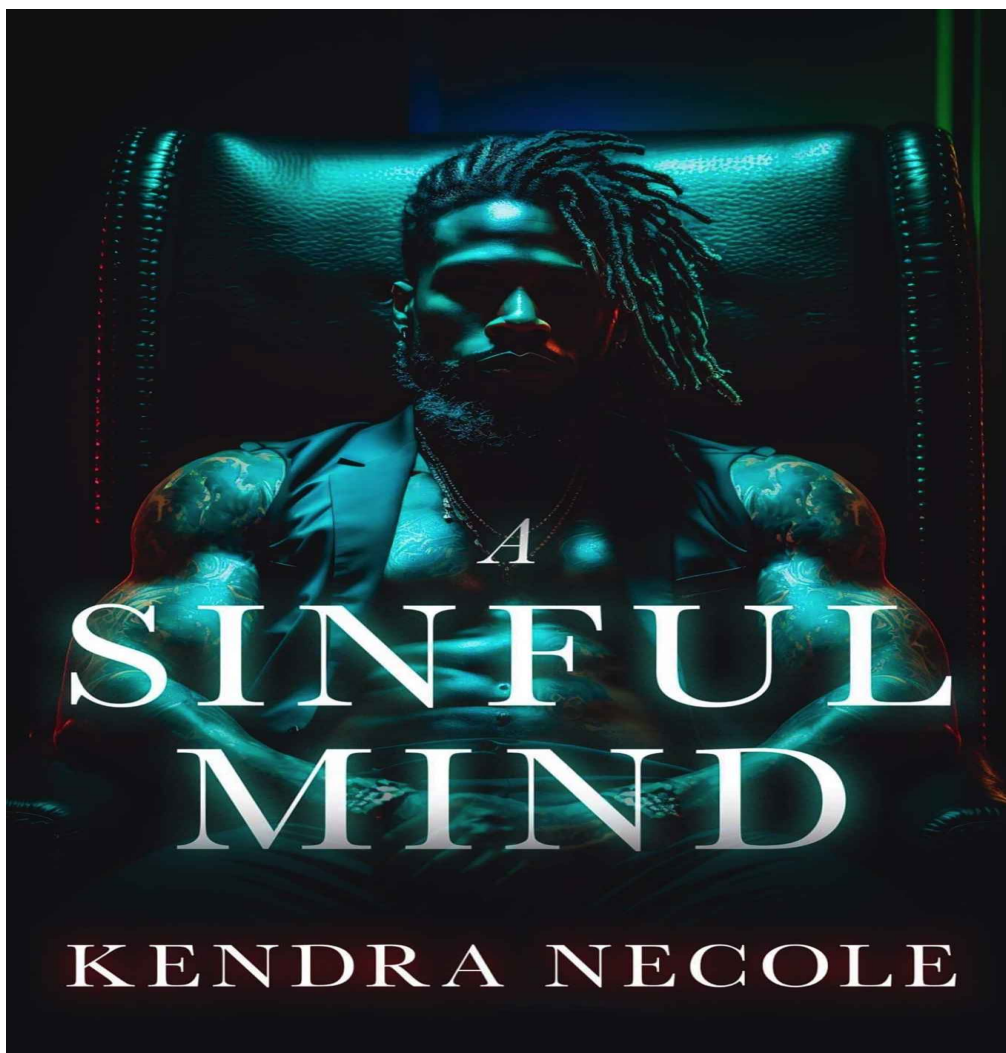


A

SINFUL MIND

KENDRA NECOLE



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DEDICATIONS

Rainy days won't last forever. Eventually, your garden will grow. This book is dedicated to anyone who has fallen and got back up again.

To my fur baby, BJ, who I lost while writing this book. Thank you for the best fifteen years of love and happiness.

CHAPTER ONE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Addiction had me in a chokehold. Drinking alcohol and popping pills temporarily helped me forget my demons.

Every day was a battle to stay clean. Throughout the years, I spent millions of dollars on different rehabs and sober coaches only for me to get released and succumb to the temptations of the music industry. I was tired of letting everyone down who cared for me. The only comfort I could find was the fact that once I was dead, they no longer had to worry about me. Death *had* to be easy. It damn sure was hard to live and be happy. Music was my solace, but Wolf Knight's bitch ass refused to let me release new material until I got my life straight. Without music, I felt lost.

Tears welled up in my eyes as I stared at the loaded gun on the coffee table. I was contemplating if I should blow my brains out or end it all another way.

