to time. We don’t want to make him feel unwanted, it may hurt his feelings.” Danni cracked a joke that actual made the girl smile.

“Okay.”

“You can call me anytime. No matter whether it is just to talk or whatever.”

“Thank you.” That seemed to brighten Shaniece’s day even more for her smile was so bright she was showing all of her pearly whites.

“Let’s get you packed up. Your ride should be here soon.”

“Yes ma’am.” Once she was out of her office, Danni collapsed in her chair concerned about her home life now. How can she be of assistance to someone else if her own household is in turmoil? Her own happiness was in the rafters with no safety net below to break her fall.

“Come in.” Danni called out to the knocker. In walked Shaniece with a beautifully silver haired lady. “Hello.”

“Hello. I’m Rita Jones, Shaniece’s grandmother.”

“I am Danielle the counselor over Shaniece’s care since she has been here.”

“I’ve heard great things about you when I talked to Niecee over the phone.”

“Oh really?” Danni looked at Shaniece. “And here I thought you didn’t really like me.” She joked.

“...” Shaniece looked shocked that she would think that.

“I’m just kidding boo.” The two ladies laughed while Shaniece smiled.

“I gave my number to Shaniece so she could call me. Technically that is against policy but I felt compelled to keep in contact with her. I pray I didn’t step out of bounds.”

“That is very sweet of you. I really appreciate it. I am sure her father won’t mind at all.” Rita smiled. “Now her guardian will be another story all together.” Rita looked at Shaniece and she looked away guiltily.

“Oh.” Danni really didn’t know how to respond to that. “Do you have any questions for me Mrs. Jones? Have any concerns you would like to discuss?”

“No, I just want what’s best for my grandbaby. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Well if there is nothing else. I will see you at our next appointment Shaniece.”

“You can call me Niecee.”

“Well alright Niecee.”

“Bye Miss Danni.” Danni received another big hug.

“Bye sweetie. You be good okay?”

“I’ll try.”

“Do more than try. For me?”

“Yes ma’am.” And with that she was gone. Now it was time to face her own drama on the home front. She didn’t know whether to investigate more or let bygones be bygones. Decisions. Decisions.

IS YOUR BELOVED HUSBAND A WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING?

Danielle decided after receiving the current email that she would investigate on the sly. Search his office, check phone bills, and check his clothes for random scents or makeup traces. The more she searched the more frustrated she became with herself for allowing an anonymous tip put distrust in her husband. Her husband? Who she had only seen in passing since he has returned from his business trip. When he first returned Danni tried to keep up a hard front because she was still hanging on to a shred of doubt that Lamont was living foul. Anything that would answer why he had become so reserved with her.

The little things were unnoticed by him now. Nothing got his attention anymore. Something different with her hair, new perfume, new outfit, make-up, or no make-up he would just give her his signature bland kiss on the lips. No soul-melting make out sessions. Boring. Boring. Boring. Maybe it was her that he wasn’t attracted to. She had gained a few pounds. Maybe thirty pounds over the past two years when things really started to change. The gym invitation from Beejay, that she had been ignoring for so long, was what she needed. Lamont always claimed he liked her thick shape but her midsection had formed a pooch.

Danielle noticed she at least didn't have any rolls. Hips, butt, and bust is what she used to be. Now she could add bigger thighs, softer tummy, and puffy face. Although none of the flaws she recently thought about took away from her natural beauty, the thought that they could be unattractive to her husband made her want to change them. First thing was first though. She needed to apologize to her husband for how she spoke to him as well as for what he didn't know. The fact that she doubted his loyalty over some speculations that had no merit was beyond demeaning.

"Hi honey, I was just calling to see what time you were coming home. I prepared us a nice dinner. Please call me back." Danni worked hard on cooking one of his favorite meals. Steak and red potatoes, with a side of apple pie. The wine was chilling just waiting on her other half to make his appearance.

"Hey Lamont. I know we left things on a bad note last week. Well I left things on a bad note by stepping completely out of character. I really want to apologize for that. Could you just call me and let me know that you're alright. I am starting to worry a bit." Danni was beyond worried that something terrible had happened to Lamont. It had been three hours since her last voicemail and he had yet to come home or call back.

"Lamont?" Danni questioned when she heard the door open.

"Who else?" He asked with some annoyance evident.

"You couldn't return any of my phone calls or texts. I was worried sick."

“Please save the nagging. It’s been a rough day. What did you want anyway?” He finally asked after looking through a few pieces of mail.

“So you didn’t check any of your messages?”

“Goodnight Danielle.” Lamont walked away without a backwards glance. Danni was left stunned out of her mind. Something wasn’t right and she was going to get to the bottom of it. This wasn’t normal. No man was that damn busy. He had something to hide. She was convinced more now than she was before that something was going on.

“What’s good Danni?” Natalie answered her phone call.

“I need your help.”

“Who do I need to whoop?”

“Your brother-in-law, if I find out he is stepping out on me.”

“What?!” Nat shouted so loud she had to remove the phone from her ear. “I mean why would you say something like that?” She asked nervously.

“Let’s just say, woman’s intuition.”

“A woman’s intuition has been wrong before too. Do you have any idea with who if he was?”

“Not a damn clue but I am going to find out.”

“Wait now. Let’s not do anything drastic. What would all of a sudden make you assume he is cheating?”

“He won’t touch me and I have been receiving emails anonymously hinting things about him. Normally I just ignore

them and move on. The very first one I received I saved. It has attachments that I assume is pictures and a video.”

“Oh no. Are you serious?”

“Yep. I will get to the bottom of this. You just wait.”

“Let me help you sis. Why don’t you come over or I can come to you so you won’t be alone?”

“Girl, I’m good. I just wanted to tell someone of my suspicions just in case I commit a crime and have to go to jail. I have bail money stashed away in my closet.” Danni tried to crack a joke but neither one of them laughed.

“Don’t do anything rash Danni.”

“I can’t make any promises. I will talk at you later Nat.” Danni disconnected the call with a new found determination to get something’s done. If her search came up empty and he wasn’t cheating, no one had to know she suspected him of doing so. She could be woman enough to admit she was wrong, if in fact she is wrong. There was only one way to find out. One way was that email that was saved on her computer at work. Danni just prayed she will be able to withstand violence if it is bad.

Chapter Three

After Danielle got it set in her mind what she was going to do next she assumed the duty of cleaning the kitchen. Putting the cold, forgotten dinner away in Tupperware containers and into the fridge. Beejay would appreciate a home cooked lunch versus what they normally eat. It wouldn't be the first time and Danielle wasn't sure if it would be the last. Considering her insubordinate mind taking on such sinister thoughts of bodily harm if the outcome of her investigation turned up not in Lamont's favor, it was only natural to plan her last meal. Her last meal as a free woman that is. That honestly was one of the reasons she took on a profession such as the one she has.

Anger management issues that ran deep as the blue seas. Being bullied in school made her sensitive in ways that most folks couldn't attempt to comprehend. Because she was on the healthier side of the track unlike most girls, the boys called her names. After the first few boys she served up in second, third, and fifth grade, no one took it a step further than words. Even though her hard front kept her from shedding tears in the faces of those who wanted so badly to hurt her, it still didn't stop the hateful words. Words really do cut deeper than most actions. Only a handful of girls actually tried to result to physically attacking her but they soon figured out that was a mistake.

Years after elementary passed is when she started to appreciate her bigger size because she had the boobs before the stick figures she came up with. Having a big booty was in style while other girls tried to pad their front and back to compare themselves. The resentment of being teased in elementary didn't vanish just because the boys found her attractive. Oh no, it became worst because she wasn't planning on giving them the time of day. They only wanted one thing and she knew that from jump. Her daddy kept her hipped to the game of the ratchet mouth hoodlums that wanted to cozy up next to her.

Shutting them down on numerous occasions caused them to revert back to calling her names. Instead of calling her out on being overweight they would now call her stuck-up, snooty, and most importantly a grade A bitch. Whenever it was said out loud, Danni would hold her head up high and give it some flavor. 'The best bitch. I can give ya mama pointers if you like.' That always shut them up. Who likes 'yo mama' jokes? Especially in front of other people that were sure to laugh. Needless to say, she never dated anyone her age. Anyone she saw was always a good two or more years older than she was. Secretly of course. Even those handful of prospects only lasted so long since she wasn't putting out or opening up.

Meeting Lamont in college was something straight out of a typical romance novel. Boy meets girl. Girl tutors boy. Boy is popular. Girl is not. Boy pursues girl after countless refusals. They finally start to date and the rest is history. The only thing is lacking is the vows they made seem pointless now as she lets her suspicions get the best of her. It is true that

she could be asking for trouble by looking. ‘Seek and you shall find’ is the saying. So be it. She needed answers.

Upon opening the saved email, Danielle thought for sure this was some type of joke, spam, or something else sinister. Just when she was going to delete and forget about it, the name of one of the pictures caught her attention. The files name was Lamont&her.jpg. Instantly her heart started to pound, ears started to ring, and hands began to itch. Anticipation was going to kill her if she didn’t appease her curiosity. Saying a small prayer to herself she braced herself trying to calm down her breathing. Quickly she locked the door to her office for she didn’t want to be interrupted or heard by anyone if this made her angry. Why hadn’t she read the attachments the first time? For sure she would have opened it up then.

The first picture was of him walking down a hallway of an expensive hotel it seems. The tux he wore was very familiar for he just wore it during their anniversary party. The time stamp on the picture confirmed that for her. Another frame showed the snow white beauty walking down the same hall casually looking behind her. The next shots were of them both disappearing behind the same door which could have been completely innocent. ‘He said he went to talk business with some colleagues.’ Danielle was steadily trying to convince herself that this wasn’t what it seemed. Deciding to send the video to her tablet instead of opening it on her computer, she wanted no evidence that she was doing personal stuff on a business portal.

The video showed them talking, smiling, and gawking at one another. Which could still be innocent until Snow White

approached her husband of five years in an unprofessional manner. She was so close to him and he did nothing to put space between them. If anything he pushed up on her harder. From the camera's angle in the corner she couldn't tell exactly what was happening for they were toe to toe speaking peacefully. Lamont brushed the blonde tresses off her face and behind her ear. The once playful banter between the two took a drastic turn as an animalistic side of Lamont that Danielle hadn't seen since college took over his normal poised self. With lightning speed Lamont swung his accomplice around by her shoulders slamming her into the large conference room table.

The vixen didn't put up much of a fight in fact from the view it looks like she enjoyed the rough playtime. Danielle couldn't believe her eyes as she watched her one and only love unbuckle his pants, letting them pool at his feet. Crudely lift another woman's dress, ripping her thong off, and ramming into her without a care in the world. The untamed beast that boned this woman who wasn't his wife was a site to see. Sadly Danielle was more jealous than she was furious in the beginning because Lamont was showing this woman his skills that she longed for. Both were careful not to kiss or leave any marks that would lead to suspicions of them being together. That much was evident. From the sight of them, this wasn't a one-time thing and definitely wasn't their first.

When he was ready to ejaculate he smacked the woman on the butt as a signal to assume the position, she did with ease. Dropping to the floor in front of him she accepted all he had to give. All those children wasted down another woman's throat instead of deep inside of her womb where

Danielle longed for them to be. Now that she had mindlessly watched Lamont's indiscretions, one thing stuck out like a sore thumb. He didn't use any protection. He always made sure she was on her birth control and would go so far as to wear a condom if she had recently started a new pack of pills. No matter how many times she tried to explain to him since she had been on the pill for so many years it would take at least three months for it to leave her system to become pregnant.

Not only did he cheat by sleeping with another woman that alone should have been the lick that killed old dick. NO! It was that the bastard had an intimate connection with this woman that he would raw dog her. At THEIR anniversary party, while Danielle was right down the hall. Then had the nerve to hold Danielle in place as they carried on a full blown conversation with his obvious mistress. Shafting her every chance he got with the little forced intimacy she gets from him. Danielle felt beyond cheated. She was feeling worthless, destitute, and lastly less than a woman. If she can't keep her own husband happy then what was her purpose?

Danielle went through the rest of the week on autopilot. She didn't attempt to get closer to her husband like she did before she discovered his infidelity. Nor did she crucify him on the spot. NO. She observed his dealings. Observed his emotions, inability to detect that something was off about his wife. The one he said his vows too was not acting her normal self but either he didn't take notice or just couldn't be bothered to care. Either way, Danielle felt even more hurt if that was possible. To the outside eye she pretended nothing was wrong and went about life as usual. When she arrived

home, she counted the lies that spew from Lamont's conniving mouth. Her self-esteem dropped to an all-time low seeing as he didn't even attempt to initiate any intimacy between the two. That further alerted her that she had been carrying their intimacy for some time. Sadly it took something this tragic to make her realize it.

“Hi Mom.” Danni greeted her mother.

“Hi Sweetie.” Her mother embraced her in a hug that spoke volumes. “To what do I owe the pleasure of an impromptu visit?”

“Is it a crime to want to see my mommy?”

“No crime. But surprised nonetheless, yes.”

“I was just...”

“Don't give me the ‘I was in the neighborhood’ bull either. You are never just in the neighborhood.” Lena chuckled while she busied herself making sandwiches without even asking Danni if she wanted one. “Do you have good news for me?” She suddenly stopped what she was doing to look at her daughter with so much hope. It broke Danni's heart to see her mother so excited, anticipating being a grandmother. Only for her dreams to be crushed because it seems that will never happen.

“Oh my God. What's wrong Danni?” Lena rushed to her now tearful daughter. Danni didn't even realize she had started to shed tears of sorrow until her mother wrapped her in her arms. The dam broke and so did her resolve. Breaking down into a full-blown sob. “Tell me, what's wrong honey? Let me help you.”

“Oh mom. Lamont... He... Oh God.”

“Did he hurt you? What happened?” Lena shouted question after question. “I will kill that son of a bitch if he put his hands on my baby.”

“No mom, it’s not that.” Danni giggled a little from her mother’s sudden outburst of violence. Her mother hardly ever cursed but when she did, it was when she was at her wit’s end.

“I just found out Lamont has cheated on me.”

“No. Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“How did you find out?”

“Someone sent me an email a while ago. Right after our anniversary party actually. It took me some time to even believe that it was real. I thought for sure it was a ploy. After a disagreement with Lamont and the doubts would never leave, I opened the email that I saved for whatever reason. Attachments were in the email with pictures and one video. I watched every ounce of his infidelity.” Danni started to cry again. “Mom, he didn’t even look sorrowful for his actions. After the deed was done, he straightened up like it was normal for him. Then had me at his side as he carried on a conversation with the woman he was just with.”

“I’m sorry Danni. I know that must have been hard for you to watch.”

“I don’t know what I am going to do.”

“What did he say when you confronted him?”

“I haven’t.”

“You haven’t? Well are you planning to address it or ignore it? Those are your only options at this point.”

“I should address it right?”

“Danni, you are your own person. A grown woman at that. You have to make the decision for yourself. The one that you will have to live with.”

“What would you do if this was daddy?”

“Before or after my crime of passion plea?”

“I’m serious mom.”

“So am I. Danni you of all people know how hard it is to have a quick temper. I fear if something like that ever happened between your father and I, there would be no turning back for my rage. In all honesty, I would be in a padded room with a little window in the door for visitors.”

“I thought that would be my initial reaction but I am too hurt to even consider it. If anything, I am blaming myself for his actions. Maybe there is something about me that lead him astray.” Danni shook her head sadly. “Then my feelings are even more hurt because he hadn’t even used protection with this woman. What if she ended up pregnant?”

“No protection? Screw pregnant, what about an STD sweetie? And how many others is he sleeping with? There are so many more questions and concerns you should have.”

“I know. I am so devastated. I am having a hard time deciphering which way is up at this point.”

“It’s going to take some time. Maybe you should stay here or get away for a bit to figure out what you want to do.”

“No mom, even though he probably won’t miss me if I didn’t come home, I have to face this situation straight up. There is nowhere else to run. I have to confront him.”

“Let me know if there is anything I can do. Set up a crime scene to look like an accident. Anything just call me.”

“Mom, you are a mess. There is one thing you can do for me.”

“What is that?”

“Keep this conversation between you and me.”

“No can do.” Lena quickly answered without hesitation.

“Mom!”

“Danielle!” Lena mocked. “I don’t keep secrets from my husband honey. I love you dearly but that is not going to happen. So if I was you I would get to the bottom of this before your over-protective daddy does.”

“Fine.”

Danni left her parent’s home with a lot of unkind thoughts on her mind. What was she going to do? How does she feel about her husband’s infidelity? Can she overlook him stepping out on her? Is this something that she could just get over for the sake of their vows? Technically he broke the vows they once said before God and their family. Divorcing his sorry tale would be well within her rights. Would it be right to walk away from a five year, legal, and Christian bonding

union? She is pretty sure that the clinical response for something of this magnitude would be to seek counseling. If he did consider counseling, who could they go to? Everyone knows them in the community. They would be an embarrassment to their peers.

Danni decided to go to Lamont's job to check out some things. For one she wanted to know how late he planned to stay at the office. Earlier in the day, he called saying he had some unfinished business to attend to. According to the lame introduction she recalled from their anniversary party, the snow white bimbo worked with him. Danni knew the saying far too well so if she continued to look for something, the worst was bound to jump right out and bite. Lastly she used to pop-up at his office all the time in the beginning for spur of the moment lunches or just to say 'I was thinking about you.' Out of the blue he asked her to stop, stating it wasn't appropriate and people had begun to whisper. Speculating the only reason she did that was because she was insecure.

"Good afternoon. How may I help you?" A large breasted, brunette greeted full of cheer. Danni had never encountered her before so she must have been new.

"Yes. Is Mr. Graves available?"

"May I ask what this is regarding?" The once cheerful smile on the broads face had been replaced with a forced one. No doubt in her mind that he could possibly be sleeping with this woman as well.

"It's a personal matter, if you don't mind. Could you buzz him please?"

"First I need your name?"

“Mrs. Graves.” Danni introduced herself adding extra emphasis on the prefix of her name. “As in his wife. I didn’t catch your name by the way.”

“Oh, I must apologize Mrs. Graves. The name is Sheri. He is currently in a meeting. May I take a message to give to him when he returns to the office? I am not for certain how long he will be.”

“No thank you Sheri. I will wait.”

“It could be quite a while.”

“That’s fine. Thank you.” Danni took a seat in his quaint waiting area not too far from Miss Sheri’s desk. The aura bouncing off of the lady sitting behind the desk cutting her delicate eyes at her when she isn’t looking was comical. “How long have you worked for my husband?”

“Almost six months.”

“Really? Do you like working for Lamont?”

“Yes, thank you.” She said stiffly.

“Benefits pretty good?” Danni was being petty with her questioning but she couldn’t help the way she was feeling.

“Actually they are. The best I have received in the business.” There was plenty of hidden meanings inside the pop tarts answer. Danni bit the inside of her mouth to keep from cursing the bimbo out.

“Well that’s just peachy.”

Thirty minutes had passed with neither one of the women saying anything else. Danni was so lost in her thoughts that the time gave her pause on whether she wanted to

confront him today or not. After all this really wasn't the place for what could turn out to be an all-out brawl. The video blatantly shows him screwing another woman at their anniversary party and it was obvious that he has some dealings with Sheri on a personal level. What else was he involved in that she had no clue about? Just as she considered leaving, Lamont walked in with his cocky swag on deck. His entire demeanor spoke volumes. He was successful, sure of himself, and lastly a professional stick in the mud.

How was she oh so lucky to end up with him? The man she once loved looked like a major prick now that she's had time to sit back and take a second look. What really threw her for a loop is the person who came in with him. The main reason she came to confront him was with him at that very moment. As if she was a small insignificant being, he didn't even notice she was there watching his every move. Finally in the midst of him ushering his female associate towards his office door, the secretary alerted him of his visitor. All the while the two women didn't look too friendly towards one another and that alone was a tell-tell sign of Lamont's dealings.

"Danielle, what are you doing here?" Lamont asked sternly.

"I figured we needed to talk."

"Talk? I'm pretty sure whatever you have to talk about could have waited until after business hours." He reprimanded.

"It's nice to see you again... I'm sorry, what was your name again?" Danni ignored her husband and greeted the woman next to him.

“Yes, it is nice to see you again...” Lamont cut the blonde off before she could finish her statement.

“I will come around to your office after I deal with my wife.” He shoed her away with ease and snow white gladly bolted out of the office. “Sheri hold all of my calls and visitors until further notice.” He spoke sternly to her.

“Yes sir.”

Storming into his office with a bang, Danni noticed right away that he didn't usher her with any care unlike the way he handled his female counterpart. Slowly she made her way to his door and closing it behind her. Lamont had slung off his suit jacket and even loosened his tie. From the looks of him he was ready for war, like he was stressed out. He had no right to act as if he was going through so many changes when he is the one that is in the wrong. She is the one that has been losing sleep over her marriage, not him. It's very evident that he could careless that she was in her feelings about something.

“We discussed this before Danielle. It was decided that you would not continue with these random visits to my place of employment.”

“Actually you decided. I thought it was dumb.”

“Excuse me? What has gotten into you?”

“You heard me Lamont. The real question is why did you want me to stop coming? Unless you are ashamed of me. What is it Lamont? What difference does it really make that I come by every once in a while? I am your wife. Spouses visit one another all of the time.”

“What is this about? Why are you suddenly nagging me about visiting me at my office? Do we not see one another at home every day? I sleep with you every night.”

“No you sleep beside me every night. There is a big difference. Choose your words wisely.”

“You sound like your ghetto sister the way you are running off at the mouth. Has she been filling your head with nonsense?”

“When did you get a new secretary?” Danni chose to ignore his ignorant comment. They have always gone back and forth with their banter. Lamont calls her and most of her family ghetto.

“Danielle, I hardly see that as any of your business.”

“It is when she looks at you the way she does. Is there something I should know about Lamont? You seem awfully chummy with your female counterparts.”

“You are so insecure. That is very unattractive.”

“I wouldn’t be insecure if I didn’t suspect my husband of creeping around on me. You make me feel like property, a burden at times, and I am sick of it.”

“You are my wife but you can be a pest as well.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me loud and clear, sweetheart. I’m a man and as a man I am not built for this girly tit for tat. When I tell you to watch your tone, I don’t expect to repeat myself more than once. Repeating myself is what one would do to a child and you claim to want one. You are not capable enough to

follow simple directions given by the head of the household. How do you plan on being an active, stern parent? I have caught myself several times reevaluating the reason I chose you.” Lamont scolded Danni with brute force. He didn’t take any soft punches with his devastating blows.

“Well if that’s the way you feel, maybe you should have chosen the blonde bimbo you are screwing. Perhaps the broad that should only take your phone calls and check your emails would be a better Stepford wife than little ole ghetto me.”

“Perhaps you are right Danielle. It has crossed my mind on several occasions such as these irrational blow-ups of yours.” At Danielle’s sharp intake of air, Lamont smirked. It was evident he was getting enjoyment out of her uncomfortableness. “What’s the matter dear, didn’t expect me to be so blunt? Ask and you shall receive. Isn’t that how the saying goes?”

“I can’t believe you.”

“My sentiments exactly.”

“I haven’t done anything that warrants the way you are treating me.”

“Exactly! You haven’t done much of anything. YOU haven’t excited me. YOU don’t excite me. YOU have let yourself go and not attempted at trying to get the toned curves back. YOU nag too damn much. Is any of this hitting a nerve with YOU? Do you understand what I am getting at?” Danni was astounded at the disrespect she was being dealt by the one she once loved. All of the love she tried to hang on to for these last couple of years was threatening to make her violently ill.

“Now if there is nothing else, you can see yourself out. If you desire to continue this foolish conversation, although I would reconsider that notion, later would be the opportune time.”

“This isn’t over by a long shot.” Danni stood up abruptly watching him walk to his office door with a chuckle.

“In that case, I will see you at home dear.” Lamont said laced with sarcasm while holding the door wide as it was her cue to leave.

“...” Instead of replying she just kept walking out of the office.

“Have a good day Mrs. Graves.”

“You as well Jezebel.”

“Danielle, that was uncalled for.” Lamont reprimanded.

“Kiss my ass.” She said lowly. Lamont had officially lost his mind if he thought he could defend one of his whores against his very own wife. He had better think again because this was far from over as she stated. One thing was for sure if he thought she was just going to roll over and take this new abusive Lamont, he had better start from scratch. The rate he was going, he was on the fast track to divorce city whether he knew it or not.

Chapter Four

Danni was completely outdone at his confession to cheating on her with other women. Whether it was just the two of them she mentioned or others that she had no clue about, Danni was appalled. The fact that he didn't even care enough to deny her speculations was heartbreaking. He didn't even know about the proof she held about his infidelity and he admitted to it. That alone was enough to make her want to burn the house down just to make all of his belongings disappear for good. Then the thought of his body not being inside to go as well it seemed frivolous.

As violent as that seemed, Danni was at that point. All sorts of murderous thoughts were roaming her mind and she had no way of getting them out. Before she could stop herself she walked a clear path in the plush carpet in their sitting room. 'How extremely pompous of him to want a sitting room filled with all white furniture?' She was going over all the things she hated about her husband as she waited for him to come through the door. The conversation was burning a hole in her skull like money in a shopaholic's pocket. When the grandfather clock struck seven, realization sunk in that the bastard was probably laid up at that very moment.

The irrational Danielle was in full affect tearing his precious room to shreds. Feathers, wood, glass, and porcelain pieces were scattered all through the room. Everything was in disarray. Moving from room to room effortlessly, Danni

started to put her angry hands on anything that he cherished in their home. ‘Their home?’ ‘Their union.’ ‘The marital bed.’ Their happily ever after has been interrupted. As it seems probably not briefly, this interruption seems more permanent. His unconcealed disrespect was more than she could handle. The text book would insist she seek therapy for this issue, the woman in her is saying to hell with therapy. Divorce!

Danni was now sitting in the bedroom that she shared with the bastard that stomped on her devotion to their vows. It only took her thirty minutes to destroy what took five years to perfect with him. His office, their living quarters, and his man cave was in shambles. The best thing that could happen at that point was if nature sent a tornado to come through and level the place. As sad as she felt, it wasn’t such a bad idea to just lay down and let the funnel suck her up as well. Her chest ached, her head hurt, and the tears left hot streaks down her face. The crazy part is she didn’t know if she was hurt, embarrassed, or just plain ole angry.

“What the hell is this?” She heard Lamont yell from downstairs. The anger and confusion coming from him almost made her crack a smile in triumph. “DANIELLE?” She ignored his demanding calls. He insisted on shouting her name instead of searching for her.

“Didn’t you hear me calling your name?”

“The neighbors heard you’re shouting Lamont.” Danni said sarcastically with a smirk.

“Why didn’t you answer me? Were we robbed? Did they take any valuables? Did you notify the police?” Danni

laughed void of all humor at his questioning. The irony was comical. “What’s funny? Are you hurt?”

“You. That’s what I find funny.” She spat. “You ran around frantic. Worrying about any materialistic things being missing. Asking did I call the police? Only if what you’ve stolen from me was a crime in the court of law. Of course I’m hurt. Why wouldn’t I be? After all I just found out my husband is some other sadistic asshole that I don’t even know.”

“Tell me...”

“SHUT. THE. FUCK. UP!” She shouted. “I am sick of your overbearing ass always trying to tell me how you feel. I have something to say without your pompous ass interrupting me.”

“YES, I was robbed. HELL YES, I’m hurt. YOU took something very valuable. TIME, you prick. The time I could have been spending on someone who would cherish me not try and change me.”

“Did you do all of this?”

“After everything I just said to you, that is all you got from that?”

“HAVE YOU LOST YOUR DAMN MIND
WOMAN?!”

“I am pretty close to it.”

“Destruction of property is against the law even if it is to be considered as jointly ours.”

“So is domestic abuse.”

“I haven’t laid a hand on you.”

“News flash honey, no matter how many white women you stick your boring dick in your still black. Sorry to break your heart. So if I call with a complaint such as that, who do you think they will believe?”

“Typical black woman behavior.”

“You don’t even care that you hurt me, do you? Did you ever love me? What was I to you? I really need to understand your reasoning.”

“You’re kidding right? You’re seriously trying to treat me like one of your patients.”

“Would you just answer the questions?”

“You are my wife. Point. Blank. Period. All you need to know is that.”

“How long have you been cheating on me?”

“It doesn’t really matter, now does it?”

“Yes it does matter. Why can’t you answer my questions straight-forward?”

“You are too sensitive to handle the truth.”

“How long have you been boning Snow White?”

“It has nothing to do with you who I am seeing and how long I have been seeing them. You couldn’t handle all of my truths so just give it a rest.”

“Are you seriously going to sit here in my face, in our home, and tell me that it’s none of my concern if you catch AIDS? So if you bring Mono home, I am just supposed to go to the doctor for my antibiotics quietly. You got life real...”

“Watch it Danielle you are skating on thin ice. Don’t say something you will regret later. Now if you don’t mind I am going to shower and prepare for my day tomorrow. I would really appreciate it if you cleaned up the mess you made during your little temper tantrum.”

“Temper tantrum? How the hell can you walk away so nonchalant like it’s no big deal that you are in a committed relationship but step out regularly?” As an extra thought, Danni decided to ask the million dollar question. “What if the roles were reversed? Would you be so understanding?”

“Easy, I look at you as a child. A dependent. Your little stunt tearing up things in our home further proved my point. I will continue to treat you as such. Rule number one is children are to be seen and not heard. You would never consider stepping out on me. Please! Who would want an immature, loud mouth, and not to mention chubby woman such as yourself?” He announced as if she were dumb. “Face it sweetie, you should thank your lucky stars I chose you. Oh and I already had dinner so no need to fix anything.”

Danni was so outdone at the things he chose to say to her. Her heart hurt tremendously. There was nothing she could do besides shed those stupid unwanted tears. If her self-esteem didn’t suffer before, it has taken a nose dive into no man’s land now. After the verbal abuse from Lamont, the man she swore to love forever had destroyed any light she had in her life. It would probably be better to just end things but she had enough common sense to know that wasn’t the answer. That would only cause those who truly loved her to suffer and she didn’t want that for them.

Murder wasn't an option either for she couldn't see herself serving a life sentence for his stupidity. What man in their right mind pokes the bear when they have already stolen something important from them? An insane man is what. Why, was the question that was nagging her the way he claims she nags him? Why would he throw away years together for flings? How many had there been? Does she know any of them? Does he have feelings for any of them? Why did he even stay with her this long if he didn't really want to be there? Her mind was made up if he didn't want her she wouldn't make him stay.

Danni drove until she was downtown, far away from home. Honestly she hadn't even realized she had walked out of the house until she was exiting the freeway. The only thing she had with her was her purse. It was evident Lamont could give two shits that she wasn't there when he came out of the bathroom so she didn't bother leaving a note. Plus she had been gone for at least twenty minutes and he had yet to call. Pulling into one of the new hotels in the area, she had the valet park her car. Asking for directions to the bar area, she had a seat in the booth furthest in the corner.

The waitress approached with a gentle, chirpy demeanor until she noticed Danni wasn't in an accepting mood. Danni tried her best to not be a bitch and just ordered the strongest drink she could muster up. Whiskey sour. One of her favorites when she was in college until Lamont told her it wasn't lady-like to drink such manly drinks. That was her first mistake as she started to reflect over their time together. She let him make so many decisions in her life. How she dressed.

How she spoke. What name she went by. Where she worked. Where they stayed. What she ate and how she ate it. Drank what he said was appropriate. Lamont was a raging control freak and she let her love for him mask the obvious.

By the fifth whiskey sour, she started to loosen up quite a bit. It had been so long since she had real alcohol. Knowing full well that an alcoholic beverage was the last thing to solve her problems she kept downing them. Several men in the area tried to pick her up but she wasn't that desperate. Even though it would serve her no good husband right but for her to let some random man bang her guts out would be stooping to an all-time low. She was not so drunk she would stoop to his level. Danni was sexually frustrated but not to that point just yet. Or was she?

“Sweetheart, you're too beautiful to be sitting all alone.” A man spoke with a face full of acne. Danni mentally rolled her eyes at the cheap pick up line. What about her was beautiful?

“Oh really?” She chuckled to herself looking in the other direction.

“Hope you don't mind if I join you.” He took a seat without her official acceptance. Danni thought for sure he had to be clueless or had a death wish. Even if she was on the outside looking in, she would automatically know to run away. “The name is Henry.”

“Look, Henry. I'm not in the mood honestly. I don't want to be rude but...”

“Hold up beautiful. Calm down. I just wanted to brighten your night.”

“That would happen so much quicker if you went back to where you came from.”

“OUCH.” He pretended to be hurt with his hand over his heart. “Look-a-here, let me just get you another drink.”

“No thank you. I can buy my own.”

“Come on now. It would be my pleasure to treat a pretty little thing such as yourself.” He smiled signaling for the waitress to come to the table.

“Yes sir?” The waitress asked when she arrived.

“It would be more pleasurable if I could continue my pity-party alone.” Danni was beginning to lose patience with the ugly duckling sitting across from her. She faintly heard the waitress giggle at her response.

“Ah now, don’t be like that. Can I get another beer and the pretty lady will have another...”

“Booth. Table. Hotel. Room. Anywhere there is solitary confinement with a wet bar.”

“Just bring her another whatever she is drinking.”

“Right away.” Danni didn’t miss the humor that was rolling off of the young lady. She hated being rude but he was testing her patience. He didn’t seem to take a hint very well. She feared she would rip him a new one if he didn’t catch a clue.

“Now back to the reason such a beautiful woman is sitting all alone with such a bitter look on her face.”

“What about me is beautiful right now? My eyes are red and swollen. I’m flushed from all the whiskey sours I’ve

drank. My hair is a mess from destroying the house filled with broken dreams. I'm pissed and might I add, I AM bitter. Well within my rights to feel that way if you must know."

"How about I help you forget about your troubles for now?"

"I feel like pure shit. So excuse me if I don't feel beautiful nor do I feel like being bothered. How about this Harry, find you some business that doesn't involve making yourself seem so desperate. No offense."

"Henry."

"What?"

"My name is Henry."

"Okay whatever. Please leave."

"I was just trying to make your night. No need to be a stuck-up bitch about it."

"I will own that one. I tried to be nice but you couldn't catch a hint with a baseball mitt."

"Is there a problem here?" A tall drink of water interrupted whatever the smugly man was going to say next. Danni was officially feeling the effects of the drinks she had consumed. The actual count was escaping her memory.

"Nothing I can't handle." Danni slurred after throwing a double shot of whiskey down her throat. Followed by the whiskey sour that had miraculously appeared. Did she order that one? Her memory was failing her.

"She is just being a bitch that's all."

"Hey brother, that's no way to speak to a lady."

“Lady? This drunken broad ain’t no damn lady. Tried to make her day.” He stomped away to his entourage who laughed at his failed attempt.

“It will continue down its shitty path. Thanks and have a nice day.” Danni staggered to her feet, straightened out her clothes, and attempted to walk towards the exit. She didn’t know how she would get home but she had to leave here. Yuck mouth was threatening to spoil her buzz.

“Excuse me but can I...” She heard the kind gentleman from before try and get her attention.

“Please just leave me be. I am not beautiful. I am not interested. NO, I’m not an easy lay. I would not like a drink. Please fuck off.”

“What I was going to ask before you started to flatter yourself was if I could call you a cab? A loved one or something because it wouldn’t be right for me to let you leave like this.” He kindly offered.

“There is no one.” Danni was crying before she knew what came over her.

“Have a seat here and I will be right back.”

“What for?”

“Just until I check on a cab really fast.”

“Alright.” She watched as the guy walked away to the front desk of the hotel. Her eyelids were so heavy. They felt like they weighed a ton. Suddenly she felt herself being lifted into the air. Her once heavy body felt light as a feather. She was floating on a cloud.

The cloud was so firm and fresh smelling. A manly scent was mixed with the fresh smell. It was so calming, Danni couldn't help but snuggle into it as close as she could. Other movement was heard around her as she was in and out of a foggy sleepy state. Faintly she heard a deep voice speaking with someone in the distance. She thought she heard the man ask for the husband of Danielle Graves. Wait, she was Danielle Graves. Was she dead? What happened? She couldn't make her body respond to her command. It was as if she was stuck inside her own head. A deep sleep she couldn't wake up from.

"I see why you're in such a pissy mood." Danni grimaced mentally from his words. She was ashamed of herself that was for sure. Dozing off, letting her drunken state take over fully she was out like a light.

Waking up to an extremely bright light, she squinted her eyes trying to block out the intrusion. Opening her eyes, trying to figure out where she was, she had to shut them just as quick. The room was moving at a rapid pace causing her stomach to do back, front, and cartwheel style flips. Her head hurt so much she physically wanted to die to escape the pain. Dragging herself from the bed she was lying in, she went into the rest room to relieve herself in two different ways. All the alcohol she consumed the night before found its way on the floor and wall while she sat on the toilet.

There was no other choice for her to make as she stripped out of her sweaty clothes to take a shower. In her confused state she didn't think of what she might wear when she got out, she just wanted to get the funk off of her. Stepping out of the shower she felt like a new person despite the heartache she felt. Everything from the day and night before

came rushing back. It was obvious she was in a hotel room and a very luxurious one at that. How she got there was the mystery? There was a manly smelling cloud and a voice looking for her husband. Danni shook her head which turned out to be a huge mistake.

What she did last night was beyond foolish. She could have been raped, robbed, or so much worse, killed. Never in all of years had she been so drunk where she had to figure out what happened the night before. Without having to search too far, she found her purse with everything she remembered being in it still there. Although dead, her cell was next to the bed on the nightstand. Surveying her surroundings further she found a neatly folded stack of clothes. Looking around to be sure she was alone kicking herself for not checking that out first. There was a pair of oversized sweat pants, a large t-shirt, a pair of boxer briefs, and some footie socks still in the pack.

Danni was a big fan of not 'looking a gift horse in the mouth.' There was no way she wasn't thankful to the kind stranger that helped her in her time of need. Now she regretted being so rude to him the night before. She had to figure out how to contact the mystery man to thank him properly. Looking at the clock on the nightstand she realized she was going to be late if she didn't get a move on it. Even though her personal life was in turmoil she still needed to treat her patients. A brave face was what she was going to have to put on and do the best she could.

Briefly swinging by the front desk, Danni inquired about the fee for the room. The attendant confirmed that the room was covered by an unknown person. Although it was registered in her name, the balance was paid in cash. Instead of

continuing her inquiry about the kind gentleman she tucked her tail and left. Relieved that her asshole of a husband was not home when she pulled up was an added bonus. She tried her best to get rid of the banging headache that was a constant reminder of her night of hitting the bottle. It had been years since she had gotten drunk. No matter how hard things got, it would probably be wise to never drink like that again.

“Good Morning Mrs. Graves. Your first appointment is waiting in the lobby.” The receptionist greeted Danni as she rushed to her office. Constantly juggling her purse, bag, and coffee in her hands she gave a curt head nod.

“Are you feeling alright?”

“Huh... Yes, just give me a minute.”

“Rough morning?”

“You could say that.”

“I will just peak in to assure they are waiting patiently. We wouldn't want to add to your stress.” Jennie joked with her perky attitude. Danni only wished she could have a centimeter of her giddiness, she would be alright.

“Thank you Jennie.”

Finally Danni had gotten herself situated, her things were put away, and now she sat at her desk ready to greet her first client of the day. The girl she had met during her admission stay was now at the office for her first outpatient family therapy session. Hopefully her dad could be in attendance seeing as she prefers to live with him instead of the maternal grandmother. It's customary to have at least one

family session a month, while she could visit with her a couple times a week at her school.

That was one of the things she had confided in Danni during one of their school sessions. Her desire to live with her father has caused her mother and grandmother to panic. According to Niecee, the hefty child support checks would stop if he was made aware of their treatment of her. Danni wondered what her paternal grandmother was referring to when speaking of 'the other family.' It was recommended to Niecee that her dad attend some of her sessions.

“Hey Miss Danni!”

“Hey Niecee. How have you been?” Danni greeted the pretty teen.

“I’ve been okay.”

“Just okay?” Danni questioned picking up on the sadness.

“Yes ma’am. Miss Danni this is my dad, De ’Marcus. Dad this is Miss Danni, my counselor.” Danni looked up to greet the person responsible for the alluring smell that tickled her nose. Starting at the designer jeans up to his fresh polo shirt, Danni finally made it to his well-defined face. He looked very familiar but she doubted she knew him. From the looks of his appearance, he could have some thuggish tendencies. She doesn’t know many people from that walk of life.

“Hello Mr. Jones. Danielle Hunter.” Danni waited for him to shake her outstretched hand. Firm yet soft, she couldn’t help but remark. The fact that she omitted Graves as being her last name, reverting back to her maiden name spoke volumes.

“Nice to *formally* meet you Mrs. Hunter but please call me Marcus or Mark.” He smiled a dazzling smile with a hint of mischief as if he was thinking something really funny. She didn’t want to correct him on the Mrs. Since she was still wearing her wedding ring. It was quite immature of her to return to her maiden name but kept the token proven otherwise.

“In that case call me Danielle or Danni. Please have a seat. I will chat with you two together for a moment and then I will speak with Niecee alone. Then if you have anything else you would like to discuss we can talk as Niecee steps out. Is that alright?”

“That’s fine by me.”

“Great, let’s get started.” Danni spoke with the two of them about what she plans to accomplish seeing Niecee and then asked Marcus to step out. Unfortunately she couldn’t shake where she had seen him from. He didn’t mention anything so she was hoping it was all in her head that she thought she knew him.

Niecee informed her that things at her grandmothers had begun to get worst for her mother came back with a vengeance. The grandmother is threatening to send her away to a boot camp or admit her for long term stay on a unit. Danni had to listen to how the young lady really felt about her other parent that she should be looking up to instead of wanting to run away from. From the sounds of things, Niecee has bouts of depression where she contemplates the meaning of life. Danni figured with the way she was talking it was time to discuss

some of these issues with her father. She just prayed he wasn't a sometimey father like so many deadbeats in the world.

"First, I would like to say that I just love Niecee. She is such a sweet girl."

"Thank you. She is my heart. I wish I could spend more time with her than what I do."

"I apologize if I'm prying but why don't you?"

"It's difficult to explain. Let's say she wasn't a love child."

"I think I get where you are coming from. Despite how she was conceived that shouldn't affect your relationship with your daughter."

"Do you have any kids?"

"No." Danni answered with a pang in heart because of how desperately she wanted one. The realization of it never happening hurt deeply.

"Then you couldn't possibly know how hard it is to fight over a living, breathing, and helpless individual."

"I apologize Marcus. It is not my intention to jump down your back or accuse you of being a dead beat. That was very insensitive of me."

"No need to apologize, it wouldn't be the first time I've been the victim of stereotypes and I'm sure it won't be the last." He took an easy breath before continuing. "If the courts were in my corner my daughter would be living with me instead of those money grubbers she is forced to live with."

“That’s one of the things I need to speak with you about. Niecee has expressed some concerns about living with her grandmother.”

“What about it?”

“Because Niecee is still a minor, I have to address certain concerns for her well-being when the need arises. In my professional opinion Niecee prefers to live with you over her grandmother. According to what she has said to me, I fear she could be facing depression.”