DING!

DING!

Suddenly, I heard my doorbell ring. I put down the bottle of Don Julio and stumbled towards the door. When I opened it, my eyes grew twice their size. I noticed a black sports car zooming down my circular driveway with the tires loudly screeching and a little baby sleeping in a car seat next to a

black duffel bag at my doorstep. I knew I was drunk, but I couldn't have been tripping that hard. Whoever the hell it was, knew the code to my gate because that was the only way someone could get onto my property.

Heavily sighing, I lifted up the car seat, grabbed the duffel bag, and went back into the house. The moment I slammed the door, that damn baby woke up crying. Just my fuckin' luck. I sat the car seat down on the couch and dropped my head to the floor. I didn't know the first thing about kids, but the first thing I tried was picking up the curly headed baby. I figured the kid had to be a girl from the pink onesie. Instantly, she quieted down and began sucking on her tiny fist. Maybe she was hungry, so I decided to feed her before I called the police. All I needed were those pigs to think I was neglecting the kid and they turned the tables on me and put my black ass up in a jail cell. That was the reality of a black man. We were always guilty even when innocent.

I laid the baby on the couch and checked the duffel bag. After taking out two pre-made bottles, I saw a folder and a white envelope addressed to me. I quickly opened it and there was a note from an associate of mine named Kiersten. She was a vixen in a few of my music videos. We sometimes had sex after getting high and partying. Honestly, I didn't know anything about her, except for her name and how her body looked naked. She was a sexy white chick with blond hair and some big ass titties.

Dear Sinful,

This is your daughter, Rose. I am sorry, I didn't tell you about her, but I didn't know how to break the news. Every time I wanted to reach out, I got scared. I know you will probably hate me, but I hope one day, you can forgive me. Right now, I am struggling so I need you to take care of her until I get my shit together. I know you got your issues too, but you are her father. I'm sure you will do

great. I have faith in you. Please, keep our baby safe. I will reach out to you soon.

Xoxox,

Kiersten

I crumbled up the note with a frown and tossed it across the living room. That bitch had lost her mind. The last time I saw her at one of those industry parties, she didn't even look pregnant. Even if she was knocked up at the time, I couldn't have been the father. I always strapped up with Kiersten. God had to be playing some type of trick on me because I had dodged a bullet with another woman claiming I was the father of her baby. After taking a paternity test as soon as she had given birth, turned out the kid wasn't mine though.

I roared in frustration and knocked over my lamp, causing it to break. That damn kid started wailing from the top of her lungs.... again. I picked her up, but she refused to stop crying. My hands started shaking, and I could feel my anger rising, so I put her back into her car seat to be safe. As she kept screaming, giving me more of a headache, I gripped my head. I had had enough. I decided to call the police to get her out of my hair. They needed to find who her real dad was, quick. I also wanted them to arrest that crazy bitch, Kiersten, for leaving her baby with a stranger. ME, because I wasn't the father!

I grabbed my cellphone. As my fingers were hovering over the key panel, I received a FaceTime call from Rhythm. I didn't want her to hear the baby crying in the background, so I stepped outside. When I finally answered, Rhythm's face was drenched with tears. My heart sank. She must've listened to the drunken voicemail I had left threatening to kill myself.... again.

"Hello?" I cleared my throat.

"You're alive. Thank goodness," Rhythm's voice cracked.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you."

“Nardo and I are coming off tour to take you to rehab. You are spiraling out of control again.”

“You don’t need to stop your tour because of my bullshit. I’m fine.”

“Stop it! Your life is more important than this damn tour.”

“Baby sis. You worked too hard for this moment. I ain’t gonna let you ruin it for some junkie like me. You’re a mother. Worry about your baby girl and son. They are the ones you have to feed.”

“Don’t talk about yourself that way. I’ll see you in a few weeks so we can get you some help. I love you.”

“Love you too. Thanks for not giving up on me.”

“You’re my family. I will always have your back.”

No matter how many times I fucked up and had the world looking at me crazy, Rhythm never judged or shunned me. We didn’t have the same blood flowing through our veins, but we were indeed *family*. She was my biggest supporter and always rooted for me to conquer my addiction. I wanted to have a comeback story that I could share with the world, but I didn’t know if I could conquer my demons; the same demons that inflicted pain on my soul every day.

Stepping back into the house, it was dead silent. I shook my head in disbelief while looking at the baby peacefully sleeping. She did all that damn crying for nothing, giving me a pounding headache. I tiptoed past the car seat and went to grab the liquor. When I placed the bottle up to my lips, I felt guilty about drinking around the kid. And besides, I had to focus on getting a DNA test. I wanted it to be done privately without anything getting out in the media. My former manager, Avery, was the only person who I trusted to help me with the situation. She was the real deal and didn’t play games. My black ass found out the hard way after she quit on me for leaving the rehab center she pulled strings to get me admitted to for treatment. Instead of calling Avery, I decided to pop up at her new office, which was downtown. She had just moved to Houston, Texas with her family and expanded her

management firm. The last time we saw each other, things got heated. I knew she wasn't gonna be thrilled to see me, but I needed her help. She was a boss and good at her job. I needed her to take the lead.

I quickly called my driver, Mr. Moore, to get me from my crib. Within fifteen minutes, he was pulling into my circular driveway. I walked out with the baby in the car seat along with the baby bag on my shoulder and he looked at me strangely with his lips pressed together as he caressed his beard.

“You are father, right?” I probed and he nodded his head.

“Yeah. I got three little ones and my wife is pregnant again. She's due next month with our daughter,” he smiled proudly.

I shook my head and frowned. “Nigga, I didn't ask you for your life story. Help me secure this kid in this truck. I got somewhere to be.”

“My apologies, sir,” he cleared his throat and grabbed the handle of the car seat.

For the past five years, Mr. Moore had been working for me, but I barely spoke to him or didn't know anything about his personal life. I didn't like getting close to people. The only reason I knew he had kids and a wife was because his lady called one day while he was at work and he spoke with them.

I opened the door to the Benz truck and slid into the leather backseat before adjusting my diamond chain. Mr. Moore made sure the kid was safely secured next to me in the car seat. Then he climbed into the driver's seat and I gave him the directions. Since I didn't want the baby to wake up, I told him not to play any music while we drove. As I looked out the window, I made a beat off the top of my head and mumbled some lyrics to myself. I laid my head back to rest my eyes since the liquor in my system had me a little twisted. After noticing there was a lot of traffic, I felt myself getting annoyed. With a scowl, I punched the passenger's seat headrest. Mr. Moore was used to me acting like an asshole and didn't even react to my outburst.

“Damn nigga. Can’t you drive any faster?” I angrily spoke with my nostrils flaring.

“It looks like an accident. I can’t go anywhere. Police seem to be directing the traffic.”

“Fuck! I don’t feel like this slow-motion bullshit!” I yelled.

Just like before, that damn baby woke up crying. I felt like I was in a nightmare. We finally pulled up to Avery’s office building and I couldn’t jump out of the truck fast enough. Mr. Moore grabbed the car seat before following behind me. The lobby was decked out in bright furniture and artwork displayed on the walls of Avery’s famous clients, including me.

“The kid is probably hungry. Handle that for me, man,” I handed Mr. Moore the diaper bag.

Mr. Moore did what he was told and took a seat on the chair to feed the kid. As he cradled her into his arms, I approached the woman at the front desk who looked to be in her mid-twenties. She started jumping up and down on the floor screaming and I just chuckled. I was always flattered by the attention from fans, especially the ladies. They loved me and always showed support.

“Omg. You’re Sinful mothafuckin’ K. I am your biggest fan and have all your music. Can I get an autograph? Please,” she begged.

“Yeah, I got chu, mama. Where do you want it? Your titties or your ass?” I licked my lips.

“I don’t care. I just want your name on me.” She bit the edge of her lip.

“What’s your name, thickness?”

“Nevia.” She popped her lips.

Shorty didn’t even care that she was at work being unprofessional, risking her job. She was looking good in her yellow dress and had my dick reacting in my pants because she was thick as fuck. After I raked my eyes down every inch of her body, I grabbed her hand and kissed it. Suddenly, a

familiar voice caught my attention. It was Avery's bible thumping ass cousin, Mary, cock blocking me. She pushed past Nevia and stood in front of the desk with her hands on her hips like she was the boss. I couldn't help but smirk seeing her wearing that long ass skirt like she was Mother Theresa. The last time I saw her was when she anointed my head with oil and was trying to pray the demon out of me in her cousin's office. Mary was fuckin' crazy.

"What's good, Mary Lab?" I winked.

"My name is Mary Lamb. What are you doing here demon? You are no longer a client at this management firm."

"Fuck all that shit you talkin'. I need to see Avery."