“Are you assuming it’s this bad or is it something she has specifically said to you?” Danni giggled with a sarcastic undertone. “I am being serious, no funny business.”

“From what I have gathered from our sessions, there is a real threat residing there. Ultimately it is up to you whether you would like to pursue this any further.”

“What kind of things has she said because she hasn’t told me anything?”

“I can’t tell you the full details due to it being a HIPPA violation.”

“But you feel I should seek custody from what you were told?”

“Yes, that’s right. Her being here was a cry for help. It was a ruse if you ask me. At the mention of your name, you should have seen her face light up with both admiration and fear. She speaks very highly of you.”

“I must say the same for you. You are all she seems to talk about lately when I talk to her. She was extremely happy

to come see you today. It just so happened to be my visiting time with her that this appointment was scheduled.”

“Maybe. But for some reason I think someone else had a hand in the scheduling. This was the date picked by Niecee.”

“Well there is no doubt she set this up then.”

“The grandmother has already signed the consent forms for me to visit with her at school once a week. So I will just schedule another family session with you two at your earliest convenience.”

“That’s fine with me as well.”

“Good. Well it was very nice meeting you Marcus. Again I apologize for being presumptuous about your part in parenting.”

“No offense taken. But if I were you, making assumptions about a person before you know the entire story may not be a wise move. After all I didn’t judge your drunken outbursts last night.” At her shocked expression, Marcus continued with a smirk. “I trust your stay at the hotel was alright.”

“I knew you looked familiar. Oh God, I am so embarrassed.” Danni’s face darkened about four solid shades from humiliation. “I assure you that is not the way I regularly behave. Honestly, I can’t recall much from last night.”

“No need to be embarrassed. We’ve all had those type of days.”

“I was wondering would I ever see my knight without all of the armor again. Here you were in my face this entire time and I didn’t even know it. Thank you so much for

everything you did for me last night.” Danni said. “I insist on paying you back. And I will wash your stuff.”

“That isn’t necessary. I’m just happy I got to save a friend of my daughters.”

“Well thank you again. So many other men would have taken advantage of me in such a vulnerable state.”

“There are still some gentlemen left in the world, how about that?”

“Only a small amount but yes you could say that.”

“Here is a little free advice for you *Mrs. Graves*, don’t let the ignorance of one change your perception of others.” Marcus said with his final goodbye. After bidding farewell to Niecee they were gone. In his departure he left Danni’s mind in utter mayhem. She wasn’t punishing others for her husband’s betrayal she was just stating the facts. There aren’t many gentlemen left in the world. Who knew she would be lucky enough to meet the last of his kind at such an awkward moment in her life? Its official, Lamont has unfortunately ruined her optimistic side.

Chapter Five

Danielle was going through some serious issues since the day she confronted Lamont about his infidelity. Her drunken night out had done little to get a rise out of him. If anything, he just accused her of being a loose whore. Calling her out as the one who should be branded with the scarlet letter for adultery. Danni couldn't believe the audacity of him to accuse her of such actions when his glass house was just waiting for impact. There was no doubt that he had been cheating for a while and he later confirmed that he started about two years ago. Sadly she has allowed the actions of her estranged husband to push her to drinking now daily. It had been a whole week since the confrontation with him and he was resulting in rarely showing his face in the home they once shared.

By the middle of the second week she was starting to sink further and further into depression. Besides at work, there wasn't any normalcy in her life. Her patients were her lifeline. They made her feel worth something. Especially one in particular. Niecee was always so excited to see her coming into her school to visit with her. Their time together was spent just talking about the random things happening around school. A couple of times, Danni has brought her lunch so they could talk on her lunch period. Most kids would hate that but Niecee seemed to be soaking that attention up. Actually Danni was soaking it up as well, so it was a win-win for them both. Once

she arrives home to her cold, empty house full of broken promises and dreams of forever all she heard was silence.

A talkative thirteen year-old was a lot better than the silence that was threatening to drive her crazy. Her parents and god-sister had been calling her but she pretends to be swamped with paperwork. Speaking with family only poses to be a problem for her for she had some tough decisions to make. Just a reminder that a piece of her family was technically obsolete was wreaking havoc on her nerves. The reality that she would have to answer so many questions, announcing to the world that she was a failure. A failure is the title she felt she deserved. She couldn't even keep her very own husband happy. So many women pray for a spouse, steal others, and basically do anything to have someone to call their own. She had that and lost it for reasons unknown.

Was she not small enough? Did she talk too much? Was the sex not worth it? What do the other women have that she doesn't? Well the answer to the last question was pretty evident. They had HIM. From the looks of the way he just blew off her feelings of resentment, they were pretty damn good at pleasing him. In fact, it was getting so good too him, he accidentally butt-dialed her phone during one of his trysts. Or at least it may have been an accident. She didn't know for sure but either way he was having the time of his life with whomever he was with. The crazy part about it was that Danni couldn't even force tears to fall for his pathetic behavior. She was all cried out for now. Maybe she was in initial shock for what her marriage has become. Nothing.

The phone call was the icing on the cake that made her get up off her butt and quit moping around. The sadness was

now replaced with fury. A smoldering inferno of anger was oozing out. She almost felt like she was in the old movie 'Waiting to Exhale' the way she was throwing his clothes in garbage bags. The expensive suit cases that she charged on her credit card were too good for his belongings. All of the duffle bags they had for gym usage or overnight stays didn't deserve to be subjected to transporting the clothes she has envisioned him burning in hell in.

Sadly she had just cleaned up the mess she made when she first found out everything. Only this time she didn't really destroy anything but his closet. The bags were so full that she physically had to drag them down the stairs. Some of them even broke open as she sat them on the porch. The whiskey in her system made her giggle at the irony. He had been dragging her around with empty promises and vows that he didn't plan to fulfill. Until in the end he ripped her heart out and left it for the coyote's to feast on. Turning to walk back into the house she realized she forgot one crucial detail. Just because she put all of his belongings out didn't mean he couldn't just unlock the door and make his way back in. Shit in tow.

Calling a locksmith was next on the agenda. Within a fifteen minute conversation, a charged payment of one-hundred and fifty dollars all the locks were changed. Did she fear for her life? No. Was she afraid of his reaction when he returned and discovered he had been unlawfully evicted? No. If anything he should be the one afraid of her. Deadly revenge plots were steadily popping up in her head. There were so many things she could think of to torture his poor cheating heart and make him wish he married the Bobbitt woman instead of her. Chopping his pathetic joystick off was the last

thing on her mind. Her imagination was running wild as she basked in her sinister smile.

“What’s going on with that sinister smile there lady?” Beejay asked as they sat at lunch. She had been on autopilot for so long now it’s kind of natural for her to lose minutes, hours, and even a day or two. Although unsafe, the good Lord has obviously been keeping a close eye on her to be sure she is still unharmed. Well physically unharmed because emotionally and mentally, she should be in a battered women’s shelter. “Hello! Anybody home in there?” He snapped his fingers in her face.

“What did you just say?”

“Alright, what’s going on with you girl? You have been putting on this pretty fake face for a minute now. I have been trying not to pry but you are taking too damn long to come around on your own. I know something is going on so you might as well spill it. That façade you are putting on isn’t fooling me sweetheart. So sorry to disappoint you. I would rather you tell me it’s none of my business than to sit here as fake as the shell of a person you are right now.”

“It’s nothing I can’t handle myself.”

“Bullshit. Let’s take a walk outside.”

“I’m not really up for it to be honest.”

“You would deny a suffocating man some fresh air.”

“You are so dramatic.” Danni laughed genuinely for the first time in a while.

“My dear, whatever do you mean?”

“You are too much for me right now.” Danni continued to giggle as they made their way outdoors. Having a seat at the picnic tables before either said anything else.

“I know you said it’s nothing but... I’m worried about you.”

“I’m fine.”

“Please stop insulting my intelligence.” Beejay said sternly. “I have to tell you something.”

“What is it?”

“I saw Lamont recently.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“A friend and I were out to dinner at an exclusive restaurant downtown. I thought maybe you would have been there somewhere but to my dismay you weren’t.”

“Did you speak?”

“No.” Beejay didn’t elaborate any further and it was killing Danni to ask the dreaded question. “Go ahead and ask what you really want to know. My volunteer days are so over.” He sighed dramatically.

“Was he alone?” There she asked even if she did already know the answer.

“No.” Beejay answered after a brief bout of silence. “I am your friend Danni, never forget that. I get that you aren’t ready but know that I am here when you are.”

“Thank you Beejay.”

“If you want me to handle that punk for you. I can call somebody for that.” He joked causing Danni to laugh again. One thing she could count as a blessing out of this ordeal was that she could openly be friends with Beejay now.

“Do you happen to know a good lawyer?” Danni asked once she sobered up.

“What’s my name?”

“Mr. Know it all who knows all.”

“Exactly and have I got the perfect person for you. When she gets done, you will have effectively raped his wallet, pockets, and any hidden accounts he may have.”

“I just want out. I don’t care about any materialistic things.”

“I know you don’t sweetie but miracles still happen every day.”

“What does that mean exactly?”

“I’m not quite sure.”

“I can’t with you today.” Danni laughed and he joined in. He just wanted to make her soul a little lighter with laughter and it was working.

The time had come for her to address her parents and quit hiding from the inevitable. Once she pulled into their drive-way she sat for a minute to collect herself. There was no need to get in a hurry to explain her situation and try to put on a brave front. Pretending to be alright with everything that was

going on was taking its toll on Danni. Upon looking in the mirror, she noticed the dark circles under her eyes. Her skin looked scaly and chapped. Overall her appearance was very poor. No doubt that it was written all over her face that she was a tad bit distraught, disturbed, and discombobulated. Not to mention she had most definitely lost some weight being that her appetite has been missing in action.

“Hi Mom.” Danni greeted like a long lost child returning home.

“Danni, how are you?” Her mother pulled her into a big hug while rubbing a soothing hand up and down her back.

“I’ve been better.”

“I’m sure you have. Come on in.”

“Where’s dad?”

“On the patio.”

“You already told him right?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

“I thought you didn’t want me to tell him.” She said with an eyebrow raised in questioning.

“I don’t think I would have been able to get the words out. I am having a hard enough time convincing myself that this is all real.”

“It would be even more real if you let me at him.” The ladies were interrupted by a strong baritone voice.

“Hey daddy.”

“Hey sweatpea.” He pulled Danni into a hug with no other words. “How is my girl?”

“I’m okay daddy.”

“Your mom told me what happened but I would much rather hear it from your point of view.”

“Just know that my maiden name is back into play when this is all said and done.”

“So you have decided to file for divorce?”

“Yes, I have to. I can’t live like that. Sharing was never one of my strong suits.”

“Don’t I know it? You lived to be in trouble in grade school.” That caused them all to chuckle just a little trying to break the tension.

“Where is he now?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care. I sat all of his stuff out on the porch earlier in the week and haven’t heard from him since.”

“That a girl.” Her mother said with glee.

“I won’t hunt that bastard down and rip him a new asshole because you mother made me promise not to. But I want you to be aware that by law you can’t sit his things out. That alone can come back and bite you in the butt.” Danni’s dad was a retired police officer that moonlighted as a private investigator from time to time. When money talks he could find out just about anything that was required.

“Yes, I know. I called myself researching the law after I did it but he didn’t bother coming back so I left it alone.”

“Well if he does and jumps wrong, please let me know.”

“I will daddy.”

“Do you need an attorney?”

“Actually I contacted a friend of a friend and she has agreed to at least hear my case during a consult for free. Then her retainer is \$2,500. Since we have so much to go over it is going to be quite hard. Especially if he makes it hard by contesting it.”

“Do you need some help coming up with that money?”

“No, I will be fine.”

“Are you sure? How will you maintain your bills? Have you separated your accounts?” Her father fired one question after the next.

“Well no... that hadn't crossed my mind until now. You don't think he...”

“We certainly do!” Her mother exclaimed.

“If a person cheats, they already lie so stealing isn't so far-fetched.” Her father stated.

“As for my bills, I will just have to figure it out. It's a part of being an adult, right?”

“If you need anything, all you have to do is ask.”

“Thank you guys for everything.”

“You're most welcome sweetie and I know that everything is going to work out.” Her mother hugged her from the side. “Have you spoken to Natalie?”

“No I hadn’t spoken to her in a couple of weeks. I tried to call her the night I confronted...him and she didn’t answer. I needed to get out of that house because I was about to commit a crime.”

“I would have gotten you off with a ‘crime of passion plea,’ I’m just saying.”

“You could have come here.”

“Mom I didn’t want to burden you all with my marital issues. Actually once I didn’t get an answer from her, I regretted calling her anyway. This is my problem to deal with I shouldn’t drag others in it.”

“We are family. If you have a problem then so do we. Don’t ever think that you are burden on us. That’s one of the reasons the good Lord put us on earth. We are parents first.”

“Thank you guys. I’m going to head home.”

“So soon?”

“Yes, I just want to relax.”

“When is your appointment with the lawyer?”

“Monday morning.”

“Do you need us to go with you?”

“No mom, I got this but I will call you afterwards. How does that sound?”

“That sounds good.”

“See you guys later. Love you.”

“Love you too.” They hugged one final time before Danni left to return to the huge, hallow shell she had to call

home.

Lamont was livid that Danielle had the balls to come and confront him the way she did at his office. What if the CEO's or any higher executive was around to witness her outbursts? He questioned her sanity for the rest of the day but that didn't stop him from doing what he had knack for doing. Cheating. Sleeping with other women besides his wife. Flirting. You name it, he did it. He felt like it was only natural as a grown man to have as many women as it called for to suit his needs. At least he wasn't committing a crime of bigamy or polygamy for that matter. Technically what he was doing was child's play.

Danielle had to learn as long as he came home after his late night romps or office flings, she had nothing to worry about. He still held her on a pedestal because at least he didn't bring it into their home. Well that she knew of. All of his nasty, freaky, candid deeds were done where she would least expect it. That was one of the reasons he banished her from his job because he didn't want there to be awkward moments such as that one. Half of the people in that building didn't even know he was married. So many new employees hadn't been there when he got married and used to bring her to the company functions.

Lately when they have functions, either he doesn't mention anything to her so he can go alone or he doesn't bother going at all. Between family functions, the few business gatherings he takes her to, and the boring hospital functions she has to attend that is all the faking he chooses to do. Faking

sounded so harsh of a word. Technically he did have love for his wife, just not enough to be faithful. She was loyal, crafty, and most importantly she kept her vagina tight. Plus he had shaped and molded her to be the perfect specimen to be seen and not heard. No matter how upset she claims to be, Lamont knew she wasn't going anywhere. She couldn't. With the shortage of black men in the world, there is no way she would be dumb enough to let a stud like him go.

“Lamont?” He felt soft skin and perky breast brush against his back while he was taking a shower. It had been a little minute since he has seen Danielle. Her outrageous behavior was appalling.

“Yes?”

“What are you doing out of bed?”

“Taking a shower.”

“I can see that.” She giggled. Kissing his back while running her hands down to his flaccid shaft made it slowly rise to the occasion. “What I don't see is why didn't you wake me to join you?”

“I didn't want to wake you. You seem so tired.”

“You wore me out but you know I would never turn you away.”

“This I know.” It was true. The last two months of sleeping with her she never disappointed him.

“Why don't you let me wash you?” Taking the soapy loofa from his hands she washed him from head to toe. The glorious attention she paid to his cock was wonderful. Once he was rinsed, she wasted no time assuming the position down

before him. Worshiping his penis like it was the best delicacy. The few times Danielle had gone down on him because that was the only way to get him amped to have sex it was alright. Nothing compared to the skills he receives elsewhere.

“That a girl. Take it all in.” He coerced. She didn’t hesitate to do as he instructed taking him to the back of her throat. It didn’t take long before she removed him from her mouth slapping her pink lips with the tip. Soon enough, creamy semen spewed all over her face just the way he likes it. The sight alone turned him on but he was pretty drained from their activities of earlier.

“Get cleaned up.” He told her stepping out of the shower to dry off.

Once he was dressed he started to re-pack his belongings. If Danielle thought he would leave the house he picked out and customized the way he wanted it, she had better think again. The fact that she tore so many things up that first night made him want to beat some sense into her. Her father being an ex-cop vetoed that notion. When he got out the shower later that night to find she had left, he checked her closet to see if all of her stuff was still there. Then he knew she wasn’t going anywhere, she was just being dramatic. Later that night to receive a call from her phone, he was prepared to give her a hard time. As soon as another man’s voice came on the line, he went from zero to a hundred in anger. How dare she step out on him?

The unidentified man then went so far as to explain why he was calling. Stating his wife was seriously intoxicated and would need a ride home. Lamont found the humor in the

situation and let it be known that he knew she needed him. Belittling her by calling her foolish for getting drunk, the line disconnected with no further words. He didn't even get the location of his wife's whereabouts. Tracking her credit card came back nothing after her cell phone went straight to voicemail. He considered having it tracked but thought better about it. After all she is the one that left, he would let her figure out how to get out of trouble. For all he knew the so called saver could have been a crazed lunatic.

“What are you doing?”

“Packing, what does it look like?”

“I can see that but why?”

“I'm going home.”

“Home? To her?”

“Yes home. To my house. She should have cooled down by now.”

“Why are you going back to her?”

“Because she is my wife.”

“But you don't love her.”

“I don't love you.”

“You could learn to.”

“Look, I am not going to throw away five years for two months. Are you crazy?”

“What about me?”

“Nothing will change between you and me. That's my home and I won't give that up. You will either have to deal

with it or...”

“Or what?”

“Would you really like to find out? How will you pay your bills with no job? The gifts, trips, and perks of being with me, is it worth the risk of giving them up?”

“...”

“I didn’t think so.” Lamont finished getting his things together. The bulk of his belongings were fine to stay at his secret condo that Danielle knew nothing about. He was only taking a suitcase back for the meanwhile. “Let yourself out, turn the key into the attendant downstairs, and I will see you at the office.”

“...”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you.” He said roughly pulling the silent woman to him.

“Yes sir, Mr. Graves.”

“That’s more like it.” He turned to leave but another thought came to his mind. “Oh and don’t wear any panties today. We have that long boring ass meeting. I need something to occupy my mind.” That gained a blush from his temptress.

“As you wish sir.”

“Good girl.” With one last wink he was on his way to make someone else’s day. Life was good. He had a wife, a home, a stellar career, and endless playmates around town. He was the luckiest man on earth, if he didn’t say so himself. Most men wish they could have it that good. His father taught him well coming up. Now that the wife was on to his game

now it would be no conversation of whether he was cheating or not. The answer has been made evident. Unfortunately she will start to be needier and requesting he give her more time than the others. Just as his mother had.

Like it was yesterday he could remember his parents going at it strong about his father's infidelities. His mother was hysterically crying about how terrible he was treating her. The countless threats she had made to leave him fell on deaf ears as his father just nodded his head. Then smirking with a deadly undertone he laid out some simple speech of encouragement.

"Then what will you do?" "Where will you go?" "You are going to let another broad reap the benefits of having me. Me? The sole provider of this house. The man of this house. My house. With so many influential people in my pocket how far do you think you will get if you leave me? NO money. NO place to lay your head. You were poor when I found you and you keep being ungrateful you will be once again. As long as I come home to you there is nothing to worry about. I will always come home to you when it's said and done. Remember I chose you to share my name and for you to have my children. It could have been another but it was YOU. Now, what's for dinner?"

Listening to that speech from the hallway of his childhood home, Lamont decided then and there that his father was on to something. He was only twelve years old so he understood everything that was being said. Not that he hadn't already taken him around some of his women before. He just explained that he needed to talk to his friend for a minute and he was to keep this from his mother. It was a man thing, he

would then say. Feeling so good about being called a man at his young age, Lamont was all gong ho on keeping the secrets of his father's dealings. He played with heads, hearts, and bodies all throughout high school. By college he just had mad hoes.

When he met Danielle he knew she was different. Successfully getting into her head, he managed to get her virginity. Once the deed was done he knew he had a keeper. She was easily persuaded with his smooth words, attentiveness, and promises of her being the only one. Whispering words of love and forever sealed the deal. For a while he only dealt with her, she really was his only one. Being so consumed with his studies, he only had time for the main chick. Plus the rate she was going she had a lot going on with her educational wise. Even though she didn't come from a poor upbringing like his mother, he made her depend on him in another arena all together. Emotionally dependent on him was better. There is no way she would try to divorce her first love. That would just be foolish.

"I was wondering when you would grace me with your presence."

"I can leave if you are going to pretend you aren't happy to see me."

"I'm not pretending to be anything."

"Do you want me to leave? Standing here talking at the door is becoming quite boring."

"You are so pompous."

“I’m surprised your ghetto-ass knows what pompous is.”

“Fuck you Lamont.”

“My pleasure.” Lamont forced his way into the apartment he paid the rent for monthly and got right down to business.

“I see someone has popped a blue pill before coming over.” She chanted between pumps. Lamont currently had her bent over the back of the couch drilling holes in her cervix.

“SHUT.UP.” It only made him hit harder. The angrier she made him the rougher the sex was.

“I bet your wife doesn’t let you hit it like this.” She taunted further. “Ahhhhh... Yesssss... Take it daddy!”

“What did I tell you about calling me daddy?” All of the chemicals from the pills he had taken was swirling through his blood stream making him feel on top of the world. He really didn’t have a problem being called daddy during sex it’s just the way she says it reminds him that his wife desperately wants a baby. A baby he isn’t prepared to give her. Then again now that she was so upset maybe it was time to relent and give her what she wants.

“Oohhh right there. RIGHT. THERE! YES!” Pulling out of her with a plop he sat on the sofa with his pants still around his ankles.

“You know what I want. Do what you do best? Besides all that back talk you are famous for.”

“You are an asshole.”

“Shut up before I slap your ass.”

“Careful Lamont, you don’t want to end up like my ghetto ass.”

“Are you going to ride this dick or what? I can always give it to someone else.” He said while rubbing his stiff member.

“It’s not like you aren’t already. Let’s be real.”

“...” Lamont chose not to comment all he wanted was to show equal love amongst his women today and this one wanted to be difficult.

“Why can’t I be enough for you Lamont?” She asked distracting him from the task at hand by this conversation.

“Wait...go grab a condom. I almost forgot.”

“Don’t change the subject. Just answer my question and I will go get one.” She said grinding into him. Swirling her hips around slowly, hypnotizing him. He was so damn addicted to pussy it was ridiculous. “I know she will always be your wife. I get it but the others. Why?”

“You’re distracting me.” He tried to sober up long enough to think clearly but she was squeezing him eternally causing him to groan from the feeling.

“Sorry. I just want to please you. I can be everything you aren’t getting at home. Just give me that chance.” He wanted to ask how much did she know about his other conquests but couldn’t form the words. His brain was fogged up with lust. “You don’t need them. Just me.” Bouncing faster and faster, blowing his mind literally. He would tell her anything to make sure she didn’t stop.

“Alright. Soon.”

“...” She stopped abruptly.

“Why did you stop?” Lamont popped his eyes open pissed because he was so close to blowing his lid.

“Soon? Don’t lie to me Lamont.”

“Please just keep going.”

“Promise me?”

“...” Lamont didn’t reply as he felt that inner beast creep up wanting to let out. He forcefully bounced her on his lap, holding on to her hips. She screamed from the force but didn’t tell him to stop.

“Promise. Me.” She kept chanting over and over again. The only answer she received was a grunt of frustration. His balls were drawing up into his body, heart was racing, and it felt like he was going to combust if he didn’t relieve himself soon. Seeing stars he came hard, zoning completely out. This was the life. There was no way in hell he would stop spreading his joy around. Promise my ass. That wasn’t going to happen but she didn’t need to know that.

“Promise.” He said lowly and could feel her face spread into a wide grin. ‘That should buy him some time’ he thought with a smirk. Today was a good day so far, now he just had to deal with the spouse and he will be all good.

Chapter Six

Danni returned home last night in better spirits than what she had been experiencing. Now that she had expressed how she felt about the betrayal out loud, the future was trying to open up. Optimism was creeping into her mind helping her to think ahead. Make some set plans. That was a step to get her back to her old self again. Going to sleep with plans brewing instead of anger simmering. The hurt was still an evident part but it wasn't so much from the love stand point. It was more hurt from being played for a fool.

The next day was Saturday and she decided to treat it as she did when growing up in the Hunter household. Saturday's were set aside for cleaning, emptying out closets, garages and such. From the huge mess she had made getting his things out of the house to straightening up the bedroom that was once theirs. Throwing away things that made her think of her failed marriage. Sheets, pillows, their robes, and other trinkets went into a garbage bag. Normally people waited until the divorce was final, Danni was a realistic person. Why sit around looking at stuff that was all a lie?

Starting with the wedding pictures, albums, and even her wedding dress was packed into a huge box. The basement was the new home for that. Out of sight, out of mind was her motto for this ordeal. The guest room had become her place of safe haven. Now the house seemed so huge for just one person. Moving her clothes from the master bedroom closet,

she turned the guest room into her very own oasis. The dresser wasn't big enough but she removed her most used things from its previous spot. Filling the drawers of the small dresser in there until they barely closed. The bathroom wasn't as big but it was doable for her.

By three, she was done cleaning the entire house and in desperate need of a shower. Gathering her undergarments, sweats, and turning her phone onto a smooth soul station. Swaying her hips, singing songs at the top of her lungs she knew, and just overall enjoying her alone time. Seems like all the songs explained how she felt in the moment. They all described what was happening in her life. It was uncanny how songs could always depict what was going on in one's life and sing the words that had escaped the logical brain. Suddenly she was jarred from her thoughts when she thought she heard something outside the bathroom.

It had to be something if she could hear it over her music. Rinsing her body quickly she jumped out of the shower, wrapping herself in a bath towel. Tip-toeing out of the bathroom, she thought for sure she was going crazy. Whatever noise she heard in the shower was a figment of her imagination. A nagging feeling wouldn't let her finish her duties until she knew for sure. Before opening the door to the hallway, she said a small prayer. If it were a burglar she knew she was good as dead cause she had nothing on her person to protect herself. Stepping into the hallway she didn't see anything but she heard some faint sounds, she couldn't decipher from what direction. Maybe the washer was acting up, she did start a load of clothes.

“There you are.” Screaming at the top of lungs she was sure she was about to die from a heart attack. Hearing a male’s voice after being in the house all alone near about killed her on the spot. Whirling around so fast, she almost fell. Luckily the wall caught her before she could go too far.

“LAMONT?!” She questioned once her fear let her think clearly.

“Why are you screaming?” He questioned with a pained expression.

“You scared the hell out of me. That’s why I’m screaming.” She clutched the front of the towel feeling naked in front of a stranger. Trying to calm her erratic breathing down, she took several deep breaths with her eyes closed. “Why are you here?” She asked when she got herself together.

“I live here.”

“No you don’t. Not anymore. As a matter of fact, how did you get in?”

“I have my ways. How do you figure you can change the locks? This is my home too. I have every right to be here. I let you have your little temper tantrum with putting my things outdoors. Can we stop this foolishness now?”

“Foolishness? The only fool I see is you standing here like you haven’t disrespected our marriage. Standing here as if you haven’t broken every vow you said before God and our family. Why don’t you stop being foolish?”

“I see you’re still upset.”

“Upset? UPSET? If I had a gun right now, I could show you upset. Get the hell out of here with that! I’m

disappointed.”

“Well I’m sorry I disappointed you. You are going to have to get over this eventually. I’m not going anywhere. Do what you have to do to make you feel at ease. Therapy. Church. Whatever.”

“I’m not disappointed in you fool. I’m disappointed in myself for not seeing you for who you really are. A lying, conniving, simple-minded FOOL, that I plan to rid out of my life just as soon as I can.”

“Rid of me? Please, I am the best thing that ever happened to you. Be happy you have me instead of being angry about things that you can’t change.”

“You are so full of yourself. You actually believe the mess you are saying. Why didn’t I see this before? I was so blind.” She said more to herself than to him.

“No you’re blind if you don’t think all men do the same damn thing. If not me then who? At least you aren’t one of the side pieces that have no binding ties.”

“It doesn’t matter, I would rather be all alone than to deal with this shit. I want a divorce.”

“A divorce?” Lamont chuckled. “Woman please and then what? You can walk around being a bitter black woman. I tell you what, I will let you take that back. You’re thinking on pure emotion right now. You should know better than to react so quickly by being a *counselor* and all.”

“You are right about that. Thinking on emotion made me jump to conclusions on you. I reacted on pure lust when I allowed you to receive such a valuable gift. My virginity. If I

hadn't allowed myself to be so consumed with the farce of loyalty from you I wouldn't be standing here today as fed up as I am. I want you out of my life. Period."

"Good luck with that."

"What does that mean?"

"You will find out soon enough dear." He turned to walk away.

"Where are you going?"

"To finish unpacking my clothes."

"You're not staying here."

"Says who?" He questioned with his hands in his pockets. "According to the law, I have every right to be here. I haven't threatened you in any way."

"Still..."

"Still nothing. And why are you in the guest room?"

"I don't want to be in anything that reminds me of you."

"Then why don't you leave?"

"Maybe I will."

"Yeah right. You have prided yourself on never needing your parents or anyone else for anything. If I wasn't your husband you wouldn't have allowed me to take charge of so much."

"..."

"Take all the time you need. I will be here when you are ready to act like a wife instead of a pouting child." With

that said he walked away, disappearing into the master bedroom.

Frustrated beyond measure, Danni went back to the guest bath. So mad that she let him get to her. Disturbing her happy mood she was just in. All hope of calmly leaving this marriage went out of the window with a vengeance. Lamont seemed hell bent on driving her mad. Why did he even come back? Yes, technically this still was his home as well. Maybe he really did love her like he claimed. Hell no, there was no way someone could love a person but still dog them out. She was letting some of the things he said cloud her judgment. The love she had for him was still trying to weaken her determination to end her marriage. He was dishonest, there is no taking that back. Plus he made no promises of stopping his nasty behavior. That was unforgettable. She would be no man's fool. So deep in her thoughts she didn't realize that she wasn't alone until it was too late.

“Shit! Lamont, what are you doing?” She exclaimed. He had crept up behind her wrapping his arms around her body securing her arms against her. The speed that he moved refrained her from turning around or getting her hands free from his grasp. Taking several steps to try to free herself from his grip only caused him to use a portion of his body weight to keep her against the shower wall.

“I'm getting what's rightfully mine. What does it look like?” He asked seductively against her ear. While doing what he used to do to get her in the mood. Which normally didn't take much. This time she didn't want her body to heat up at his touch. His forwardness was turning her on as he bit and sucked her sensitive skin.

“No. Stop. I am no longer yours.” She forced out trying to regain some of her composure. Conjuring up the anger that she felt for him.

“You will always be mine. Your breasts...” He groped her breasts in his hands. Her nipples were hard as pebbles. He was remarkably strong holding her with just one hand as the other explored her body. Now she hated she didn't lock the door when coming in. “Especially this... It's all mine. I'm the first. And I will be the last.” He said sliding a digit between her folds causing her to shudder from the touch. It had been so long since he had caressed her body that she had missed the attention terribly.

“I don't want this. I don't want you.” She tried so very hard to shake the dulling of senses. But damn he was doing a good job.

“That's not what your body says. Your slick for me. ME.” He growled lowly in her ear. This was the Lamont she craved. The one she once knew but that was probably the same Lamont that was spreading his skill with so many other women.

“If you would stop.”

“If I would stop what?” He paused to let her speak but he had dipped a finger into her pulsating center driving her close to an orgasm. “Stop this? But you're so close. I can feel your walls tightening.” He was trying to make her forget about their issues and sadly it was working.

‘Come on Danni, don't forget. Don't forget. He is a low-life. Tell him to fuck off.’ She kept chanting to herself between whimpers of the sweet torture. The sweetest feel that

a woman could feel as she was on her way to a heavenly release but it was bittersweet. This was the man that was just doing this same thing to another probably before he came to her. All the while he had been talking but she wasn't paying any attention until he said something that killed her vibe.

“I was thinking that maybe we should start working on the baby you so desperately want. What do you say?” His words were like a double edged sword. It killed any haze she was in and stabbing his efforts.

“I say, get your FUCKING. HANDS. OFF. OF. ME.” She annunciated each word.

“What?” He stopped all movement lightening his hold on her wrists as well.

“GET. OUT!” Danni shouted now in tears. “Get away from me. If you don't leave, I will call the police and scream rape. I mean it.”

“Rape? That's bullshit, you were into it. Plus you are my wife.”

“I also told you to stop. I don't want anything to do with you. How dare you try to bribe me with a baby? That was a true low blow.”

“Danielle... You are being unreasonable.”

“I don't know where you lips, dick, or any other part of your body has been. Go waste your semen on one of your whores. I don't want your diseases.” Danni stopped speaking to breath. She was developing a migraine. “Get. Out. Please.” Lamont stormed out like he was angry with the world, grabbing his clothes in the process.

Danni felt damn near defeated. She almost let her hormones think for her again. The same as she did when she gave into him in the beginning. That was pretty much how it happened when she lost her virginity to him. Thank the heavens she had matured a little. Obviously not completely because she allowed him to get too close. The tears she shed now were a mix of angry, discouraged, and grateful tears. What was she going to do? How was she going to live under the same roof with his arrogant ass? Would there be other times when he would try to prey on her weaknesses? For her sanity she hoped not.

The weekend went by with them having minimal interaction. If she saw him coming, she would just try her best to ignore him or go in the other direction. He demanded a key or he would call the police to force her to give him one. She had no choice but to relent. One thing she did do was have a deadbolt put on her bedroom door while he was away doing God knows what. With God's knows who. She felt safer while she slept now or taking a shower. There was no way she wanted him to get the idea that he could creep up on her in her weakest moments. She was horny, mainly because sex had become a part of her life. The body has withdrawals after a while. Especially with sex being a big part of just about everything on television or in books. Only if she was as free as her whorish husband.

“Good morning. I’m Regina Jones.” A beautiful brown skin woman greeted Danni with a handshake.

“Hello Mrs. Jones. Danielle Hunter.” Danni said nervously. “Of course you already knew that.” She rambled.

“No need to be nervous. This will be simple just relax.”

“Easier said than done, I’m afraid.”

“Would you like something to drink? Water? Coffee? Tea? Bourbon?” She said the last as a joke that successfully broke the ice.

“Water is fine. Although after the weekend I have had, bourbon sounds better.”

“So tell me what’s going on? Why are you seeking a divorce?”

“My husband has been unfaithful. That is a deal breaker.”

“Is it speculation or do you have proof that he was unfaithful?”

“I was sent an anonymous video showcasing his rump with a co-worker during our anniversary party.”

“That would be proof.” She said sarcastically. “Did you confront him on said video?”

“He admitted to being unfaithful. Saying it was a man thing. That was all without me confessing about having seen the video.”

“Are you sure this is what you want? Hear me out.” She said quickly before Danni could get started on her argument. “A lot of women jump straight to divorce when they felt they have been dealt a bad hand. During the process they

have second, third, and sometimes forth thoughts about proceedings. Those extra hesitations cost a lot of money. I just don't want to waste your money or my time if this is purely an emotional cry for help.”

“Have you thought about going to counseling?” She asked after letting her speech settle in.

“I am a therapist. I have thought about going and giving him another chance. The truth is I would never be able to get over this. The vengeful side will always bring it up or suspect he is up to no good. A healthy relationship would never thrive from the lack of trust.”

“It seems you have thought this over thoroughly. Now I must tell you that this is going to be quite hard taking into consideration that you two may have many joint ventures. Do you own your home? Have joint accounts? Retirements?”

“So this is going to be a hard fight? If you take the case.”

“I will be honest with you. There is nothing easy about a divorce no matter how simple some make it seem. There are a lot of factors into separating lives that were joined together under the impression that it was for a lifetime. If the other party decides to contest the divorce it could take longer than normal.” Mrs. Jones said. “Also I must warn you that under North Carolina law, divorces are not typically granted for adultery unless you have been apart for a year.”

“He has voiced he doesn't think I will file but I don't see why he would contest it. I don't have any monies that would interest him. To be honest he makes more than I do. As

for the separation part, we co-exist in our home. Although I don't feel safe there.

“That may be but you will be surprised at what measures some people go to if they want to cause problems for the other.”

“Is there anything I can do about him refusing to leave the home?”

“Legally no unless there is a threat that violence could occur.”

“Violence will occur if he continues to try and push up on me. I hate his smug face.”

“Oh no. Well I suggest you leave if it's that bad.”

“...”

“I understand totally. It's your house. You probably put a lot into the home to make it your own.”

“No. No. You're right. I should leave and just let him have it. Honestly it doesn't feel like home. Just a big empty shell of a place that seems lonely and cold. I was more focused on the financial aspect.”

“Congratulations on taking the first step towards finding yourself outside of being Mrs. Graves. I will be happy to take your case for you.”

“Thank you so much.” Danni breathed a sigh of relief.

“You are most welcome.” Mrs. Jones said with a smile. “I have one final question for you. What do you expect to gain from this?”

“I hate to sound like Tina Turner in ‘What’s love got to do with it’ but all I want is my name. Nothing means a thing if I can’t get back to being myself before meeting him.”

“Excellent point. Do you have any questions for me before we get the necessary information needed to start the process?”

“Just one. About the retainer. How does that work?”

“The fee is an upfront fee for me to basically file all of the proper paperwork, have my research team gather the necessary items to divide things accordingly, and so forth. When the divorce is final he will end up having to cover those costs as well as any other fees occurred by the courts.” Danni was thinking in her head how she was going to come up with the upfront retainer. She desperately wanted out of this marriage but how was she going to afford it. Then she needed to consider what it was going to cost to move out.

“I see the wheels turning in your head so let me offer one more good deed. Off the record, if you tell anyone I will deny it to my grave.” Once Danni nodded her head she continued. “Because you were recommended by one of my very dear friends, I will offer to you a payment plan option.”

“Are you serious?”

“I don’t play with money, I assure you. There was a down payment to get started. Your next payment is due in thirty days from this date. It is already drawn up in a contract for you to look over and sign if you agree.”

“Was? What do you mean was?”

“I was given a sizable deposit already to take this case but I had to be sure you were really ready before I gave you my definite answer. I cannot give you the details of the generous donor, all that I ask is that you do your part. And I will definitely do mine.”

“Oh my God. I don’t know what to say.” Danni thought she was all out of happy tears. She thought they were gone for good. Boy was she wrong.

“Say yes before I change...”

“Yes, I agree with everything.” Danni cut her off.

“Well alright then.” Mrs. Jones then buzzed her secretary telling her to bring in all of the papers Danni needed to sign.

By the time they had laid out all of the information needed, Danni had one thing she could be optimistic about. It may not be easy but she was getting out that farce of a marriage. She would be free of his lying, cheating face soon. Thanking her lucky stars she never got pregnant. That’s one thing he got right. He kept denying her the opportunity to have their baby and now she couldn’t be happier. If she had to go over a custody battle with him, she knew for sure she would murder him first. Seeing him on a regular for scheduled visits and such would never work out. Just the thought of him having their child around random women made her angry just from the thought. Yeah no baby was a good thing.

“Yes I would like to open a new bank account. Transfer this amount from this account into the new one.”

“Yes ma’am, I can help you with that.” Danni waited for the attendant to handle that part. They were making small talk when all of a sudden the attendant’s facial expression changed. “Is there another account ma’am? There isn’t anything in this account. Actually it has been overdrawn by \$500. That is the limit.”

“There must be some kind of mistake. That is the joint...” Danni stopped what she was about to say for it was going to be extremely ugly. That sorry bastard had taken all of the money. The question was, when? “Can you print me off a transaction sheet for the last thirty days?”

“Sure thing.”

Danni sat at the desk looking over everything that Lamont has been up to without her knowledge. According to the printout he had taken all of the money from their joint account the day she sat all of his belongings on the porch. All of the money she has spent since that day with her debit card has caused the account to be in the negative. There was no way she could pay all of that back, open a new account for her to receive direct deposit, and handle the other obligations that she has. Lamont has added to her already high stress level. She couldn’t wait to confront him about it.

“What about opening the new account?”

“Unfortunately at this time, we cannot open a new account at this branch. Because your home loan is also through this bank, you are behind on your mortgage payments as well. The system is preventing me from going any further.”

“Wait, my mortgage payments are behind?”

“Yes ma’am. It says in the system you are four months delinquent.”

“Four months?!” Danni questioned loudly. This couldn’t be right. Why and how did things get so out of hand?

“Notices were mailed to your post office box.”

“What post office box? I don’t have a post office box.”

“According to our records that is where you requested bank documents to go.” The attendant wrote the information on a sticky note and passed it to Danni. She was seriously speechless. Lamont had one-upped her from the jump.

Leaving the bank totally defeated from what she has learned, Danni could only lean her head against the steering wheel. She was screwed for sure. If she wasn’t in it bad before, it was evident now that things were only getting worst as time went on. How can she afford a divorce now? How was she going to afford to live period? Let alone afford to get her own apartment. She was determined not to call on her parents. That wasn’t an option. She was going to figure this out on her own. There was no other way.

Chapter Seven

After leaving the bank getting the worst news of this mess yet. She came to the conclusion that she would just get another job. Something that would assist her in paying for some much needed things. Passing by the hotel that she woke up in a while ago, she saw a sign on the board stating they were hiring. She figured no better time than the present to get on the job search. It's been so long since she has done anything other than be a therapist she hoped she could find something.

Once she applied for that job, she went home to start an extensive search online. Two hours later she had applied for any and everything that paid fairly decent. From hotel worker to janitorial, she was desperate for any job. About seven she heard the garage door open. Round three of this divorce mess was on the way. Confronting Lamont about taking all of the money was all she could think about. Luckily for her the two credit cards she had in case of an emergency would tide her over until she could do better. That wasn't going to stop her from checking him though.

“Lamont we need to talk.”

“I was wondering when you would be ready.”

“Why did you take all the money from our account?”

“Because I figured you would do something dumb like try and take it.”

“All I was going to take was what I contributed. What I earned. Trust me when I say I want nothing from you and that’s including money.”

“Sure you were. Women scorned tend to think they deserve more than their worth.”

“Are you serious right now?”

“Very. Now if there is nothing else.”

“Actually there is. Why haven’t you been making the mortgage payments? The house is four months behind. In two more months there won’t be a house and we both will have to move because it’s foreclosed on. What the hell is going on?”

“I’ve got it under control. Don’t worry about it. I’ll go down to the bank and straighten everything out.”

“I went to the bank. There is nothing to straighten out.” Danni shouted. “Look, just give me my portion of the account and you can have the house. I will leave since you won’t.”

“That’s not possible.”

“And why is that?”

“The money is tied up in investments at the moment.”

“Investments? I didn’t authorize you to use my hard earned money on any investments.”

“We have a joint account so I use the funds appropriately. I have been handling our bills thus far. You can stop with the, my, my, my. Everything is ours.”

“That’s bullshit. Everything was ours. Now I want what’s mine.”

“Well it looks like your move is going to have to wait.”

“Think again.”

“Good luck with that honey.”

“I am not your honey you son of a bitch.”

“You will always be my honey.”

“Save it for your whores.”

“They just want what you are denying yourself.”

“You are unbelievable.” He just chuckled like she had told the funniest joke. All she wanted to do was claw his eyes out.