She folded her arms against her chest and tapped her foot. "Your language is uncalled for, sir. Do you have an appointment?"

"Naw... But it's an emergency. Tell her to come holla at a nigga."

"Mrs. Valentine-St. Clare is in a meeting. Now, if you want to see her, you will need to setup up a time and a date. We don't allow pop ups at the office, especially not from sinners."

"You better stop judging me, grandma skirt. You don't know anything about me."

"Psssh. I know everything from how you act in the media. You're rude, a druggie, and a sinner. I don't care too much for people like you. What type of name is *Sinful K* anyway?"

"I'm a man who loves to dance with the devil."

She put her hand in my face. "You're a heathen."

"Fuck you! You righteous bitch, suck my dick." I grabbed my crotch.

Mary gasped and clutched hold of her imaginary pearls before she ran off towards the elevator. I guess I crossed the line calling her a bitch, but she never should've judged me. All those church folks wanted to do was point their fingers, but they were the biggest sinners. My father was a pastor, and that nigga was the biggest hypocrite. He had his entire

congregation fooled, believing he was some great man and savior. He wasn't shit but a devil who made his family's life a living hell. I hated that mothafucka. It was because of him those demons corrupted my innocence.

"My bad, thickness. I hope I don't get you in trouble and Mary tells on you to the boss," I said to Nevia who was still looking at me with lust in her eyes.

"Ain't nobody is worrying about Mary. Plus, she is my cousin, she'll be okay. How about you call me some time, Mr. Sinful." Nevia wrote her number down and handed it to me.

I plugged the hoe's number in my cellphone before calling hers to have mine. Then I turned to look at Mr. Moore who was still holding the baby. He didn't utter a word. There was no way I could leave without speaking with Avery. I decided to call her, but she didn't answer. Feeling frustrated, I raked my hand down my face. I really was gonna be stuck with the kid. As I turned to leave, something wet was tossed on me. I looked to see who did it and saw Mary holding a mini vile. I didn't even see her ass come back down to the lobby. When she flung some more oil at me, I rushed towards her and tried to grab the vile from her hand. She kept moving her arms away. I didn't want to do anything that would get me labeled as a woman beater. When she turned around, her ass was on my dick. For a church girl, she was thick. It had to be those church suppers that got her sitting right. I couldn't focus on that because I was burning with rage.

"You think you're gonna keep putting that on me without any consequences."

"Get off me now before I scream. You ungodly man!" Mary yelled.

I removed my body from against Mary's and grabbed my phone. She wanted to keep playing, but I had something for that ass. I was going to get the last laugh. I stepped outside and called the police. Yeah, it was petty, but I was sick of her overly righteous ass. The police arrived on the scene about fifteen minutes later acting like they were concerned especially when the two of them recognized me. I made sure

to use that to my advantage. I explained to them how I was assaulted and wanted them to arrest Mary. Since I was a celebrity, they wanted to be extra helpful. They followed me inside the building, and I had the receptionist chick call Mary down to the lobby. At first, she didn't want to comply, but she picked up the phone. I leaned against the wall with my arms folded, waiting for the show. As soon as Mary strolled off the elevator, I motioned my head in her direction and the police approached her with questions. Mary shot me a dirty look and I chuckled.

The female officer showed her badge. "What seems to be the problem here?"

"Whatever do you mean, officers?" Mary said softly with her hands clutched in front of her body.

"Tell the cops how you assaulted me while calling me a demon," I got straight to the point and stared at Mary.

"I did not touch you. You're probably high." Mary looked at me with her teeth baring.

"How about we roll this building's cameras back to see what you did, you little Lamb?" I blew her a kiss.

I could tell she was a virgin and just wanted to get under her skin.

"I can't stand you. You're gonna burn in hell."

"I don't care about burning. All you got to do is join me." I winked.

"What? You're not even my type. I want my husband to be saved and God fearing. I can see it in your eyes you're no good and don't believe in the higher power. That's why I didn't want my cousin representing you. I am glad she fired you and got away from your dark wicked self." She shook her finger at me like I was some child.

"No man in their right mind is gonna wife you. Just look at you, you don't have any sex appeal. You wear ugly long skirts that look like they could be used as tablecloths, and your Shirley Chisolm curls are gone out of style. I bet you're a

virgin who doesn't even know the scent of her own pussy when you're wet."

I provoked Mary and she slammed her 1960's dress heel on my foot. After being rushed by the female officer, Mary was grabbed and handcuffs were placed around her wrists. As I pushed back my falling dreads from my face, I smirked seeing her in distress, trying to plead her case.

"Please, tell the police this is a misunderstanding. I can't go to jail. Help me please," she begged.

"Naw, you should've thought about that before you started talkin' shit. Now call on your Jesus." I frowned.

The police escorted Mary to their cruiser as she sobbed and yelled something about getting her prayer cloth. She didn't look so righteous with those handcuffs around her wrists.

CHAPTER TWO



MARY LAMB

Never in my life had I been in any trouble. Being shoved into a tiny cell that reeked of urine had me gripping hold of the cold metal bars and uncontrollably sobbing. I was a good Christian woman with morals and didn't deserve to be treated like some heathen. Those police officers should've been ashamed of themselves for arresting me without hearing my side of the story. The only reason why they even listened to Sinful K was because he was a big celebrity. Who would trust a man with a name like that anyways? Once I got out of custody, they were going to be hearing from my attorney. My wrists were in excruciating pain because they had the cuffs too tight and I could still see the line marks deeply imprinted into my skin. That was police brutality at its finest. No wonder they stayed in the news for their behavior. They wouldn't know how to treat people with a guidance counselor standing next to them. Abusing their authority seemed to be their goal.

As more tears rolled down my puffy cheeks, I took a seat on the bench and wrapped my arms around my body. Looking around, I saw other women who didn't seem fazed about being locked up. Either they were talking or sleeping with their backs against the walls. I just prayed someone gave me a phone call so I could contact my cousin, Avery, because I was

petrified. My heart was beating so fast and the small hairs on the back of my neck were standing up. I felt like I was going to pass out at any moment. It didn't help that a lady wearing a tight cheetah dress and long heels came and sat next me with her legs crossed. My grandma Mable always said people that dressed like that were tacky and I should avoid them because they weren't any good.

"Don't cry, honey. What are you in here for?" She smiled.

"Uhhh. I'm innocent." I sighed.

She pursed her glossy lips. "Girl, that's what we all tell the mothafuckin' cops when we don't want to go to jail. We tell our public defenders that too and they still manage to fuck up our cases."

Her foul mouth made me cringe. Even at thirty, I wasn't comfortable with people cursing around me. The one time I did try to curse as a child, my grandma washed my mouth out with dish soap. Literally. She used so much, I thought I was going to start coughing up bubbles. After that, she sat me down and had a long conversation about not using foul language because it wasn't becoming or sophisticated for a young lady. I vowed not to do it again and kept my word. Avery had gotten the same talk, but she didn't get the message like I did. She was always cursing up a hurricane, especially when she was angry. Our granny hated it and never missed an opportunity to remind her.

"I am telling the truth. I didn't do anything but try to cleanse this devil man by putting a little anointed oil on him. That isn't a crime. I'm doing God's work."

She raised up her eyebrow. "Did you have permission?"

"No." I shook my head.

She snaked her neck and her eyes got big. "What's wrong with you? You can't be going around putting shit on people, sis. I'm surprised he didn't knock your head over the dryer. If you ask me, he's a saint, because if he was a devil, you would probably be in a smaller box than this one."

I placed my hand on my forehead feeling confused. “My granny told me it’s okay to do it because people don’t know when they need a good spiritual cleanse.”

“Well, your granny is gonna get your ass beat and from those 1960’s kitten heels you’re wearing, I don’t think you will last one second in a fight.” She chuckled.

“Fight? I don’t believe in getting physical with people. Peace is always the key.” I smiled.

“Damn, boo. I wish I would have met you two hours ago before I beat my now ex and his mistress after catching them in my place having sex.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry that happened. If I had my prayer cloth, I would pray for you.”

“Aww, that’s sweet. What’s your name?”

“Mary Lamb,” I said politely.

“That’s unique. My name is Brooklyn, but everybody calls me Brook. It’s nice to meet you.” She reached out her hand and I shook it.

To past the time by in lock up, we made conversation about our jobs and some of the things we did for fun. She loved going to night clubs and dancing. I told her how I loved baking for the church’s bake sales. Brook was actually very funny and animated. Eventually, I laid my head on her shoulder and fell asleep. About an hour later, I popped my eyes back open and something was smelling awful. I clutched hold of my chest when I saw a woman sitting on the metal toilet, grunting. Everyone else was very casual about the situation, but I felt offended. I didn’t want, nor did I expect to see her using the bathroom. She smelled horrible and I couldn’t help but gag. I almost vomited inside of my mouth. Some of the other women curiously glanced over in my direction.