Throwing herself on her bed, she groaned in frustration. Tomorrow was a day full of work, clients, and meetings. Amongst all of the drama in her home life this was becoming too overwhelming. A counselor would be in the works but honestly she knew too many of them personally. It just wouldn't work and she did not want all of her business in the streets. If Lamont wasn't so overbearing she would have some girlfriends to go to about these issues but alas she has no one but family. She couldn't blame anyone but herself for allowing a man to have so much influence over her life. Never again will she be that vulnerable. Love what? It definitely will never live within her again.

Danielle was having a pretty good day despite where she woke up at and who walked around the house like nothing was wrong. With some thoughtful prayer the night before she had a brighter outlook on life in general. Clearly she was just

going through a rough patch. Over time it had to get better, it just had to. On the Brightside she got to meet with one of her favorite clients. Niecee was due in with her father, she hoped. Hoping and praying things made a change for the better. During their meetings at school they never get around to discussing her living arrangements. Although she isn't certain what her dad does for a living, the fact that he seems to care so much for his daughter is a plus.

Knowing from her own experience that he was a protector. He protected her in a drunken state without a second thought or at least she hopes he didn't have second thoughts. Mark seemed very sweet and she recalled Niecee saying how busy he was with work. Danni never asked what he did for a living for she felt it was none of her business. He had such a hard exterior but he never wore a business suit. As memory serves her correctly the first night she met him he was wearing a nice pair of designer jeans and a polo. That seemed to be his attire of choice. She hated the train of thought she was going at but couldn't help herself.

So many questions were forming in her overanalyzing brain. What does he do for a living? Was he a dangerous man? Why didn't he have custody of his daughter? Was his profession the reason? Was it dangerous? Did he have an education? He didn't sound ghetto to say the least. But what did ghetto really sound like? She concluded that she had been around Lamont far too long that she was judging the man by his appearance. That's all she could go off of unless she asked him. In her opinion, it was only her business if it would harm her client.

“Hey Niecee. Mark, you guys can come on back.”
Danni cheerfully greeted the two of them.

“Hey Miss Danni.”

“What’s been going on little lady?”

“Nothing much at school. I think I told you everything last week. My grades have come up in math and English.”

“That’s great sweetie. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thank you. I did what you told me to do with my notes. It worked.”

“I knew you could do it.” Danni clapped ecstatically.

“Mark, we are totally excluding you from the conversation. How are you and how has everything been going? What is new?”

“It’s fine. I’m glad she has someone to talk to since she chooses to leave me out at times. I am doing much better now that my baby is feeling better. As for what’s new...”

“Daddy, can I tell her please?” Niecee interrupted bouncing with excitement.

“Go ahead Niecee.” He chuckled.

“I get to live with my dad. AHHH!”

“That’s great sweetie. I told you things will work out for the best.” Danni beamed. She was hoping it would work out like that.

“Actually it’s only temporarily pending the judge’s final ruling.” Mark added.

“My vote is with you. As I told Niecee, everything will work out for the best in the end. Obviously if they ruled in your favor to have temporary custody, something peaked their attention. Now they have to do their research to make it stick. I’m happy for you two.”

“Thank you.” They said in unison.

They talked for a bit longer. Mainly the grownups sat back and listened to everything that Niecee had to say. Every so often they would get to say a few sentences but her bubbly personality would soon overtake the conversation again. Danni just listened, along with presenting the two activities she had to complete with them. In her notes she decided to cut-back on the times that she needed to see Niecee. Unless something came up she would be able to discharge her as a patient all together. Her bosses wouldn’t allow them to continue to see a patient with not a care in the world.

“Alright guys, I have to give you two my final thoughts on the therapy. I don’t see a reason for us to have to continue these sessions. My supervisors would read my notes and request I discharge you as a patient. Until that time we can schedule to meet once a month.”

“Wait so I don’t get to see you because I’m doing better?” Niecee asked with a scowl on her face.

“Well pretty much. Therapy isn’t really meant to be long-term unless there are some major problems.”

“But I don’t want to stop seeing you. You are one of the main reasons I have been doing so good. Even though I got my daddy finally, I still need you too.” Danni was about to shed some crappy tears because how devastated Niecee

seemed. Making her sad was hurting her feelings seriously. Doing what she was thinking could get her fired but it was worth the risk to put Niecee's mind at rest.

“Okay, I tell you what. I will give you my personal information.” Danni said and quickly thought it be better if she correct herself. “If that's alright with your dad. I apologize Mark, I am not trying to...”

“No, it's fine. I was going to suggest something close. I was going to say or I can hire you as an outside source. Pay you for personal treatment.”

“Even though an extra job would be wonderful, I couldn't ask you to do that. On top of that, it would be a double whammy to getting fired because that would be considered as moonlighting.”

“Just a suggestion.” He shrugged and Danni couldn't help but divert her attention to his massive shoulders. ‘Shake out of that haze Danni.’

“Miss Danni, can you come to my first volley ball game?”

“Sure. When is it?”

“Thursday at six.”

“I will be there.”

“Alright baby, we have to get going so you can go learn something.” Mark said.

“It was great seeing you two. I will see you Thursday.” Danni walked them out and tried to continue on with her day as best she could. At least she makes one or two people happy

in this life so she shouldn't feel like a total failure. 'Can't win them all.' She had a lot of paperwork to do and a lot of decisions to make. The only thing she could do is pray that luck would be on her side.

Thursday had finally come and the only Brightside of her week was that she could be around Niecee and her bubbly personality. When she had walked into the kitchen to leave she found Lamont there looking for something to eat. Surprising her to no end because before the divorce talk, she couldn't pay him to show up at the house before nine. Sometimes later than that. 'What a shame, it took divorce papers to get some get right,' Danni thought to herself. Since she had skipped lunch earlier in the day for going on a job interview at a new club that opened up downtown, she was ravished. Grabbing an apple from the fridge, she attempted to continue on with her night but Lamont had other plans.

"What are you wearing?" Lamont asked with disdain clearly in his voice.

"Clothes." Danni said with a scowl. That was one thing that always grated on her nerves. Lamont trying to dictate what she can and can't wear.

"They look more like rags." He retorted. Danni was dressed down in a pair of appropriate ripped Capri jeans, a fitted plain white t-shirt, thick caramel leather woven belt, and a pair of caramel brown wedges that had been in her closet for too long. Her accessories were moderate with a simple gold necklace she got from her mom, gold studs in her ears, and a gold watch. Nothing fancy but cute.

“Whatever Lamont.” Danni wasn’t going to let his condescending behavior throw her off balance.

“Danielle, I can’t believe you would embarrass me like this.”

“Embarrass you how?”

“With this. Have you lost your damn mind? What would my co-workers think?” He ranted slamming a stack of papers on the table. Danni leaned over just enough to see that he had received the divorce papers. She smiled on the inside because as promised her lawyer had gotten straight to work. “And you have the nerve to smile about it!”

“What do you want me to say Lamont?”

“I don’t want you to say anything but I think it’s best if you forget about this foolishness. Go back to being the wife I chose not this.” He gestured toward her appearance. Whatever the hell that was supposed to mean.

“Sorry that’s not going to happen.” She turned to leave the kitchen because of him she was going to be late.

“Where the hell are you going?”

“To mind my business and staying far away from yours.”

“We are not done discussing this.”

“By all means continue, just without me.”

“I don’t know what has gotten into you. Or shall I say WHO?”

“Excuse you.” Danni whirled around almost throwing herself off balance.

“You heard me loud and clear. Are you fucking somebody else? Is that what this is about? I can forgive you if so.”

“You can forgive me? YOU CAN FORGIVE ME?!”
Danni felt her temper trying to reach beyond its secret compartment. “You can take your forgiveness and shove it up your ass. How about that? I am going to be late to a prior engagement. Goodnight.”

“We aren’t done.”

“Yes we are.”

Danni couldn’t believe the nerve of him to try to turn his deceit around on her. If she did cheat, there was no way in hell he could blame her. Considering what she has seen him do with her own eyes and hearing him admit to it on top of that. Just the fact that it could be so many more women just blew her mind. What if he contracted something and gave it to her? Sexually transmitted diseases are real and deadly. He is always adamant about using protection when they are intimate but from the video with snow white, he didn’t attempt to wrap up. Danni shuttered at the thought.

Walking into the gymnasium with so much on her mind she felt a migraine coming on. She had to get out of her current living situation. Living with him was going to cause her too go mad. Looking around for a seat, she happened to find a spot open near the center net. The game had started already but it seemed she had only missed five minutes. That was enough to feel terrible about missing it over a pointless discussion with that bastard. When she first spotted Niecee she could tell she looked a little off. As soon as Niecee saw her

she instantly brightened up and that warmed Danni's heart.
'She was happy to see her.'

"Glad you could make it." She was so focused on the floor she didn't realize she wasn't alone anymore.

"Hey Mark."

"Hey Miss Danni." Mark gave off a dazzling smile that caused Danni to give him a second glance. His cologne was making her dizzy it was so alluring. 'Had Lamont ever smelled so well,' she questioned herself.

"Uhm, sorry I got here so late." She had to clear her throat.

"Better late than never. Do you see that smile on her face?"

"..." Danni only nodded because Niecee was beaming on the floor.

"That's because of you. Sure she was happy because I was here but she was looking a little off before you showed up."

"At least somebody is happy." She said to herself or so she thought.

"Are you not happy Miss Danni?" He asked never taking his eyes off of the floor.

"At the moment yes."

"And every other moment?"

"It could be better but I won't complain."

"It wouldn't do any good if you did."

“My father always said that.” Danni chortled.

“Wise man.” Mark chuckled. “So what are you going to do different to get your joy back?”

“To start, I’m getting a divorce.”

“Getting or filing? There’s a difference.”

“Already filed.” Danni didn’t know why she felt so at ease to discuss her issues with Mark. He seemed so easy to talk to. They never took their eyes off the game as they had their back and forth.

“Are you sure that was the right thing to do? Have you gone over all of the pros and cons of something so final?”

“You sound like my lawyer.”

“Just asking.”

“Yes I have. There is no other way. The bond is broken, there is no going back.”

“Well good luck with everything.”

“Thank you.”

They watched the rest of the game cheering for the team and making side comments. They sounded like announcers there was so much conversation going on about the game. When it was over they went out on the floor to greet Niecee. The team was off to the side after shaking hands with the losing team. Danni attempted to leave because she saw nothing but parents waiting around for their kid but Mark wasn’t having it. He had placed a hand near the small of her back ushering her over to stand near him as they waited for the coach to finish his speech.

“Miss Danni!” Niecee ran up and hugged her tight. If she was honest with herself, Danni would have to say she needed that hug. It was filled with love.

“You did so good out there.”

“Thank you.”

“Is Miss Danni the only person here?” Mark asked jokingly.

“Sorry, hey daddy.”

“That’s more like it.”

“Miss Danni, can you come out to my celebratory dinner with us?”

“Niecee...”

“Sweetie...” They both laughed for speaking at the same time. “I’m sorry go ahead.”

“No you go. Ladies first.”

“What I was going to say was, I didn’t want to intrude on father and daughter time.”

“You won’t be intruding. If you aren’t busy we would love for you to join us.” Mark said with a smirk on his face. He knew she was having a hard time telling Niecee no to anything so he only tried to give her an out.

“Please Miss Danni.” Niecee pulled no stops with her persuasion. She was currently putting the puppy dog face on blast.

“Ok, how could I possibly say no to a face like that?”

“Yes!”

The three left the school with Mark leading the way. They ended up at a family soul food restaurant on the *urbanisque* side of town. Danni had only driven to these parts when visiting with a family of a patient but never of her own accord. Although she felt completely out of place, somehow she felt safe being with Mark. He walked with an aura of confidence. Without a care in the world as if he was the top dog and no one could top him. The crowd of people even seemed to notice when he stepped over the threshold. Danni didn't know whether she wanted to be afraid or turned on.

So many street type of men were speaking to him and calling him by name. Quite a few of people called him by some other name that she hadn't heard before. Nor would she, it's not like she knows him intimately. Intimately? Danni was mentally slapping herself for letting her mind wander with the simple word such as intimate. 'What has gotten into me?' She questioned herself. Personally was the word she had intended on using not the other one. Obviously she was having some withdrawals in the bedroom department. In her feelings so much lately that she hadn't even touched herself to alleviate some of the buildup.

On the way to the table he had stepped aside to let her go before him with Niecee leading the way. His hand brushed the small of her back for the second time that night. Her hormones were out of control by now for sure. The first time she felt tingles all over but she brushed them off. This time however left a load of heat where his hand once was. It slowly started to spread through her body. An attempt to shake it off only caused him to inquire what was wrong. She used the ancient excuse for being a little nippy.

“So what has you so preoccupied Miss Danni? You seem to be deep in thought when my daughter isn’t talking your head off.” Mark asked when Niecee went to the restroom. Danni regarded him for a few minutes before considering telling him what the problem was. One thing was for sure she couldn’t tell him of her attraction to him. That would be wrong on so many different scales.

“I have to find me an apartment, condo, house, or something before I go to jail for murder.” Danni said with a straight face only to gain a chuckle from Mark.

“That would be drastic don’t you think?”

“No.”

“You can’t let other folks steal your joy sweetheart.”

“Too late for that line.”

“It’s not a line and it’s never too late.”

“I hear you.”

“I know you hear me because you are responding but until you absorb the words, nothing will change. Now feel me.”

“So you are the therapist now?” Danni didn’t mean to sound condescending but she felt some type of way that he was trying to coach her on how to feel.

“Never that. But I have lived, learned, and done better with each life lesson.” He smirked at her. Before she could say anything else Niecee came back. They went about dinner like nothing had ever taken place. Mark didn’t even seem the least bit offended from the defensive way she spoke to him. Why

couldn't she have a man like that? Instead of the jackass she was now stuck under the same roof as.

The next day at work just continued to drive her heavy into an abyss of depression and loss of self-worth. Not only did Lamont eat her last raisin bagel but he drank the coffee she had gotten up early to prepare while she showered. On an empty stomach, she rushed to work with her gas tank damn near on empty as well. With there being no money in the account there was nothing she could do. Her actual payday wasn't until next week and thankfully with the last twenty-five bucks she had, she was able to open another account at another bank. In the meantime she didn't have a clue what she would do. She could always ask her parents for a loan but that was going to be the last resort.

Finally arriving at work, she realized that she left her office keys at home. There was no way in hell she was going back so the janitor had to let her in. Hoping the day couldn't get any worse, she soon got her answer when her boss called her into his office. NO doubt something was wrong to be called in so early in the day and on a Friday. Her gut was telling her that this was terribly wrong. Taking a seat in the cold, plain office she greeted the stuck up man with the expensive suit. He hardly ever showed his face at the hospital as is and now he wanted to see her.

“Danielle, do you enjoy working for this institute?”

“Yes sir.”

“It has been brought to my attention that you seek other employment.”

“I’m sorry sir. I’m not sure I understand where this is coming from.”

“You do know the term moonlighting, correct?”

“Yes sir but I am seeking a part-time job to help supplement my income.”

“Perhaps you should try living within your means Danielle.”

“Pardon me sir, but me living within my means is all I know. The problem I am boggled with is that I am going through a divorce.”

“That brings me to my next dilemma. An issue of that magnitude brings concern to the board of whether it’s wise of you to see patients while going through personal situations.”

“...” Danni was floored at the way this uppity man was speaking to her as if she has no professionalism available for her to do her job properly.

“It is with grave displeasure that we must put you on a leave of absence until further notice. Effective immediately.”

“Thank you sir.” With the last bit of restraint Danni had left, she hightailed it out of the bastard’s office to her own. Hastily she gathered her belongings before security showed up to ensure she didn’t go out with a bang per say. She knew the routine and protocol all too well. When the door opened she just assumed it was them coming for her.

“Meet me at our spot for lunch.” She heard Beejay rush out instructions before she could turn around security had shown up. Instead of replying she just nodded and kept it moving out of the building. Tears were blocked from escaping

her eyes. Her life was in shambles and there was nothing she could do about it. There was no doubt in her mind that Lamont was behind this. Being spiteful for having been embarrassed at his job, or so he says. He was the true embarrassment.

“Hello?” She answered her ringing cell blindly. Not really caring who it was.

“May I speak with Danielle Hunter?”

“Speaking.” She perked up praying it had something to do with a job. Pulling to the side of the road she wanted to give the caller her undivided attention.

“This is Gabriella from ‘The Mix’ and I wanted to offer you a position as a bartender. Can you start tonight?”

“Yes!” Danni didn’t care what it was at the moment she just knew she needed something.

“Well alright. You do understand this is a trial position. I know you have no experience in this field but the person we originally hired couldn’t do it. You were next in line so please don’t disappoint me.” The woman said.

“I will do my very best.”

“See you at 8:00. Wear all black. Jeans, skirt, or pants. Heels or boots. Sexy is the idea. Any questions?”

“No. Thank you.”

“See you soon.” Behind every corner it seems evil was out to knock her joy from under her but she was determined to continue to fight. No matter what else was thrown her way. She just had to.

Chapter Eight

To say Danni had been having a day from hell was a major understatement. The once love of her life had totally sabotaged the only thing she had left to call her own. He had already played her for a fool the entire marriage and now he had humiliated her by spreading untruths to her employers. Lamont knew how hard it was for her to climb up the corporate ladder at the hospital and dang sure couldn't get a promotion. Now she wondered had he been the one throwing a monkey wrench in her professional climb all along. It sounded logical. Normally it would be the woman that did shady things to destroy their ex but not in Danni's case.

Lamont was proving be a major bitch in the relationship. A man scorned was what he was portraying himself to be. Like she had been the one who cheated and disrespected him. Meeting Beejay for lunch had proven her suspicions correct as he told her of his inside source giving him the full tea. In turn he poured the 'tea' for her, giving her all the juicy details that were provided to him. Lamont had gone too far in her opinion. That was the lowest blow. The only good news she got of the day was the phone call offering her a night-time job at the new social lounge. Having never done anything like that before, she was petrified of messing up.

Another great thing about Beejay was that he was easy to talk to. After confessing that she was struggling financially

and didn't want to accept any type of handout, he put her onto some serious game. Insisting that she follow him to places unknown, she wound up at a jewelry dealer or pawn shop. The idea of pawning anything had never crossed her mind before. Mainly because she has never had to suffer financially before. Her parents weren't rich but she never wanted for anything either. They instilled in her the importance of paying bills on time. Not depending solely on credit cards, they were for emergencies.

Unfortunately for her, she married an ass that lied about cherishing those same values. 'What a waste,' she thought to herself. He had ruined her credit to a point where just applying for a gas card was frivolous. 'Who gets denied for a gas card?' Danni was constantly berating herself as of late because she allowed 'ONE' person to dictate her entire life. With the ending result being she was led astray and dumped in a sea of debt. 'How could she be so stupid and trusting?' Her very expensive wedding rings were a constant reminder of all that bastard had done to screw her over. Of what she needed to let go if she was going through with this divorce.

When the worker at the shop asked whether she wanted to sell the rings or borrow on them, she was tempted to say sale. Instead she relented to borrowing. In her mind those rings that ended up on a credit account in her name were going to be a constant reminder to never go down this road again. Love really didn't live there anymore and she highly doubted that it ever would again. Danni had heard so many horror stories of men treating women like crap and she always thanked her lucky stars Lamont did not. Too bad she spoke or thought too

soon because indeed she was being screwed with a diseased dick. She chuckled to herself from her errant thoughts, thinking sourly she was losing her mind slowly but surely.

“How much did you get?” Beejay asked when she walked out.

“A thousand.”

“Why didn’t you sell them?”

“I need them as a reminder.”

“A reminder of what?”

“Never fall in love again.”

“Girl stop. WHEN! Let me repeat, when, the right man comes along you will be singing a new tune. I get that your hurt right now but this too shall pass. You mark my words.” Beejay said with confidence. “I know you don’t want to hear that right now so I will leave it alone. Just know I am prepared to do my victory dance for being right when it’s all over with.”

“I will see you later Beejay. I gotta go find something to wear tonight. Wish me luck.”

“Good luck sweetie. You will do just fine. Just don’t drop the liquor that shit is expensive. I have bartended before.”

“That’s right, I remember you telling me about that. Any pointers?”

“I just told you don’t drop the bottles. Since you have never done this before, I am going to pray you know the basics of mixing drinks right?”

“Kind of.”

“Danni, why the hell would you apply for a job you have never done before?”

“I was desperate.”

“Oh my, you are going to be the death of me.”

For the next couple of hours, Beejay tried to drill the basic skills of bartending into her head. Now that she was dressed it was only a matter of time to see if his skills will be used wisely or wastefully. Arriving fifteen minutes early, Danni was escorted to the back she assumed where the employee dressing room was. She had chosen some black skinny jeans, a pair of black thigh high leather boots with a three inch wedge heel, and a simple black fitted sweater. Gabriella gave her a fitted tee with the name of the club in sparkly letters across her breast. Luckily for her she wore her Spanx underneath her jeans to be sure the extra softness she harbors around her midsection didn't turn into a muffin top.

Glancing around at the other women in attendance some wore spandex pants, painted on jeans, and even a couple girls wore mini-skirts. The guys were mostly muscular and big in size all around. Their shirts fit their biceps like a second skin. She was a bundle of nerves from just sitting in on the meeting with the other staff members. No one else seemed fazed by it being a Friday night which was great for business. The manager seemed like he was bent on perfection and nothing less. Danni was hoping and praying she wouldn't be the one who rocked the boat.

Two hours into the shift and Danni's nerves were shattered to smithereens. Two very expensive bottles of alcohol had hit the ground with a resounding crash. The manager was holding on by a thin thread of restraint from calling her everything but the child of God. By the time the customer called her a bitch for spilling the drink on the front of her dress accidentally she was done. Not by choice but by force. The manager had not so politely called her to the side, reprimanded her for a poor performance. He told her the owner wanted to speak with her about compensation for all the damage she caused.

From the talk amongst the other employees, the manager was a cake walk compared to the owner. He didn't take no mess. The women referred to him as a sexy, tempting giant with no wiggle room or soft spot for the ladies. Quite a few said that they would love a run with him but because of his demeanor and no bullshit attitude towards any fraternization they relented in any attempts. According to some that started training a few weeks ago, the girl whose place she took was fired on the spot for suggesting the things she could do with the boss. Trying to use her womanly wilds to seduce some special treatment from him.

"Wait here." The impatient manager said when he showed her to a masculine decorated office.

He quickly turned on his heels to leave grumbling about having to work in her place. Several other slurs left his mouth but she couldn't make them out. Determined not to cry, she tried to think of any excuse possible to persuade him to not

fire her but maybe give her something else to do. Hearing the door open and close silencing the commotion on the other side of the door made her tense up. The only sound heard was rustling of papers as if he were reading while walking. It frightened her more that she couldn't hear any footsteps whatsoever and he wasn't saying a word. She was too afraid to turn around or mumble a sound until he was in clear sight.

“Mark?” Danni questioned thinking for sure her mind was playing tricks on her. He snapped his gaze up to meet hers and smirked before dropping the folder on the desk.

“Miss Danni.” He said her name so sensually or maybe her mind was doing some extra things to her imagination. “So you are the one causing all of the ruckus on floor?”

“Oh my God, Mark I am so sorry. I was so nervous but...”

“Danni calm down. It's cool. Well now that I know it's you that is.” He chuckled.

“Does that mean I can keep my job?” She asked hopefully.

“Uh no.” He chuckled again. Danni heaved a breath of despair.

“What am I going to do now?” She sighed. Not realizing she spoke out loud.

“What's the problem Danni? What are you going to do about what?”

“I am having the worst day of my life. Well besides the day I found out about my soon to be ex-husband cheating on me for god knows how long. I have basically lost my job

because of that bastard. This was my last resort. I have to find another place to stay.” Danni was beyond frustrated at this point.

“Whoa. Whoa. Calm down Danni.” Mark scrambled from his desk to grab a bottled water from his mini-fridge. Danni was spouting so many words, she was starting to hyperventilate. “Danni, I need you to calm down and breathe. Breathe. Breathe, baby, breathe.” He was speaking to her in a soothing tone while forcing some water down her throat.

“...” The only thing Danni could do was shed tears from feeling extremely ridicules. Mark must think she was a lunatic or a blubbering idiot. She was so damn embarrassed.

“Better?”

“Yes, thank you. I’m sorry for that outburst.”

“It’s cool.”

“No it’s not that was so uncalled for. After all I was once your daughter’s counselor. Now I am a blubbering mess.” She expressed with disdain.

“Everyone needs someone to talk to at times. You can’t be everyone’s sounding board but neglect to seek out your own. Listening to yourself rant will only drive you mad.”

“Still...”

“Still nothing. I would think by now we are on familiar ground to say the least. You and my daughter have become friends is a way. A friend of hers is a friend of mine.”

“Thank you Mark. I appreciate you saying that.”

“Now what about you needing to find a place? Something about you would rather be homeless.” Mark inquired causing Danni’s cheeks to flare from another bout of embarrassment. ‘How much had she said out loud?’

“It doesn’t matter, it seems I have said too much as is.”

“...” Mark didn’t say anything which caused Danni to look up at his face. From the looks of it, he had a ‘don’t bullshit me’ face on blast. Danni visibly swallowed thinking about the dangerous disposition that the employees spoke of.

“My...uhm... my ex refuses to leave our house. He is making me feel extremely uncomfortable there. I decided to let him have the house and find me something else. He took all of the money we had in our joint account leaving me with nothing to my name but bad debt. I applied for several jobs to gain some extra money to achieve that. That soon turned into more than extra income because obviously I just need a job period now. I’m screwed all around.”

“Wow.”

“Right.”

“Uncomfortable how? He hasn’t hurt you has he?”

“Not physically. Basically I have a lock with a key for my door to the spare bedroom that I have turned into my own.”

“Oh really. It’s like that, huh?”

“...”

“I have a solution to that problem.”

“Really, what a stun gun?”

“I can get you one of those as well if you like but no.”
Mark chuckled darkly. “I have an apartment that you could use until you can get on your feet.”

“That won’t be necessary Mark. Thank you though.
Plus I don’t have any income to pay rent or anything.
Especially since I just lost the only job I had at the moment.”

“What if I offered you a part-time job?”

“At this point it depends on what the job entails. As we see I am not good in the service industry. Bartending. Waitressing.”

“Yeah I see. No seriously. I need someone I trust to watch after Niecee. If you are living in the apartment we both have a win-win.”

“I would love to look after Niecee free of charge so I couldn’t take your money for that.”

“But I am offering so is that a yes?”

“Wait just a minute. I didn’t say that. I don’t feel right about taking funds from you for watching her. I will do it but not for payment.”

“You drive a hard bargain Miss Danni.” Mark smirked.
“What about the apartment being the payment? You watch her and that way I am assured she has a safe place to be with no drama. Deal?”

“...” Danni thought over his offer thinking what the hell she had to lose. Nothing. What other offers did she have knocking on her door? None. “Fine until I find another job.”

“Cool. Nice doing business with you. Why don’t you meet me at this address sometime tomorrow and I can show you the space?” Mark said writing the address down on a sticky note.

“Thank you again Mark. You don’t know how much you are helping me right now.”

“It’s cool. Now go ahead and get up out of here. I will have Big Bobby meet you at the side exit to walk you to your car.”

“That won’t be...” Mark cut her off before she could finish her sentence.

“It is necessary. For me?”

“For you.” She conceded. Before her mind could stop her movements she had hugged him in gratitude for just being there. He instinctively wrapped his arms around her waist. Feeling a little too comfortable in his embrace, Danni took a needed step back. Regretting the step almost immediately. “I will see you tomorrow.” She confirmed awkwardly.

As promised Big Bobby was waiting at the exit ready to escort her to the car. He had gone as far as to open the door for her and waited until she pulled away. The simple gesture was enough to show her what she had been missing at home. She had suddenly met two gentle giants and not to mention the one guardian angel with a feminine swag. Although gay as all get out, Beejay still treated her like a lady. What was Lamont missing that he didn’t possess any of those characteristics?

“Where the hell have you been?” Danni was startled to hear Lamont’s angry voice boom as soon as she stepped into

the house. The lights were off so she assumed he was asleep or caught a ride to continue with his dirt.

“Minding my own damn business.” Danni snapped back. She was in no mood for his antics.

“You are my wife. I have every right to know where the hell you have been. I have been by your parents’ house. You weren’t there. I went to your sisters you weren’t there. She said she hadn’t heard from you.”

“The problem of me being your wife will soon be rectified, you just hang on for a bit. As far as you checking up on me, you shouldn’t have. Trust me, I am the least bit flattered.” Danni rolled her eyes, turning to walk away.

“You wait just a god damn minute. I want to know where the fuck you have been, right damn now. You strut in here past midnight wearing this slutty getup. Have you resulted to hooking now?”

“No that’s your bitch ass mistress that’s the hooker. Either one of them, take your pick. They are the ones fucking for trips. Not I said the cat.”

“You are walking around in too little clothes to get attention from men, Danielle. Is this what you really want to do? Look like a slut? You reek of cigarette smoke and... Another man’s cologne?” Lamont had inched closer and closer to Danni with her refusing to cower away from him. He was so close she could smell the liquor on his breath. Obviously drunk out of his mind for him to think he had room to question anything she did. “Who the fuck have you been with?”

“A better man than you.” She said with all seriousness. Even though she hadn’t technically been with Mark, they just shared a hug but she wouldn’t clarify that to him. Turning on her heels having grown tired of their conversation she went to walk away with a smirk.

“I’m not done with you.” Lamont had grabbed her arm so hard snatching her back to stand in front of him that she stumbled on her heels falling.

Danni didn’t have time to stable herself enough to try and gain her own footing again before she was roughly thrown into the wall. Lamont was roughly groping and grabbing different parts of her body. Accusing her of being a good for nothing whore, among other hateful things. She felt degraded to the fullest extent as he banged her against the wall several times as she tried to fight him off. In all the years they had been together he had never laid a finger on her and now he was steadily proving himself to be someone she didn’t know.

From the feel of his boner that was sticking her she realized instantly that he was going to possibly rape her if she didn’t get out of this position. Seeing a small opening she kned him with all her might in his precious balls sending him thrashing to the floor. He yelped a series of curse words threatening to make her pay for that assault. She didn’t stand around long enough to see what would happen now. Hightailing it up the stairs hearing him trying to gain an upright position to catch her. Making it to her room just in time to see him top the stairs. Locking the door she slid down waiting to see what was going to happen next.

Banging, screaming, cursing, and threats were passed through the door to her as she tried to figure out where she went wrong. He was like a crazed animal after a meal or maybe even a possessed demon out of blood. Either way he had scared the shit out of her. Too afraid to step away from the door even though he had quieted down the commotion, she fell asleep right where she slid to. Hearing the garage door open the next day caused her to stir and look around disoriented. Remembering everything that happened earlier she made up her mind to accept the help Mark offered.

Packing as fast as humanly possible, she loaded up her car as best she could. Danni was too afraid to take a shower for she didn't know how long he would be gone. Locking her bedroom door after making sure she had all of her important things she dipped out. Pulling out the address Mark gave her she plugged it into her GPS and followed the directions he gave her. Hoping like hell she wasn't going too early, knowing he was at the club for a while. The further she drove she started to wonder just where the apartment was. Pulling into a gated community, she realized this must be wrong.

"May I help you ma'am?" A guard stepped out of the small building.

"I'm not sure but I think I may be lost." Danni stuttered.

"What address are you looking for maybe I can help you?" She recited it the way Mark wrote it.

"You're in the right place. Your name?"

"Danielle Hunter."

“Could you hold just a moment please?”

“Uh sure.” Danni was really confused now looking around at the expensive homes up ahead. Well the parts of the homes she could see.

“You are cleared to pass ma’am. Up ahead, take a right and then a left. The house is the last one on the block. Have a nice day.” He walked away hitting a button allowing her access.

“I must be dreaming.” She said to herself. There was no way in hell she was in the right place. Upon pulling into the huge circular drive, she was awestruck at the massive structure. It was a mini-mansion in her eyes. The brick structure has to be around six-thousand square feet if not more.

“Are you going to stand out here all morning?” She heard Mark question jokingly. Obviously she had stood there staring too long. “Come in Danni.”

“Is this your house?”

“Yep, that would explain me answering the door in my basketball shorts.” He chuckled.

“Your house is gorgeous. And huge.”

“Thank you. It was custom built. As you can see the design kind of got out of control but I wanted what I wanted.”

“Wow, I’ll say.”

“Let me give you a tour and then show you the apartment.” Mark touched her back softly but she cringed anyway. He jumped back as if she had burned him. “What’s wrong?” He looked her over.

“It’s nothing.” She shyly averted her eyes. “You were saying. The tour?”

“Oh yeah right. How about I show you the apartment first? That way you can get yourself settled. I noticed you had your stuff in the car.”

“Boy aren’t you observant.”

“It came in handy where I’m from. Follow me.”

“I wasn’t aware that the apartment was actually in your home.”

“Don’t worry I won’t disturb you or invade your privacy. The apartment is in the finished basement as you can tell. The only time I will be down here is to shoot pool occasionally. You have your own private entrance if you prefer to use it versus coming upstairs. You can use anything in the kitchen if you want. Whenever you want.”

Mark showed her the downstairs area. The living room was furnished with a huge sectional made of the softest leather she had ever touched. A large wall unit held a nice size television with all the extra’s that went with it for entertainment. On the other side of the room, there was a large pool table with a khaki top and clear balls. Down the long hall there were two doors. Inside the first one there was a decent sized powder room that he explained was for guests. The other door was a spacious bedroom with a king sized poster bed with a canopy covering. The soft beige color draperies made the room feel so warm and comforting.

The oversized furniture was quite intimidating for Danni wasn’t used to such nice things. Everything in the room

seemed huge and expensive. Rich colors of gold, wine, and various shades of brown gave the room a royal feel. Inside the bathroom was a garden tub, stall shower, and toilet behind a divider wall. A walk-in closet was in the far corner big enough to fit all of her stuff plus any extras she could possibly dream of obtaining. Single vanity with a beveled mirror hung on the wall. Danni was in love with the overall scheme of the whole place.

“So what do you think?”

“I love it. Have you ever rented it out before?”

“Honestly no. I originally just set it up as a guest suite.”

“So why now?”

“Just a feeling.”

“Mark...” Before Danni could say anything they heard Niecee yelling his name.

“Daddy!”

“There’s your girl.” Mark said teasingly. “Down here Niecee.”

“Daddy, whose car is...?” Niecee said stopping mid-sentence. “Miss Danni!”

“Hey Niecee.”

“I’m so happy to see you. Are you going to be living in the apartment?”

“It seems that way.” Danni looked over at a smirking Mark before answering.

“AWESOME!”

“I’m glad you approve.”

“Of course I approve. Now I get to see you whenever I want.”

“Uh, no ma’am. You will not be traipsing down these stairs whenever you feel like it. Only if invited. Miss Danni deserves her privacy just as if she was someone you didn’t know.”

“Yes sir.”

“Mark its fine. I understand what you are saying and I don’t want to step on your parenting toes but its fine. I love being around Niecee. If I had a daughter, she would be an exact replica.” Both Mark and Niecee gave her indescribable looks before anyone spoke again. Niecee had a smile on her face that showcased extreme giddiness and Mark had a thoughtful expression as if he were in deep thought.

“Uhm...Let’s grab your things from the car. What do you say?” Mark asked after he cleared his throat.

“Alright.” Danni agreed as they made their way upstairs. Between the three of them all of her clothes, shoes, and other luggage containing her personal belongings were settled into her new bedroom. Niecee was already upstairs rambling about them having breakfast together.

“I will let you get settled in for the most part. I know you probably want to get comfortable so you don’t have to come up if you’re not feeling up to it. It looks like you have had a long night.”

“Why do you say that?” Danni asked confused.

“One your shirt looks as if someone jacked you up. Two you are still in your clothes from last night and three you have bruises on your upper arms. When I touched your back you near about jumped out of your skin so assume your back is sore as well.” Mark stated all of his observations of her appearance down to a science and all Danni could do was stand there feeling ashamed.

“Mark...”

“It’s none of my business but for the record I am glad you are safe. Get cleaned up and come up stairs, breakfast will be ready by the time you get done.” Mark turned to leave with one last look.

Surprisingly it wasn’t a look of pity or anything like that. It was something that Danni swore she mirrored but it had to be an illusion. Interest. She had to be just seeking attention from the male species and was soaking it up. Mark was a mystery to her. Danni didn’t know a thing about him and he her for that matter. Either way she didn’t think she was his type. ‘But what was his type,’ she asked herself. ‘Hell what was her type?’ The answer was not going to come easy because she wasn’t planning on going there with anyone anytime soon. The fact remained that Mark was extremely attractive and as she earlier thought, attentive. Wondering curiosity had her questioning if he was an attentive lover as well. If only...

Chapter Nine

Danni had been going through the motions for so long that it felt odd to not have to walk around with a fake smile. At times she found herself feeling sorry for herself but after interacting with Mark and Niecee, the feeling soon goes away. Grateful couldn't even begin to explain how she felt towards Mark. He opened his home to her at an extremely difficult time. Having only heard just the tip of the iceberg where her troubles stemmed from, he still didn't pry for more information. Taking what she had to say at face value. There weren't many men like that in the world that was for sure.

After she had moved in they chilled out around the table in the kitchen after eating breakfast. Danni made sure she wore a long sleeved shirt and some yoga pants. There weren't any marks on her legs but she didn't want to disrespect anyone else's home walking around scantily dressed. Once they had laughed about nothing and everything at the same time, Niecee offered to help her unpack her things. Since she enjoyed spending time with her she took her up on the additional help. In return for such an awesome welcome, she offered to fix Sunday dinner.

Mark assured her that everything she would need was in the freezer in the garage, fridge, and the pantry. Deciding on a simple meal consisting of Cajun rotisserie chicken, asparagus, yellow rice, and crescent rolls she got busy. Danni hadn't cooked a home cooked meal in a while where people

actually appreciated her efforts. Niecee had offered to assist in the kitchen while Mark said he had important business in his office he had to attend to. Leaving the two girls to bond further, dinner was ready in no time. They sat down to dinner together giving Danni plenty of praises for a job well done. Mark and Niecee officially nominated her to be the primary dinner preparer if she was up for the challenge.

Although she had gone through hell and had yet to emerge the victor, her situation was looking better. Just from the small step she made in getting away from the bastard she had wasted years on. Living with Mark and Niecee had posed to be quite a fulfilling experience. If time permitted they would share breakfast and dinner. Mark had gone above and beyond his Christian duty as Danni always joked with him about. Even though they were only joking it was true in a sense. He had offered her a place to rent when the money was scarce. The only thing he asked in return was that she looked after Niecee from time to time. While also sticking with the counseling plan of sorts.

Mark had explained that he had lots of business dealings that needed his attention sometimes into the night. Instead of uprooting her from his mother's house during the late hours, he preferred her to be home. Understandably not alone, so he could focus on his work instead of whether she was safe or not. The atmosphere was so nice and calming. It had such a homey feel. Considering the fact that she was only a live-in Nanny, she couldn't complain one bit. Anything was better than that mess she was forced to live in.

Lamont had actually tried to call her in which she blocked his number. The phone app actually picks the call up

and then hangs it up after four seconds. Knowing full well he has probably heard her actually having fun before the line was disconnected. Good for him, she never wanted to play the 'let's make him jealous roll' but it did feel good to know he was stressing about her whereabouts. Danni knew it was serious when her parents and god sister called her inquiring about where she has been. She felt bad immediately because she hadn't informed them that she had moved out of the house.

"Hey mama."

"Hey baby, where have you been?" She asked hugging her when she walked into the house.

"Girl, what's really going on? I was worried sick about you." Nat exclaimed walking towards her. They hadn't communicated like they used to. For the life of her Danni couldn't put her finger on why that was.

"So much has happened but I can't go into that right now." Danni said gesturing towards Niecee who stood behind her quiet as a church mouse.

"Who do we have here?" Lena asked smiling her way. Niecee returned the smile.

"This is Shaniece. Baby girl this is my mom Lena, and my god sister Natalie."

"Nice to meet you sweetie. You are too pretty." Lena gushed. "Wait Shaniece. As in Niecee? I have heard so much about you from Danni."

"She is pretty. Where did you find her Danni?" Nat asked skeptically.

"Thank you." Niecee said shyly.

“Her father asked me to watch after his prized possession and I couldn’t turn down such an awesome responsibility. Plus I get to do the whole girly bonding things with someone since I don’t have my own.”

“Speaking of having their own...” Nat said letting the sentence hang to be dramatic. “You may not have your own but you will have a little niece or nephew soon. And you Mama Lena are going to be a grandmother finally.” She said excitedly. Through everything going on Danni really wanted to be happy for her but she just couldn’t shake the jealousy bug from killing her slowly.

“Congratulations!” Lena shouted hugging her.

“Thank you.”

“Congrats Sis. I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you. And I want you to be the god mother.”

“Really?”

“Yes really.”

“What does the father think? Shouldn’t he have a say so in the choosing of god mother?” Danni hated that she didn’t really feel up to the challenge of such a high honor. Mainly because she thought she would be the first one to give her mother a grandchild not Natalie. After all she was the one that had been married for years but what did she know.

“He will be okay with it. Trust me.”

“Well alright then. I would love to.”

“Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

“So... I wasn't aware you were serious with anyone after Thomas. I know you were saying he was old news. What's been going on with you?”

“Girl it was something that just happened during the heat of the moment. You know how that...” Nat stopped like something just dawned on her. “Never mind, it's not important.”

“So when do we get to meet this mystery person?” Lena asked.

“Actually you all are the first to know. I plan to tell him tonight.” Nat checked her ringing phone and then excused herself to answer it.

“So, how is my baby doing?”

“I'm fine mom. I found an apartment. Doing okay for now. I got a call from a hotel downtown. I start there next week. Working during the day.”

“That's wonderful honey, I knew you would bounce back.”

“Who bounced back? What did I miss?” Nat asked walking back into the room.

“I was just telling mom, I found an apartment and a temporary job.”

“Oh really. That's good. Why haven't you come to me about what's been going on? You know I would have had your back.”

“I know. I needed to do things on my own without a biased ear. Things are working in its own time and that's fine.”

“I can’t believe he would be so...”

“I really don’t want to discuss any of that right now. He is what he is and doing what he pleases.” Danni cut off anything else she was going to say. She didn’t want to always talk about the negative in her life. When she wanted to talk to Nat she didn’t have time now she wanted to rant and rave but Danni wasn’t going for it. Especially not in front of Niecee.

“My bad...” She held her hands up in surrender. “I gotta go see a man about a dog. I will talk to you good people later.”

“Alright girl. Take care.”

“You too. Call me if you need me.”

“Will do.”

“So Miss Shaniece, tell me about yourself.” Lena engaged Niecee into conversation to take Danni’s mind away from everything. For that she was grateful. Hearing that Nat was pregnant kind of dampened her spirits a bit but this too shall pass.

After leaving her parents’ house she was to drop Niecee off with Miss Rita to spend the night with her. Mark favored his mother quite a bit now that she got to see her after meeting him. She was so nice and insisted that she stick around for bit. However when leaving she couldn’t help but feel so lonely. Going back to the even bigger house she noticed it wasn’t cold comparing it to her own house. Maybe she should have taken Miss Rita up on her offer to spend some

more time with them. She wasn't expecting the woman to be so open and inviting with her.