“Excuse me? I don’t mean to offend you, but nobody wants to see your body parts or smell you.” I squeezed my nose as I expressed my discomfort to the woman using the bathroom. “You’re killing my stomach.”

“Bitch! Do you know who the fuck I am? I am a Black Wolf. I will fuck you up. Who you reppin’?”

“I am reppin’ the Lord.”

That woman confused me because she sounded like a man and even looked like one with the fade haircut she was sporting. When she pulled up her baggy pants without wiping her butt, I frowned my face. She was being very unhygienic. I knew she was gonna have some poop stains in her underwear. My comment had obviously rubbed her the wrong way and caused her to tower over me with a serious scowl on her face. I swallowed hard. Honestly, I had never been in a single fight and didn’t know how to defend myself. Next thing I knew, she snatched me up and wrapped her gigantic hands around my neck. My eyes were rolling to the back of my head and all I could do was call on the Lord. Suddenly, Brook leaped on her back and started banging her in the head with her fist. That big mannish looking woman released me from her grip and tried to get Brook off of her back. They both fell on the floor and Brook climbed on top of her body and started punching her in the face.

Two guards rushed into the cell and slammed them down on their stomachs and put them in handcuffs. As we made eye contact, Brook winked at me before being taken away with the other woman, who had blood leaking out of her mouth. The other cellmates were cackling about the brawl, but I felt horrible. Brook had gotten in trouble for defending me. It was all beginning to be too much. The lifestyle of being locked up like an animal and I had only been in there less than three hours. I was already yearning to be freed. When I saw a female guard walking around, I stuck my hand out through the bars waving to get her attention, but she didn’t even acknowledge me. Feeling defeated, I raked my hands down my face. I felt like crying even more. That’s when I had to remember the scripture that said God wouldn’t give me anything I couldn’t handle. I wiped my tears with the back of my hand, took a seat back on the bench, waited patiently until I got a phone call, and kept calm by singing my favorite gospel songs to myself.

When I used to sing in the choir for my church, everyone told me my voice was beautiful. The other cellmates seemed to have thought the same. Some were swaying their upper bodies left and right while still sitting down on the bench. Others had their eyes closed, probably praying they could get out of the funk we were all in. Suddenly, I heard my last name being called by a guard who was standing outside the cell. I stopped singing, quickly leaped up from the bench, and bolted out that cell at the speed of light, almost knocking the guard down. The guard gripped my arms and escorted me to the holding lobby entrance of the precinct where Avery was standing with her new baby girl, Charlotte, strapped in a harness against her chest. I rushed towards her and she shook her head upset.

“Cousin, I can explain,” I was getting ready to tell her the whole story.

Avery put up her index finger stopping me before I could start. “Let’s go Mary. We will talk on the way to the house.”

I followed behind Avery as we made our way outside of the precinct. She had her Mercedes truck parked in front of the curb, at least I thought it was hers. But when I saw the license plate with the name “Sinful K” on it, I stopped dead in my tracks. I wasn’t getting into anything that belonged to that man. He must’ve sensed my presence. All I heard was the backseat window rolling down and saw him in his black shades as he flashed his grills at me. I rolled my eyes in disgust and he thought it was funny. Obviously, that man had lost his mind.

“How was your timeout, little Lamb? Did you eat any hay in there? Or did you get fed carrots?” He rubbed his chin.

“You think getting me locked up and messing up my perfect criminal record is funny? It’s not, sir. There is a special place for people like you.”

“Next time, you will keep your damn oil and your hands-off me. I don’t like anybody touching me without my permission. You’re a bible thumping lunatic.”

“You’re the crazy one walking around with that horrible name. I can’t believe people around the world listen to what

you have to say when you can't even pronounce your words all the way."

"For you to be so Christian, you always judging a nigga."

"I need the both of you to shut the hell up!" Avery yelled because she obviously got tired of listening to us.

She slightly jumped, scaring her poor little baby. "Get in this truck right now, Mary. You don't know how much trouble you've caused me."

I didn't want to get Avery anymore upset than she already was, so I climbed into the truck without a fight. There was another little baby in a car seat. She was so cute and had so much hair. Her cute little chubby cheeks were so adorable I wanted to pinch them. That little one took a look at me and smiled. I extended my hand to rub her little arm, then Sinful wanted to be ugly and pushed it away with a frown on his face.

"Don't touch the kid with your hooves, Lamb. She is off limits."

"Why is that? And I don't have hooves. If I have hooves, you have horns on your head and toenails that look like knives. You demon." I pursed my lips.

"And that's why. Because you don't like me, and the kid might be mine."

"Stop lying. This kid is too cute to belong to a devil like you. Whose baby you stole? You're trying to convince that judge in your new assault case that you're a stand-up citizen for taking care of a baby?" I ridiculed him.

"He is being serious, Mary. Sinful will be staying with us for a few days until he gets a DNA on the baby. After we find out the results, we will go from there, so I need you to be nice."

"What? I don't feel like sharing my space with the likes of him. His house is probably ten times bigger than yours and Cupid's. Why does he need to stay with y'all?"

Avery shot me a look to shut up and refused to answer my questions. It was almost as if she was trying to spare his feelings. Looked to me that he was a grown man who needed to handle his own responsibilities instead of acting like some entitled little child.

Then, Sinful had said something that shocked me. “I’m an addict, Mary. I don’t trust myself being alone with this baby. I wouldn’t hurt her, but I might get so fucked up that I forget she is there. I can’t have that on my heart.”

Sinful was so transparent about his struggles, I almost wanted to cry, but I didn’t want him to think anything of it. My heart was very touched, though.

Sinful continued, “Your cousin offered to let us stay with her since she is working as my manager again, thanks to you, because that’s the only way I wouldn’t press charges.”

He had to ruin the only positive thoughts I had about him.

I folded my arms against my chest. “If you put it that way, you’re right. The baby would be safer in a more stable environment.”

“Mary, enough,” Avery warned me.

“I know what I am, Lamb. You don’t have to tell me, I am fucked up and I own my shit.”

Honestly, after Sinful said that, there was nothing left for me to say. He owned up to his wrongs. And if a person could own up to their wrongs, then that was the first step to a righteous life. I didn’t know if he was actually going to get to that point, but the rest of the ride home, no more words were spoken. I just looked out the window and enjoyed the sights. Houston was a beautiful place; the kind of place that I would miss being in after I went back home to Pennsylvania. Granny Mable only allowed me to help Avery setup her office, but I wasn’t able to work for her anymore because I was going to be the new accountant at the church. I was really sad about it. I loved working as Avery’s personal assistant. And even though I got on her last nerve, we had a great time. She was my best friend. Growing up, she was the only one who accepted the

way I carried myself. Everyone else thought I was a weird, geeky goody two shoes who couldn't have any fun. I never went to dance parties. I didn't participate in any sports because Granny Mable thought the clothes were skimpy, and I didn't even go to prom. My childhood was not like most modern folk, but Avery would always come over to my house to hang out with me. We would even read the bible together sometimes. And even though it wasn't for a long time, she made an effort to relate to me through the things I held dear to my heart. Thinking about those things made tears fall from my eyes, but I quickly wiped them away before anyone could see me crying.

We pulled up to the house and I quickly got out the truck. I was walking towards the front door, but it felt like someone was looking at me. Turning around, I saw that Sinful K was staring at me as he was carrying his potential baby in the car seat. We all made our way inside and Charlie ran to give her mother a hug. She was so big and loved being a big sister. After Avery allowed the nanny to leave, she was showing Sinful where he would be staying. I almost had a fit when I saw his room was right next to mine. But I was a guest, and I didn't want to cause any problems. I had to remember my manners. After shutting my bedroom door, I stripped out of my clothes and took a shower. The water felt so good against my skin. Every droplet felt like a massage. As I gently washed the soap out of my hair, I felt a sudden cool breeze. At first, I thought it was Sinful trying to be a pervert, but it was Avery who opened the shower door, standing in front of me with her hands on her hips. I quickly snatched down my towel to cover myself and turned off the water before stepping into my slippers.

“What are you doing, Avery? I need my privacy.” I tightened the towel around my body.

Avery popped her lips. “Girl please. I don't know what you're hiding. We got the same body parts, heffa.”

“Yeah, but granny said even girls shouldn't see each other because it's wrong.”

“This is my house. Grandma Mable doesn’t run shit up in here. Now get dressed so we can talk about your foolishness.”

I quickly got dressed and sat on the edge of the bed with my hands cupped into my lap. For a moment, Avery just stared at me with her lips pressed together. I figured she was trying to find the right words. Once again, I had put her business in jeopardy for the same foolish man. She worked so hard rebuilding after her divorce and I really felt bad for possibly ruining it.