While married to Lamont his mother was never the loving type. She was boogie, kind of self-reserved. It was evident she snubbed her nose at Danni and sometimes she would catch pity glances. However she thought it was all in her head and maybe she just didn't like her. That was the reason for her never to engage her warmly. Lamont always stated that was just her nature it was nothing personal. Now that she thought about it, his father was probably the same way. That had to be the reason Lamont was so hell bent on it being 'a thing' men do and it was no big deal.

Danni thought it would be cool to have a spa zone for herself. She started by giving herself a pedicure and manicure. Next she applied an avocado mask with cucumber eye pieces for the puffiness she knew she accrued over the past month or so. Her legs, armpits, and private areas were completely hairless. It had been a while since she had rid herself of such hindrances. Not having anyone to pay attention to those parts caused her to become careless. Tonight was different, the wine was making her fidgety and quite horny. Just the feel of her soft, smooth skin in the sudsy bath water was turning her up a notch.

Just rubbing her thighs in a slow lazy motion was causing her womb to clench with eagerness. The thought of touching herself intimately was damn near orgasmic. Since she didn't have the affection of a partner, the thought of making love to herself sounded damn good. While one hand massaged

the smooth hairless triangle, the other hand worked her heavy breast. Taking her time to give each one equal attention, pinching her nipples every so often. The first brush of her middle digit against her hardened clit almost did it for her. She hadn't realized how neglected her body had been.

Clinching her inner walls she swirled her middle finger and ring finger around in a circular motion over her pearl. Not wanting to undo the anticipation so quick she dipped the two fingers into her waiting center, pumping slowly while letting her mind wander to parts unknown. Her entire body was hot with need. Her heart was beating a mile a second as if it wanted to burst out of her chest to sooth the ache. Laying her hand flat as she continued to glide in and out of her box, the palm of her hand grazed her protruding clit with every movement.

So bad she wanted to stop to collect herself as to prolong her release but her hand had a mind of its own. Soon she was chasing the release with each pant, eyes wide open staring at the ceiling, face contorted like she was in pain. Then she saw stars as her body lifted off sending her soaring through the skies from a powerful release. What scared her to shit was the face she saw in her mind and the name she whispered. Shaking and pumping harder, faster to reach the goal line. Lifting a leg as if it were being held by the once faceless person, she triggered another. Riding her wave until it was nothing but a mere memory.

“Mark.” The realization of whose name she sighed was too much for her to handle. Sitting there in a daze for an unknown amount of time, she tried to come to terms of what it all meant.

The temperature her body had compared to the water was like night and day. Letting the water out, Danni dried off, and moisturized her body. Standing in front of the full length mirror she admired her body from top to bottom. In her opinion she wasn't a bad looking woman. Although full-figured she was well proportioned. Donning on a pair of pajama shorts, a tank with a built in bra, and an oversized t-shirt. Her long locs were in a high pony-tail and footie socks with the little ball were on her feet.

Straightening up her bathroom while still listening to her music that was hooked up to her Bluetooth speaker, she was in her own little world. Thoughts of why the hell she called out Mark's name of all the men she has ever been acquainted with was heavy on her mind. It was weird and very dangerous. Technically what she was experiencing was 'captain save a hoe' syndrome. Mark had swooped in saving her at her worst and she was fantasizing about the hero versus the dud for a change. That had to be it. It was an attractive male that didn't treat her like an object, possession, or a child.

"SHIT!" Danni jumped ten feet in the air hearing the pool balls crack when she walked into the den area. She had absently walked down the hall not aware that she wasn't alone anymore. The music could be heard clearly from her room so it was no wonder she didn't hear anything.

"My bad baby. I didn't mean to scare you." Mark chuckled at her reaction. Danni was still trying to get control of her breathing.

"I didn't know you were here."

“Sorry. I thought you may have been in for the night. I was chilling listening to music.” Just then she realized her music was clashing with his that was playing lowly.

“Oh damn, I’m sorry. Let me turn that down.”

“Nah, you cool. When the door is closed you can’t hear anything. It’s a soundproof room.” Danni breathed a sigh of relief because he could have heard her intimate moment with herself if he had been there the whole time. Thank God for soundproofing. “I should have checked with you to let you know I was down here.”

“This is your house. Don’t be silly. You can be wherever you like.” ‘Even between my thighs’ Danni thought to herself. She scolded herself for thinking like that.

“You look refreshed. Your skin is glowing. Have a relaxing night?” He looked her over before returning his attention to the table.

“Uh yeah. I feel more relaxed than I have been in a while. I have come so far yet I still have a ways to go.” Danni stated with a smile, shrugging her shoulder. “I just came out to grab some more wine and I will be out of your hair.”

“Why don’t you chill with me?” He suggested. “We could shoot some pool. You know how?”

“Yeah actually I do. My dad taught me how.”

“Uh oh, do I have a pool shark in my house?”

“No pool shark. Actually it’s been so long since I played. I probably suck by now. All rusty and stuff.”

“I doubt that. You look shiny as a new penny, no rust in sight.” He gave her a once over before smirking at his own joke. “Anyway it’s like riding a bike. You never forget how.” Riding? Did he have to bring up riding? Oh how she would love to ride...

“Huh, shit... I must have zoned out.” Danni asked when she saw he was giving her a weird look.

“You alright? How much wine have you had?”

“Not enough.” She said lowly. “A game is probably what I need to take my mind off of something’s.” She said pulling in a shaky breath.

“Cool.”

“Let me go throw on more appropriate clothes.” Looking down, she could feel her breast start to get heavy and her nipples were starting to harden. Goosebumps were forming on her legs.

“You are at home. Don’t let me take you out of your comfort zone.” Mark said. “You look better in my shirt than I ever did.” He chuckled.

“I completely forgot this was your shirt. I should have returned it.” A part of her wanted to feel as close as she could to him so she lied about not remembering it was his shirt. He didn’t seem to care to call her out on it other than to point out he knew it was his. Mark’s signature fragrance surrounded her on a cloud of contentment. “Rack em’ up.”

“Oh god, now she thinks she is hard.” He laughed harder. Even his laugh was sexy. How was this going to work?

Two hours later and they were still shooting pool while drinking countless different mixtures. They had obliterated their chosen poison from fruity cocktails to straight shots of patron. Buzzed beyond rational thinking, Danni enjoyed hanging out with Mark. Too many times since they had been chilling he had gotten too close to make her horny mind go into overdrive. The liquor had soon started to affect her body's natural cooling system, so a particular article of clothing had to go.

Taking off his large shirt, leaving her in her skimpy pajamas to get some much needed air. If she were thinking logically she would have called it a night before she made a fool of herself. Showing her a few tricks on the table caused him to be all in her personal space. Making it next to impossible to think clearly. Her focus was clouded with lust. Avoiding eye contact with him was her main goal. There was no way in hell she wanted him to know the affect he was having on her body. Just for him to stand within arm's reach of her, smelling his mouth-watering scent, and feeling the body heat radiating off of him was making it hard to keep her hands to herself.

“Uhm...” Mark had cleared his throat as he was showing Danni a trick shot. He had been standing directly behind her. When she bent over the table widening her stance she bumped her derriere into his package. “Shit.” He hissed lowly. Danni had subconsciously grinded into him. Satisfied that she had some sort of effect on him.

“Shit.” A spray of cold water slapped her in the face making her curse out in a thwarting way. She could have sworn she felt the bulge grow upon contact. “Uhhh...”

Danni turned around awkwardly preparing to put some distance between them. Her wanton behavior was making her act out irrationally. This was her client once upon a time, and here she was teasing him. It had to have been the liquor making her act out of character. Taking a much needed step back Mark laid his pool stick on the table looking at Danni expectantly. She had no choice but to follow suit laying herself down as well. The wheels were turning in her head to come up with something to say to justify the stunt she just pulled. Just as she was about to make up something, ‘Sex Therapy’ by Robin Thicke came on.

“I know that was weird.” Danni stammered.

“Weird?” He cocked an eyebrow.

“What would you call it?”

“Teasing, sounds better.” He crossed his massive arms over one another.

“I am so sorry. That was completely out of line...” Danni started to explain but was caught off guard when Mark started laughing. “What’s so funny?” She started to feel self-conscious and let her shattered self-esteem allow her to think he was making fun of her in a way. As sexy as Mark was, there was no way he was interested in her simple self.

“Wait, where are you going?” Mark asked grasping for one of Danni’s hands as she tried to flee to her room. “What’s wrong? Did I miss something here?” He asked regarding the moisture on her face.

“...” All the ugly words Lamont spoke came filtering back in her head. ‘Who would be attracted to her?’

“Danni?” She went to walk away but he pulled her body into his when she tried to walk away again.

Hugging her so close to his body that she wished she could crawl into his skin to get closer to the comfort. The soft and uplifting words whispered from Mark were meant to make her relax further. Instead it stirred the same something that caused her to start this whole misunderstanding in the first place. Wanton. Before she could pull away again she was scooped up as if she were light as a feather. Her body had a mind of its own, her legs were wrapped around his body as she was placed on his lap. Sitting on the couch made it look more intimate than what it was supposed to be. One kiss to the forehead, then another to each cheek made her insides flutter.

“No offense Danni but this is a very awkward position we are in.” Mark joked lightening the mood only by a small margin. Her tears were no more as she took steady breaths to get herself under control. His hands were going up and down her exposed thighs when his chuckle settled.

The intense look on his face was enough to make her cream her pan... ‘Wait I’m not wearing any panties,’ she thought to herself. A blush quickly spread throughout her body from the realization of what position she was really in. Sitting perched on his lap with a raging gutter-filled mind with no barrier besides her pajama shorts that had risen nicely. While his hands moved back and forth over her legs his thumb was so close to the goal line. What she wouldn’t give to have him swipe his thumb across her naked flesh. To feel the imprint in his pants without the hindrance of the restraints.

“Don’t do that.” He said lowly as a warning.

“Do what?” Danni asked resting her hands on the cushions on the side of his head. Mark didn’t reply he just reached a hand up to her face using his thumb to pull her bottom lip from between her teeth. Rubbing his thumb over her lip in a soothing manner caused her to sigh. “I should probably...”

“Don’t move...” He groaned. Danni had attempted to get up from his lap trying to clear her mind from the lust swirling around.

“Am I too heavy?” She asked timidly. Lamont had often said he didn’t like her to straddle him for it was a strain to keep his legs lifted.

“Nowhere near. Why would you ask something like that?” He chuckled before realizing she was serious. Then as a thought registered, he cocked his head to the side to study her further. “You know you’re beautiful, sexy, and tempting right?”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“Do you think I would have this...?” He thrust his hips upward causing her to gasp in surprise.

“That doesn’t say anything outside of there’s a half-naked woman on your lap.” Her failed attempt of a joke fell on deaf ears.

“I’m going to act like I didn’t hear you just put me in the category with every other man in the world.”

“Since we have established that I am not heavy to you. This is still a very compromising position we are in.”

“Yes it is indeed. I’m rocked out and you smell so damn sweet.”

“I’m pretty sure I taste just as sweet.”

“Fuck!” He hissed raising his hips up to meet her core again while squeezing her thighs. The raw, roughness made her purr like a kitten. “You are making it so hard for me to restrain myself right now.”

“What if I don’t want you to restrain yourself?”

“What are you saying exactly Danni? I need to hear you tell me what you want.”

“I NEED you to…”

“To what?” Mark bit his lip looking up into her dazed face.

“Kiss me.” Without hesitation Mark pulled Danni to him in a sweltering kiss that took her breath away. Detaching his mouth from hers he attacked her neck with his feverish tongue. “Touch me.” Within an instance his hands were fondling her breasts through her skimpy top.

Danni had enough of the PG-13 affection, she wanted to feel his skin against hers. Removing her top, she didn’t have to wait long before he had taken a nipple into his mouth. Massaging the other one skillfully. Arching her back, holding on tight to the couch cushions afraid she would fall off. Grinding into his hardened member with skilled precision, Danni’s shorts were moist from the friction. A sharp intake of breath was taken feeling Mark swipe his thumb across her bare flesh.

“Damn and you don’t have on any panties.” He stated huskily, never stopping his assault on her silky petals and sensitive pearl.

“I NEED you to put out this fire.” Danni groaned.

“That I can do.”

Mark didn’t waste any time flipping their positions. Danni found herself laid against the soft leather marveling at his strength. Her shorts were slid off in record time along with his jeans, boxers, and undershirt. His body was something to ogle. From his bulging biceps, muscular chest, and stacked abs he was a work of art. Sexual frustrations was so raw and real as she withered below him. Mark was busy sheathing his member unintentionally blocking her view of his package. Hoping and praying he knew what he was doing. She knew from personal experience that ‘packing’ meant nothing if he didn’t know what to do with it.

Testing the waters, Mark went for the goal after looking to be sure that she had no second thoughts about continuing. Stunned beyond belief at his size Danni tensed up. Mark didn’t halt his movements obviously saying to hell with it. With each in and out, Danni dug her nails into his forearms. Hoisting her legs parallel to her upper body, she could see her feet clearly. He was literally drilling the inside of her vagina. Swiveling his hips, he hit every spot open for his enjoyment. Grunts, curses, and skin slapping mixed with the music playing in the background.

Danni pried her eyes open to watch as Mark expertly opened her legs wide enough to see his handy work. The animalistic look he displayed made her instantly wetter. She

craved this attention so bad and now she didn't know how to handle it. She wanted to run from the steady beat that tapped her cervix but the grip he had keeping her legs open didn't allow that. Deep down she knew what they were doing was so wrong on so many different levels but the woman in need didn't care at the moment. Not breaking stride, Mark flicked her painfully hard nub sending her to the moon and beyond.

“Ahhh!” She screamed feeling her insides tighten increasing the pleasure from his rapid thrusts. “MARK!” His name was screamed to the heavens.

“DAMN!” Groaned Mark with his lip between his teeth like a savage.

“OH...!!!” Danni could swear she saw stars, black spots, and fireworks as he drove her to the peak of a major orgasm. Never in all of her adult years has she been given such an experience. Her gasps were mixed with extreme whimpers as she tried to figure out just who she was dealing with. When Mark finally came, she thought for sure it was over.

“Now that we got that out of the way. Let's take this to the bedroom.”

“Huh?”

“I know you didn't think we were done.”

“I don't think I can. I don't think I can move.”

“You can handle it. Allow me to help you.” Danni screamed from Mark picking her up walking her to the bedroom. Wasting no time making a mad dash to his room to retrieve so more protection. All the while her brain wanted to formulate the words to put an end to what her body so boldly

craved. 'A man of Mark's stature couldn't want something permanent or he would have that. They could always just be booty buddies.' She went over in her head. Nothing serious, no feelings attached. Just some old fashioned screwing. As a matter of fact, now that they had gone there, he probably wouldn't even think about revisiting. They could always stick to the age old excuse, 'We were drunk.' It just had to work.

Chapter Ten

Danni woke up the next morning sore as all get up. Everything in her, on her, and around her hurt. The sheets were tangled, yanked, and scattered all over the bed. However the comforter was nowhere to be found. Turning over on her back, she tried to gather all of her thoughts together. The first one that came rushing back was Mark taking her to new heights on the couch. Then if that wasn't enough, he took her there so many more times before she collapsed on her stomach. Marks sexual appetite was insatiable. So much stamina from one man was only heard of in porn unless medically induced.

Just thinking of Mark and the things he had done to her body made her sit up in the bed fast. The sun was shining through the window, silence was all she heard. Looking all around she realized she was indeed alone in her room. If her body wasn't hurting so bad she would have sworn it was only a dream. Danni couldn't lie and say she felt some kind of way that he wasn't still there when she woke up. That only solidified her resolve that they were both only looking to have a great time. NO strings. NO feelings. NO attachments. They both just needed to blow off some sexual steam.

After taking a long hot soak in the tub, straightening up the mess they made, Danni went upstairs to get something to eat. Although she was fine with what happened last night, she couldn't help but feel it would be a little awkward. They had seen each other naked and done some naughty things. How do

you put those thoughts out of your head and continue as if nothing happened? What if he regretted going there and didn't want to see her slutty face again? After all he was technically her landlord now. What if he put her out before she could get settled?

“Good morning Danni.” Mark's smooth baritone voice startled her out of her thoughts.

“OH. Hey. Good morning.” She rambled.

“You sleep alright?” He asked with a smirk.

“Uh...yeah. Of course. You?”

“Wonderful. Only if I didn't have to get up to greet my mom and Niecee, I could have slept *in* a little longer.” Danni's cheeks flared with a blush from his emphasis on 'in' and that gained a chuckle from him. Well so much for it not being awkward. “The blushing is cute.”

“...” Danni put her head in her hands sitting at the breakfast bar. She could feel the blood travel all over her body from his insinuations.

“Especially when...” He whispered in her ear making her body heat to rise further. The wicked things he whispered in her ear almost made her melt against the bar stool.

“Good morning Danni. I missed you.” Niecee exclaimed when she walked into the kitchen. Danni was so preoccupied that she didn't hear her coming but thankful that Mark had walked away already.

“Hey sugar plum. How was your time with your granny?”

“It was great. We went shopping, the nail shop, and just hung out. I wish you could have been there.”

“Sounds like fun.”

“Maybe next time we can all go?” She asked with hope clear in her eyes. Danni didn’t have the heart to tell her no.

“Sure, I would love to.”

“So what did you do while I was gone?”

“Oh a little of this a little of that.” Danni said swallowing the juice that Mark had sat down in front of her. She needed the distraction.

“Daddy didn’t keep you company? He didn’t bore you did he.” Niecee asked to which Danni spit out some of her drink and started coughing, while Mark had another reaction. He was chuckling his life away.

“Um...”

“We just shot some pool and hung out little girl. If you must know.” Mark said after he got himself under control.

“Yeah.” Danni agreed.

“Good.”

“Go wash up breakfast will be ready in a few.”

“Even though it’s too late for breakfast.”

“Well brunch then.” Mark rolled his eyes at his daughter’s theatrics. “Just go.”

“Mark...” Danni started but Mark cut her off.

“I don’t know exactly what happened last night Danni. One minute you were backing it up on me and the next you

were calling me stupid. I was just trying to understand what was going on at first. Then things just happened.”

“I didn’t call you stupid.”

“Yes you did.”

“If I was calling anybody stupid it was myself. I let the alcohol dull my senses to a point where I acted on my hormones. I apologize for putting you in an awkward situation. I totally understand if you want me to leave.”

“Do you regret it?”

“Which part?”

“The end result?”

“As bad as this may sound, no. I don’t. Does that make me a slut?” She whispered the last part.

“Hell no. It makes you human, desirable, sexy, and able woman. For the record neither do I. The only thing I regret is that I didn’t wake you up with round...where did we leave off at again?”

“Oh goodness.” Danni flushed again making him laugh.

“Let’s eat. I’m starving.” Niecee came back just in time. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing honey.”

As the three of them sat down to eat together for like the umpteenth time since Danni had been living there, they talked randomly. Every so often they would catch Niecee staring at them with something clearly weighing heavy on her mind. For a minute Danni thought she was on to them and

what they had been up to. Sweat was starting to formulate in her palms thinking the worst. Mark on the other hand would study her for a minute then turn to Danni to gage her reaction. Soon he sat back and just observed.

“Something on your mind baby girl?” He asked Niecee.

“Huh? I mean sir.” Niecee smiled after her failed attempts at playing oblivious.

“Why do you keep looking at us like that?”

“This just feels like a family. I never really had that feeling unless I was with you for Thanksgiving. That’s all.”

“Aww.” Danni said absentmindedly.

“Girls are so sappy.” Mark drawled mocking them. That erased the small tension in the room as they laughed together. Danni had to agree with Niecee it did feel like a little family. Like all families, there little fake one had a big secret that could backfire on them, all could possibly be hurt.

It had been almost a week since Mark and Danni did the do. The dirty deed that she thought for sure would make him treat her a certain way. To her surprise everything went back the way they were. No awkward moments, he stopped saying off the chart things pertaining to their rump. Sadly Danni didn’t know how she felt about that. Her mind would often go into the gutter though just from the sight of him. Him walking around in basketball shorts, no shirt, with sweat all over his toned body. It made her hot just thinking about it. It

was like a memory that kept playing in her head like a movie. At night she would relieve the stress she held by the vision.

Mark had gone for a run through the wooded area behind the house which she now knew was a manmade trail. She was in the kitchen fixing some sandwiches when he came in through the back door. His shorts clung to the most intimate parts of his anatomy, while sweat dribbled down his sculptured chest to the last pack of his abdominal muscles. Disappearing either inside the material to his glorious package or absorbing into the waist band of his shorts. Either way it was a sight to see. Her imagination was in overdrive as she longed to be those droplets of sweat.

Never had she liked the act of going down but she had tried with Lamont. Mainly because he had hinted on it until she gave in to his needs. Something about the taste made her internally gag but for some reason Mark made her want to do some nasty things to him. She could just imagine taking his joystick in her hands before dropping to her knees in the kitchen to top it off. Sweaty and all she could practically taste the pre-cum on her lips. Taking as much as she could muster up into her mouth without gagging. Slurping and sucking him until he felt faint. Needless to say she didn't act on her wanton day dreams but that didn't stop her brain from forcing those images regularly when she was alone.

Her mind did some things to her body that even the best cold shower couldn't tame. All because of a reckless night with him. The object of her desires at the moment, Mark was something to dream about. Everything she was envisioning was just as wrong if not worse than her cheating bastard of a husband. Technically she was a married woman fantasizing

about another man. A man that is a little girl that looks up to her for guidance at the moment, her father. Here she was supposedly only taken care of Niecee but she can't stop fantasizing about having her father between her thighs.

~

Here she was again in the kitchen making lunch while he was out exercising. This had turned into an everyday thing. Only this time she wore a little less clothing than normal. After he would walk in she would pass him his sandwich which he accepted with great appreciation and go about his business. Danni would run back to her safe haven and pleasure herself. The restraint of her bra was restricting her nipples from hardening to their full potential. Normally she would have on some shorts, pants, or panties but today she wanted to make it easier on herself. Only wearing one of her many sundresses, she was completely bare below with a fresh wax to boot. Her fingers trembled in anticipation waiting for her daily eye candy to make himself present.

Like clockwork he strolled in looking oh so delectable. 'If I could only muster up enough courage to ask for what I want,' she thought to herself. Biting her lip unintentionally she tried to focus on the matter at hand. As soon as he had his food he would be on his way or so she thought. Instead of greeting her with polite conversation as he usually did, he gave a curt head nod as a greeting. For some odd reason she found his rugged aura today an extreme turn on. She always assumed she didn't do bad boys. Assuming they weren't her type. Looking at Mark, she had to rethink her previous statement. This man was all MAN. Danni was so far gone at trying to

regain her composure she didn't realize he had crept up behind her until his body heat was felt against her back.

“Mark, what are you doing?” She asked with a shaky voice.

“Did you know when you get turned on your pulse leaps?” He asked in a husky voice that sent tremors down her spine. “Right here.” He circled a spot on her neck that had her lean into him more.

“Not to mention you bite your lip when you are turned on and lost for words.” He continued.

“Umm... I don't think we should... um... do this.” She cursed herself for stammering like an idiot.

“Do what?” He asked never stopping his assault on her senses. “This?” He asked as he roughly grabbed her breasts causing her head to fall back against his chest. Eyes shut, lip tucked between her teeth, and hands gripping his encouraging him further.

“You feel that?” He nudged her legs apart with his and she didn't fight back.

“Y-yes.”

“I know you want this d*ck but I need to here you say it.”

“Hummmh.” She hummed from the sheer harshness of his tone.

“Say it!”

“Fuck me!” She screamed but was too far gone to be embarrassed at her crass words.

“Assume the position.” Without a seconds notice Danni found herself bent over at the waist with her legs apart. Somehow Mark had guided her far gone body to the opposite side of the island with her hands flat against the surface.

“Shit!” Danni’s inner muscles trembled from the sudden intrusion from a huge source digging for gold in her loaded tunnels.

“Damn.” He groaned. “So good.”

“Oh my...” Danni felt her legs trying to give out but Mark wasn’t having that. Slanging one of her legs up on the stool opened her up wide as ever for him to continue while giving her nowhere to run. “Ahhh!”

“Why don’t you have on any panties baby?”

“Huh...” He wanted to ask questions that there was no way she could answer. Her brain wouldn’t even form words without her stammering.

“Always have it ready for me.” She couldn’t tell if he was issuing a command, questioning her motives, or declaring that was what he already knew.

His balls slapping her bud was enough to have her try and tap out. She couldn’t take it. He was literally tapping her insides into submission. She was positive she wouldn’t be able to walk right for the next week. Screaming so loud that she was sure the neighbors could hear her pleas. For the life of her she couldn’t figure out what her plea was. Did she want him to stop? Did she want more? What kind of drugs was he on? Danni was beyond conflicted. One thing she did that got his

attention was slap her hand against the counter top so hard it caused her to hiss.

“No tap outs.” He growled. “Take it!”

“Oh God! Mark!”

“Almost there!” He said. The only audible sound was a squeak and then silence. Danni couldn’t breathe. Her eyes were bulging out her sockets, mouth had formed a perfect “O”, and body was on fire. There was a buildup so tough she thought for sure she was going to die. Then a big ‘gush’ happened and it was all over as she panted with relief. “That’s it.” Mark pulled out leaving his essence all over her back.

The lovers tried to regain their composure not saying a mumbling word. Danni’s legs felt numb and Mark knew the reason why. He assisted her in getting her leg down and held her until she could stand on her own. Closing her legs seemed to be quite a chore within itself from how swollen her precious flower petals were. Mark had put a beating on her that she thoroughly enjoyed. However sick that sounded, she was trying to keep the guilt at bay. Mark stepped back from her when he knew she was stabilized.

“Shit...” Mark didn’t know what to say.

“Don’t say anything Mark. We are both adults.”

“Adults that are attracted to each other.”

“Sexually. It’s no big deal.”

“...” Mark didn’t say anything to her statement. He just stepped back and looked at her with an unreadable expression.

“I guess I made quite a mess.” She hinted looking down at the small puddle on the floor. Most of it had soaked into his shorts that were now covering his member.

“I got it, just clean yourself up.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, technically it’s my fault so...yeah.”

“...” Danni couldn’t find any words to say. She just walked away feeling incomplete but satisfied in the same breath if that made sense. If only she had met Mark before she had been damaged by Lamont, circumstances would have been different.

Danni had finally gotten the hang of working at the hotel she woke up in a while back. That was the night she first got confirmation of Lamont’s horrid ways and on the bright side Mark was placed in her life. She often wondered if she hadn’t been practically saved by him that night would they have become fast friends. Would he have taken her in if they first met at Niecee’s visit? Mark had become a wonderful asset in her life and not just because he could do things to her body to make her forget her problems. If only just for a little while.

Since the incident in the kitchen a week ago, it had become hard to get her daily eye candy because she was at work in the day. The schedule has changed a bit as of late. He would tip to the basement late at night and take her there one good time before going back to his own room. They spent time together just the three of them when time permits. Whereas if

Niecee was gone it would get downright dirty. He would break her off in few new places in the house, having her begging him for more and a break in one scream. A couple times she felt something during their encounter but she pushed it away. Honing in on the pure lust of the situation. The only place they hadn't been was his room which felt a little too intimate to her and of course Niecee's room.

In Danni's mind they were the epitome of friends with benefits. The benefit for her was she could open up to him about anything and he would listen. Giving his honest opinion when she asked for it. When she desired sex, he gave in with no questions asked. Why would he ask questions? He is a man after all, a sexy well-endowed man, with a sensational sexual appetite. She was helping him out or so she kept trying to convince herself. The sad part was she didn't know what he did for a living besides him owning the nightclub. There was no way he made enough money to live like he did off of a nightclub. The fear of sounding stupid kept her from inquiring about his whereabouts when he says he has business meetings. He seems to keep quite busy but still finds time to spend with her and Niecee.

Danni had asked him to accompany her to a picnic given by her family. Her aunt was actually the one that was throwing it at her house. She hadn't really been around any of her family on the outside of her mom and dad since the divorce proceedings were on the way. As far as she was concerned no one was the wiser about her recent separation. That was alright with her cause she didn't feel like explaining anything to anyone anyway. Niecee was excited to meet more of Danni's family while she in turn wasn't all that thrilled

about going. If it wasn't for her mom bringing it up in front of Niecee she might have ignored the invitation.

“What’s wrong Danni?” Mark asked.

“Nothing.”

“You don’t really want to go do you?”

“Not really.”

“Why?”

“I don’t feel like explaining myself or my situation.” She said being mindful of Niecee being in the car. Mark was driving them there.

“Then don’t. You don’t have to explain yourself to anyone if you don’t feel like it.”

“They are going to ask where he is and why I am arriving with you. This I know for sure.”

“Would you rather I drop you off? You insisted that I come remember.”

“You didn’t refuse.” Danni snapped unconsciously.

“Whoa. Check your tone.” Mark said sternly. Luckily Niecee had her headphones on and couldn’t hear their conversation.

“I apologize. That was out of line.”

“I’m just trying to be there for you but if you rather me not. Then so be it. I’m not forcing myself on you Danni.”

“I know and I’m sorry. I wouldn’t have asked you to come with me if I didn’t want you to. Thank you for being my friend.”

“Amongst other things.”

“You are so nasty.”

“I can show you nasty baby.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“Remember no running. No tap outs.”

“I can’t deal with you right now.” Danni shook her head trying to clear the fog she was in. She could feel the moisture start to gather in between her legs. Her breathing had increased just from his hints. Letting her mouth get her into something her cookie couldn’t get her out of once again. This had become one of their rituals, he talked dirty she talked back, and boom she was left screaming.

“You are looking good in them jeans by the way.” Danni felt more confident in her appearance than she had in a while. Mainly because Mark always complimented her on what she was wearing or how she looked in general.

“Thank you.”

Finally they arrived at her aunt’s house. There were cars lined up and down the block. The drive way was full and even the yard had a few cars. Walking around back she went straight to looking for her mom and dad. As soon as they stepped foot in the back yard it’s like time stood still. People who were chatting with others stopped mid-sentence assessing the situation. Niecee was walking beside her in a similar outfit as hers consisting of skinny capri jeans, layered tank tops, and sandals. While Mark walked behind them dressed down for the occasion in cargo shorts, Jordan’s, and a coordinated shirt.

Spotting her parents sitting with some other relatives, she wasted no time getting over to them.

“Hey Ma. Hey daddy.” Danni greeted giving them a hug.

“Hey Sweetpea.” Her daddy hugged her tight. “Hey pretty girl. How are you doing today?” He said speaking to Niecee.

“Good.” She spoke shyly.

“And who is this handsome young man?” Her mother asked eyeing Mark.

“Mom, dad, this is Mark. Niecee’s dad. Mark these are my parents, William and Lena Hunter.”

“It’s nice to meet you folks.” Mark shook their hands.

“Nice to meet you as well.” Her mother gushed. Danni scrunched up her eyebrows in wonderment. Her mother was acting like a love sick cougar.

“Come along son and tell me about yourself.” William pulled Mark away from the women. Danni was still stuck on the whole ‘son’ word. He didn’t even call Lamont son.

“He is nice looking.” Her mother said.

“Mom? What has gotten into you? You are ogling like some old cougar.”

“What? I was just admiring how nice looking he was. You all looked so cute together when you came in. Looking like a little family.” She beamed.

“Really mom?”

“I say the same thing all the time.” Niecee chimed in. The whole time Danni thought she had her music on.

“See even the baby sees it.” Lena smiled. “Come on sugar, let grandma show you where the kids are. Introduce you to some new friends hopefully.”

“Okay. See you later Danni.” She skipped off with her new found friend. Danni was floored when Lena referred to herself as grandma. Walking over to the other women, she decided to stop being rude and interact with everyone.

“So who is your friend?” One of her nosey cousins asked. They meant well but they were always in somebody’s business.

“He sure is fine.” Another said.

“I’ve seen him somewhere before.”

“Way to go Danni.”

“You are playing with fire.” One of her aunts chimed in with distaste.

“What do you mean, playing with fire?”

“You are walking around here gallivanting with another man while you are a married woman. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Where is your husband anyway?”

“Oh Ruby, stop that finger pointing right now.” Lena interrupted with much attitude. She had just walked in on the butt end of the conversation. “Where is your husband?”

“Hell, she ain’t got one.” Aunt Celia said scowling at her sister’s choice of reprimand.

“You shut up Celia you ain’t got one either.” Ruby exclaimed.

“I’m a widow, what’s your excuse?” Celia shot back.

“She ain’t got one. She talks too much.” Lena said causing everyone to snicker at Ruby’s embarrassment.

“Lena you ain’t right. How you gon’ let your child sit up here and embarrass her husband like this? I don’t have to be married to know what she is doing is wrong. Bringing that thug up in here and with a half grown child at that. She is running around here playing mama instead of having her own.”

“You don’t know my story or anything that’s going on in my life. For your information, Mark is a really good friend of mine. You really don’t have to worry about what I do with him or her.”

“Well, what do we have here?” Danni stiffened at the last voice she expected to hear before they went to court to put their sorry excuse for a marriage to rest. “Who is this character I have been hearing so much about?”

“Lamont?”

“Of course it’s me honey. Why didn’t you tell me about *our* family function?” He said gently rubbing circles in her lower back. Danni instantly tried to move away but his grip tightened on her to prevent her from moving.

“There you are Lamont. I was wondering when you would show up.” Ruby cooed before rolling her eyes at Danni.

“Thanks for inviting me since my lovely wife neglected to.”

“Oh please.” Lena retorted giving him a death stare.

“Is there a problem here?” William asked with enough venom to kill a rattle snake.

“No problem sir. How are you today Mr. Hunter?” Lamont turned to him with an award winning smile.

“I will be better when you remove your hands from my daughter.”

“Is there a problem with showing my wife some affection?” Lamont leaned to kiss Danni but she snatched away forcefully. Gaining her freedom, she unconsciously stood next to Mark. “Who do we have here?” He turned his attention to the huge man standing next to her. Mark beat Lamont out by a couple of inches in height and quite a few more in width. His muscles could crush Lamont’s leaner frame. The stone cold face he revealed would make a bear retreat.

“My name isn’t important homeboy but I know who you are.” Mark said with a sinister sneer. “You alright Danni?”

“Yeah I’m good.”

“Tsk. Tsk. Danielle this is the best you could do? Some no good, designer dressed thug from the hood. Is this who you snuck off to be with? This is who you shacked up with now? With boys in the hood? I thought you were better than that. You’re just a simple little wh...”

“WATCH IT!” Mark growled. From the corner of her eye she saw her father getting agitated.

“Or what?”

“You don’t know me or what I am capable of but with this one...” He gestured toward Danni. “I suggest you tread lightly.”

“Are you threatening me boy?” Lamont smirked. “I have you know I am a very influential person in this city and I can have your little cartel dismantled in an instant. I have seen your kind before.” Mark only glared at him for a few minutes before he displayed a smile that shook Danni to the core.

“Mark it’s alright. Let’s just grab Niecee and go.”

“No he should be the one to leave.” Lena said. “Don’t let him ruin the day.”

“That’s enough. I won’t have you and your little boy toy disrespecting my house. You need to tell your company to leave. He isn’t welcomed here. I don’t like that kind of riffraff around where I lay my head. I know how they operate. Hoodlums are all the same.”

“Ruby you need to get a life, you don’t know nothing about this young man.” William defended roughly. “And furthermore with you siding with this low-life says a lot about your character. Any snake with scales could see one of their own kind standing before them. Yet you are bashing a complete stranger to you. Influential my ass! Boy you aren’t fit to wipe his shoes. For all you know...” He went on until Mark cut him off.

“It’s alright William.” Mark said silencing the older man from telling the grumpy old battleax and the pompous ass what the deal was.

“I’ll grab Niecee and meet you at the car.” Danni said.

“I’m not done talking to you Danielle.” Lamont barked.

“But I’m done talking to you. Anything else you have to say will be said only with our lawyers present.”

“LAWYERS?” She heard everyone question at once.

“That’s right the almighty wonderful Lamont and I are getting a divorce. SURPRISE!”

“Just stupid.” Ruby hissed. “You young girls kill me running around here after these no good men when you could have a good one. Just a waste.”

“Lena let’s go, I’m done with this shit.”

“Right behind you.” Lena stated with a bad taste in her mouth following her husband.

The ride back to Mark’s house was silent. Niecee ended up being privy to some of the bickering going on at Ruby’s house. She even remained silent not knowing which way to turn from the chain of events. Danni felt the need to apologize for her family’s behavior and putting them in the middle of it. For the life of her she couldn’t find the words from being so angry at all the hateful things that were said about her. She wasn’t stupid or a waste, but wasted is what she felt like being. All she wanted to do was drown her sorrows in a big bottle and hopefully kill the pitiful demons that were attacking her soul. It was funny how no one knew to what extent her and Mark’s friendship went but they all had enough speculation to create a story.

Chapter Eleven

Danni had been summoned to dinner by her god sister whom she hadn't seen in a little while. In all honesty they hadn't shared a conversation lasting longer than a few minutes since she found out she was pregnant. Danni didn't want to be a Debbie downer so she was okay with not talking to her. Being frank about it, she was embarrassed because she couldn't do something as simple as keep her husband from wanting to tip out with other women. Not just one, he obviously had a few and weren't that far between. Lack of being able to satisfy your husband was becoming hard to deal with. Here Nat was with something she always dreamed about. Some people would say it was never too late to have children but she had already destroyed any hopes of ever going down that road again.

“Hey girl. Long time no see.” Nat greeted.

“I know. I've just been so busy.”

“Girl you should have let Lamont's ass take care of you and you wouldn't be in this mess.”

“What are you rambling about?”

“Come on now Danni. Remember when he wanted you to not work and stay home. What happened to that? You would have been there at his beck and call. Honey given the chance I would in a heartbeat. You probably still can if you would stop being so stubborn.”

“Wait a damn minute. Are you suggesting I go back to that no good, disease packing whore bag?”

“He’s human and he made a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes. No one is perfect. You know how men are. All of them cheat but is it worth being alone? Hell no.”

“Cheating is no mistake Nat. What has gotten into you? He blatantly went out and started screwing random females no telling how many. People who work with him and all. I will not sit around and be some man’s door mat.” Danni said on the verge of tears. Not from being hurt but for feeling stupid for being with someone like that. “Furthermore you never liked him anyway so why the sudden need to defend him?”

“What do you mean?” Danni noticed Nat was a little fidgety.

“Is he putting you up to this? How did you even know he cheated? Now that I recall you have been all too gung ho about talking about his infidelities but I just told you my suspicions. I don’t think I ever confirmed it.”

“To what? Of course you confirmed it.” She moved around a lot as if there was something else.

“Talking to me about giving him another chance that’s what.” She chose to ignore the confirmation of his cheating because so much has happened, she had a hard time recalling some conversations.

“Well he was still at Aunt Ruby’s when I got there. I didn’t know anything about you all’s altercation and so he filled me in. He told me that this guy wasn’t good for you. You

were starting to take on his characteristics. Whatever the hell that meant? Danni you have to be careful who you associate yourself with. I know you can't be that naïve. You are letting your hurt feelings run you in the wrong direction."

"Over-exaggerating his innocence as usual. Typical Lamont behavior. Now he is the victim. What would you know about my so called decisions? I haven't talked to you in what feels like forever. You are eating up everything he has to say like it's nothing. Fuck Lamont."

"I know you aren't dumb enough to divorce him for real are you? You know you won't get anything right?"

"Wow... You are something else." Danni gathered her belongings.

"Where are you going? We haven't even ordered yet."

"I can't do this as long as you are a Lamont cheerleader. I will see you around."

"You are making a big mistake. Lots of women would kill to be in my shoes."

"They don't have to kill, steal, or anything else. Cause they can have his dog ass. Goodbye." Lamont has turned her employer against her, some of her other family members, and now even the chick she considered as a sister. He was literally making her life a living hell.

~

Danni was working behind the desk of the hotel. Lately she hadn't seen much of Mark because he was always busy with work. Still she hadn't the slightest clue what his 'work' consisted of. The relationship with Niecee was the same and

had been invited by Mark's mom to a pampering day followed by lunch. Miss Rita was so much fun to be around but she kept giving Danni these long hard glances. Her features were always soft as if she were in deep thought. It was just that Danni really wanted to know what she was thinking about.

Mark and Danni hadn't done anything X-rated since the family gathering gone all wrong. She would be a bold faced lie if she said she wasn't feeling neglected. Every time they would pass, one of them was on the way out to handle business. Besides the family dinners they happen to catch and see what's going on in each other's lives in a minimal way, they don't talk much. At night she found herself dreaming about him on a serious note but she knew that was all in her head of wanting a happily ever after. Now it was evident to her that those didn't exist.

Now that Mark didn't visit her in the night anymore further validated that what they had was pure lustful attraction. Nothing more. And obviously the attraction had worn off. All the ugly things that Lamont had said about her was starting to make her think that maybe he was on to something. Mark was apparently successful in whatever his business was, sexy as sin, with the best humble personality. Wealthy, evidently powerful, and sweet as pie all wrapped up in one amazing body. She just knew her mind was playing tricks on her because she could have sworn she just heard his chuckle. Looking around the lobby of where she worked she spotted a large muscular body that looked a lot like Mark's. The only difference is he was donning a suit. A very expensive looking suit, while Mark normally wore street clothes.

Upon further evaluation, she realized it was none other than Mark when she heard the woman with him call him Marcus. She was giggling horribly at something he said. It was evident she was flirting with him on the sly. Danni couldn't hate and say the woman was ugly unfortunately. She was well endowed in the chest department even if they looked like some fake balloons. The rest of her body was on the small side but her short skirt was so short it gave off the impression that she had some sort of hips. Her face was almost Egyptian but with a tad bit too much makeup. Removing the scowl from her face she prepared to come face to face with her.

“Good afternoon ma’am. Welcome to...” Before Danni could finish her greeting the snooty woman had cut her off.

“Yes. Yes, dear. Reservation for Beverly Cranford.” She finished with an eye roll.

“Yes ma’am. I just need to see your I.D. or the credit card you booked the room with.”

“Excuse me? You must be new here.”

“I understand that ma’am but policy says...”

“Where is the manager?”

“Is there a problem?”

“No. No problem Marcus. It seems there is a new employee that isn't aware of the regulars.” The way she said his name reminded her of how Eartha Kitt called Eddie Murphy in that movie ‘Boomerang.’

“Miss Danni.” Danni raised an eyebrow at Mark. Since when did they go back to the Miss?

“Mr. Jones.” Mark cocked an eyebrow at her greeting.

“I didn’t know you were working here.”

“Yeah, I guess I forgot to tell you exactly where I was working.”

“Mr. Jones, Ms. Cranford, nice to see you both. I apologize for the hold up.” The manager came from the rear. “Danielle I will handle this check in.”

“How do you know her and does she not know...” Mark cut off whatever else Beverly had to say.

“It’s quite alright Jimmy. She was just following protocol is all, isn’t that right Beverly?”

“Yes of course Marcus.” She swooned.

“Jimmy, please have someone show Miss Beverly to her room. If you don’t mind I would like to speak with your new employee. It should be nearing her break. Am I correct?”

“Yes sir. Not a problem.”

“Beverly I will meet you back in the restaurant.”

“Oh... I was hoping we could have a private lunch. With so much travel, I thought we could forego the hustle and bustle of a busy restaurant.”

“I completely understand that. Would you like to postpone this meeting to a later time, perhaps after you have rested?” At Beverly’s obviously stunned silence Mark made the executive decision to suggest a time. “How about we meet in the restaurant at say three?”

“Three it is.” The pure fakeness hopping off of the woman did nothing to ease the nerves in Danni. Watching the

exchange between the two, there was an obvious attraction coming off of her. Somehow Mark seemed unfazed.

“Shall we Ms. Hunter?” Mark gestured for Danni to follow him.

“Don’t worry Danielle, I will handle the front until Debbie returns.” Jimmy said eagerly.

Mark led Danni to the grand elevators in silence. From the sound of clacking heels, Beverly was in a hurry to make it in time to ride with them. Ushering Danni into the elevator he was sure to settle in the corner near the panel. There was an evident layer of thickness in the air sending off all kinds of odd vibes that made her feel so uncomfortable. Someway it felt like the Beverly woman was shooting daggers at Danni but she couldn’t figure out why that was. The bellhop escorting the obnoxious woman was even fidgeting nervously. Noticing that only one floor number was pushed, Danni prepared to get off when they arrive. Only to have Mark place a hand on her elbow to halt her movements.

“After you.” Beverly attempted at being polite speaking to Danni.

“We won’t be getting off here Beverly.”

“Oh.” She said in disappointment leaving the two of them alone.

Mark scanned the little black box on the wall with his wallet and the elevator ascended to the private level. Danni knew of that level but was aware that it was mainly for the important people of the hotel chain. Owners, investors, and people of that nature. One question kept running over and over

in her mind, 'who was De' Marcus Jones?' Although that has been one answer she had been dreading to receive, it was just something she needed to get to the bottom of. At one point he seemed so thuggish and hardcore but now it seems there is something more distinguished. That only seemed to point to one thing in her mind, mafia. As ridiculous as it sounded it could be true. Who said the mafia was only of none African American decent? He seemed so dangerous when the need arose.

Arriving at the room or apartment, whatever it was, Danni was awestruck. The room was huge with a living room, dining area, beautiful balcony, and French doors that lead to the bedroom no doubt. Glancing in that direction she saw the massive bed in the middle of the room covered in a thick white goose down comforter and pillows. The luxuriousness of the place was breathtaking. Only in her wildest dreams had she ever considered being in something like this. Here she was alone with her friend, on occasion lover, and in reality he was nothing more than a stranger. She knew nothing about him.

"Go ahead and ask away Danni." Mark broke the silence. "I can practically see the questions swirling around in your head." He chuckled. Danni had turned around only to see he had removed his jacket, loosened his tie, and was undoing his sleeves.

"Who are you really?" She asked the only question that seemed important.

"The real question is, who do you think I am?"

"Honestly?"

“That would be nice.” Mark easily slid his hands into his pockets watching her intently with no humor.

“I don’t know. Of course I have speculated but honestly I have no clue.”

“What did you speculate?” Mark asked not leaving room for her to answer. “That I was some no-good thug? Sold drugs? Kingpin. Mafia. What exactly?”

“...” Danni swallowed her nervousness.

“The crazy part is that I’m not even mad at you. I’ve heard it all before. Because I don’t dress in a suit twenty-four seven, I am labeled as a thug. Then when I do wear a suit, it seems I more dangerous. Why? I know that wasn’t how you were raised. So how did you develop that stereotype?”

“How would you know how I was raised?” Danni snapped back becoming defensive.

“I did have a conversation with your father. I happen to believe I am a good judge of character.”

“I apologize if I wrongly judged you.”

“*If?* That’s an understatement.” His face was set in stone.

“Come here Danni.” Mark never took his hands out of his pockets or changed his facial expression. He had moved around the room smoothly while they talked. Danni didn’t take her eyes off of him as he stopped at the large eating area. “Do you really think I would endanger my daughter by doing something illegal? As much as you love Niecee, if you really believed I was living that lifestyle would you report me?” She

didn't respond truly thinking about whether he seriously wanted her to answer.

"Tell me Danni. If you really allowed yourself to think the worst about me, why would you allow me to become so acquainted with you? Intimately?"

"I don't know."

"Do me a favor."

"What is it?"

"Take off your clothes."

"What?"

"Take. Off. Your. Clothes."

"Mark..."

"Either you do or I will." Danni didn't know why his threat turned her on tremendously. No matter how bad she wanted to disagree and tell him to go to hell, she refrained. "Leave the thigh highs and heels on." Feeling self-conscious of her out of shape body, she thought to cover up.

"Don't cover up. I have seen it all before anyway." Sliding the chair back from the dinette table, Mark gestured for Danni to sit on the table.

"Mark, I am too heavy for that table." She blushed profusely.

"I assure you that nothing but the sturdiest furniture is in this room." Danni was effortlessly lifted onto the table top. Hissing from the sudden coolness on her backside and heated core. "Lay back, open up, and relax." Mark demanded.

Knowing the kind of positions he has had her in before she was anticipating a serious coochie beat down.

“So thick and appealing.” Mark said huskily never taking his eyes off of her peach.

A blush quickly spread over her body accompanying goose bumps from the coolness of the room. Covering her flushed face with her hands for a second she looked up to the ceiling. Her legs were pushed further apart with his hands as she heard an appreciative grunt come from deep within him. A shiver sped down her spine feeling his thumb brush across her lower lips. Biting down on her bottom lip to hold back the moan from his touch. Instantly her clit started to harden with no further prodding. Further embarrassed from the appreciative noises coming from Mark.

“Damn you smell so damn good.” Mark leaned in sniffing her inner thighs. The feel of his breath over her center caused Danni to hiss. Automatically she tried to close her legs but failed miserably because of Mark’s strong hold.

Before Danni could imagine his next move, Mark sat down, scooted his chair up to the table, and yanked her body to his. Her legs were placed over his shoulders, thighs braced with his strong hands, and face buried deep into her goodies. Arching her back, Danni could only shriek at the shock of it all. The skills he showcased in the bedroom with his lower half was remarkable but his munching skills were terrific. Although she was so tired of comparing him to Lamont, she couldn’t help herself. Since she’d only had one other sexual partner, that’s all she had to go on. Lamont wasn’t an oral person so to have her toes curling was all too damn new.

“Mmm...Marcus.” Danni moaned feeling so good. Now she was purring his whole name. “What are you doing to me?” She questioned absentmindedly. Mark only chuckled.

“You want me to stop?” He asked lowly. Danni’s head snapped up with irritation clearly written on her face. “I guess not.” He chuckled licking his lips before continuing with a new form of urgency.

His skills were driving her mad. He caused her to buck, clutch her thighs, arch her back, and gasp moan after moan. Before long the shyness she once had evaporated. Making her grab at his head to grind into his face more if she could. After the first orgasm she was damn near in tears. He would alternate between slow, gentle, fast, and rough until she was begging for something. Too bad he only chuckled at her constant pleas because they were not clear at all.

“Cum for me baby.”

“SHIT! Again?” She sighed afraid she may pass out.

“Hummm...” Mark hummed opened mouth against her core causing her to see stars.

“Ahhh!” Lapping up all of her release, he didn’t stop until she was limp against the table.

“So damn good.” He gave her one last smack of the lips loudly. They both laughed a little to that. Danni felt all girly and giggly. “Come on let’s get you cleaned up.”

“I can’t. My legs feel like jello.”

“I’m sorry baby. It was just so damn good. I couldn’t stop.”

“It’s obvious you couldn’t stop. What about you?”

“You complaining? And I will be fine.”

“No.” They worked silently to get themselves together before proceeding to leave the suite. “I feel like such a slut-puppy.”

“Why?”

“I just engaged in a quickie of sorts on my lunch break. In one of the rooms upstairs at that. Never mind that I still didn’t get many answers.”

“I’m a business man Danni. I dabble in a little everything honestly. I dress the way I do most of the time because I don’t think I have to dress the part in order for others to know I’m successful. Is that what you needed answers on?”

“I suppose.” They rode down on the elevator together in silence.

“I will see you at home.” Danni only nodded.

“Perfect timing.” Beverly squealed when they stepped into the lobby. She must have come down on the other elevator. The look the other woman gave Danni should have made her turn to stone it was so harsh. “I am starving shall we eat.”

“Actually I already ate.” Danni choked on the gust of air she sucked in hearing him say that. “Maybe I can summon the room for a small bite. Don’t want to take away from the business we have to discuss.”

“Of course.”

“Thanks for lunch.” He caught up to Danni and whispered lowly. Obviously the other woman caught some snippets from the conversation because she looked at her with so much envy.

“How was your lunch break?” The other attendant asked.

“Fine.”

“I bet. That Mr. Jones is beyond fine. And rich.”

“Rich?”

“Yes honey. I think he is part owner of this hotel. Where have you been? What I wouldn’t give to have just a small piece of him or his fortune?” The woman by the name of Debbie gushed.

“He owns this hotel?”

“Yes amongst other venues I have been told but that’s mainly hearsay. I wouldn’t know. He doesn’t brag about his accomplishments so I guess you wouldn’t know unless he told you for sure. What did you two discuss while on lunch?”

“Oh nothing. He was just welcoming me aboard. It seems we have someone in common we both care about. Just catching up is all.”

“You are lucky. Although he comes in from time to time for business meetings and such, none of the employees have ever had legit conversations with him.”

“Oh.”

Danni went the rest of the day on autopilot not knowing what to make of the new found information. The

gossip mill is a place she didn't frequent often because of how messy the truth could get when it's passed from person to person. Somehow this rumor made sense though. Mark seemed to be a well-rounded, resourceful man. A vision of her father came to mind. 'What if I asked him to do a background check on him?' Danni quickly dismissed that notion. Mainly because it was so unnecessary to have him investigated when she could ask him herself. He gave her the opportunity but she wimped out.

The person she should have been investigating was her no good bastard of an ex. That snake had some serious tricks up his sleeve and now she was stuck taking care of it. Having taken all of her money she was stuck with the little money she received from pawning her wedding rings. She had her two emergency credit cards but she had to use those almost immediately. They ended up being used to pay her cell phone bill, outstanding car note, and insurance. Her job came right on time but if it weren't for Mark she would have been up the creek without a paddle. Having no rent or utilities to pay was a life saver. Somehow she still felt it was like taking advantage of his kindness.

One thing Danni did decide to go to her dad about was to have a background and credit check done on herself since he had easier access to all of those things. According to everything Lamont had acquired, charged up, and owned was courtesy of her. Credit cards, boutique charge accounts, and an apartment was in her name. She was stumped at quite a few things that weighed her down in the credit department. Another thing that was odd was the amount of tickets that were under her driving record. Certainly she would have

recalled getting any traffic violations. Someone was using her name to do plenty of dirt was the only thing Danni could think of.

This whole time she was under the impression that Lamont was the reason she wasn't getting any call backs for jobs. When all along some of those if not all of them were because there was a crook screwing her royally. Dragging her once tarnish free name into the muddy river and leaving her drowning in a sea of debt. Now the question remains, who? Who would hate her so much as to do something like this to her? Who would have the brains to get away with this amount of sneakiness and not be found out before now? Basically it seems someone was using her identification to acquire nice things and made just enough payments that didn't require her to be notified. One thing was for sure, when she found out who this person was, she would be pressing charges.

It had been a couple of days since the incident at the hotel. Danni and Mark had been just missing each other due to being weighed down with business issues. The limited things her dad found out on the reports from her background and credit, she made him promise not look any further into it. Being a man of his word he just passed her the information she requested with a simple, 'I'm here when you need me.' Her mother on the other hand was kind of peed off about something but wouldn't say quite what it was just yet.

"Hello Ms. Hunter. It's nice to see you again." Her lawyer Mrs. Jones greeted her warmly. It was time to have the first meeting with Lamont and his lawyer. She was not excited

in the least bit. When Mrs. Jones' secretary called to set up a date and time, Danni was a little confused. One because she hadn't made any payments thus far so why was there any room for an appointment? Two, she didn't have any money to give to her. She was under the impression nothing else was going to happen until more funds had been put towards the divorce.

“You as well.”

“You don't seem as excited as I thought you would. Are you having second thoughts?”

“No. No. Hell no. That's not going to happen.”

“Good because as I stated in the contract, I don't issue refunds.” Mrs. Jones gave her a pointed look before ushering her to have a seat on her couch. “What's bothering you?”

“Well for one I was under the impression there would be no further actions taken if the money had not been paid.”

“True.”

“Well I haven't made any payments.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite positive. If I did have the means, I would have but I don't right now.”

“Hold that thought.” Mrs. Jones buzzed her secretary to bring in a report for the payments made towards her representation. “It shows here there was a payment submitted just last week. It was paid in full.”

“I didn't make that payment. I don't have that kind of money right now. Plus I haven't been here since our first meeting.”

“It wasn’t paid in person, it was delivered by a courier service.”

“Maybe it was meant for someone else.”

“No ma’am, your information was written on the cashier’s check. No return address was on it so I placed your receipt inside of your file.”

“Well girl, looks like you have a secret donor once again. Either way, I can’t complain or should you.”

“I hate to put a damper on this mysterious savior but you two have to be at the meeting in ten minutes.” The secretary said with urgency.

“Oh shoot. Let’s go get this under way. Shall we?”

“Sure.” Danni didn’t know who her knight was... The thought that it could be Mark came to mind but she quickly dismissed that idea. Why would he do something like that? It couldn’t be. Could it?

Once they arrived in the conference room at the courthouse. They sat on opposite sides of the table with their litigators ready to get the negotiations on the way. It was hard for Danni to process that they were once a happily married couple. Or so it seemed. She was so blinded by the illusion that she was married to a man who loved her unconditionally. A man who worshipped the ground she walked on. Never bad mouthed her in a demeaning way, just to offer some words of encouragement. In his own way, Danni came to the conclusion he actually believed he had done no wrong. That he was the perfect spouse that he knew how to be. Too bad with this new

found understanding of his actions she wasn't dumb enough to forgive him. But still, she understood him just a little better.

“This should be quite simple as my client is requesting a simple divorce. Monies that were acquired during the marriage should be split down the middle as well as the debt should be taken care of accordingly. Although everything seems to be in my client's name, it is only fair that your client takes part of the responsibility.” Lamont and his lawyer shared a few words amongst themselves before the other woman glared at Danni. From the looks she had been receiving from her since they came in it was evident he was sleeping with her as well.

“Although it may seem fair to share responsibility of the bills but Mrs. Graves didn't see that as a factor when she tried to unlawfully extract my client from the premises. Because of that inconvenience Mr. Graves was forced to get a storage for his belongings for fear of his estranged wife destroying some of his other things during one of her drunken nights. My client is under the impression she was attempting to move in the man she had been having an affair with.”

“An affair? That's bullshit and you know it. You lying, sneaky son-of-a-bitch. I have never cheated on you.”

“Danielle.” Mrs. Jones tried to calm her client. They had gotten the desired rise out of her already making her look like the bad person in this.

“Against my advice, my client has requested to attend counseling sessions. Her erratic behavior may be associated with her abuse of alcohol. He is concerned for his wife and her unpredictable behavior. It's obvious she needs some kind of

psychiatric help. She may be a threat to herself and others if not addressed.”

“Absolutely NOT! I hate you for trying to pin this on me.”

“Mrs. Jones I would advise you to keep your client calm. Her outrageous outbursts is only fueling the simmering fire from her guilt of being a manipulative spouse. According to special investigations she has been seen all over town with another not her husband. The man suspected of being her lover in question.” Before Danni could say another word against them trying to slander her reputation her lawyer held up her hand to silence her.

“Now, now Miss Hawk there will be no mudslinging or hearsay. Unless you would like for me to bring forth my own investigation into your client’s dealings.”

“...”

“Very well. Because your client was so negligent in his assumed duty of taken care of the household expenses, the house is in jeopardy of foreclosure. The cars are severely behind on the lease agreements. Since my client feels it isn’t safe to live under the same roof as Mr. Graves, she decided it best to extract herself from the home. Therefore my client is willing to physically sale the home to Mr. Graves since he currently resides there. Also monies that were in the joint account belonging to my client should be returned.” After another brief discussion from the two she returned with some shocking news.

“My client is willing to fight for his marriage. He insists that this is all a misunderstanding that can be rectified.

He is even willing to forgive his wife's indiscretions. Her unstable behavior was a way of lashing out at him to get his attention. This is no more than a woman seeking attention from her spouse when he refused to start a family."

"No deal. I was hoping we could come to a serious agreement but it seems your client is not thinking clearly. This is not a game and we have nothing further to discuss."

"Perhaps it's your client that isn't thinking. Stalling for a payout."

"If you were listening instead of throwing a tantrum like a jealous lover you would see that my client only wants to leave this marriage with her maiden name."

"Excuse me?"

"You're excused. Now since this isn't a serious matter to either of you. This meeting will be adjourned. We will see you in court. Miss Hawk, Mr. Graves, have a good day." Mrs. Jones stood gesturing for Danni to do the same. Before she could get too far her arm was snatched back by a fuming Lamont.

"This isn't over Danielle. You will come crawling back when that thug has used you all up. When he is done using your oversized body he will throw you out like trash. You better hope your shoes aren't filled by then. Even then I may just let you work for me around the house." Lamont sneered loud enough for her to hear. Mrs. Jones was on the phone giving out orders when she was approached. Just as soon as he grabbed her he was storming away in the other direction with his lawyer hot on his tail.

“So much for this being easy.” Danni sighed feeling the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Chapter Twelve

Through some serious discussion with her lawyer, she was informed that it would be in her best interest to file for bankruptcy and turn her house over to the bank. That thought alone scared the mess out of her. Her parents had always taught her the value of taking care of her bills before other luxuries. Credit was needed to do just about anything in the world. Now hers was so shot she couldn't even rent an apartment without having a co-signer. Instead of investigating things further, Mrs. Jones advised her to stay clear of everything and give it over to the authorities. Agreeing to do just that only because she didn't think she had it in her to keep her hands to herself and handling things appropriately.

All in all, it had been a long day filled with disappointments. So much so that she had almost forgotten about her anonymous donor. If she asked her parents and they turned out to not be the ones who did it, they would want to know her financial status. Though she was still kind of in the same predicament with Mark as she would have been with her parents if she took their help, it just felt different. How? She couldn't explain it herself. Although she didn't want to admit, she felt at ease or maybe even at home living with Mark. She didn't know if that was a bad or good thing though. It was starting to get a little fickle even if she was honest with herself.

Pulling into the driveway, it looked as if no one was home. Sadly she was actually looking forward to seeing Mark or Niecee. Then she remembered that Niecee had a sleepover with one of her friends and wouldn't be home until later the next day. It was Friday and if Danni had any friends or even a man she could enjoy a night out. The thought of calling Beejay came to mind to see what he was up to, especially since they hadn't had time to catch up lately. He complained of being swamped and was kind of fed up with the hospital the last time they talked. Deciding that after her long shower she would shoot him a text to see if he wanted to grab some drinks or maybe hit a club. She hadn't been to 'In the Mix' since she was fired.

Walking into the dimly lit house she heard the faint sounds of slow music being played. The smell of jasmine and vanilla wafted around her filling her with a serene peace. She always favored those scents together. Slowly peaking in each room she saw there was a place setting for two in the dining room. Candles were lit, wine was chilling, and the mood was set. Immediately she started to feel jealous of the mysterious person this was set up for. Obviously Mark had a date of some sort. As quick as those ugly feelings rose up she pushed them down because she had no right to become jealous. They were just booty buddies, he could woo whomever he wanted.

"What do you think?" Mark had asked. Danni had whirled around so fast she lost her balance. Luckily Mark had good reflexes. "Whoa there."

"Sorry. You scared me."

“I guess you could say I like the ending results of startling you.”

“Is that so?”

“You always end up in my arms one way or another. Do you like horror movies?”

“Not really. I’m too scary.”

“Good maybe we could watch one.”

“Ugh, just messy.”

“What? I know you will be snuggled all up under me that way.” Mark chuckled. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“What was that?”

“What do you think of all of this?” He asked spinning her around to look at the room.

“It’s beautiful. I was just about to make myself scarce.”

“Why would you do that?”

“You have a date right?”

“Yes.” Danni felt her insides clench at his low yes. “You.” She felt his body heat against her back while he let their intertwined hands hang at her side.

“Me?”

“Uhh, yeah. Go wash your hands and meet me back here. I was fixing our plates when you walked in.”

“...” Danni was speechless but she wasn’t dumb enough to not do as he asked.

“Wine?”

“Yes.” Danni answered. “This looks delicious.” On her plate was some stuffed salmon, grilled asparagus, and wild rice. In the center of the table there was a platter of sliced bruschetta bread covered with tomatoes, blue cheese, parsley, and shredded parmesan cheese.

“Thank you.”

“Where did you buy this from?”

“Ha, funny. My mama made sure I could throw down, I have you know.”

“Wow that she did. This is so good.”

“I’m glad you approve.” Mark decided to quit watching Danni eat and dig into his own plate. “So how was your day?”

“Trust me you don’t want to know. I don’t want to spoil this wonderful atmosphere.”

“Nothing could spoil it. Now spill it.”

“If you say so.” Danni went on to tell him the events of her hectic day. He listened intently never passing judgment as he has so many times when she needed to clear her mind. The more she talked the more she felt guilty that he never has a chance to discuss anything about him. Maybe that’s why she doesn’t know much about him. He would make the opportune spouse. “See that’s why I didn’t want to talk about my day. I just occupied the entire dinner.” Danni shook her head finishing her wine.

“It’s cool baby, quit tripping. I asked because I wanted to hear it not because it sounded like a nice thing to say.” Mark said with a genuine smile. He excused himself to run upstairs

while Danni chilled listening to music. “Come on, I got something else for you.”

“What?”

“Get up woman and come on.” He dragged her from the chair and up the stairs. She would be honest in admitting she always wanted to come upstairs to look around but didn’t want to seem too forward. This was his house so if she wasn’t invited she wouldn’t dare invite herself.

Stepping over the threshold into his room she was floored, his room was another page straight out of home and garden. His huge king sized bed sat up on a platform against the far wall. There was a sitting room, with two chaises separated by a glass antique table, and a wall to wall entertainment center built in. His room resembled something that royalty would have in their bedrooms. The lights were dimmed in the room as well with the covers pulled down, rose petals all over the sheets, and the large television added the fireplace feel to the room. On the screen was a fire flickering giving the room such a romantic feel. He let her peruse the bedroom for a minute or two longer before gently pulling her into the adjoining bathroom.

Candles surrounded the bathroom, bubbles sat in the huge Jacuzzi tub, and the scent of sweet jasmine mixed with honey was all over the place. Neither Danni nor Mark uttered a word as he let her astounded appraisal say it all. Removing her clothes one article at a time until she was naked as the day she was born, he pulled her hair up into a ponytail at the top of her head. Successfully folding it over into a bun so it wouldn’t

get too wet. The moisture in the air would still be enough to make her natural main curl up but she didn't care.

How careful he was in attending to her was all too much for her. Never in her adult life had anyone ever done anything like this for her. Danni could feel the tightening in the back of her throat as she shook her head to clear the haze of emotions trying to dampen this set up. Just like that Mark had scooped Danni up into his arms bridal style stepping into the water. Taking his seat having Danni situate herself between his legs with her back against his chest.

“Is the water too hot?”

“No it's perfect.”

“Good.” They sat in a comfortable silence for a bit.

“You alright?”

“I'm more than alright.”

“That's all I needed to hear.”

“You didn't have to do this.”

“I know but I wanted to.” Mark said. “Just relax.” A good half an hour later, when the water had started to lose its warmth, Mark gently washed her body. He didn't have to tell her twice to relax because she ended up being putty by the time he was done.

Giving her the signal to rise up so he could get out. She watched with hooded eyes as he dried off. Wrapping the towel around his waist he smirked at her quiet appraisal of his physical features. Holding a towel out for her to step into, she did so without hesitation. Draining the tub he escorted her back to the bedroom. After she was dried off, he assisted her

onto his high bed. Telling her to turn over on her stomach. He placed the towel over her lower half before getting onto the bed with her. Looking over her shoulder she saw he had positioned himself over her body careful not to lean all of his body weight on her.

Warm oil was poured onto her back, followed by strong soft hands. The effect his hands were having on her body was like a dream. Straight out of a massage therapy manual, his skills were greatly appreciated. Having gone to massage studios before, this one by far was the best she had ever had. By the time ten good songs had gone by her entire body was oiled and rubbed down. She had sung every song that came on, that was the only reason she knew how time had passed. Aroused beyond measure, she stayed awake the entire time he kneaded all of her stressed out muscles.

“Hope I could make you feel a little better.”

“You did that and so much more. Thank you Mark.”

“No need to thank me.”

“I have to thank you some way.”

“What do you have in mind?” He had a wicked gleam in his eyes. If Danni could get any hornier she was sure she would.

Instead of answering she pushed him down on the bed climbing on top of him starting at his neck working her way down slowly. The groans coming from him let her know she was indeed affecting him the way he always did her. She knew where she was headed she just hoped she got it right. By the time she made it to the extremely hardened, long, thick

member surrounded by soft hairs. She just massaged it looking up to see Mark watching her every move.

Still mesmerized by his size even though she'd felt him deep inside her on several occasions at all speeds. Before she lost her nerve she applied the appropriate pressure to make his eyes drift closed to take some of the attention away from her. If he watched her please him she wasn't sure if she would be able to do it. Moistening her lips, she inserted the tip into her mouth causing him to hiss from surprise. Repeating the previous step taking more and more of his length in before Mark stopped her.

"Shit. Wait Danni." He tried to catch his breath. "You don't have to do this."

"But I want to." Danni said boldly. "Unless you don't like it." The shyness tried to resurface and override the new bold Danni.

"You're kidding right?" At her serious face he knew she was dead ass. "Trust me it was fine but I can tell that's not what you do."

"Then teach me."

"Huh?"

"You heard. I want to learn how to... you know."

"You're serious?"

"Very. Either you teach me or I learn on my own. Using you as a practice subject."

"Shit you can use me as a practice subject whenever you want. I can't really tell you what to do besides don't use

your teeth. An occasional brush of your teeth is fine but other than that just do what feels natural to you.”

Danni took into consideration what he said. Going back to the task at hand. The grunts, groans, and curses coming from him let her know she must have been doing something right. His mushroomed head hardened alerting her that he was close to cumming, so she recalled the informational tool she had read about pleasing your partner. In the tutorial it explained that men have a spot between the scrotum and anus called a perineum. Out of curiosity she applied said pressure and sure enough, he was still hard but the sensation to cum had passed.

“What the hell...” He pulled Danni upright with the quickness seeming almost dizzy. “Shit...”

“Did I hurt you?”

“Hell no. That was...oh my damn... what have you been reading?”

“...” Danni just giggled.

“Look baby if you are going to do that I need you to do me a favor.”

“What is that?”

“Give me something to keep my mouth and mind occupied because you got me sounding like a girl.” He chuckled shaking his head.

“You mean...”

“Hell yeah that’s what I mean.”

“Mark I am not sitting...”

“Yes the hell you are. Either in that direction or in the riding position but I’m gonna get my desert. Which do you choose?”

Choosing the sixty-nine position it was as he took her to another world so tough she was finding it hard to concentrate on her own task. They were like two lovers battling over who could make the other scream out first. Danni was officially a quick learner as she focused on sucking him into submission. He let go of her pearl to damn now growl a moan. Smacking her ass with his large hands as he erupted into her mouth. Climbing off of him satisfied with her new found skill set, she relaxed against the pillows at the head of the bed. Sipping from the wine glass to chase the surprisingly sweet tasting essence of Mark, she didn’t have to wait long to see what was next.

Mark’s predatory crawl towards her had her interest truly peaked. Wanting to know just what he had up his sleeve. Plucking the glass from her hand, he put it on the nightstand. Smothering her with his luscious kisses made her eyes flutter shut. So much was being transferred through their lip service. Their bodies were molded together like clay figures. Sculptured with sensual caresses to create the perfect explicit piece of art. Like magnets, Danni felt Mark’s rather large member glide into its spot deep within her. Nestling comfortably to the hilt. A grateful moan was passed between the two to be joined in such a fashion. Without breaking the heated embrace and lip-lock, Mark started a slow mating dance. Missionary never felt so good.

Long, deep, strong, and repetitive strokes were about to drive Danni crazy. Her soul was weeping, her lip was sore

from biting down, and every nerve ending in her body was on high alert. This felt different on so many different levels. Instead of fast-paced, head board banging sex this was a conversation for the entire body. Sweet, slow, passionate, and downright erotic almost mimicking the real thing. Why would Mark make love to her? They weren't in a relationship. They weren't even dating. Nothing serious. No strings attached. Until now.

“Mark?” Danni half moaned, the other half questioned his movements. The sensations flowing through her veins were so hypnotizing that she was finding it hard to breathe. She didn't know how long he had been gently stroking her body but her emotions were starting to get the best of her.

“Don't hold back.” Mark said soothingly against her neck where he was brushing kisses and sucking. No doubt leaving behind love bites. The overwhelming sensation to let go was indeed powerful. Normally her eyes would be shut tight, this feeling however was different from all the others. Eyes wide open just in time to make eye contact with none other than Mark himself. From the look on his face he was thoroughly enjoying the reactions he was pulling from her.

Being it was extremely hard to tear her eyes away from his as it seemed it was equally hard for him. Danni was no dummy and she had read so many sex therapy books. According to the books, eye contact during intimacy was the ultimate experience. It causes the bodies to sync into one, share emotions, and increase the bond between lovers. Even with that information clear, she still couldn't look away. An invisible force was keeping them paralyzed right in that spot moaning, panting, and breathing one another's air.

“Cum with me baby.”

“...” Danni could only nod her head in recognition that she understood what he wanted her to. When the tense heated moment had passed, Mark smashed his lips against hers. Successfully taking her breath away. Her inner muscle perked up from the tingles that were quickly spreading. That only resulted in Mark’s member to stiffen considering he had just blew a load. Danni realized he never removed himself from inside her like he normally would with a rubber on.

“Round two it is.” Mark said while biting his bottom lip. Leaning his forehead against Danni’s he started grinding just little harder but still at an unhurried pace. The feeling was more intense than the one before but still saying something.

Danni noticed the music choices in the background described their meeting in the bedroom to a tee. Groups from Silk, Dru Hill, Jodeci, Guy, and so many more were crooning their sexual cocoon. Danni begun to dig her nails into his back, arch her back into him leaving her neck fully exposed. Mark took full advantage kissing her chin, throat, and down to her collar bone. Interlacing one of her hands with his and leaning on the other to keep all of his weight off of her, he delivered thrust after thrust.

Without warning Mark lifted up resting on his knees bringing Danni along with him. Wrapping her shapely legs around him, arms around his neck, she allowed him to move her body against his. The new position was another intense one that took her breath away once again. Mark was full of surprises as she could tell. Getting the hang of how he wanted her to move she started to mimic the pace he established.

Chasing her own release she tried to speed things up but Mark wasn't having any of that. Obviously he had something else in mind and fast banging was not it.

As if she were light as a feather, Mark maneuvered them further up the bed until her back hit the soft cool leather of his massive head board. She didn't have a clue of how this was going to work but it left barely any room between the two. At the moment she couldn't really complain. Enjoying the closeness they shared even if it was for the time being. In her mind she knew this had to stop. This needed to be the last time. Feelings were starting to get involved. At least on her part and she wasn't anywhere near that type of commitment.

“OH Mark!” Danni exclaimed feeling him thrust in at a punishingly steady pace. Her toes were curling, digging into the soft mattress from being planted flat. Somehow he had managed to have her up in a deep squatted position with her knees at a perfect ninety degree angle. Her breasts were in his grasp as his head alternated from one to the other. Although her cookie was feeling a little over worked, she was tingling and shooting off her own essence happily. “Oh Gawd... I'm gonna cum.”

Dropping his hands down from her boobs to her butt, Mark grinding faster and faster chasing both of their releases. Danni felt like she was going to faint from the passion. Mark kept going like he was possessed ripping another scream of a release from Danni before the previous one could subside. She never knew that was possible. Of course she had read about it but felt it was another thing. By the time he came she was a shivering mess trying to get some relief anywhere.

Both of them were breathing hard trying to gain some sort of normalcy. Her body sagged against his completely drained, his strength held them both up. Tenderly he kissed her brow before extracting himself from her warmth. Mark had laid back on the mattress carefully bringing Danni with him. They laid at the foot of the bed for the top was saturated with juices and sweat. The last thing Danni remember was being pulled into his arms and the sheet being pulled over their sated bodies. She was out like a light soon followed by Mark.

Mark woke up the next morning kind of early considering everything that had happened the night before. What possessed him to do the things he did with Danni? He wasn't quite sure yet. One thing was for sure he wanted to give her a dose of how a woman should be treated. If she was his woman, there would be no doubt whether she was loved. Cherished every day and night without pause. And not just sexually. Danni was a good girl treated badly. So bad that she somehow didn't think she deserved to have a good man by her side. He had caught her during one of her pity parties one too many times confirming she believed everything that bastard had said to her.

Every hateful word, sentence, threat, and insult aimed towards her from him was taken to heart. Just recalling the chance meeting with that bastard made his knuckles itch. What he wouldn't give to sucker punch that fool with all of his body thrown into the mix. Speaking of his club, the punk bastard had the nerve to show up at the spot with a chick that looked awfully familiar. For some strange reason he couldn't pin point where he'd knew her from. From what Danni had said,

while being angry, he was into white women now. This chick, although light skinned was far from being that dang light. It took everything in him not to storm over there and knock him around a couple of times just for the sheer enjoyment of it.

Danni didn't deserve the treatment that had been dished from him. He wanted to do everything within his power to prove to her that all men were not scum. Since they never officially said anything about dating, moving things to another level, or even being interested outside the bedroom he kept his opinion to himself. The truth was he was interested in Danni on a deeper level but considering the fragile state she was in, he knew she wouldn't be ready. The first time he laid eyes on her, he knew she was special but the wedding ring pointed out she was not available. No matter how attractive a woman was, Mark didn't do married women. Well at least up until he got to know Danni a bit more he didn't. Ever since that faithful night that things went wild between them, he had been addicted to her. Technically she was married by law but emotionally she was free gain. Mark wanted that gain so very badly.

"Mark..." Danni moaned. "What time is it?" She asked groggily.

"Time for you to open up." Mark had grown impatient waiting for her to wake. Soon it would be time to pick Niecee up and he needed his fill before then.

"...Morning breath and all... really?" She asked and giggled. Trying to hide her face from him.

"Nothing a little mouth lip service won't rid. It will be fine. Now open up and let daddy in."

“Daddy huh?” Danni instinctively opened her legs allowing him to slide into place without much effort.

“That’s right baby. Daddy.” Mark glided in with ease knowing full well she always kept it wet for him. Using the bottom of the bed as leverage he gripped the mattress after situating Danni’s legs around his torso. Hitting all the right spots while tapping the very back of her tunnel. It felt so damn good he wanted to scream out his damn self.

“Oh shit... *Daddy* just like that.”

“I thought you would see it my way.” Mark figured if she would let him have his way all of the time, then in no time she would be all his. In and out of the bedroom. Would she be willing, was the billion dollar question?

Chapter Thirteen

The friendship that Danni had with his daughter was another major attraction on the outside of her voluptuous body. At first meeting after introductions were made, he couldn't help but watch her hips sway naturally as she showed them to her office. Pointing out he had been her savior the night before was only to sooth his bruised ego that she hadn't remembered him. The fact that he went home that night wishing she would have been sober enough to ask him to stay with her was enough to never forget the beauty. When she spoke up on his parenting is when he felt a little defensive because he hadn't known that his daughter was going through some things. He felt stupid for believing the 'nothing is wrong daddy' bit that Niecee always gave when in his gut he felt something was off.

Sadly that situation still wasn't over. They had a court date scheduled for eight weeks' time where the judge wants to hear everyone's side of the story. Even Niecee will be summoned to tell her side and ultimately make a decision on where she would like to live. Unfortunately even though he has one of the best attorney's money can buy he still doesn't want to get his hopes up too soon. Things could always make a turn for the worst. Besides his mother, he hadn't even thought about sharing his baby girl with another woman. That's why he didn't date because the whole step-parent thing tends to get tricky. Folks act a certain way until the papers are filed and then flip doing all kinds of screwed up things.

Danni had already developed a lioness protecting her cub syndrome to Niecee and didn't even realize it yet. Niecee clung to her more than he could ever recall her clinging to her birth mother. That tramp still hadn't reached out for anything other than to issue threats and demand money. Not once had she called to check up on her to see how she was doing. Something simple as demanding visitation, nothing. That further let him know she really didn't care. She obviously only saw Niecee as a payday. A hefty payday at his current financial status. Back in the day was more of an on demand cash cow, now it was strictly through the courts of his own doing. He would never understand how selfish folks really are. Only if he knew then what he knew now.

The era of his life when he found out Theresa was pregnant was a blessing and curse. It was the happiest mixed with the saddest moment of his life. Happy blessing being that he was going to be a daddy. He was finally going to have someone to call his very own. Even if he was still in high school, Mark had a lot going for himself. Not all of it was legal starting out but things happen and some shit floats. The good part about it was that he knew he wouldn't live illegally all of his life. That would just be plain stupid and the main reason why so many were locked up at the top of the game.

They didn't know when to leave. Theresa was a sweet girl that loved her hard core man. Never had any qualms about his thug life days. As far as he knows she wasn't a gutter rat or at least not until after him. He blamed himself for creating a money grubbing monster like her. When he was high in the game he was all she could dream of in a man. As soon as he found out she was pregnant he started to make his plans

known to end his fast money living. That's when she turned into the curse.

Come to find out Theresa loved the fast life so much that she didn't want him to stop. After begging him didn't pan out she resulted in threatening to leave him if he stopped. That was an eye-opener for Mark. Instead of getting the desired rise out of him as she thought, she got dumped. Crying, throwing fits, and threatening to sell him out proved pointless as well when he called her bluff. No matter, she knew she still had him where she wanted him because of the baby. The saddest part kicked in meaning his baby girl would be all the bargaining chip that Theresa would ever need to make him do whatever to keep seeing her. Whether it was extra money here or new clothes there, Mark provided.

Once he went legit and money wasn't as easy to come by he put himself on child support. Mainly because he didn't have money like that to keep throwing away. Sadly he didn't have the means to take Niecee away at the time either. Business was his major and key take overs was his game. A professor he considered as more of a mentor had no dependents to leave his business to when he became ill with cancer. Having put Mark through a work study program in his small financial company and later allowing him to be an intern, helped him prove himself worthy. Some questioned his sanity at assigning this kid he barely knew as his beneficiary.

Either way it seemed he had to start from the ground up to make it so much more. Doubted by the employees that were already there as well as prove to himself he was more than a little punk from the hood. At twenty years old he worked from sun up to sun down pounding the pavement,

gaining customers. In three years' time thanks to his day and night dedication he forced the company to grow substantially. From a nickel and dime to a million dollar corporation, it didn't take as long as most would think.

Sometimes he regrets he didn't look into full custody sooner and he will have to live with his decision for the rest of his life. He just wanted to be sure he did all he could to make sure his child would have everything she ever needed as well as a legacy to pass on. Plus the claims that she was stable where she was always played a part. Niecee never complained about anything so he thought he would be uprooting her if he stepped in so late. Boy did he feel like an ass for believing anything Theresa or her buck-teeth mama had to say. One major corporation and countless investments in other venues was something he was proud of. But to have a family was one wish he would love to come true. Business was good but a family would be better.

“Hey baby. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Hey mama.” Mark hugged his mother.

Their relationship was always touch and go earlier in his years, now it couldn't be further from the truth. She had a tough time when he was coming up. Money was always funny but she made him promise to not fall into the wrong crowd. Of course he did the exact opposite of what she asked but what kid didn't. As bad as it may sound he doesn't regret or want to take back any of the things he has done. He honestly thinks they made him the man he is today. That is one of the reasons

he has no qualms on hiring a brother with a sketchy background if he is at least expressing a need for change.

“I just wanted to come check on you. I missed you. All you seem to care about now a days is Niecee.” He pouted like the big baby he was. Mama’s baby. Only in private though.

“Mama’s baby boy.”

“Only boy.”

“Whatever. Where is my grandbaby?”

“At the mall with Danni and some of her friends.”

“Ah... How is my future daughter-in-law?”

“Did I miss something?” Mark asked with a brow raised. “Do you have another kid I don’t know about? What kind of secrets are you keeping woman?”

“Boy don’t play dumb with me. I see the way you look at her when you think no one is looking. News flash, I was looking. And as slick as you both think you are, so is Niecee.”

“Whoa! What?”

“I will not beat around the bush. Niecee has expressed her desire for you and Danni to be a couple. She has it in her head that you all would make the perfect family. And surprisingly enough she wants you two to give her siblings. I hate to break it to you but I have to agree with my very intelligent granddaughter. You two would make a great duo. In turn making great parents.”

“I admit I do feel something for Danni on the outside of friendship but...”

“But what?”

“She has been through a lot. Her ex has messed her up in the self-esteem department. I don’t know if I could deal with the constant skeptical looks and untrusting feelings.”

“You can and you will. In time.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because you’re already in love with her.”

“Hold up lady. I never said that.”

“And you didn’t deny it neither.”

“What if that’s not enough?”

“Then it’s her loss.”

“Why are the answers so easy for you to reveal?”

“Because mama knows all dear.”

“If you say so.”

“I do say so. You want to know what else I say.” Rita didn’t give Mark a chance to respond. “That Danni is the one. It may not happen immediately but it will happen. Everything that has happened, you are her knight to restore her value. Mark my words.”

Mark took what his mother had to say about his situation with Danni as he left her place. He would be a bold face lie if he denied the fact that he felt strongly for her. Something on the lines of love. Was he absolutely in love with her? He couldn’t be sure. He had never been in love before. Had he loved before? Of course but this was deeper. It was different. Very intense feelings of this magnitude could break a person’s will to live if crushed. What if she didn’t return those feelings? That was the most important hiccup. If he were in

love all alone with no inkling of her reciprocating would be devastating.

“Hey. If it isn’t my two favorite ladies.” Mark greeted walking into the den of his home. He hadn’t seen Danni all day. Ever since he woke her up with a bang. Literally. Danni had offered to go get Niecee from her friends because they were begging to keep the party going. Wanting to go to the movies and mall for a bit, Danni stepped in knowing Mark really didn’t want to do it.

“Hey daddy.”

“Hey baby girl.”

“Hey miss lady. How are you?”

“I’m okay, how has your day been?”

“It’s been cool. Just handling a little business here and there. Nothing strenuous. What have you two been up to?”

“Chilling. For now that is.” Danni sighed heavily.

“What’s going on? Something on your mind?”

“Nothing serious. I just have some investigations to do. A little research for myself. Not to mention I have to go by my old house to clean out some things. Since it’s about to be foreclosed on, I might as well finish getting rid of anything that belongs to me.”

“Need some help?”

“Nah, you have done enough. Mark you can’t keep bailing me out you know that right?”

“Who said I was trying to bail you out? I just want to make sure you get everything. Between your car and my truck we should be able to get everything.” Mark said easily while sifting through some mail. “Plus any investigation that you plan to do doesn’t sound too safe.”

“Are you kidding me? My dad is a private investigator.”

“Exactly sweetheart, he is. You are not.”

“You are so out of line.” Danni giggled. Mark remembered what his mother said about Niecee so he chose that moment to gage her reaction to their conversation. She just sat aside smiling like a Cheshire cat. Like she knew something that neither of them knew.

“Yeah Danni let daddy help. I would hate for you to throw your back out or something.”

“Alright, ganging up on me I see.” Danni smiled. “Honestly there is no need for us both to drive. Actually it would be fine if we just took your truck.”

“I can stay here until you two get back. I have homework anyway.”

“You are so not slick young lady.” Mark whispered for only Niecee to hear. She just smirked. “You ready to roll out so we can get back.”

“Yeah sure.”

“Pizza good for dinner?”

“Works for me.” Both Niecee and Danni said before busting out laughing.

“Two peas in a pod or double mint twins?” Mark shook his head escorting Danni to his Avalanche.

Pulling up to a modern two story home, Mark couldn't help but compliment the look of the place. It was indeed a nice looking place if you were into that type. He preferred the suburban feel over city living. It just felt more personal for him. Upon entering is when he wanted to take it all back. Although the inside was sleek and pristine, it had a cold feel to it. Nothing about it screamed, 'honey I'm home.' That was a definite no-no to him. How on earth did she manage to live here? It was so dreary and felt damn near untouchable.

“It used to look a little homier but I kind of rectified that.” Danni spoke into the silence that stretched between them. Mark hadn't said a thing about what he felt. Another sign that she may just be what Doctor Rita ordered.

“I didn't say anything.”

“You didn't have to. The look on your face said it all.”

“How did you rectify it?”

“Let's just say it was a lot messier a while ago. Well actually twice I destroyed things in here.” Danni giggled nervously.

“You went all Angela Basset in here huh?”

“Screaming 'I'm not gone cry, I'm not gone shed no tears!'”

“I can see that.”

“I’m kidding. I wasn’t singing but I did do quite a bit of damage.”

“Come on let’s get done with this. This place is...”

“Cold.”

“Pretty much.”

“Sadly that described my marriage, yet I am just now figuring that out.”

“It will get better with time.”

“Honestly, I don’t really care anymore.” Danni showed Mark what all she wanted to take. He didn’t want her to lift a finger so she basically packed anything else she wanted while he loaded. Hearing a car pull into the garage out back broke her from her thoughts. She was dreading the day she came face to face with HIM again.

“What the hell are you doing here? Finally ready to end this charade or did the thug finally put you out. Finally tired of your boring ass?” Lamont sneered.

“You were always good at assuming. Since you like to make an ASS out of yourself let me burst your bubble. I came to get the rest of my things out of this cold place you call home.”

“Still on the ghetto kick, I see. You are pathetic. I can’t believe I wasted all this time trying to train your simple ass. I should of left you to those nobodies you used to hang around with. Obviously you like scum from the looks of who you choose to associate with currently.” Mark made his presents known to Danni but obviously Lamont was on a role and hadn’t figured it out just yet.

“Fuck you Lamont. Your high and mighty ass. You have no clue of what you speak of. You are beneath me and anyone else you have put down.” “That a girl,’ Mark thought to himself.

“Beneath you? That’s rich. Sadly you actually believe that shit you are spewing. The best you could do was find some nobody who nine times out of ten only wants a taste of that boring sex of yours. Tell me Danni, does that bastard know that I was your first and only. You never forget your first. That I taught you everything you know. How bad did you have to beg him to touch your fat ass? Did you cry and make him feel pity for you so he would touch you? A pity fuck.” He snorted.

“He probably is disgusted with himself for even going there with you? Who would want you? Be happy I put up with your whiney ass as long as I did. I tried to be the fall guy and let you blame me for everything. The failure of our marriage was not all on me. When are you going to take some of the blame? You were barely good enough to suck...”

“That’s enough!” Mark barked. He was so sick and tired of hearing this bastard bad mouth Danni. All the while she stood there taking every tongue lashing he gave. From the sight of her heavy breathing and rapid tears that flowed from her eyes, she was damn near defeated.

“How dare you bring your fuck buddy into my house?” Lamont yelled at Danni making her flinch away from him. “Have you lost your mind?”

“How dare I do what?” Danni asked starting to fume. “You’re kidding right? I have listened to you berate me for the

last time. Lamont you can jump off the nearest bridge with your dump truck load of bull shit and sink to the bottom instantly. You thought I wouldn't notice the small signs of another woman being in this house. And you are questioning what I am doing?"

"While you're playing house, being his whore and nanny, someone had to do your job." Lamont smirked.

"Luckily she knows the house so well."

"You've had her here before. You are disgusting."

"Whatever. Just get your shit and get out." Suddenly Mark saw a female making her way into the house. He recognized her instantly but didn't think it was wise that she just showed up during this time. But who was he to stop the inevitable.

"What the hell? Danni who is this and what is going on here?" The woman asked looking between the two heated faces and then Marks curious one.

"This is her fuck buddy and he was just helping her get her shit out. Would you like to lend a hand? You know with you being damn near sisters and all." Lamont asked with a sinister smirk.

"Danni, you are really going through with this?" The woman asked. Mark was looking at the woman in a disbelieving way. 'What was really going on,' he found himself truly confused.

"Nat, you are still on this bullshit I see. You are in cahoots with this bastard after everything he has done to me.

He has badmouthed you every chance he's gotten and yet you stand here like I'm the bad guy."

"Danni it's not like that." The woman now known as Nat tried to defend herself.

"Then what is it like? I am curious."

"Be careful what you ask for. I don't think you want to bark up this tree." Lamont's smirk grew wider. "Maybe it's time to skin the cat alive. Curiosity did kill the cat after all."

"Lamont don't do this. This is not the time."

"Why not? The whore she really is has begun to surface. It must run in the family. The loyalty is quite comical if you ask me."

"Do what? Loyalty, I don't understand." Danni looked between those two truly confused. Mark feared this was going to be the breaking point for real. The shit was going to hit the fan for sure. "What is going on?"

"I don't think this is the appropriate thing to discuss in front of strangers." Nat had the nerve to look at Mark like he was gum on the bottom of her shoe.

"I think it's the perfect place. If you ask me." Lamont shrugged.

"Well I'm asking you and Mark is the least of your worries if someone doesn't start explaining what I am missing here."

"Sure thing my dear wife. You see, your dear sister here has been the one keeping house while you've been away. Doing god knows what with your little thug boyfriend."

“LAMONT?!” Nat yelled his name.

“I’m just pointing out how incredibly dumb the *therapist* really is. She did all that research on me only to come up with nothing. When the main ass I have been tapping for some years now was right under her nose the entire time. The one you complained to, Nat was the same one who would tell me about how pitiful you really were as she bounced on my lap. You were often the topic of discussions before, after, and sometimes during our sessions. Isn’t that right?”

“Is that true?” Danni asked looking at no one in particular. Her head was tilted to the side but her eyes were staring off into space.

“Danni...”

“Yes or no?”

“Yes.” Nat whispered. Before anyone could blink Danni had slapped Nat so hard, she rocked the couch when she fell on it. “Danni wait, the baby.” Nat shouted protecting her stomach.

“Baby?!” Lamont was now the one confused. “What baby?”

“Please Nat tell me it’s not his.” Danni was damn near pleading.

“It just happened.”

“Just happened? He was my husband Natalie. MINE.” Danni stomped near her like she was going to stomp her out but thought against it taking a much needed step away. “And your dumb ass was so hell bent on fucking anything with a hole you forgot the number one rule. Strap up or make sure

she was heavily boggled down with birth control. Now I know it was just me you took all the necessary precautions as to not knock up. From your reaction it's evident you never wanted kids."

"Or the fact that you just weren't good enough. I didn't want your ass to get fatter." Lamont bucked. Danni lunged for him after successfully punching him in his jaw. Mark was quick on his feet grabbing for her before Lamont realized what hit him.

"Calm down baby, it ain't worth it." Mark tried to sooth her but it was no use. He knew he was going to have to use some force.

"Bitch! Wait until I get my hands on you." Lamont shouted. Mark pushed him back before he could get too close to lay a hand on Danni.

"I can't believe you got her pregnant. I HATE YOU. I'm not good enough? You will rot for this one. I hope she drains you dry you bastard." She was behind his back trying to get around him.

"Stop!" He shouted and Danni instantly stopped. "Fuck him. Fuck them both. Let's go."

"That's right get out of my house the both of you before I call the police."

"Danni, I'm sorry. Just let me explain."

"Go to hell with your explanations. I never want to see you again."

"But we are family."

“Supposed to be family. Real family would never do something so despicable.” Danni said sadly. “You two deserve each other.”

~

Upon arriving back at the house, Danni went straight to the basement to get herself together. Mark went to check on Niecee before giving her instructions on ordering dinner and giving them a few minutes to talk alone. He rushed to the basement apartment to find Danni was in the shower with the bathroom steamed up to a point where he could hardly see. Niecee was on the phone with her little friends so he knew she wouldn't bother them for a bit. He had exactly forty-five minutes before the pizza arrived.

Killing two birds with one stone was how he was going to proceed. Stripping down to nothing he slid into the shower with Danni. She had her back against the shower wall just letting water fall over her head and body. Caging her against the wall is what snapped her out of her daze. The sight of her sad face made his own heart clench. It was breaking his heart to see her like that. He just wanted to make the pain go away if only for a minute.

With no words whatsoever, Mark picked Danni up settling between her thick thighs. No foreplay was needed because he knew her body like his very own. Her cookie was always nice and moist for his sampling. Sliding in with ease had Danni clutching his back, shuddering from the feel of him deep inside of her. Watching her closely to see if she had any objections or was uncomfortable in any way, she only nodded that she was ready. Danni's head rolled against the wall,

shutting her eyes, and relaxed letting Mark chase away all the pain. The stress that held her body captive in a tense rivalry was no match for the massage given to her moist walls.

Slow and easy, he pumped with ease while holding her gently in his arms like she was fine china. Sex wasn't the cure for everything but it sure lessened the hurt from certain things. Danni's soft whimpers turned into hearty moans and pleading him not to stop. Mark felt a pull like no other to fill her up to the brim with want to overpower the hateful things that her ex had dealt. Shitty words and insults, his cheating, betrayal, Mark wanted to chase them away.

He wanted to make it all better. But how? He didn't know how she would react to what he was going to tell her. He had come to realize his mother was absolutely right. He was in love with Danni. That's why he always wanted to make everything all better. Never wanted to see her cry unless it was from sheer happiness or extreme pleasure. Pleasure that he knew without a doubt he was delivering now.

"Ahh..." She panted with her mouth open with a tears coming from the corner of her eyes. He waited to hear the one thing he knew would flow from her lips. "Mark..." She sighed before biting into her bottom lip. A sure sign that she was cumming hard.

"Baby." Mark groaned feeling her inner walls grip him like no other. As the previous night, he let his stream go freely into her womb. They never discussed whether she was on birth control or not but he didn't care. He knew he wanted Danni. Now the question was, did she want him?

Chapter Fourteen

Danni was dumbstruck at the events that had occurred in the last months. Just before her anniversary she was happily married with future plans of becoming a mother. They lived in a nice house, pleasant neighborhood, and didn't want for a thing. Sex life was decent to say the most. Job was simply a paycheck. The full support of family with one being the closest to a sister that she would ever have. With a flick of the wrist it seems all she really had was tainted truths. An abstract perception of what her life truly was surrounded by.

Her husband was a filthy dog that laid with any and every thing with a vagina. For all she knows he could have been a turd burglar as well. Everything and everyone she once thought she knew, now she understands it was all a mirage. Lamont played her like a cello with no sheet music. All the talk of it not being the time to start a family now meant he wasn't ready to settle down. Maybe he knew his shit was going to hit the fan and blow up the peace they once had. Now she was ecstatic that he wouldn't agree to start their family. She could just imagine having to go through a divorce having a dependent. A bitter custody battle is no place for a child to be in the middle like a bargaining chip.

The house she once considered as home all because it was what her husband wanted. The head of the household that was to be in charge of insuring things ran smoothly. Kept the bills paid, made his wife feel safe, and do all the things the

man of the house is supposed to do. Instead of taking care of home, he screwed it with a diseased cock. A rotted, rusted, no good, and chlamydia diseased penis is what he delivered. With no Vaseline or KY jelly in site for a smooth glide. The home was to be foreclosed on because there is no way she could come up with that much money. There was no way she could even walk into a bank and request a loan or refinance. Lamont had screwed her royally.

No husband. No baby. No house. And to top it off, the only person she had that was as close as a sister was screwing her right along with the bastard. All the time Natalie had listened to Danni cry about her home life. The fears of being left dusted and disgusted by her husband were swept under the rug. Nat would tell her to suck it up and be a woman. Be there for your man. So many other pieces of pointless advice when she was the one banging him all along. Sadly she didn't even want to know how long. It was disgusting to even think about having shared a man with a chick she was raised with. Terribly enough she just wants to blame herself for being so damned blind to what was going on around her.

“As dumb as this question probably sounds, are you alright?” Mark asked. They were currently sitting in the downstairs den watching movies. Niecee had long retired. It had been an interesting weekend to say the least.

“Just peachy.” Danni retorted.

“...” Mark only regarded her with a serious expression. She had learned in the short time they'd known one another that he despised sarcasm. When it was a serious matter that is.

“Shocked to say the least. So much insight to what I was blind to. I feel like I am having a system overload.”

“Anything I can do?”

“You have done enough. For being my friend and everything else. Thank you for being there for me today. I am surprised you didn’t go running like your underwear was on fire from that mess. You don’t know how much that meant to me. I’m sorry you had to witness that.”

“No need to be sorry. I wanted to bash his head in if I can be honest with you.”

“Why didn’t you let me? If I recall you pulled me away.”

“Because you don’t want that on your record or your conscience. They were definitely going to press charges on you. You were just angry. Rightly so but in the heat of anger people tend to do things before they have time to think straight.”

“I’m sorry he keeps bringing your lifestyle up every chance he gets.” Danni said totally missing the expression on Mark’s face. “That’s one thing I don’t understand. He has bashed Natalie’s way of living. Calling her ghetto but he wasted no time screwing her. And he still got her pregnant. Every guy she brought around be it a thug or not, he would talk bad about them. Now that I think about it, I was never good enough for him. He always criticized my weight. The way I talked. I wasn’t allowed to have friends really. What I chose to wear. What meal I cooked. How to entertain his colleagues. Now let’s see how easy she fits into that category.

“Let me ask you a question Danni seriously.”

“Sure go ahead.”

“Do you think I am a no-good thug? As I have heard so many times that its ridicules, I might add.”

“I mean you told me you were a business man so I just accepted that. You never went into detail.”

“You never asked for details.”

“True. But it’s hard to be serious and ask questions when I am being seduced.”

“So you are saying I seduced you to a point where you couldn’t ask me what you really wanted to know. I don’t really offer information unless it’s inquired about. I don’t feel like I have to justify myself.”

“Then don’t.”

“You aren’t getting it, I see.”

“Getting what? Mark you are saying you don’t feel the need to justify yourself to me and that’s fine. We are only friends. It’s not like we are walking down the aisle. We just met not too long ago. I figured that maybe it’s not my business what you are into. Curiosity killed the cat, remember?”

“Friends huh?”

“Well a little deeper since we...well you know.”

“No, say it. We what?”

“You are going to make me say it.”

“Yep. Speak your mind. If we are friends as you say, why not?”

“So we aren’t friends?”

“Of course we are.”

“Well you said ‘as you say’ like you don’t think so.”

“One, quit changing the subject and two answer the question.”

“Fine. We fuck. Is that what you wanted to hear?”

“Is that all we do?”

“Mark, that’s all we have, is a physical lust. It’s not like we are in love and moving things further. Hell I’m still committed to another on paper. So there isn’t room for another. What we have going on is making me feel guilty enough. I am no better than Lamont and his cheating.”

“Wow. That’s how you feel.”

“It’s the truth. I probably will never trust again. Everything I had was a lie. The dreams I had for my future was an illusion.”

“The life you had with him was a lie but your future is what you make out of it. You are only putting truth to his hateful words by allowing yourself to believe it.”

“Why do you even care? What’s in it for you whether or not I open up to accept anyone else into my life or not? Maybe I am not meant to have the husband, family, and happily ever after I always pictured. When I met him I was reserved and didn’t trust easily then. Guys only tried to talk to me to get in my pants. The one time I let my guard down, I was hoodwinked with Lamont. A wolf in sheep’s clothing. Look where that got me. I gave up my virginity for nothing.

Hell I could have at least become a nun.” Danni snorted in mock humor.

“Are you even listening to yourself?” Mark asked with a bad taste in his mouth. “Danni baby, you are beautiful. A wonderful person inside and out. Your heart is so big that the right person would love to cherish it. I know in my heart you are going to be a great mother one day. Hell you already are to my daughter. Why can’t you see you are so much more than what you have heard? From what you have made yourself believe.”

“I love Niecee. I do. I would do anything for her. It’s just that I am content with believing that I may never have my own. Unless I get a surrogate or sperm donor.”

“If that’s the case let me be your sperm donor.”

“Hell no. Mixing friendship with something like that may not work out.”

“Let me get this straight. You would have a baby by a stranger? Help me raise my Niecee? Filling in the motherly role but not have an actual baby with me?”

“I think it would complicate things.”

“So, if I wanted more from you, the answer would be...?”

“Well I know that wouldn’t happen so what’s the point of thinking about it?”

“Humor me.”

“I am damaged goods. There is no way I am good enough for you.”

“You’re kidding right?”

“No. Where is this going? I value our friendship. Besides another friend of mine, you two are the only ones I have in my pitiful existence.” Danni said with a sad smile. “I don’t know what all your business consists of nor do I care. It’s your business. As long as it doesn’t harm Niecee in any way. My insecurities would bring more headache to you than I am willing to bargain with. Plus this was hypothetically speaking so there’s no point in entertaining the notion. You are too good for me. Hell you are too good to me and for that I thank you.”

“I have been thinking lately anyway. Especially after what happened yesterday. I started looking for an apartment. It’s best that I moved out. The temptation to continue doing what we are doing. Plus I am afraid we will be found out by Niecee.”

“So you want to stop ‘fucking’ as you so crudely put it?”

“Why the attitude?”

“Look Danni, I am going to keep it one hundred with you real quick.” Mark sat up and turned to Danni to gain her full attention. “I have evolved from just being your sex partner. I have started to feel you on a deeper level. Hell I think I always have since the very first day I met you. The other night was a testament to that. What started off as doing something nice for you, turned into something else completely. Tell me you didn’t feel a different level of intensity.”

“I did but...”

“But what?” Mark asked. “Did you even feel anything?”

“I did. It was like you were mimicking the act of making love but...”

“Mimicking? No baby that was the real deal. I don’t mimic shit. When I do something, it’s to the fullest believe that. I don’t play games Danni.” Mark stopped talking for a millisecond. “What I am getting at Danni is this. I am falling in love with you. It wasn’t planned, it just happened.”

“...” Danni just stared at him with a surprised expression on her face. She never thought in a million years that what they were doing would turn out like this.

“Nothing. You have nothing to say?”

“What can I say? I mean I am still legally married. We are friends, that’s where I think we should remain. Things would be difficult if they went sour. It would be complicated if we were together. I can’t do that to myself. To Niecee. To you. It’s best if we stay where we are.”

“I basically just told you that I love you and the only thing you can come up with is that we should go back to being just friends.”

“I can’t reciprocate those feelings Mark.”

“...” Mark only chuckled while rubbing his hands together.

“Mark?”

“Nah it’s cool. I am going to go ahead and turn in.”

“Wait...”

“Just let me be Danni. It’s cool. We’re cool. Good night.”

“Good night.” Danni felt like pure shit for squashing his attempt to express his feelings. Now she knew for sure she had to move out. Things were bound to get messy or tense being under the same roof.

“Why are you moving out?” Niecee asked.

“Because sweetheart, I am a grownup. As a grownup, I should be able to take care of myself. Here I feel like a leech.”

“Daddy doesn’t see you as a leech. Do you daddy?” Niecee asked Mark. Danni didn’t even know he had walked into the kitchen. Her body had stiffened at the acknowledgement. She hadn’t slept well the last couple of days since their conversation. The tense, awkward moments had begun just that quickly.

“No baby but it’s her prerogative if she wants her independence baby girl. And you shouldn’t make her feel guilty about it either. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir.” Niecee said sadly. “I’m sorry Danni. I didn’t mean to make you feel guilty. It’s just that I won’t see you every day anymore. When you find a place, can I at least still come visit?”

“Of course you can.” Danni said but caught herself. Niecee wasn’t hers to say something like that. “I mean if it’s okay with your dad, that is.”

“Of course baby girl.” Mark kissed Niecee on the forehead. “I need to speak with Danni for a minute. Run along

and get your homework done.”

“Yes sir.”

“So you are serious about moving out?”

“Yeah. I think it’s best. Don’t you?”

“It’s up to you ba... Danni.”

“See that’s what I mean. I don’t want to make you feel like you have to sensor yourself because we kind of stepped out of the friendship zone.”

“Actually I didn’t want to make you feel uncomfortable by calling you something other than your name.”

“Oh.”

“Look to show there’s no hard feelings. I have a spot that just opened up.”

“You have another apartment.”

“Well actually it’s a condo. The condominium building downtown that’s on the rise is mine. So if you don’t mind some construction going on for a bit, at least until it is finished. I would be willing to rent that out to you.”

“A condominium, a hotel, and a club... what else do you own?”

“The condos I got the idea from being an investor in the hotel, not owner. The club is mine. They all fall under one umbrella so to speak.” Mark said easily evading putting too much emphasis on his business dealings but that was what Danni asked. He was only going along with what she wanted.

“So are you interested? I’m giving you the first opportunity before I have it listed.”

“How much is it? You know I don’t make that much. The only reason I have a little lea way is because a fairy paid my attorney fees.”

“Is that so?” He decided that moment to check something on his phone. Or at least that’s how Danni perceived it. “To answer your question, the asking rent is \$1200.”

“Goodness. That’s a little too expensive for me. The story of my life. I can’t afford anything right now. I may have to relocate or look for another job.”

“That’s another thing I wanted to discuss with you. A friend of the family is looking for someone to partner with them in operating a clinic.”

“What kind of clinic?”

“Psychotherapy clinic if I recall correctly. That’s what you majored in, correct?”

“Yes that’s correct.”

“I’m pretty sure that would help you get back on your feet in no time.”

“Mark, I don’t know what to say.”

“Just trying to help out a friend.”

“I really appreciate you Mark. You will never know how much.”

“No use in keeping my blessing’s all to myself. I might as well spread the love.” There was that ‘love’ word again.

Danni blushed looking away just thinking about the conversation they had. It's not that she really didn't feel anything for him it was just too soon to tell what was real and what was infatuation. "This is the address to the condo if you want to take a look at it. The manager at the building is looking for your visit. His name is Mr. Willis. Just tell him I sent you by."

"Alright thanks. I will do that." Danni couldn't help the pang of feeling pushed out. It's like he couldn't get rid of her fast enough. Now she just sounded pure conflicted.

"In two days, I will be meeting with the guy about the clinic would you like to join in so you two can meet?"

"Sure, that would be great."

"Cool. Well I have some business to do at the club. Do you mind watching after Niecee? It will probably be late when I return."

"Of course. You know you don't have to ask."

"I hear you. I will see you later then." Mark said.

"See ya."

Some of the playfulness they once had was gone. All because of a uncontrolled, hormonal, and lustful night. Although it was good, she couldn't help but feel she may have lost her friend. 'That's stupid,' she mused to herself. If they weren't friends he wouldn't continue to push her in a positive direction. Steadily trying to help her no matter how hard she tried to not return his feelings. She knew all too well how bad it hurts to give someone your love for them not to recognize it.

For them not to really care about how deep the blood flowed for them.

Mark had opened himself up to her with no qualms whatsoever. He was at ease as he confessed his feelings of love. All Danni did was throw his love back in his face. Sadly that wasn't what she really wanted to do but she really didn't have a choice. It would physically kill her if Mark would ever betray her. Even in the slightest bit would probably drive her insane. Straight to the looney bin. Plus she loved Niecee so much and it would hurt deeper if she couldn't see her anymore if everything went sour. No she couldn't, wouldn't go there. Even though she missed the connection they shared it was only slightly dimmed now.

~

“Hey sweetie. I'm glad you called.” Lena greeted her daughter with a warm hug.

“Hey mama. I know. I've just been busy with work and trying to find an apartment.”

“I thought you were living in the apartment Mark had in his basement. What happened with that?”

“Mom, I messed up.”

“You messed up or are your feelings messed up? In other words conflicted.”

“Is it that obvious?”

“It's obvious that he is determined to be all that you didn't have with Lamont. It's also obvious that Mark is a very good man. Hard working, loving, caring, dependable, and

don't even get me started on his looks again." Lena said and Danni groaned.

"He is all of that. Also mysterious, a sense of hidden danger, and too good to be true."

"Now we are getting somewhere. Too good to be true?"

"Mom, he could find a bunch of women to fill his head and his bed. He has money, power, and not to mention a body to drool over. What do I have to offer? Nothing. I have a mediocre job right now. No apartment and only a few dollars to my name." Danni sadly stated. "My husband cheated on me to only god knows what end. My so called sister screwed me royally by being one of his bang buddies. And to top it off had the nerve to ask me to be the god mother of her lust child. Who the hell does that?" She questioned totally forgetting who she was talking to.

"..." Lena didn't say anything for few minutes.

"Oh mom, I'm sorry. That was really rude of me. So out of line to curse in front of you."

"It's fine Danni. I promised your father that I would keep my face out of his business but..."

"But what?"

"I snooped a bit further passed what you asked your dad to, pretending to be your dad's assistant. Information containing any personal accounts he may have. Other credit cards that you know nothing about. I wanted everything. It became an obsession. In that information I snooped to a point where I found a name on one of his accounts that wasn't his."

“Don’t tell me he got something else in my name.”

“No honey.” Lena took a deep breath before she continued. From the look on her face she was pained by something. “It was Natalie’s name.”

“...”

“I’m so sorry honey. I couldn’t bring myself to tell you. Your dad was very angry at me for snooping. Saying it was my own fault for snooping because I ran up on something I wished I hadn’t. Knowing you were already distraught over the other women, adding your...Natalie to the equation would have crushed you.”

“I know it’s wrong to hate someone but I really want to so bad right now. Mom, I’m so tired of all this mess that’s surfaced. Nothing is the way I dreamed it to be. My entire marriage was a lie.” Danni did something she hadn’t done in a while and that was cry. “She has a piece of my husband that I will never have. All this time she has been cheesing in my face while screwing him behind my back. Year’s mom. Years.”

“Baby you should thank your lucky stars you are able to get out of that mess with only a bruised heart. That will heal over time. Time and a good man will have you looking shiny as a new penny. With the way he is fighting the divorce there is no doubt in my mind if there was a child involved he would fight you tooth to nail.” Lena said hugging Danni as best she could. They had walked to a park down the road from where the condominium was located. “He would use that child against you at every chance he got. Especially with you not having a job right now.”

“I know sweetie, it’s going to hurt. It may hurt for a while but you cannot punish others for where he went wrong. Do you understand?”

“I’m not.”

“Yes you are. Even though I don’t know the whole story of what’s going on with you and Mark, I can tell it has you torn though.”

“Mom. I like him but I don’t trust anyone. Especially like that.”

“Are you two sleeping together?”

“I am so ashamed.”

“Why? That man is fine.”

“I’m practically a married woman.”

“With a no good cheating, lying, deceitful bastard. Life is short honey and you have wasted a bucket load of precious time on his blistering ass. Luckily for him that I have restraint because I wanted to give him a heaping helping dose of a good ole ass whooping.” Lena said with conviction. “You have nothing to be ashamed of Danni. Yes adultery is wrong. I get that. We were all born in sin. So is pre-marital sex. Do you regret losing your virginity to Mr. Nasty before you were married?”

“Mom?!”

“Oh Danni, quit acting all shocked. I know everything. I’m a mother.”

“I probably will never get to use that line.”

“Yes you will. Just you wait and see.” Lena spoke with confidence. “Come. We have a condo to look at. For some reason that address seems so familiar.”

“I was thinking the same thing. I just don’t remember where I have heard it from.”

“Oh yeah. It was on your credit report. I thought that was where you were moving to but I knew you were living with Mark. Recalling you said he lived in a house so I knew that wasn’t it.”

“Mom, you are so sneaky.” Danni shook her head giggling.

“I know I am. It drives your daddy mad.” She only shrugged her shoulders.

“But now that you mention it. It was on my report. The day I went to the house to get the rest of my things, I was supposed to check it out. Considering everything that happened that day, it’s no wonder I got sidetracked.”

“Well let’s check it out.” Lena suggested.

“No time like the present.” The two ladies walked into the nice structure on a mission. After announcing who they were to the male attendant at the desk he notified Danni that her name was on the visitor list to speak with the manager. Both women were confused as to why they were summoned by the manager.

“Hello Ms. Hunter, my name is Sebastian. Mr. Jones wanted me to be on the lookout for you. Are you ready to look at the space?”

“Oh of course. Sure that will be fine.” Danni said shocked by the welcome. “I must introduce you to my mother, Lena Hunter.”

“Of course. Beauty in its finest. Hello Mrs. Hunter. It’s a pleasure.”

“Oh aren’t you just sweet.” Lena blushed.

“Now I must ask for you I.D.’s to show you the property. Until you are a tenant it’s required that we make a copy for our files for the protection of our residents. Even though my wonderful boss recommended a beauty such as yourself, I still must follow the rules. I’m sure you understand sweetie. It’s nothing personal.” He was super flamboyant but friendly as all get up.

“Oh it’s not a problem. It actually makes me feel safer to know there are such rules as these.” Danni said going into her wallet to retrieve her identification.

“This will allow me to rest easier at night knowing my baby is safe.” Lena said retrieving hers as well.

“Thank you ladies.” Sebastian gathered them both before looking down at them and then back up to both ladies. The smile he once had faltered for second.

“Graves?” He questioned.

“I’m sorry, I should have made that clear. Hunter is my maiden name. I am in the process of getting a divorce.”

“Oh no sweetie that’s fine. Mr. Jones explained some things to me without going into full details. It’s just that this name... Danielle Graves?” He stopped to go to his computer.

“Is there a problem?” Lena beat Danni to the punch in questioning.

“Ma’am, I don’t know how to say this but I already have the same name as a tenant.” After a few more clicks on the keyboard, he looked mortified at the information before him. “With this exact driver’s license number. What in the actual...”

“If you would be so kind as to confirm that condo number to be 2345?”

“That’s correct. It actually has you down as a co-signer now that I dig a bit deeper.”

“How is that possible? Wouldn’t I need to be present for paperwork, signatures, and such?”

“Yes ma’am, that’s correct. This condo was acquired before I started. There was another manager before me and he was fired for sexual harassment of a tenant.” Sebastian spoke with a shaky voice. “Mr. Jones won’t be pleased about this at all.”

“It’s alright Sebastian. I’m sure you won’t be blamed for this. You had no idea that something like this has happened.”

“Still... I pride myself on being on top of my game. I don’t want to lose this job.”

“You won’t, I assure you.” Lena tried to sooth his rigid nerves.

“Can I please go to this condo that is in my name?”

“I think we should call the police or something.”

“Have you ever met whoever rents the place?”

“My nerves are all over the place, let me think. When I first started there was an association meeting for all tenants to attend. As far as I know the woman goes by Mrs. Graves. That is the information that I had so therefore that is what I called her. She never disputed the name or corrected my error. Plus there is a male that visits and he is always addressed by Mr. Graves by the attendants.”

“Would you know the man if you saw a picture of him?”

“Yes ma’am I am pretty good with faces.” Danni began flipping through her phone searching for pictures hoping she hadn’t deleting them all.

“Wait!” Sebastian got her attention. “That is Mrs. Graves. Well the one that I have been under the impression of being Mrs. Graves.” He corrected.

“You are shitting me?” Lena said and Danni near about passed out.

“No ma’am I assure you I am not shitting you. That’s her.” Danni was floored. Her very own sister was screwing her royally with no Vaseline whatsoever. Sleeping with her husband behind her back, now having his baby, and destroying her credit as well.

“Here, is this him?” Lena showed him her phone. Danni had zoned out not realizing her mother was looking through her own phone for pictures.

“Yes ma’am that is him. Do you know him?”

“He is my soon to be ex.”

“Oh sweetie, I am so sorry. He always seemed shiftier from first glance. A snobby son of gun. Would snub his nose at me as if I sickened him.”

“That’s him.”

“Don’t cry honey. We will issue something so deep for the people that hurt you to sink in they won’t know what hit them.” Her mother tried to comfort her. She hadn’t even known that she was crying until she mentioned it. The sad part was she wasn’t crying because of what they did she was crying because she was infused with anger. Revenge. Payback. Whatever she could think of that kicked in her vindictive side was surfacing.

“Take me to MY condo. Please.” Sebastian was shocked at first at the evil glint in her eyes but soon a sneaky smirk of his own appeared. Her mother even sat silently and then began to grin also. It was time to take back her life. Piece by piece. Starting with a place to live that was her very own. Without them even knowing what they did, Lamont and Natalie had just given her the necessary flick she needed. The flick that will unleash something more dangerous than anything they have yet to deal with. A woman scorned and pushed to her breaking point.

Chapter Fifteen

“Who is it?” They heard a woman say from the other side of the door. Sebastian was closest to the door, with Danni and Lena casually leaning against the wall around the corner.

“Sebastian. The manager.” He said sweetly.

“Oh hi. Is there a problem?” They could hear Natalie ask.

“Yes ma’am, as you know I am new and I needed to make a copy of your identification for our records. It seems yours is missing out of all the tenants in the building.”

“Oh...” They could clearly hear the quiver in her voice. “Can I bring it down to your office later today? I was just in the middle of something at the moment.” She said.

“Well I am already here with my portable scanner so it won’t take but a second.”

“Actually I don’t have my driver’s license on me. I think I may have dropped it in the car.” They could hear her moving away from the door moving further into the apartment. “I was actually on my way out, I can just swing by when I come back.” She had taken her eyes completely off the door leaving it wide open for intruders. The two ladies saw that as their welcome in with open arms.

“Hola sister dear.” Danni greeted. Nat’s back stiffened ramrod straight. “What’s the matter sister? You’re not happy to see me.”

“Danni, what...” She turned around being further shocked to see Lena standing next to Danni. Not only was she standing there the look she was giving her was one of pure fury. “Mama Lena?”

“In the flesh, dear heart. It seems your dealings don’t quite match what I have taught you to be.” Lena shook her head in disappointment.

“It’s not what you think.”

“Oh isn’t it? You aren’t really sleeping with Danielle’s soon to be ex-husband? You’re not pregnant with his child? Or maybe that you didn’t use her identification to do all of this fraudulent stuff? Please enlighten me because I am truly curious as to how or what it IS NOT what I THINK?” Lena said with an attitude evident in the way she was speaking.

“Mama...”

“You don’t get the honor of calling my mother that. You selfish, spoiled, nasty, good for nothing cunt. How could you? How could you do this to me after everything I have done for you? Does Lamont know that you have gone through three other abortions before this child? I am surprised you can even hold the one you are carrying. The countless sexually transmitted diseases you have encountered throughout our high school days. All the secrets I kept for you. The love of a sister that I had for you. I can’t believe you would throw all of that away just to have a piece of what was supposed to be mine. Why? WHY?!” Danni shouted the last word so loud Natalie flinched. Sebastian now stood near the door to be sure no one was to come near it with complaints of noise. Lena was

now seated comfortably at the bar area away from any blows that could be thrown.

“You know what, fuck you Danni. Little miss goody-two shoes got her heart broken. So fuckin’ what! It’s always been about Danni this. Danielle that. She is so smart. She has such a level head. A good head on her shoulders... blah, blah, blah. Even Lamont would still go on and on about how obedient you were. How easy it was to train you to be the perfect wife? Seen and not heard. One that would do as the man of the house asked without all the extra baggage. And let’s not forget the fact that you were so pure just for him to curve to his will.”

“All my life I had to live in your shadow even before my mom died. She would say little things like she wanted me to be just like you. The day William and Lena took me in, I was even more aware of how much more pressure I would be faced with to grow up to be just like the perfect Danielle Hunter. You were always daddy’s little girl. NO matter there was another one right in the house. William doted on his precious ‘*sweetpea*’ every chance he got.”

“Now you wait just a damn minute young lady. We never treated you any different than our very own daughter. You take that back right now.” Lena jumped down getting defensive now.

“No you didn’t complete the actual act but I knew deep down you all were sick of the trouble I got into. You felt an obligation to your friend to take me in but I knew deep down William never favored that idea. The grades that I didn’t make.

I know you all forced Danni to tutor me so I could live up to your standards.”

“I didn’t make Danni do a damn thing. It was her decision to tutor you. Personally I offered to sign you up with someone else at your school but your sister that you now hate so much stepped forward. Out of the kindness of her heart. It had nothing to do with me and my standards. We only required that you get good grades because we wanted you both to do something constructive with your lives. Not being what the hell you are now.”

“And what the hell is that?” Natalie chose that moment to get buck like she had a grudge or something.

“Hold up bitch, I will not sit here and let you snap on my mother like that. The woman that raised you and cared for you like a mother should. So you can release some of that base right up out of your throat.”

“I didn’t ask her to do a damn thing for me.”

“You are so right you ungrateful tramp!” Danni laughed bitterly.

“It’s alright Danni, it’s the bitterness and jealousy surfacing. I did my part as a fill in parent. That attitude doesn’t faze me. Selfishness and sloth doesn’t bother me one bit. If anything I pity her. Bringing pain upon someone else will never bring you a moment’s peace her way. The hell you created for Danni will bring you to your knees soon enough. You mark my words.”

“But it does faze me.” Danni said calming down to a dangerous level. “So I tell you what. You have a cool thirty

minutes to get your shit out of MY condo. That seems sufficient enough?" Danni asked.

"Get out of... What the hell? You can't put me out!" She snapped.

"My dear you are sadly mistaken. If I am correct this condo is in my name. With my social. My identification. Isn't that correct Sebastian?" Danni asked him and he nodded his answer with a smirk of his own. "Without my permission at that. So would you like to rephrase that statement?"

"You are just mad that I had your man in more ways than one. All up and through here. This underdog got your man and could have that chocolate kiss you are screwing too, if I wanted him. You are pathetic. This is the only thing you can do to issue payback. Wait until I tell Lamont your pitiful ass came to take back this little condo. What are you going to do with this place? That fine specimen of man already got bored with your ass? Well that was quick. It took Lamont all of two years to succumb to the better sister."

"Slutty. Sister." Sebastian covered with a fake cough and sneeze. Then smiled with triumph at getting his point across. "Excuse me. Darn allergies."

"For that little insult, I will be reporting your ass to the owner. I'm sure Lamont will be all too happy to speak with them on my behalf." Natalie had the nerve to threaten. "The mother of his child." She threw the last little dig in to grate on Danni's nerves. Too bad it was too late for that dig to take effect.

"I doubt that seeing as you have no clue who the owner is and obviously he doesn't either so...yeah." Danni let that

last statement hang.

“Unless you would like for me to call the police to have you escorted out, your time is ticking and I have work to do. Ms. Hunter was so gracious as to give you a generous amount of time to gather your belongings. Please do as you were asked.” Sebastian stated with finality retrieving his cell phone from his pocket. His playful demeanor was replaced with a look of pure seriousness.

“Fine.” Natalie tried to mask her fear with a look of determination but it didn’t quite work.

Sebastian wasn’t easily persuaded with the act of participation from the sneaky woman so security arrived soon after she retreated to the bedroom. Danni couldn’t have been more grateful for his act of kindness and seriousness. The buildings officers watched her every move and waited for her to leave. She was to be escorted from the premises fully with a warning to never return or face jail time trespassing. While they were seeing to her departure, Lena was on the phone with her husband. She wanted to be sure this was handled legally to cover their asses. A lawyer friend of his was checking all the grounds of eviction and covering all bases to assure she couldn’t press charges on any levels.

“Sebastian, may I use your fax machine for an important item from our attorney?”

“Yes ma’am you may. I will have my assistant bring it up if you like.” He recited the number to her while Danni looked around. She couldn’t force herself to listen to everything that was going on around her. Her mind was focused on what she was going to do with this condo while she

tried to keep her hands to herself. There was no way she would allow herself to get arrested for whooping a pregnant woman. It was bad enough she had slapped her ass once.

“Time is up!” Danni said to the constant movement going on around the spacious place. “The rest of your shit will be near the dumpster in the rear if you want to retrieve it.”

“You are such a bitch.” Natalie snickered. “What will you do sitting up in the very place where we have made love just about every night? Well if we weren’t in the bed you once called yours that is.” She cackled. Danni had to admit that one hurt.

“Good one. I will admit that one stung a bit.” Danni admitted. “After some serious clean house rescuing, this place should be good as new. All while you wallow in the projects to raise that bastard growing inside of you. Sadly you actually think Lamont will still be with your scamp ass. He won’t take care of you. Or better yet he won’t have the means after I am done with him.”

“Now be a dear and run along. You are polluting this fine building.” Sebastian said. Motioning for the officers to help nudge her along.

“That will never happen. At least I will have something of his while you sit alone like an old maid. Good luck with that.”

“Oh and Natalie, for the record you are not welcomed in or around my home until you are willing to apologize for all the wrong you have done. I am neither judge nor jury but you will meet your maker one of these good days. God have mercy on your soul.” Lena sadly said her peace. Danni hated to see

her mother forced to choose between her two girls as she always called them. She knew that Lena really loved Natalie like a daughter but there was no way she would put up with the disrespect she has showed.

“You know what Lena, you can go to hell with your pity. The stuck up bitch you raised could use it more than me. I don’t need it and I don’t need you. I’m done with this entire family. I could care less about any of you. You were only a means to an end now I don’t need any of you any longer.”

“Girllll...” Danni shook her head with a sinister smile on her face. Natalie had disrespected her mother for the last time and she was about to feel the wrath if she didn’t beat it. To jail be damned she was about to stomp her ass into the next two floors. “You know me and have seen me in action. If you don’t leave this place immediately, it’s going to take an act of God to get me to release you.” Danni was shaking with her threat. Natalie didn’t say another word as she hustled out of that place like she was on fire.

“Yes baby!” Sebastian said with a little too much enthusiasm. “You handled that like a true diva baby. Put that scarlet in her place. You may not need it but I have connections honey. We can have this place cleaned out and redone in no time. I mean if you like.” He suddenly dropped back down to the shy role at the end seeing as though neither woman said anything for a minute. The two ladies suddenly burst out laughing at his giddiness.

“Oh my god, thank you Sebastian. I needed that laugh so very much.” Danni said wiping her eyes of the tears from the laughter and the pain she secretly still felt. “As a matter of

fact, are you seeing anyone?” She asked as if a light bulb went off.

“Oh honey, I thought it was evident. I don’t eat fish.” He scrunched up his nose.

“Fish? What does fish have to do with you being single?” Lena asked causing Danni and Sebastian to fall over themselves laughing their asses off. Danni was crying and Sebastian was coughing trying to catch his breath. Lena was only giggling in confusion cause she really didn’t get what they were talking about.

“Oh...mom...” Danni continued to laugh.

“I don’t see what’s so funny.” Lena pouted but was secretly happy to see Danni laughing despite everything that was going on. “Would one of you stop laughing and tell me what’s the punch line?”

“Miss Lena... I am gay.” Sebastian said with a broad smile.

“Okay that I gathered but that doesn’t...”

“I prefer a leaner choice in meat. Instead of the fatty acid of fish no matter how good it’s supposed to be.” He laughed at his own joke. Danni rolled her eyes at him giggling herself.

“Mom, some gay guys refer to women as fish because some are not so clean. You know down yonder?”

“OH!” Lena exclaimed and then frowned. “Ewe. You young folks are so nasty. Always referring stuff to food. Just disturbing it for all of us old heads.” Danni and Sebastian were now laughing at Lena’s disgusted face.

“Oh my god I haven’t laughed this hard in forever.” Sebastian said trying to get himself together. “You two are going to get me in trouble. I haven’t done any work today.”

“You will be fine. She knows the boss personally.” Lena said shocking the hell out of Danni and Sebastian just clapped his hands.

“Mom?”

“What? It’s true.”

“Well damn. Not that I would abuse a hook up but that is one fine choice. I have seen that thing you were married to and Mr. Jones is a way better catch. That man is sex walking and so kind hearted.”

“That he is. But we are only good friends.”

“Whatever honey who am I to judge?”

“Like I was trying to say. I have the perfect guy for you if you aren’t attached.” Danni said with Beejay in mind. They would be perfect together.

“Girl, hook a brother up. If not a love connection, I still enjoy meeting new people.” He said with glee.

“Great now let’s get down to business with these hookups you have. I want all of this crap out of here. Operation let’s get my life back starts now.” Danni said with conviction.

“I like that operation.” Lena said.

“Consider it done but if I may make one other suggestion.”

“What’s that?”

“Let’s take a look at the condo Mr. Jones sent you to see. Once you see this place you will fall in love, this I know. I am sure he won’t have a problem bending the rules on switching the lease from this place to that one. That way I still have an opening for an outsider. A stranger can get this place that needs to be cleaned by a priest to get rid of the negative energy in here.”

“That is a wonderful idea Sebastian.” Lena clapped with glee. Danni didn’t even get a chance to say anything before she was drug out of the place and onto the elevator. The idea sounded good to her as well. Things were starting to look up for her after so much turmoil threatened to leave her permanently paralyzed.

Danni had spent the day with Sebastian and her mother going over details of the move. The switch over from one condo to the other was easier than she thought it would be. Mark approved the move of her name over from one place to the other when they explained what had occurred. He was initially incensed that something of that magnitude had been done but agreed to let Danni handle it her way for now. Danni could tell when he said the fatal words ‘for now’ she knew he wasn’t letting it go completely. There were going to be consequences for certain individuals eventually.

Sebastian held true to his word with putting her in touch with certain people to get the new place furnished. Mark had an account with a high end furniture store where he purchased all of his model furniture for his show condos. Lena offered to charge everything for the place as a housewarming

gift, so Danni couldn't refuse. Because Danni had to go to work, her mother and Sebastian took over the project so that it would get done. They assured her it would be all that she ever wanted it to be. Putting full trust in them to get it done was her first test in lending her trust to others again. Some would say that didn't really count considering it was just decorations and furnishings. In truth, Danni felt trust was trust no matter how big or small.

The day had come for her to meet with the acquaintance of Mark's about the behavioral clinic. Danni was both excited and nervous. What if the person didn't see favor in Danni enough to start a business? She was licensed and proficient in her field but this could run deeper than that. There was a personal feel professionals had to have in order to be comfortable in doing business. Would they clash personality wise? Would they clash professional wise? So many factors could work against her chance at growth. What she always wanted do was to own a clinic and the opportunity was finally within her grasp. The time had presented itself to her, now it was up to her to sell herself.

“Good afternoon Ms. Hunter.” Mark greeted Danni as she approached the table.

“Good afternoon Mr. Jones.” She returned the greeting.

“Mr. James I would like to introduce you to Ms. Hunter.” He tried to make introductions but the two folks already knew one another.

“Well. Well. Well. Always trying to one up me.” Danni smirked with her hands crossed in front of her.

“Good to know you are still alive.”

“Still kicking.”

“I am very upset at you young lady.”

“And why is that?”

“No phone calls, emails, text message, pigeon message, or anything remotely close to it.”

“I am assuming you two already know one another.”
Mark jumped into their back and forth.

“I believe so. You could call us friends. Distant friends as of late.”

“Aww Beejay, don’t be like that. I have just been so dang busy. Don’t be mad at me.” Danni pouted.

“Luckily I can’t stay mad at you young lady but it wouldn’t hurt for you to pick up the phone every once in a while.” He fussed.

“I know. I apologize. It was my intentions on calling you a last weekend but something came up.” Danni subtly looked towards Mark and he instantly recognized what she meant.

“Well you two just made my job that much easier.”
Mark said getting comfortable in his seat. Loosening his tie and removing his jacket. “I hate business meetings but love doing business. What a combination.” Mark said smoothly.

“You are a mess.” Danni said sitting down in her seat.
Mark only shrugged his shoulders.

“I have a question though. How do you two know one another?”

“Uh... Remember I was telling you about the job at the club and everything. Well I kind of left out that he was Niecee’s dad.”

“Oh so this is...”

“Beejay.” Danni called out. Mark chuckled seeing it was obviously some inside joke that she didn’t want him to be privy too.

“I was just going to say the one who fired you but offered you an apartment.” Beejay smirked. That was obviously payment for not keeping in touch. She had successfully embarrassed herself insinuating there was something else. Well there was but he wasn’t going to say anything.

“Was there something else he could have said Danni?” Mark asked with a smirk.

“No of course not.” Danni blushed.

“Blushing? Always your give away.” He joked taking a sip of his drink. “Now this business lunch can be a little informal since everyone is pretty familiar with the other.”

“Since I have been formally introduced to your friend, I would love to proceed with the plans as previously stated. As soon as Regina gets here we can get started.”

“You know Regina is always late.” Mark waved off. “Oh here she comes now.”

“Sorry, I’m late. Court ran over.” Danni glanced up seeing none other than her divorce attorney. “Hey baby.” A twinge of jealousy stung as Mark embraced her smaller frame.

“Hey yourself.” Mark smiled. “Where’s that knuckle head cousin of mine?” He asked pulling back.

“My dear hubby is parking the car.” She giggled. “Hey honeybun.” She turned to Beejay giving him love as well.

“Cousin...” She sighed. Danni didn’t realize she had said it out loud until everyone looked at her in amusement.

“Well hello to you too Ms. Hunter. It’s nice to see you. I assume you are the friend of my dear cousin. I really must thank you for looking after Miss Niecee. I love that child. Can’t wait to have one just like her.” She rambled.

“Regina honey breathe.” A very attractive man similar to Mark’s stature approached the table with a chuckle. “Hello, I’m Randal Jones. You must be Danielle.” He shook Danni’s hand.

“Yes, it’s nice to meet you.”

“It’s funny you just walked up on this table and didn’t speak to anyone but Danni.” Mark said with humor written all over his face.

“Whatever clown, I see you still hate wearing suits.”

“Only when it absolutely calls for it.”

“What’s up cousin?” They greeted one another in a brotherly hug.

“Nothing much man.”

“Beejay, what’s up boy? I only see you now when we are discussing business.” Randal and Beejay did the whole brother greeting as well. “We need to get up on that court soon, it’s been too long.” He added.

“I’m down whenever.” Beejay responded. “Now that everyone is here, shall we get down to business?”

“Let’s order and get to it.” Regina said and everyone nodded. After everyone placed their orders they got down to it.

“Run down the terms, conditions, and details of this arrangement. I will just fill in my portion. Agreed.” Mark said gesturing to everyone.

“Works for me.” Beejay continued to unfold everything.

By the end of the meeting, they were as carefree as they were in the beginning. The business portion was ironed out within thirty minutes. Danni didn’t have to be further tempted into signing on the dotted line to formally be an active partner in the private clinic. Mark was one of the investors in the clinic along with Regina. Randal was the developer or in other words the contractor. His company is the one that owns the actual building and periodically he offers rental properties for extra income. The rent would be reasonable but that was also where the investors came in.

The business plan was ironclad with all the bells and whistles. Along with a sizable return for those who put the startup funds on the table. Beejay had begun the client search as well as sought out proper advertisement to give them a quick gust of work. Beejay confessed to wanting to bring her in as his partner rather attending this meeting. But agreed to the meeting that was suggested by Mark as a favor. Also he wasn’t sure she would want something of that magnitude going through what she was.

Danni assured him it was just what the doctor ordered to gain more of her independence. Neither partner came to the table with anything besides their education and experience so the line was an even split down the middle. New condo, check. New job, check. Freedom, on the way. Love life? Well an occasional hook up with her good friend was good enough for now. Maybe in another lifetime under different circumstances it would have been ideal. After this terrible divorce is final, there was no telling how she will act to her freedom. Random flings may be all she ever desires. Only time will tell.

Chapter Sixteen

It had officially been a month since things started to get back on track for Danni. Her and Mark zoned into a good friend relationship with no sex play. Though she didn't know really how to feel about that, mainly because she actually started to miss the intimacy they once shared. Mark had a way of making her feel so needed, wanted in more ways than just sexual, and the fact that he claimed he loved her was another plus. They had officially moved into the friend zone and that wasn't even mutually decided on. It was just something that happened. With both of their busy schedules they barely found time to spend with just the three of them. Now that she didn't live with them anymore they would make plans to eat out or share the responsibility of fixing dinner either at her place or theirs.

Moving into her newly furnished and decorated condo was everything she envisioned it to be. Lena and Sebastian had decked the place out better than she could have ever dreamed. There was a spacious updated modern style kitchen. There was an open floor plan concept. Having the living room, dining area and kitchen in view from the large patio overlooking the city was euphoric. Her bedroom was equipped with a large platform king sized bed and sleek furnishings. One thing she absolutely enjoyed in her master bathroom was the fully closed steam shower and soaking tub that she loved so much at Mark's place. Everything about her place screamed independence. Since the official moving into her own spot, she

has also started working at the new practice. Things were going pretty good. The clientele picked up almost immediately.

Even some patients they once saw at the Helping Hands facility moved their treatment over to ‘Just the Beginning’ outpatient clinic. By no fault of Beejay’s or Danni’s but who were they to turn down patients. Loads of people had complained about not getting the proper treatment from the facility. Niecee was still doing so well with her own behavioral battles. No setbacks were visible. She and Danni still spent a great deal of time together so that could have been the case. The court date to determine who Niecee will reside with permanently had finally been set with no more stalling. Danni was not looking forward to her part in the testimony but she was prepared to do what she had to do. It came with the job.

“Well, what do we have here?” Danni saw a woman approaching them with a sneaky grin on her face but she didn’t know who she was. Some of her characteristics looked familiar but she still didn’t know her.

“Mama?” Niecee questioned stiff as a board. Danni stopped all movement and stared the woman down.

“In the flesh. Aren’t you happy to see me? Come give mama some love.” The woman broadly smiled only looking at Danni. A couple of other people walked near them behind the woman. They were currently at the mall doing a little retail therapy and were on their way to lunch when they were approached. Danni couldn’t lie and say she was feeling quite

unsafe being they were in the underground garage. Sadly no one was around but them at the moment. Niecee timidly walked into her mother's embrace.

“What are you doing here?”

“I was just picking up a few things for you and look at who I run into. Small world. My baby girl. Haven't you missed me?”

“Sure.” Niecee said pulling away to cling to Danni's side.

“Hello, I'm Theresa, Niecee's mother.”

“Danielle.” She stuck her hand out to shake but the other woman only glanced at it. “Well we should be going.”

“I wasn't done speaking with my daughter. Why don't you run along and give us some privacy.” Danni only cocked her eyebrow at the smugness of the ignorant woman.

“Excuse you? Why don't you run along and continue with whatever you were doing before disrupting our peaceful day. If you have something to say or want to speak with Niecee, I suggest you contact her father.”

“Protective aren't we? I heard there was some bitch playing house with my child. Just never thought he would stoop so low. Never knew De was a chubby chaser. All that money he is sitting on, I knew for sure he would end up with a model type chick. Or maybe a white woman.” She cackled. “Don't get too comfortable, he isn't the settling down type. I'm pretty sure he has plenty of others just waiting to replace you.”

“Nah, just a fat chick.” Another woman that resembled Niecee and Theresa. “Her replacement is waiting, I’m sure.”

“Tell your slew footed mama, it’s not nice to throw insults when flaws are evident.” Danni threw back only gaining chuckles from the men that were with them. The gasp that left the old bat was enough to know she cut deep.

“Bitch, don’t get stomped in this garage. There is no one here to help you. By the time security gets here, you will be nothing but a memory. You can’t hide behind De. He can’t save you.” Theresa threatened taking a step forward. Danni said to hell with the rest of the people with her and smirked. Pushing Niecee behind her, she was not backing down.

“Bitch? I got your bitch. Please believe I can show you better than I can tell you. This is not what you want.”

“What the hell are you going to do? Your prim and proper ass don’t stand a chance. You don’t have to be brave. All I want is my daughter.”

“Over my dead body.”

“That can be arranged.” One of the guys threatened showing he was packing.

“Hold up. Niecee come here.” Theresa held her hand up and then demanded Niecee to come to her. “Let me talk to you for a minute.”

“Danni, can we just go?” Niecee was now pleading to leave.

“Yeah baby, I’m sorry. We can.”

“Baby? You really think playing mama would ever compare to actually being one. Pathetic women like you are so disrespectful. As a woman you should never try and take another woman’s child. A judge will never side with a man that is a drug dealer. So unless you want your dirty laundry brought up in this, I suggest you steer clear.”

“I don’t have any dirty laundry sweetheart so if I were you, I would back off. You are fighting a losing battle.”

“We will see about that. I will see you later sweetheart. I can’t wait until you come home where you belong. We are going to have a long talk about you being so disobedient.” Theresa backed up until she was even with her little family posse. Danni wasn’t turning her back on them though. When they turned to leave she let out a sigh of relief. That situation could have gone another way all together.

It wasn’t until they got into the car that Niecee started to bawl her eyes out. Every fiber of Danni’s being tore up at the sounds of her sobs. She couldn’t fight her own tears as she embraced a very distraught Niecee. They sat in that parking garage locked tightly together rocking back and forth until her sobs calmed down. Luckily her condo wasn’t too far from where they were so she was able to get them there without wrecking. One hand held Niecee’s while she drove with the other one. Upon walking off the elevator she was surprised to see Mark leaning against the wall by her door. The stern face he had when he noticed the puffy eyes of Danni and Niecee he was on full alert. And if looks could kill, Danni was sure they would die on the spot hopefully by accident. For it wasn’t clear just who he was mad at.

“What happened?” Mark boomed.

“Let’s take this inside Mark.” Danni unlocked the door pushing it open to allow Niecee in first who was still holding her hand until they were in. Mark brought up the rear closing and locking the door. “How did you know something was wrong?”

“Niecee texted me but it was very vague.”

“You need anything baby?” Danni asked Niecee and she just shook her head. “Anything for you?” She turned her attention to Mark.

“An explanation.”

“Calm down Mark, I handled it for now. Just have a seat and we will tell you what’s going on.”

“Nah, I’m cool standing right here. But I need for you to quit stalling.” He crossed his massive arms over one another with his jaw ticking. Clearly from feeling agitated.

“We were walking to the car when we were approached by who I now know as Theresa. Niecee’s mom. And she wasn’t alone.” His eyes snapped from Danni to a nervous Niecee.

“What else happened?”

“Well words were exchanged. As well as threats passed around.”

“She threatened Danni daddy. Junior even showed his gun. I was so scared.”

“WHAT?!”

“Look I apologize for my own words. I didn’t make it any better by talking about her mother and bucking back. Maybe some of that could have been avoided. I was completely out of character. And I shouldn’t have gone there in front of Niecee.”

“Danni it wasn’t your fault. She called you out of your name.”

“I know honey but I shouldn’t have stooped to her level. I should have just walked away. That was not the best role model type of behavior.”

“But what if one of them would have attacked you when you turned your back?”

“She’s right Danni. Those type of folks you don’t back down from. That only fuels there need to seem bigger than they are. Show out for company.” Mark said. “Are you two alright? I wish I was there.” He plopped down between the two making them move over to allow him room. Wrapping one arm around each of them.

“I’m scared daddy.”

“Why baby, I won’t let anything happen to you?”

“But what if they take me away from you.”

“I’m doing everything in my power to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“Just have faith baby girl.” Danni added her two cents.

“Daddy you don’t understand. I can’t go back there. It will be ten times worse.” Niecee exclaimed all of sudden. “She

said we would have a talk about me being disobedient. I didn't even say anything. Danni you didn't tell did you?"

"I'm so sorry Niecee. By law I was required to report it to authorities."

"Wait what are we talking about here? Didn't say anything about what?"

"Oh no." Niecee cried further crushing Danni. A day that started off pretty good was now full of drama all because of a money grubbing supposed mother.

"Niecee, baby I need you to calm down and tell daddy what's wrong." Mark pulled his daughter over into his lap pleading with her to tell him what happened to her. "Danni?"

"I can't Mark. It's bad enough I was forced to break my silence because if my records were audited by my superiors, I would have been fired. Possibly lost my license. So much more. When you confided in me about going before the judge demanding custody, only then did I make my report." Danni was now pacing back and forth trying to explain herself. "I'm so sorry Niecee." After a few minutes of sniffing, Niecee finally pulled away from Mark to go to Danni who had sat down on the other couch.

"Daddy, I was threatened that if I told you what they were doing to me that you would go to jail because you were doing illegal stuff. All I ever knew was that it wasn't safe to live with you. Every time I got to spend time with you, I never wanted to go back there. Only when you came and got me did I get to wear my good clothes as they call them. They would tell me I wasn't good for nothing other than the fat check you were made to send."

“Mama was never around much. My grandma would make me sleep in the room with no bed. I made the mistake of saying something to one of my friends and she told her mom. That alone caused me to get a whooping and when the teachers called a conference with the counselors at the school, I got worst one. Grandma was so embarrassed and made up all types of excuses as to why that happened. Later that day she made me take off all of my clothes in the living room and whooped me with a cord. Everybody watched it happen and nobody did anything. They just laughed.”

“Then she made me go to school with a turtle neck, pants, and a sweater on to hide the bruises for two weeks. It was so hot but I knew not to ever tell anybody else again. Whenever somebody asked about my clothes I just said I was sick. Kids started to tease me for my clothes so I started to fight. School was terrible and home was worst. That’s how I ended up at the hospital.” The whole time Niecee was talking Mark was fuming. Danni figured out that he wasn’t just mad at the details of what those people did to Niecee it was also that he wasn’t there to do anything about it. He had no clue. Even though he was there for the most part, he felt like the biggest deadbeat daddy in the world.

“I’m so sorry baby girl. I had no clue.”

“I know daddy, I just didn’t want them to take you away from me.”

“They couldn’t have done that baby. I haven’t done anything wrong to go to jail. They lied to you.”

“...” She just nodded her head.

An hour after all the much needed information was laid on the table, Danni had convinced Niecee to go lay down in the guest room that was pretty much hers. Checking on her one final time to be sure she was resting, Danni went back into the living room only to find it empty. Going into her bedroom she thought about taking a nap herself. Too much had happened in only a short period of time. Hopefully Mark had snagged her keys when he left so he could let himself back in. Fearing that sleep was going to take her to some place unknown.

First she removed her bottoms, leaving her in nothing but her undies and her button down shirt. Walking over to the patio door it just seemed like an open invitation to wind down. It was always so calming to look out over the city. Another thing she loved so much about her condo was the long patio that stretched from the front room to her bedroom. Sliding the blinds back enough to crack the door slightly to allow the breeze through, hoping the fresh air would help ease the tension she felt. What she didn't expect was to be scared shitless seeing Mark sitting in one of the chairs. Where he was sitting she wouldn't have seen him from the living room and would have to be against the door in her room to see him. He looked to be battling with some inner demons so she decided not to disturb him.

“And here I was thinking I had the most calming view in the world.” Mark scared Danni half to death.

“Shit. You walk too damn light to be so big.” She held her chest to calm the racing organ. She couldn't seem to figure out how she didn't hear the door sliding open. “Now what about the view?”

“I was saying the view in here is much better.” He leaned against the opened door when his small chuckle had subsided.

“Oh.” Danni shyly looked away. “I thought you left or something.”

“Yeah, well.” He didn’t say anything else. The expression on his face was enough to cause Danni to feel for him. The battle with blaming himself for what happened was weighing heavy on him.

“I’m here for you too.” Danni approached Mark timorously. “To talk, listen, or whatever.”

“Thank you Danni.” Mark said with all seriousness.

“I haven’t done anything but I’m here if you need me. You don’t always have to be the one to save everyone. You should have someone to lean on too.” Danni said resting her hands flat on his chest. She was surprised once more when he wrapped his muscular arms around her for a comforting hug.

“I should have known.”

“You can’t blame yourself Mark. It’s not going to help anything.”

“I want to do something so thoughtless right now. I could show the dark side they want to provoke so bad.”

“That wouldn’t solve a thing.”

“I know but it would make me feel better.”

“Then what? Where would that leave Niecee?”

“I just have so much...” He growled even making Danni flinch back some. “My bad. Come here you know I

wouldn't hurt you." He pulled her back into his hard body kissing her forehead several times. Letting his lips linger there for a bit before he tilted her head back to look down on her. One peck turned to five, and then a full blown kiss that always made her want to melt from the inside out.

Mark's hands slid down her frame until they rested on her bottom. Deepening the kiss walking her backwards to a dangerous place for them to be. Especially with Niecee in the house. Adding to the fact that they were in her condo meaning that the noise would certainly travel fast. Danni wanted to stop his advances but she couldn't make herself tear away from this addiction. In one fluid motion she felt the soft bed under her back with the hardness of Mark pressed snugly between her legs. Holding most of his weight off of her, Mark deepened the kiss even further.

"Mark... wait." Danni finally snapped out of the seductive daze she was in when Mark removed his shirt and hers. His open mouth kisses down her neck was causing heat and moisture to pool between her legs. "We shouldn't. I mean, can't."

"Please baby. This is the best distraction to man." He continued his assault. 'A distraction it was,' Danni thought to herself.

"B-but, Niecee... Niecee might hear." She tried to convince him this was too dangerous.

"Then you will just have to be very quiet." He whispered.

"Me?"

“Yeah you.”

“Mark...”

“Baby...” He moaned continuing his pursuit in removing their clothes. Danni didn't have any more fight left in her when he attacked her nipples. His hand was doing magic priming her for his grand entrance. “That's right baby, open up for daddy.”

“*Yes daddy.*” She purred softly feeling him stretch her walls nice and slow. Danni loved the way Mark always made her body feel. He was always so damn passionate. No matter how bad she wanted him to change the tempo, she kept her mouth shut. Letting him use her anyway he needed to in order to chase away the demons that were threatening his sanity. “Faster baby.”

“No rush job.” Mark groaned silencing any other argument from Danni as his lips latched onto hers. Their intertwined hands were above her head, his tongue was battling hers for dominance, and his member was gliding deep but slow. The sky even opened up assisting in the mood surrounding them with rumbling thunder and soothing rain drops. The merging of souls was becoming too much to handle. Danni made up in her mind this had to be the last time seriously if they couldn't leave emotions out. She wasn't ready. If she would ever be ready. This had to last her for a while.

No sooner than they finished their session, Danni was feeling off a bit. Too much in thought while Mark was just silent. Even though a lot had happened in one day, them ended

it with sex was probably a bad idea. Niecee could have walked in on them at any given moment and there was nothing either of them could have done about it. They cleaned up silently before throwing their clothes on as if nothing occurred. They decided to order in because neither one of them felt like going out. Cooking was definitely out of the equation. As they waited Danni thought it was a better time than any to address the elephant in the room.

“Mark?”

“Yeah?”

“I don’t think we should umm... do what we did again?” She blushed feeling like a school girl just now losing her virginity instead of a grown ass woman.

“You didn’t seem to have a problem when we were doing *it*. As you put it. Danni, where is this coming from? And where are you going with it?”

“The act of making love. It could confuse things.”

“The correct term is making love not the act of. And furthermore confuse things for who? I already told you how I feel about you.”

“That you did but I also told you I couldn’t reciprocate those feelings right now. Or if I ever will be able to.”

“I see. So you don’t trust yourself not to fall in love with me. In other words you don’t want to. I got you.”

“Mark it’s not like that.”

“Yes it is. Be real with yourself if no one else.”

“Look I’m just saying if we do continue to... you know. We should leave emotions at the door, is all.”

“In other words we should just fuck?”

“Pretty much since you want to say it like that.”

“If you say so Danni. I’ll get the food.” Mark dismissed Danni when he heard the knock on the door signaling the arrival of their food. That went better than she thought it would. Note the sarcasm. Then again he was a very attractive man, she was sure he didn’t want for any woman. She didn’t feel she was anything special. Having made up her mind to not go on an emotional rollercoaster of love with him was a hard one to do but deep down she knew it was for the best. How come she didn’t feel any better about it?

Since that conversation they hadn’t been intimate anymore. When she thought about it was sort of unfair that she wanted a no strings attached type of setup. She was denying herself the opportunity to enjoy the affection from Mark. In her defense she didn’t give herself time to breathe completely from Lamont’s bullshit to Mark’s compassion. Some argued that a relationship with that type of urgency is a recipe for disaster for at least one of the parties if not both. Danni couldn’t stomach the idea of ever hurting Mark the way she has been hurt in her past. If his feelings were genuine, there was no doubt that she would eventually treat him like shit because of her trust issues. It was bad enough she was already trying to push him away.

Sadly enough even a therapist with the license to force others to see their faults couldn’t admit that she may be going

about this all wrong. What kind of therapist can't solve their own emotional problems? Looking in the mirror with a defeated expression gave her all the answers she needed. Truth of the matter was that Danni was just a big ole chicken shit. Afraid of being hurt by Mark if she allowed a relationship to blossom. Afraid that Niecee would one day grow to hate her for creeping with her daddy or making her daddy unhappy in the long run. Afraid of hurting someone as nice as Mark. His heart was made of pure platinum, worth more than gold. With her deep rooted insecurities, there is no doubt she would be unbearable eventually.

“Girl. Girl. Girl.” Sebastian sighed dreamingly. They were currently having a girls kick back. Well sort of. The only people in attendance were Lena, Regina, Rita, Niecee, and Sebastian was the extra addition.

“What is it Seb?” Danni laughed.

“Thank you for introducing me to Beejay.” Sebastian beamed.

“So you two are really hitting it off? I knew y'all would.”

“He is so... I have no words.” He just sighed with so much extra added. By the way he was acting it was speaking louder volumes than actually using words.

“So dang dramatic.” Regina laughed drinking from her wine glass.

“Hush it missy. You are the same way when it comes to your hubby, I'm sure.”

“We all are.” Lena said. “Isn’t that right Danni?”

“Mama I already told you there is nothing going on there.”

“I heard what you said.”

“I sure wish it was cause I need some more grandbabies.” Rita said lowly so only the people in the room could hear after Niecee excused herself to go to the restroom.

“...” Danni gasped so loudly they could have sworn she was slapped by the woman. The others in the room fell out laughing at her shocked face.

“Miss Rita?!”

“Don’t Miss Rita me. Girl everybody within a 100 mile radius can see that you two are meant to be together.”

“Everybody except for her hard headed butt.” Regina added her two cents.

“Would you all hush? Niecee is in the other room. She could hear you.”

“Oh poppy cock, you keep using that child as an excuse to not admit the truth.” Sebastian added making everyone else nod their heads in agreement.

“I do not. We are only friends. Nothing more. It would never work anyway. We have nothing in common. With everything I have been through we would be better off as friends nothing more. To keep everybody’s feelings safe.” Danni finished just as Niecee reemerged. “More wine?”

“Me!” Everyone held their glasses up.

“I hate what he did to you baby. I want to do something so illegal to him, you just don’t understand.” Lena was silently fuming again. Every time they start on her personal problems she got mad all over again.

“I know.” Regina, Sebastian, and even Rita chimed in. At that admission everyone started to giggle again. They were getting a bit tipsy but it was all in fun.

“Baby girl you want some more cider?” Danni asked Niecee.

“No ma’am. I’m okay.” Niecee said. “Who is next to get their nails painted?” Niecee had offered to paint the ladies nails as they sat around Danni’s condo gossiping. The guys had gone out to play basketball and then to a sports bar to watch some game. This was another notch on her getting her life together list. Now she had good friends to add to her top things to be blessed for.

Chapter Seventeen

Later that night after everyone left her condo, she started to get that lonely feeling creeping up in her. All the ladies and gentleman would be snuggled up to their companions while she was left with only her thoughts. Why did liquor make the hormones so unstable? It was getting late and she hadn't heard a peep from Mark. She just knew after everyone spanned out to be with their significant others that he would come to her. Or at least call to see what she was up to. Lena insisted on Niecee coming to spend the night at her house when her dad came to pick them up. He was the designated driver considering that they were all two sheets to the wind. Deciding to hell with the dumb stuff she called him to see what he was doing. Why did he have to be the one to call for the booty call? Women can make the call as well.

“Yeah?” Mark answered his cell after the third ring.

“Hey.” Danni felt stupid for sounding so innocent.

“What's up Danni?” He asked casually. She just noticed there was a lot of ruckus in the background. She briefly wondered where he was and then decided it wasn't her business. Music, lots of voices, and other activity was heard clearly.

“Nothing just checking on you.”

“I'm cool.”

“I didn't think you were going to answer at first.”

“I was a little preoccupied.”

“Oh...”

“Yeah so...that the only reason why you called?” She could now hear him excuse himself from whomever he was with.

“Umm yeah.” She cleared her throat.

“Quit bullshitting, what’s really going on?”

“I was just sitting here after everyone left and you crossed my mind. That’s all.”

“How was your little girl time?”

“It was nice.” Danni could still faintly hear music in the background.

“That’s good.”

“Are you at the club or something?” She asked before she could stop herself.

“Yeah. Hold on.” She could hear a woman asking if he wanted anything else to drink. “Danni. Listen I have to get back...” He started but Danni chose that moment to cut him off. It was stupid of her to call him.

“I’m sorry to have interrupted your night. I just...”

“Just what?”

“I guess I just wanted to... I mean see...if you wanted to swing by later. It’s no big deal.”

“Swing by huh?” Mark chuckled in his mysterious way. “That’s cool. I’ll see you later Danni.”

“Ok.” Danni hung up with butterflies floating around in her stomach. Groaning, she threw herself against the bed for sounding like a dunce. Why did he make her feel so dang shy all of the time? It’s like she couldn’t think clearly when it came to him. Her brain was foggy. Words were jumbled up. And not to mention the lust factor was through the roof. Mark had officially spoiled her. Even the liquid courage couldn’t force her to be fearless for long.

Danni decided to jump in the shower to clean her body and calm her nerves. The heat mixed with her horniness was enough to make her extremely anxious. Sensual scented lotion was applied to her body along with a sexy wine colored satin gown. The thin straps were just enough to keep the material from falling off. It was so short that if she bent over all of her assets would fall out. Her silky smooth legs and all between was eager to be stroked by Mr. Jones. The song ‘Me and Mrs. Jones’ came to her mind so she played it just for kicks. The fact that she and Mr. Jones did have a thing going on brought a smile to her face.

Minutes turned into hours and before long she found herself fast asleep on top of the covers with only a throw over her body. The last thing she remembered was lying across the bed to rest her eyes. Faintly she remembered trying to stay alert just enough to hear the door or her phone. Checking her phone for any missed calls or texts, she was sadly disappointed there was nothing. Quite certain if he came and she didn’t answer the door that he would have called. No one would drive all the way to someone’s house surely and not call if they didn’t get an answer at the door.

Worry started to settle in. What if something happened to him? He was at the club the night before. What if a fight broke out? Or worst what if he was driving under the influence? In the short time she has known Mark, she knew he didn't drink hard unless he was home. Somebody could have slipped him something. Women are just as sneaky now a days. NO... She shook her head dismissing that fact but what if he was in an accident all the same. She would be devastated. Deciding to get it over with she dialed his number. Holding her breath the entire time.

“Hello?” Mark’s deep voice answered.

“Mark, oh thank god.”

“Is something wrong?” She could hear him ask with a twinge of worry.

“No. I mean yes.” Danni took a deep breath to calm herself down. “What happened? I waited up for you. I thought something happened to you.”

“*Marcus is everything alright?*” The steam coming out of Danni’s ears right now was similar to the cartoon characters in the movies. Here she was worried sick about him and he was with another broad. Well shows how much love he really had for her.

“Everything is fine, thanks. If you will excuse me for a minute.”

“*Sure thing. Take your time.*” They had an entire conversation while she sat there listening. A smart person would have just hung up but no she felt the need to hear this out.

“Danni, you there?” Mark asked snapping her out of her rebellious thoughts.

“Yes. I’m sorry I didn’t mean to interrupt yet again.” Danni rushed out feeling dumb to the twentieth power. “I will talk to you later Mark.”

“Alright.” He answered back. It was then that she felt him disconnecting from her. Who could she blame but herself?

~

Monday rolled around like clockwork and instead of moving around with some pep in her step she was dragging. Once again she was miserable but unlike it being her no-good ex, it was all her fault this go around. She should have never let things get out of hand with Mark. He expressed his feelings for her and she let it be known that she wasn’t ready. For him to have agreed to the terms of their dealings, she thought they were on the same page. It was high time she saw someone for her problems and she knew just who that person would be. If she could just get over the addiction she has to Mark, she would be alright. She just had to. There was no way she had come this far just to give up.

“Hey, hey now.” Beejay greeted.

“Hey.”

“Aww. Babe, what’s wrong?”

“Beejay, I need to set up an appointment.”

“An appointment?”

“I am all over the place.”

“Marcus...Darling...”

“Right.”

“Well I don’t have anyone until the afternoon. How is your schedule?”

“Same here.”

“Well alright girly, let me tell our secretary we need the do not disturb sign up. Meet me in my office?” Danni only nodded leaving all of her personal belongings in her office and trudging to his. There was so much going on in her head that she doesn’t know where to begin. “Tell me big daddy Bee what’s the matter.” He said taking a seat in his chair while Danni sat on the couch.

“Mark has expressed his feelings for me on a deeper level.”

“That’s great, right?”

“No. Yes. I mean it would have been if it was before all of the mess I am going through now.”

“Hold up. You are letting...” Beejay started and then stopped. Pinching the bridge of his nose with his eyes closed he took several deep breaths before continuing. “I apologize for my unprofessionalism. Since I have mastered having multiple personalities, I would like to first give you my therapist. When you are finished with our session, I will switch over to your friend. Basically, to smack some sense into your stubborn tail. Let us begin with how things are going pertaining to the divorce. How are you really feeling about it all?”

“Do you think I am making a mistake by not acknowledging Mark’s feeling’s for me?”

“Therapist here, I don’t have a definite answer. Let’s go to the beginning again shall we?”

“Fine, I have so many hateful feelings towards Lamont, towards Natalie and even towards the baby. There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t want to do something down right destructive. My heart is broken in more ways than one. I feel hopeless sometimes. Like what’s the point in continuing this losing battle of self-worth.” Danni said. “When I first met Lamont he was so arrogant and sure of himself. He just knew he had every chick on campus right where he wanted them until he met me. I let it be known right then and there he wasn’t getting nothing from me outside of a little tutoring. That didn’t stop him one bit. His persistence is what won me over. That and the fact that he basically blew every other girl off that was on his jock to prove to me that he only had eyes for me.”

“We dated and he was always the perfect gentlemen. Besides some heavy make out sessions he wasn’t pressuring me to do anything else. I loved that he would wait for me. It melted away the hard exterior giving me the green light that he was the one. The night he proposed is the night I gave him my innocence. What a gift for a gift right? Why make him wait any longer? It wasn’t fair that he had to go without just because I was afraid to put out.”

“Things were good in the beginning. Anniversaries were something straight out of a romance novel. He doted on me, loved me, cherished me, and for it to all come crashing down as a big fat lie was devastating. How could someone play the part of such a wonderful man and then emerge as the villain all along? None of it was ever real. I see that now. The

crazy part is that he has tainted my view on a lot. Lamont is the type of man I chose basically because he did everything I always dreamed of having in a mate, a husband. He put on an award-winning performance just to get me. How can I tell the actors from the real deal ever again?”

“Mark pops up out of nowhere. Being everything to me just like that. At the snap of my fingers he was my savior. He picked me up when I was pushed down so hard. All I wanted to do was fight but I didn’t know how. With the flick of the wrist he made all my bad dreams run away.” Danni faintly smiled thinking about her black knight. “It’s like I am waiting for the other shoe to drop. He can’t be this perfect. Why would he be? Lamont wasn’t. He claimed he was but he never really was. If I would have stopped to pay attention instead of trying to force my image of my perfect life, I possibly would have saw his lies.”

“You are aware that you are discussing two different people. Why do you think you are trying to put them into one category?”

“I have only been with the one for so many years that I have nothing to go off of.”

“What about your father?”

“Mark is a lot like my father come to think of it. He is a protector by nature. His natural instinct to protect those around him is what I admire most about him.”

“Why is it so hard to believe that Mark is different from Lamont?”

“Mark is different from Lamont but for how long?”

“I don’t understand.”

“A lot of things happen for the most part for reason and purpose. Basically it was a learning experience. If I am honest with myself, I could tell when things changed with Lamont. He was faithful in the beginning and then he turned. Things changed. He was more power hungry. Material things became of importance to him. My feelings not so much when he changed.”

“What if Mark is only a rebound? What I needed to get myself together? He was my boost to stop wallowing in my self-pity. Everyone comes into one’s life for a reason, season, purpose, period, and if the one is lucky, a lifetime. I don’t know if I could survive if Mark turned away from me the way Lamont has. I was more pissed than hurt now that I can be honest at myself. He cheated. Nasty bastard. With my so called family. Silly trick. Got her pregnant. Ugh...” Danni was rambling but it actually felt good leaving her lips and not sticking in her head. “I wanted a little person to call my own so bad. Now I knew it wasn’t meant to be because a higher power knew what was to come. Knew that he was not what I needed.”

“You speak as if you don’t believe in second chances.”

“I thought I was pregnant last week. I ran to the drug store and bought seven tests. Although Mark and I aren’t in a relationship, for that moment I contemplated on imagining being in one. A baby? That would be our baby. Mark, Niecee, and I would be this little happy family.” Instead of a vibrant smile it was a sad one. “The tests were negative. My cycle

started last night. It had been missing for bit. Speaking with my doctor confirmed it was all stress.”

“If for that moment you pictured a happily ever after scenario, what makes you think that it won’t come at a later date? Less stressful situations.”

“I can’t be with Mark or anyone right now. I am damaged goods. I’m too afraid of love at this point. Love hurts. I don’t think I am capable at this point to decipher which love is good and which is bad. Maybe one day I will be confident in allowing myself to open up to the possibilities but what if it’s too late for the love I want.”

“If you don’t let go of the previous hurt, you won’t be able to recognize it when it arrives. Your subconscious will always search for the wrong instead of embracing what is right.” Beejay took a moment to let what he said sink in. “As your friend, I have to admit you are risking a lot by pushing Mark away. In a way I understand what you are trying to do by putting distance between the two of you to test the theory of ‘if it’s real it will return.’ On the other hand I don’t want your reluctance to cause you to miss out on a wonderful man. God fearing man, who is madly in love with you. Ultimately it’s your choice and I don’t want to see either of you hurt. So handle it however just so long as you remember with a gamble there are risks. I got your back regardless.”

“Thank you Beejay.”

“Anything for you. One thing I’m so happy about is that we can openly be friends now. I love you girl.”

“Awe. I love you too.” They shared a hug with promise. That was the first person she has shared love feelings

for besides her parents in a while. Deep down she wishes she could have said those words to Mark in response to his confession. Only time will tell if what they share is written in the stars.

Some time had passed with Danni and Mark only talking briefly or seeing one another when time permitted. This being one of them. Thanksgiving had gone over without many setbacks. Of course some family was still ignorant as to why Lamont wasn't present and Danni chose not to dwell on explanations.. Now it was very evident to most the divorce would soon be finalized because the announcement was printed in the newspaper. Danni had never paid much attention to that portion of the paper until someone brought it to her attention. Needless to say she wasn't tripping on the world now knowing that she was going to be a single woman again. Who should care anyway?

The one thing that raised concern was where Natalie was. She didn't dare step foot in her mother's house just as she was warned. The anger she did possess from them was still very much a factor. The betrayal of that magnitude was enough to make some people homicidal. Only by the grace of God has she let certain things go without going off the deep end. Her Aunt Ruby hinted on being messy by pointing out that Lamont and Natalie were both missing. Then as if everyone was privy to the secret family issue they brushed it off giving no ammunition for it to fester any further. For that fact alone Danni was happy. Messy people will always try to ruin the peace that others have but with the right support system even they will fall.

One thing that didn't happen was Danni, Mark, and Niecee showing up or appearing as a happy family. Instead they drove separate cars and just so happened to arrive simultaneously at the many stops they had to make between the two of them. Danni's first stop was at her mother's house when she looked up seeing Mark walk in with Niecee. Of course she had planned on going over to Rita's house later that day to visit with everyone but she hadn't expected them to come to her parents. They hadn't discussed anything outside of just seeing each other later. Tension was so apparent when they were around each other. No matter how they tried to remain impassive to one another the sexual tension would ruin any setbacks they had.

When they were around everyone else they fell into the friend roll to keep others off their scent. However they weren't throwing people off too good because they still got those looks. The looks that said 'y'all ain't fooling nobody,' but they overlooked them. At least Danni did. Her mother and Rita stopped trying to force them together, for now. Danni often wondered what she would do when he found another woman he felt worthy of pursuing. Where would that leave her? The odd ball out with no man or kid to hold a candle to a new budding relationship.

Poor Niecee even decided to throw caution to the wind and ask if she thought her dad was attractive. She wouldn't lie to her sweet girl so she told her the truth. Only to add that they were only friends. Nothing romantic. Instead of asking anything further Niecee took that into consideration moving on to another subject. Telling her how she overheard her

teachers and other faculty at her school commenting about how fine he was.

They had even begun a bet to see who can tempt him into taking a second glance at them. The jealous Judy bug showed up all over when she heard that. Niecee also told her they were being extra nice to her all of sudden. Danni immediately knew exactly what was going on and she was internally fuming. ‘Some women had no values,’ she mused. Then a thought that she had no room to refute made realization hit. Mark wasn’t hers and at the rate she was going he would never be.

~

Mark was balls deep inside of Danni. She had been clawing at his back because that was the only thing she could think to do. Steadily grinding until she tried to close her legs but that didn’t stop his stride for his wide body was already wedged between her quivering thighs. On shaky hands, Danni tried to scoot from under him by pushing down and upward. Hitting the floor sounded like the best option to ease some of his torturous thrusting. Suddenly her hands were yanked above her head with some powerful force, held tightly with one hand. His strength was remarkable, holding her hands while never ceasing the pumps.

“Oh God!” Danni groaned. She could have sworn she heard him growl lowly.

“Wet and tight...” He groaned still going full steam.

“Mark... I can’t...” Danni wanted to tell him to stop cause he was rocking her world literally. Her body has never been worked so thoroughly before Mark. The first couple of

times they had gone there while ‘just fucking’ was great but the raw need during this time was intense. Mark had nestled his head next to her ear, ready to give his one word command as usual. She shivered at the sensation feeling his hot breath against her neck.

“Cummm.” He hummed the word against her sensitive flesh. As if they were one, her body succumbed to his command doing as its master requested. The small piece of reserve she had crumbled, sending her nerve endings to above and beyond.

“Ahhh...” Danni’s hoarse cry drowned out his grunts. After catching his breath for a minute he pulled out. Made his way to the restroom to flush their protection. Mark had gone back to using protection. Danni faintly remembered when they stopped around the times he was slow and sensual with her. A thought came to her mind that maybe he was involved with others besides her now. Suddenly a hard vibration sounded off in the quiet room disrupting her sad thought process. Danni instantly knew it was his phone going off because hers was cut off. Unfortunately her legs felt numb or she would have made her way to the restroom as well.

“Hello?” Mark answered his phone that was on the nightstand. She didn’t even hear him come back into the room. “Who is this?” Danni’s ears perked up just a little when she heard a female voice faintly.

“Shit, chilling with a friend of mine. What’s up with you?” He said all of this while sliding on his boxers and basketball shorts. Even though she had no right, she still felt some type of way by being called just a friend.

“Nah, nothing like that. Just a friend. Nothing for you to concern yourself with.” He said with a straight face balancing the phone between his face and shoulder while he busied himself doing other things.

Danni didn't hear anything else as she finally managed to hoist herself up to go to the restroom. Her legs were like jelly, the rest of her body wasn't any better. Head pounding, chest aching, and ears ringing Danni wanted to make a mad dash for it. Too much was going on. Every time ending things with Mark comes to mind, she finds herself in bed with him. Each time it's her who initiates the hook-up but she claims not to want anything serious with him. Only physical satisfaction is what she seeks from him besides his friendship. He was an outstanding friend and the benefits were well worth it. As of late she had been feeling off in a way after they complete their deed. So it was only natural to want to end things before they got complicated.

Washing up her sore sex, she made her way back out to the bedroom. Mark wasn't in the room where she left him. Swiftly moving around the room, Danni gathered all of her belongings. Throwing her clothes on in a rush. She had come over to his house for this one thing and now that it was done it was time to dip out before her jumbled feelings made a fool out of her. Fleeing was the best option until she could steel her bubbling sensitivity. Unfortunately a formal goodbye wasn't going to happen. “See you Mark.” Danni whispered into space. Her only regret leaving this way was she knowing the outcome was going to cause some friction between the supposed friends.

Arriving home in record time driving in a complete daze, Danni made haste jumping into the shower to wash away traces of their sex. The junction of her sex was tender to the touch, yet longing for more special attention. Mark never seemed to disappoint in delivering every stroke with precision. In the past their sessions had always been a little more intimate, passionate, and something on the lines of making love. Since the last time they were together, she blatantly told him she didn't trust him or any other man and probably never would again. Mark only smirked leaving her feeling confused. Her soon to be ex-husband had diminished any chances of love living in heart again with his foolery.

At least that's the lie she keeps telling herself. Danni had begun to feel tingly whenever her and Mark were together be it physically or casually interacting. When he addressed that he would love to be more than just fling partners, Danni had withdrawn completely. Rejecting any thoughts of possibly starting something serious with her savior. Mark had swooped in rescuing her in almost every aspect of her life after her failed marriage.

An extra job, a place to stay when things turned sour with the divorce proceedings, and finally some sexual healing that eased her self-esteem from crashing any further. Not to mention he was such a great person, friend, and father to Niecee. To say she truly owed him so much would be an understatement but how would she ever repay him. She could work the rest of her life and still not have enough. What he has done has no monetary value. Only if things were different. Different time. Different circumstances. They would be a match made in heaven.

~

“Who is it?” Danni called out as she walked to the door. She was awakened from a restless sleep. Sadly she had contemplated whether or not she was doing the right thing by keeping Mark at a distance. Her thoughts wouldn’t shut off for her to get any sleep.

“Mark!” The deep timber of his voice stopped her dead in her tracks. Slowly she made her way to the door although she wasn’t sure if she was ready to face him just yet.

“Hey.” She said hesitantly.

“Good morning to you too sunshine.” He remarked with his signature smirk.

“What are you doing here?” It came out ruder than she intended but it was out now.

“May I come in?”

“Sure.”

“Why did you leave last night?” He asked taking a seat on the sofa without a care in the world.

“There was no reason to linger around. Our business was completed. Right?”

“Business?” He chuckled sarcastically. “You couldn’t even say goodbye. See you later. It was fun. Thank you, nothing.”

“Your phone conversation seemed important I didn’t want to interrupt.”

“That’s cute.” He chuckled again.

“What’s cute? And what’s funny?”

“You. This act. The fact that you seem jealous.”

“Jealous? Why would I be jealous? I am just a friend, nothing for your late night caller to worry about.” Danni said rolling her eyes.

“It’s amazing that you have an attitude about something that was your idea. Being just friends was all on you. Then you show up at my house initiate sex claiming to only want a nut. I deliver and you are still bothered. You seem really confused right now, so I tell you what I suggest.” Mark said with all seriousness. Danni recognized the stern Mark so she thought it best that she state her woes.

“Mark...”

“Let me finish, this won’t take long at all. You always get to state your say and what you think. Now it’s my turn.” Mark said sternly. “I stated to you before that I am a grown ass man and I don’t have time for games. You assumed I was an uneducated thug because I don’t walk around in a full suit twenty-four seven. You also assumed I had my fair share of hoes left and right. If I wanted all of that I wouldn’t waste my time on your stubborn ass. I have let you dictate how, when, and what time we can share any time together. I am not nor have I ever been a pussy ass dude that will let a woman run over me. Nor am I a womanizer like your dumb ass ex. I saw something in you, I wanted, and I went for it. You have made it very clear that’s not what you want but in actuality you want what I have to offer on your terms.”

“That’s not how I am wired so that won’t work for me. In time we can work on being friends again with benefits

being completely withdrawn from the equation. It's obvious you aren't built for any sort of interaction such as that. I care about you but I won't be made to suffer for someone else's actions." Mark said void of his smirk but replaced with stone. "You and Niecee have a relationship on the outside of what we have. So I won't be a total prick and cease that interaction you have with my daughter. As a matter of fact, I am willing to share custody of Niecee with you if all goes well with the courts. That is something I wouldn't even allow with her birth mother or anyone on that side of the family."

"Niecee looks at you like the mother she was never fortunate enough to have and I admire the love you have for her as well. You can continue your relationship with her and I won't interfere unless we have something planned already. Maybe one day we can work on our friendship again but for now we should be cordial to one another. Before you try and add your own stipulations, it's either this or nothing."

"Deal?"

Danni stared at Mark trying to decipher if she was dreaming or not. The way he just spoke to her was a true eye opener. She had pushed him too far. Just when she was thinking of second guessing her ways he ends their friendship all together. Maybe it was for the best that he ended it because she had tried on several occasions coming up empty. He was an addiction she enjoyed. What rehab could she go to for help with recovering though? It's either what he offered or nothing.

"I don't have all day Danni. I have to pick Niecee up from my mom's house. What will it be?"

"Fine. Deal."

“Alright. I will see you around.” Mark didn’t hesitate in his words or steps as he headed for the door. Out the door he went and damn near out of her life. This time unlike finding out about the betrayal from Lamont and later her sister, this hurt a hundred times worst. When the door closed she crumbled to the floor holding her chest rocking. What was she going to do now?

Chapter Eighteen

Danni wanted so bad to be with Niecee and Mark during the whole custody thing but she had to remain impassive. For a lack of better words, professionalism would be the key to this all. The ghetto crew made themselves present a few minutes before the judge was supposed to take his position to hear everyone's testimony. They were all in the hallway no one speaking to the other besides Regina going over a few needed things. Danni could feel the shift of the atmosphere to several very confusing energy levels. Negative energy. Nervous energy. And scary enough, angry energy. There was no doubt that the angry energy was steaming off of Mark as he tried to ignore the ignorant activity going on around them.

The silly broad and her family were making crude remarks towards the other people around. Some low blow threats were mumbled if this didn't go as planned. Finally it was time to start the ball to rolling so that everyone could go about their business. Hopefully it will go smoothly but dealing with such stupid people there was no telling what was going to happen. Unlike how she acted in the mall, Danni was determined to not show her tail. Every insult that was hissed her way she kept her eyes forward as to not give into their baiting. Miss Rita would pat her shaking leg ever so often to offer her own encouragement. There was no way she would be the downfall for Mark's case. She would never be able to forgive herself.

“Good morning. We are here to deliberate the permanent placement and care of Shaniece Rene Jones. De’ Marcus Jones versus Theresa Williams for full custody. Mr. Jones, Shaniece has been in your custody temporarily for the last few months. Is that correct?”

“That’s correct your honor.”

“How has things been going pertaining the child’s behavior?”

“Wonderful your honor. There haven’t been any further disruptions at school or home sir.”

“That’s good to hear.” The judge said only glancing their way briefly before continuing. “There have been reports of child neglect and possible abuse by the maternal family. Is this correct?”

“That’s correct your honor.” Regina replied. There were several people grumbling from the other side of the court room that caused the bailiff to express the need for silence.

“Does your client have anything to say to that Mr. Watkins?”

“Sir there was never any witnesses to back those allegations up. We believe it was all a ploy to cause suspicion to land us in court now, your honor.”

“Good thing I am a fair man and look forward to hearing each one of your witnesses. After everyone’s testimony, I will retire to my chambers to review all that is provided where my final decision will be announced. Are there any other questions before we proceed?”

“No sir.” Both lawyers spoke busying themselves to get started.

“Very well. Mrs. Jones please call your first witness.”

“Yes your honor, I would like to call to the stand Danielle Hunter.” Regina announced. Danni rose to take the stand with grace. The chatter of voices heard over the room would have set an irrational minded person straight off. She was called everything from a bitch, hoe, home-wrecker, wanna be, and the list could go on for days. She proceeded to be sworn in ignoring the ill-informed people in the room.

“State your name for the record.”

“Danielle Hunter.”

“Ms. Hunter, please state your profession. If you please.”

“I am a licensed psychotherapist. Formally a social worker for Helping Hands behavioral health institute.” There was a hush over the crowd in the room that made her smile on the inside. Briefly she let her eyes travel around the strangers in the room, their mouths were hanging open in surprise.

“When did you meet Shaniece Jones?”

“When she was admitted into the children’s unit? It was a part of the process for her to speak with a social worker.”

“And you were that social worker?”

“Yes that’s correct. I was asked by a colleague to take the case because he felt I could reach her somehow.” Danni went on to explain how treatment was administered and how

the patient responded. While also giving a sworn testimony as to why she felt the need to report the incidents to authorities. Although she hated being the center of attention she knew this was for a good cause. Sucking up her nerves she displayed complete professionalism in delivering the detailed extent of the conversations in question.

“That is all Ms. Hunter. Thank you. No further questions your honor.” Regina winked and walked away.

“You may cross examine Mr. Watkins.” The judge directed his attention to the enemy’s side. Danni saw them whispering amongst themselves and mentally groaned. ‘Here comes the bullshit,’ she thought to herself.

“State your name and position again for us if you would.”

“Danielle Hunter. Psychotherapist. Former social worker for Helping Hands.”

“According to our records there isn’t a Danielle Hunter under their employee index. Is there perhaps another name you could be listed under?”

“Hunter-Graves. However I am in the process of returning to my maiden name.”

“That is a crucial piece of information you withheld from the courts. Wouldn’t you agree?” Mr. Watkins questioned without leaving room to respond. “When was your employment terminated from Helping Hands?”

“Objection your honor. Ms. Hunter is not on trial here.”

“Where is this line of questioning going Mr. Watkins?”

“I assure you your honor it has relevance to the case with Ms. Hunter being the one responsible for my client’s parenting to be in question.”

“This better be good. Answer the question Ms. Hunter.”

“Two months ago.”

“Why after years of service did you leave your former employer?”

“The terms of my leave were because of a personal matter.”

“According to witnesses who prefer to remain anonymous, it had to do with the personal relationship you have with the paternal parent.”

“Is there a question you would like for me to answer Mr. Watkins?” Danni asked as if she was unfazed by his insinuation. That seemed to throw him off a bit. They were expecting to make her lash out proving guilt.

“Is there a relationship between you and the father of the child?”

“I consider Mr. Jones a friend. If that answers your question.”

“Isn’t that against the regulations? You would risk your license for a friend?”

“We became friends after my departure from the facility. Last I check there wasn’t a crime in making new friends Mr. Watkins.”

“Do you sleep with all of your patients parents Ms. Hunter?” Mr. Watkins smirked. “Is that your idea of helping the children you see? By playing the parent role.”

“Objection your honor.”

“Questions withdrawn. No further questions your honor.” The male snake slithered back to his seat leaving the room full of snickers from the pit of others like him.

“You may step down Ms. Hunter.” Danni took her seat praying because of her the case wasn’t blown to hell. She was prepared to deny those accusations and commit perjury all for the greater good. Niecee needed to remain with Mark.

Everyone got to have their say so in the case before the judge asked all others to excuse themselves so that he could speak with Niecee. He wanted no other adults present for he felt she may be intimidated to speak freely. Once out into the hall, Danni grabbed a wall to post up on. Soon enough it would all be over with she just didn’t want to be the reason things didn’t go the way they hoped. In her opinion, Mr. Watkins throwing the low blow insinuating them being lovers could be detrimental. When it is reviewed from beginning to end, confirming they were friends it seems she would do anything for a friend. Including lie.

“Don’t worry Danni.” Regina tried to reassure her that it wasn’t as bad as she was thinking. Mark only looked lost in thought.

So bad she wanted to run to him. Hug him and tell him everything would be alright. The truth is she wasn’t even sure that was the case. Kiss him just enough to let him know she was there no matter what. Honestly they had only been

associates currently to avoid any awkward moments from previously being intimate. Whoever said friends make the best lovers must have forgot to complete the warning label. A label that should read 'careful: may destroy friendship.' Could they really consider themselves as friends if one didn't want to be in the room with other no longer than a few minutes?

They might as well be acquainted strangers because the only common ground they had now was that little girl. That was one thing they agreed on without a doubt and that was they loved her to pieces. Only wanting what was best for her, being with Mark no doubt was the best place for her to be. Those other folks didn't know anything but how to be disruptive. A time too many the bailiff threaten to remove them from the courtroom and the judge threatened to shut down the proceedings. In Danni's opinion that didn't sound so bad. If he would have just done that, the decision would have been made immediately.

That could have possibly taken away the tension in the air that simmered around the two former lovers with Regina and Rita stuck nearby fidgeting uncomfortably. Not only did he feel uncomfortable around Danni because of their past but he would hate her if the judge ruled in Theresa's favor. Danni couldn't stand the queasy feeling she was experiencing being near him any longer so she was about to remove herself from the equation. Obviously Mark read her mind before she could take a step away.

"Mark..." Danni attempted to pull away from his penetrating gaze and strong grip on her wrist. A simple tug on her arm and she was pulled very close to him. His other hand brushed her cheek causing her to sigh from just the feel of his

body next to hers. Brushing his thumb over her bottom lip made her heavy eye lids shut. The hand that was once holding her arm went to the back of her neck. His lips made contact with her forehead and she almost shed a tear of the sweet gesture. It was so sweet.

“Thank you.” His deep voice sent trimmers down her spine leaving her breathless.

The battle to hang on to all the hate her heart tried to hang onto... The bitterness that wanted to set up shop to keep her from ever loving again was slipping away. Too bad it may have been too little too late. Danni only nodded her head prepared to remove herself from his embrace again. Only this time when he pulled her back his hands dropped to two different destinations. Her face was cupped in his right while the left went effortlessly around her waist. All at the same time as his mouth attacked hers eagerly. Not waiting on an invitation, Mark plunged his tongue into Danni’s mouth sweeping from side to side. It was evident that Mark was staking his claim in front of the world and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Including Danni leaving her speechless and content.

“Friends my ass!” They heard Theresa shout. Followed with several disapproving comments to come behind. “I hope the judge saw through that fake ass testimony you gave. When this is all over, please believe you won’t ever see my daughter again!” That was like cold water splashed on Mark as Danni saw a different side of him. This animalistic side was a fire-breathing beast ready for its next meal.

“Careful now.” Mark smoothly said which was most definitely a threat but an onlooker wouldn’t know what to make of his calm demeanor.

“Mark, calm down.” Danni stood on her tip-toes and kissed his bottom lip. Mainly because that was as high as she could get. She fully expected him to pull away but was pleasantly surprised when he just wrapped both arms around her. Bone crusher describes his hugs to a tee but they are always so full of comfort.

“You could never be me. How does it feel to use a child to get a man? So pathetic!” She kept ranting until she said something that made Danni pull away from Mark in surprise. “You see baby she doesn’t care for you, she just wanted your dumb ass daddy. He’s only thinking with his dick.”

“Niecee...I can explain.” Danni was going to try and defend herself but was cut off by Niecee. She wasted no time embracing Danni in a hug rendering her speechless again. The Jones’ family was doing a number on her emotions.

“I already know.” Niecee said. “I have always known.”

“What?” Danni questioned looking accusingly at Mark. He just held his hands up in surrender with his signature smirk.

“So, now can we officially be a family? I mean can I call you mama?”

“She will never be your mama! I can’t believe you bastards poisoned my daughter against me!” She ranted.

“Please. You did that all on your own. Mother? You don’t know the meaning of such a term.” Rita said. That set the woman and posse on another louder rant. They could hear her attorney trying to calm the woman down. Regina was telling him he needed to get her under control before the judge appeared. Her only concern was that the court date would be rescheduled.

“What is the meaning of this foolishness?” The judge appeared at the door with a very angry expression on his face. The bailiff held the door open for him. “You are allowing your client to disrespect this courthouse in such a manor Mr. Watkins and it is not helping your case one bit. Since Ms. Williams is bent on causing a scene, I am ready to render my decision. Please come in quietly. If there is any disruption you will be held in contempt. Is that clear?”

“Yes your honor. I apologize on behalf of my client.” With that said the judge returned to his seat after he retrieved his paperwork from his office. The tension was so thick it would take a buzz saw to cut through it.

“It is my decision that it is in the best interest of Shaniece to remain in the care of her father.”

“Hell NO!” Theresa whisper yelled while Mr. Watkins tried to shush her.

“Your final warning.”

“May we discuss visitation your honor?” Mr. Watkins asked.

“After careful thought and witnessing the behavior of your client I am granting full custody to Mr. Jones with no

visitation rights. It is so ordered that your client has no further involvement with the child. Unless the father allows such visitation the courts have been given the power to strip all parental rights.” The anger coming from that side of the room was crazy.

“This is bullshit. I demand a do over.” Theresa shouted.

“I smell a payout.” Her mother shouted at the same time.

“That is it. You were warned.” The judge banged his gavel hard. “Bailiff take those women away. The charge is contempt of court. Anyone else want to join them.” It became so silent on the outside of the two women being carted away shouting all sorts of slanderous things. The judge continued to add days, time, and money on to their already tarnished cases.

“If there is nothing further. Court is adjourned.”

“Christmas came just a bit early.” Regina commented. With the two ringleaders being thrown in jail the others that were with them left silently with no other threats. The murderous glare that was on Mark’s face probably didn’t help matters either.

“That is so true. Merry Christmas indeed.” Danni said.

“Let’s go celebrate.” Rita said trying to break the intense stare off Danni and Mark were having. “Niecee you ride with me. Come on. Where would you like to eat lunch?” Regina and Rita were escorting Niecee out of the courtroom. Leaving the two lovers behind.

“Come on.” Mark held his hand out for her to take.

“I have my car.”

“We will get it later.”

“Alright.” Danni was tired of fighting those demons. What harm would it do to ride together? They had so much to discuss. It wasn't like he was proposing marriage. Just a ride.

“You know how I feel about you Danni.”

“I know how you said you feel. You also told me we couldn't be friends anymore.”

“Actually I couldn't be the type of friends you wanted anymore. You wanted my friendship with all the benefits I gave you like a companion. All because I wanted more than what you were willing to give. I have been miserable without you.”

“And I you.”

“I won't throw it in your face that you are finally admitting you feel something for me.”

“Actually you kind of are.”

“Whatever smart ass. Don't get that ass spanked.”

“You know I like it kinky.”

“Says the one who keeps trying to run or tap out.”

“Ah. Out of order.”

“No seriously. I want you baby. All of you. At least a chance.”

“Mark I am so damaged. What do I have to offer you?”

“Do you believe everything you hear Danni?”

“No of course not.”

“Then why are you letting everything that bitch made punk say to you be the gospel. Baby you are beautiful inside and out. I love everything about you. Why don't you believe me when I say it? Why is it so hard to believe that I want you with all of your hard headedness? I will take you anyway I can have you. I won't go anywhere unless you demand it.”

“He has done so much to break my spirit Mark. So much distrust.”

“Do you trust me? Do you trust I would never hurt you?” Danni had to think but it was evident she trusted him. She was being foolish in trying to push him away even if it was self-consciously. Here he was again pouring his heart out to her.

“I trust you.”

“Then let me love you completely. With you full consent. I want you all in now.”

“Fine Mark.”

“What kind of agreement is that?” Mark asked with his brow cocked and a stern look on his face. “I want to seal it with a kiss for now. A kiss that says ‘yes Mark I will allow you to show me how to love right.’ Then later I want those thighs in the air quivering from my touch because your body has missed me so much.” Danni leaned over the middle console in his truck to seal the deal with a kiss. With a gleam in her eye she kissed him with so much promise. She couldn't talk because there were no words to express how she felt.

“Just for the record, I want more than your body. I want your heart.” Mark added still holding her close to him. Looking her in the eyes with such seriousness she could swear he could see clean clear to her soul.

“I can’t give you what you already have.” Danni said letting one lone tear escape. She spoke the truth. Now that she has allowed all the hurt and rejection to evaporate at its own time without holding on. She realized it would have left long ago had she not allowed fear to cause it to grow. What she once had was nothing compared to what she could have with Mark. It was only practice. Possibly practice so she could appreciate a destined love once it came along. “I love you too.”

“I swear to you I will never abuse your love.”

“I know. I trust you.”

“Damn...Although the gift I just got from the judge was the best gift ever, your heart and love is in a category all on its own.”

“Same here.” Danni kissed him to prove her point. The only thing that stopped them was the knocking on the window letting them know they had an audience. Breaking away was hard but the promise of having a ‘later’ to share more was well worth it.

Christmas Eve had arrived and instead of having several houses on the list to visit, everyone was invited to Mark’s. Danni’s family along with Mark’s was gathered around after stuffing their faces with an array of different

foods. Danni didn't want to invite her entire family to Mark's at first considering all the ugly stuff that came from her Aunt Ruby. Not to mention some sly comments were made while others thought she wasn't privy to the information about wanting Mark. This time however she wasn't worried. Mark was no Lamont even if some of her cousins wanted to be Natalie, so she had nothing to worry about. The word got around that they had been spotted together a few times. According to them she still wasn't showing much and that baffled Danni. Then it occurred to her that she could have been bluffing about being pregnant. Either way she didn't care one way or the other. That had nothing to do with her.

Minding her own business was all she cared about besides getting the divorce to be finalized. The date had finally been set for right after the New Year. She couldn't wait to be free from that burden. His constant threats were silenced when Regina made it clear that she would be filing a suit against the Snow White chick he had been screwing. Reports shows they have been fooling around for a few months before Danni found out. The mystery was finally solved of who sent the email to her all those months back. Another woman Lamont had been screwing in the computer tech department found out he was married after he forced her to abort the baby she carried.

Her father was a master in what he did and uncovered several juicy tidbits that proved beneficial in the long run. All added ammunition to get away from that delusional bastard. Finding out the main mistress was also an heiress worth a nice penny when she turned twenty-five was enough to get the proceedings on the way. He was more than happy to get the

ball rolling again with no further arguments. Danni didn't give a damn about any of the funds she just wanted to have something threaten them with. Since it was legal to sue the mistress for breaking up a marriage she used that as her loaded gun. Threatening to hit them where it counted. However being unfaithful wasn't a punishable offense technically. So they had to think of something else and that was perfect.

Come to find out, Mark and her father had been doing business together for years. That was the major shocker but it was no wonder they got along so well together. Now Danni knew without a doubt that Mark has been her secret donor for some time. Especially with the divorce. When she questioned him about it, he just kissed her on the lips telling her to quit being nosey. 'You don't want to seem ungrateful, do you? No matter who it is right?' He would say and saunter off. That was a sign all by itself if she had never heard one before but it was whatever. Not that she was a whore who screwed for money but she did give him some good loving later that night while saying thank you in the end. He didn't complain about her thank you as much as he pouted about sounding like a girl as he reached his peak.

"It is gift time everybody." They had made it a new tradition to exchange gifts on the eve of Christmas and open one before they dispersed for the night. Everyone except for Danni would be leaving to their own homes. Although she still had her condo, she spent a great deal at the house with Mark and Niecee. One or the other, and sometimes both of them would ask her to stay.

"Here baby. I want you to open ours first."

“Ours?”

“Niecee and I decided to collaborate on a gift.” They were both cheesing big time.

“You sure? I’m afraid to open this honestly. Especially in front of everyone.”

“Why?” Mark asked with his brows knitted together. Everyone was just as curious as they stopped what they were doing to see what was going on.

“Because... I don’t want to cry.”

“Quit being a chicken and open it. Curiosity is going to kill everyone forget the cat.” Sebastian remarked making everybody laugh.

“Fine.” Danni removed the bow and paper seeing a nice sized box. Opening the box, she found a beautiful picture in a crystal frame.

They took the picture during Thanksgiving. If she wasn’t mistaken it was taken by Mark’s cousin who was a photographer. It painted the picture of a perfect blended family. Those dreadful tears were already forming. There was also a bow with a key ring next to it. So drawn to the picture she just picked up the key ring before looking at it fully. Finally she glanced over the keys to see what they were to. On the ring was a chain and two keys she recognized as the keys to the house. She had returned her keys to him when she moved but he was giving them back obviously. That was the sweetest thing ever to her. Meaning she could come and go as she pleases. A true sentiment of trust. At the end of the chain was a pink crystal with something else tied to it? Upon further

appraisal she saw it was a ring. Looking to Mark she saw he was now on bended knee next to her.

“Mark?” She gasped seeing the gesture. Shock was what she felt and a heart attack surely was going to occur if she didn’t slow her breathing down.

“Danni, I know we have only known each other for a short time. What is time when it comes to matters of the heart? I believe no matter if it was a second, minute, hours, months, or years I would still feel the love I feel for you. I am intensely in love with you and you have the honor of holding the award for being my very first love. Never have I felt this way about another woman. You have loved my daughter like your very own. Representing the true vision of what a lady and mother truly is. Please, do me the honor of becoming Mrs. Danielle Jones.”

“But...”

“I know and it will be finalized soon.”

“In that case, how could I say no?” Danni said rolling her eyes at him always reading her thoughts. “Yes.”

“YES!!!” She heard the room erupt in praise. She was finally going to experience a happily ever after. Not the one of a young inexperienced girl but that of a grown woman who had the battle scars to feel worthy of such a love. A love that was destined to stand the test of times and so much more.

“I love you.” Mark said gazing down into her tear stained face.

“I love you too. So very much. Thank you for being my knight.”

“You are so welcome. I vow to forever keep you smiling or shedding only tears of happiness from this day forward.” Mark kissed her again sealing that with a promise she knew he would die before breaking. “As soon as these people leave, we can start making your other wish come true.” He whispered in her ear.

“You’ve already given me everything I could ever wish for. What is left?”

“Babies. There’s nothing stopping us but privacy right now. I want you pregnant before the year is out. So get ready my sweet fiancée. Your birth control should have worn out of your system by now.”

“You are just...”

“Horny.”

“You’re really ready?”

“Shit, I have been ready. I thought about knocking you up all those times we went with no protection. Until you told me about the birth control you had been on for months, I thought something was wrong with my little men. I made a doctor’s appointment and everything.”

“You are too much.”

“You always seem to handle all of me just fine.”

“That I do and I look forward to doing just that for many years to come.”

“Forever and a day?”

“Forever infinity.” Danni was certain there would never be room for doubt in her mind that she was worthy of

such a love. The vows Mark made well before they would get the chance to say 'I do' have proved to her that not all men are alike. No more room for 'Vows of Deception' only room for a love everlasting.

Epilogue

Danni was ecstatic that the day had come and gone for her divorce to be final. When she arrived at the courthouse with her attorney the smug look on his face said it all. He truly hated every ounce of her being. Mainly because she beat him at his own game. He was under the impression that every woman only wanted one thing and that was money. Sadly he was so wrong about Danni she only wanted to leave their train wreck of a marriage with her name.

Mark wasn't for letting her go through that part alone. It took some serious convincing to allow her that luxury to rub it in Lamont's face later. That day just seemed too easy. Although it isn't nice to repay a bad deed with an equal or greater bad deed, the plan they had for Lamont did sound like the ultimate karma. Well deserved 'in your face' that he technically brought upon himself. In the end he couldn't blame anyone but himself.

The judge had no problem granting the divorce on the grounds of abandonment. The little white lie stating they had been living separate for an entire year helped speed the process along. In North Carolina it is law that spouses have to be separated for an entire year if the cause is adultery. Lamont wanted the case to be over with so badly that he agreed to just about anything to be out from under the threat she held over

his head. His little girlfriend was going to lose everything if he didn't cooperate.

Speaking of his girlfriend she was thrilled to have Lamont all to herself now. The other women probably weren't as happy. Especially Natalie who was last seen still sporting a flat tummy and a broken spirit. Turns out she really was pregnant but because of the many abortions she has had, it wasn't a viable pregnancy. Even the anger Danni felt towards her didn't keep her from expressing her heartfelt condolences. The thought of always wanting to be a mother wouldn't allow her to wish something that terrible on anyone.

Sad to say, her sentiments were not appreciated. For Natalie cursed her out calling her every name in the book and even accused her of wishing death upon the child. Stating she was jealous of what her and Lamont had. The threats of repaying her one day when she saw her again was what set Mark and her father off. Instead of leaving it alone they proceeded to press charges against her for identity theft. That alone landed her in the women's state correctional facility being a broad by the name of Big Bertha's bitch. Or at least that's what her mother said. Danni figured at least she got her own mate for a change instead of stealing someone else's.

The wedding plans had gone underway without a hitch. Rita and Lena took the liberty to plan the entire thing for them while William handled the honeymoon. Mark was busy getting things together in his business while Danni worked hard with her partner Beejay. They didn't really have time for planning so the mothers were too eager to step in filling the void.

Niecee was over the moon at the changes that had occurred in such a short time. Soon she would have a mother and father that truly loved her. All that was missing are some siblings. She wasn't giving up that notion, she couldn't wait to be someone's big sister.

If Danni was honest with herself she would say she was over the moon with excitement at the mention of becoming Mrs. De' Marcus Jones. That fine man she met one drunken night will soon be her forever after. The father of the children she hopes to have in the near future. Not a night goes by that he isn't speaking up a pregnancy. It's a wonder she wasn't already experiencing morning sickness. Ever since he proposed he has not disappointed with dropping his load on a nightly basis. Get in a good raunchy mood with Niecee away and he would try to keep Danni in bed all day.

There were still so many things she was learning about her dear fiancé. One that he was very well off and successful. She already knew he was smart but damn she had no idea what she was really about to marry into. Not only did he own businesses, he had a corporation. He allowed his competent heads run the company as he sat back and collected. Normally he only participated in the board of director meetings, leaving the rest of the odd and end decisions to them. This day however he needed to clean house so to speak and he invited Danni along for the ride. As they arrived at the building everything started to make sense. She felt kind of dumb for not putting two and two together but with everything that had been going on, could anyone blame her?

“Mark?” Danni questioned as they made their way through the building. A few faces were very familiar having seen them a time or two at different functions before Lamont forbid her from going to them anymore. They only gave them both cursory glances as if they were wondering why they seemed to walk through as if they owned the place.

“Yes baby?”

“Why are they staring at us this way?”

“Because they are curious as to why we are walking around like we own the place. When in fact *we* do own the place.”

“Just because I am slow and just figured out that you own Jones Corporation. Why doesn’t anyone else know this?”

“Because my love, I like to keep a low profile. Sadly I come here often but I never have meetings on this floor. Well not since I moved the company in this building. You see, when it was much smaller I worked it myself. Once I stepped back, I played the corporate boss that never oversaw personally. I have others for that. Some of these individuals have seen me on several occasions they just don’t remember and I like it that way.” Mark said calmly.

“Mr. Jones. It’s nice to see you again. I want to guarantee you that I have everything set up the way you requested.” A guy she remembers meeting a time or two

before. He then turned to a very observant Danni before gasping in surprise.

“Bernard Bennett, this is my fiancée Danielle Hunter.” Mark introduced pulling her to his side. From the smug look on his face he knew the guy recognized her as Lamont’s former wife.

“Hello Mr. Bennett, it’s nice to see you again.”

“Uh. Yes. Mrs. I mean, Ms. Hunter. It’s nice to see you as well.” Mr. Bennett stuttered. “I apologize for the baffled response.”

“It’s quite alright Mr. Bennett. So many are so used to seeing me with my ex-husband.”

“Ex-husband? Oh yes. Off the record, I am very happy for you. It seems you have not let a person such as himself kill your joy. You are absolutely radiant. The happiness seems to be surrounding you in a glowing aura.” He said with a smile on his face.

“Thank you. That is courtesy to my loving fiancé here.”

“She makes it easy.” Mark said with a grin the size of Texas on his face looking down at her.

“Wonderful. I will call in everyone else if there is nothing else you would like to address.” He escorted them to the auditorium style meeting space.

“Honey if you would be so kind as to have a seat right in front of me. I want to keep my eyes on you as I speak with

some of my staff members and introduce myself to others.” He winked.

“Sure thing.”

“Give me one quick kiss for luck before everyone comes in though.”

“No. Your kisses are addictive and they tend to take on another level of intensity.”

“No? You telling me no? Bet I got you later on.”

“No Mark. Okay.”

“Nope too late.” He said seriously as the doors opened as people started to pour in. “Remember NO tap-outs allowed.” He smirked. Danni’s eyes were the size of quarters and her cookie trembled. That man was going to kill her with his appetite but what a way to go.

“Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I know many of you are wondering why this meeting was called.” Mr. Bennett addressed the crowd. “First I would like to thank all of you who were prompt in attending this mandatory meeting. Also it is with great pleasure that I introduce the owner of Jones’ Corporation. I know several of you have been curious as to who actual signs our paychecks.” Several people in the room laughed. Just then the doors opened off to the side. In walked Lamont, his secretary, and his little pet.

“Mr. Graves and company, it’s very nice of you all to join us.” Mr. Bennett smartly remarked.

“I apologize for my tardiness sir.” He hurriedly took a seat not acknowledging anyone’s presence. His head was down in shame. The only person who sort of knew something

wasn't right was his secretary who looked at Danni like she had two heads. Danni in turn returned her attention to the stage.

“As I was saying. I would like to introduce to some and present to others. Mr. De' Marcus Jones, owner of Jones Corporation.” People stood clapping after they got over the initial shock that they were in the presence of the man that made it possible for them to have such success in the business. The fact that he was an African American man probably stunned several but they hid their shock well.

“Good morning.” Mark greeted everyone sweeping his eyes over the room as he spoke. Danni was thrilled beyond measure watching her big macho man conduct business. From the end of the row she sat on she could have sworn she heard Lamont's heart stop beating from sheer shock. Taking a chance in glancing in the area where Mark's gaze seemed to have stopped, she saw the horror written all over Lamont's face.

The meeting was to get some rules and regulations about office fraternization under control. The amount of relations going on in the office was becoming a threat in keeping things professional and without tragedy. Bringing to the surface that several women had brought up sexual harassment allegations against one of their very own. Mark let it be known that type of behavior would not be accepted. He announced that those individuals whom have been proven to have been inappropriate will be dealt with appropriately.

“Lastly, I have a very special announcement to make. As employees of Jones Corp., you all that will remain have

proven loyal to hold your positions. I pray that you all will govern yourselves accordingly from thenceforward. Without further ado, I would like to introduce you all to my beautiful and intelligent fiancée.” Mark said with ease. However Danni wasn’t expecting that introduction. “Come on up sweetheart.” Danni took timid steps as people stood to their feet with applause. He was going to pay for this embarrassment for sure.

“This is my lovely fiancée Ms. Danielle Hunter. She also holds a sizable share in Jones Corp.” Mark announced shocking her as well as others in the room. She whirled around to him, only to catch his signature devious smile. He kissed the shock off her face. “I told you to give up my kisses.” He whispered into her ear.

“I am going to get you.”

“You sure about that?” He warned. She bit her lip and clenched her thighs. “That’s what I thought.” He patted her on the butt.

“Unless there are some questions. You are all dismissed aside from the names on the projection screen. Those individuals please go to the waiting area down the hall and to wait your turn. If anyone is not present for the one on one meeting then you will be immediately dismissed. Thank you.” Mark said. People started to file out one by one. After several handshakes and plenty of congratulatory expressions they were finally able to move to conference room down the hall.

Walking down the hall was so invigorating. Lamont sat with several women along with his puppets and a few other men. Men she has known to be his male associates. They all

had worried expressions on their faces. Lamont however had an angry expression on his. It was kind of sad to know she was once associated with such a narcissistic prick. Thank God she got out of that mess before it consumed her.

One at a time they called in one person at a time. Each time another one was dismissed with their ruling passed down before the entire board of directors and the main owner, their reactions were all pretty much the same. *“You can’t do this. I have done nothing wrong. No... Oh no!*

What will my wife say?” And the list could go on. The men and women in the room were disoriented at being fired. They kept shouting disgruntled statements. If their cases weren’t so drastic it would have saddened Danni to see such defeat present. The truth of the matter was they brought their fate upon themselves with their destructive behavior. The lack of professionalism was repulsive.

“Ladies and Mr. Graves, it shouldn’t be hard to distinguish why you sit before us. After the speech delivered next door it is with grave disappointment that I must call for your immediate dismissal from the positions you hold.” Mr. Bennett stated with a blank expression on his face. They collectively chose to conduct this meeting with all three of them present.

“Your belongings have been packed for you and sent down to the security desk. An officer has to escort you from the premises by law.” Mr. Bennett said with finality.

“This is all over that boring bitch. Are you happy now?” He had the nerve to question Danni. “This isn’t the last you have heard from me. I will sue this company and you for

everything its worth for this unlawful discharge.” Lamont never let his angry expression falter.

“One this has nothing to do with my fiancée, who you will refrain from referring to as anything other than her name. Second, the last time I checked she was extremely happy. Am I right baby?”

“Absolutely. Never been happier.” Danni replied.

“Third and final, you have no room to issue a lawsuit. If anything I can sue you all for damaging the reputation of this company with your absurd behavior. Barbaric treatment to several women in this company who have issued written statements as well as proof to your wrongdoings. Will there be anything else?” Danni was turned on from the power exuding off of Mark. ‘Damn he is ALL mines.’ She thought she said to herself. “Yes I am.” Mark smirked at her loud observation. She couldn’t do anything but blush.

“...” Lamont and his counterparts were speechless. The women were balling their eyes out. The stipulation for Snow White was she had to obtain and keep stable employment in order to collect her inheritance. The other woman just needed her job and with Lamont being unemployed as well, she was screwed.

“Furthermore, I took the liberty in reaching out to some of our competitors that you have been caught finagling while on the clock for us and they want nothing to do with you. The lawsuit that threatens their own asses isn’t worth the risk of hiring you.” Mark added as a reassurance that he wasn’t to be messed with. “Not bad for a no-good thug.” Mark winked extending his hand to his woman.

“Yes sir. You can get it any way you desire.” Danni said it loud enough that everyone heard no doubt and she didn’t give a hot damn.

“Damn, I love you woman.”

“I love you more man.”

She let her absolutely adorable, charming, sexy, and powerful husband to be escort her from her past. Beyond the shadow of a doubt Mark was leading her into a world of bliss away from a cold existence. An existence that tried to drain her for every ounce of self-love, self-worth, and pride. Now she can live, love, and cherish the vows she will soon accept. Accept that Lamont’s vow of deception was officially null and void.

“So, when were you planning on telling me we’re pregnant?” Mark asked leaning against the elevator wall.

“How did you know?”

“I know your body woman. You really underestimate me.”

“That wasn’t my intentions. It was supposed to be a surprise.” Danni bit her lip. “Thanks for ruining it for me.”

“Look at the bright-side I am still surprised and extremely thrilled.” Mark beamed pulling Danni into him. “I will make it up to you later.”

“Oh really. How so?”

“You have to wait and see when we arrive at our next destination. Trust me you won’t be disappointed.”

“What next destination?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“Not fair you get to surprise me but you snatched mine up.”

“Only because I love to spoil you baby. You deserve it and so much more. I promise I will spend the rest of our days showing you just how much I appreciate having you in my life. I had to have you confirm my suspicions because I had to make sure you didn’t get sick on the flight. I apologize baby, I just couldn’t wait any longer.”

“I love you Mark.”

“I love you more.”

“Infinity.” They sealed the deal with a kiss of forever mores to come.

The End!

Note from Author

Hey all,

I just wanted to drop a line or two to thank you all for tuning into this stressful time for Danni in “Vows of Deception.” This story, I’m sure tugged at some heartstrings and ruffled some feathers. I always enjoy a read that I can relate to. Therefore I hope that my writing brought those feelings of relating with the characters to the readers as well. I pray you enjoyed reading as much as I enjoyed writing this story. Thanks again for supporting my writing experience for I truly love what I do.

Please tune in for other titles coming soon as well as those that you may have missed.

Be Blessed,

Mrs. K. K. Harris

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kanika Harris is an Arkansas native. She currently spends her days writing and her nights alongside her husband of close to ten years building their dream of running their own business. If she isn't writing she spends the remainder of her time with her church duties as the choir director and praise dance coordinator. With writing being the ultimate passion her laptop is a permanent attachment, going everywhere she goes.

Every extra moment available in a day she spends jotting down ideas for the new books or finishing works in progress. During her journey as a writer she has developed all sorts of new found talents that she had no clue she was capable of. Although she considers herself as an urban fiction novelist she has uncovered her talents in writing in several other types of genres. This is only the beginning, stay tuned for what is to come.

Other titles...

Love Drug (The Crew Series Book 1)

Mo' Better (The Crew Series Book 2)

Questionable Intentions (The Crew Series Book 3)

Austin's Desire

The Ultimate Fight

Blaze

KING (King Series Book 1)

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