“Why do you keep having these run-ins with Sinful K? You know we can be sued, and I can lose my business? As much as I love you, I will kick your ass if you take my lively hood away from my kids.”

“That man does something to me. He is bad.”

“How do you know he is bad? You don’t know that man. I already told you, Mary, you can’t believe everything you hear, especially in the media. They get paid to print false stories about celebrities, especially the ones who have internal struggles. The media are *the demons*. They will turn someone’s struggle into false rumors that make people question their integrity. We are all human, Mary. You above all people know that.”

“I can feel it in my bones something isn’t right with him.”

“Despite what you think, he is a phenomenal artist but an even greater person. He just can’t get his demons under control. If you ask me, I think you got a little crush.”

I placed my hand on my chest and rapidly shook my head in disagreement. “You got to be kidding me. I don’t have a crush on that man. He isn’t my type. I am looking for a good Christian man.”

“No offense, Mary, but you don’t have a type. You never had a boyfriend and you’re almost thirty-one years old.”

“True, but I know it’s not Mr. Sin. He is trouble. I don’t deal with those type of people.”

“That’s a lie. You love my dad. He was the biggest crook and stayed in trouble for years until he got saved.”

“You’re right. I love him to death.”

“Girl, you got one more week here with me. Please just be nice.”

Next thing I knew, Avery looked me in my eyes and collapsed into my arms, sobbing. And when she got going, I started sobbing too. Neither one of us had siblings. We were polar opposites, but we had such a wonderful bond. Our parents were sisters and that was what we were. I was gonna miss her just as much as she was going to miss me. From Pennsylvania, Texas seemed so far away. After we wiped our faces, Avery left to make a few business phone calls.

I was in charge of preparing dinner and headed downstairs to the kitchen. It was so spacious to move around. After thoroughly washing my hands, I grabbed the beef roast from the glass refrigerator. Then, I got the pot and pans to cook sides. Once I got my meat seasoned, I put it into the oven with carrots and potatoes. Then I took a seat at the table with my mini bible. My soul needed a little cleanse especially after my time in lock up. As I slid my finger under the words, reading them intently, the sound of crying broke my concentration. Sinful K strolled in cradling his little girl against his chest. She was giving him a run for his money and I thought it was funny. I couldn’t stop the smirk from tugging at my lips. He cut his eyes at me before opening up the refrigerator and took out a bottle. I saw him trying to figure out the fancy bottle warmer. He had no idea. It wasn’t the baby’s fault he didn’t have any sense, so I stood up to show him how it worked and then placed the bottle inside to heat it up. He leaned against the counter with the baby and spoke politely.

“Thanks Lamb.” He winked.

At first, I didn’t answer and felt conviction in my heart for being rude. I sighed before turning to look into his eyes. They looked so empty and lost.

“You’re welcome. Do you want me to show you how to feed the baby?”

“How about you do it? I’ll watch. I don’t know what the hell I’m doing.”

“Maybe you should’ve thought about that before you had unprotected sex before marriage.”

“I am a rock star, baby Lamb. That comes with the lifestyle.”

“You’re disgusting.”

“Here you go with your judgmental ways again. Maybe you should get some dick and you won’t be a witch.”

“I am proud to be a virgin. Thank you very much. Now get out of my face, demon.”

“How about you read Matthew Chapter 7, in your bible, where it talks about judging others and how you will be judged, since that’s all you do.”

Sinful grabbed the bottle from the warmer and walked off with the baby. As he left, I rushed behind him to grab his arm to stop him from leaving. He was right. I wasn’t being a good Christian. Despite his reckless lifestyle, I didn’t have a right to judge him. Only God could. After asking to help with the baby, he handed her to me, and she slightly smiled. Honestly, they didn’t need a DNA test, she had his same exact honey - brown eyes. The little ladybug was just innocent and pure. I cradled her into my arms and gently placed the bottle nipple into her mouth. She softly sucked it with her eyes closed like she was living her best life.

“Do you want to try to feed her? She is actually a good baby.”

He cleared his throat. “I’m not ready. I don’t want to hurt her.”

“All you have to do is be careful. I can show you.”

“I’ll watch and then do it later,” he was adamant.

“Okay, if you insist. What’s the pretty girl’s name?”

“Rose.” He smiled.

“I like that. She will be able to get a job with a beautiful name like that.”

“How do you know about babies? I know you ain’t busting it open to have any of your own.”

“Very funny, devil man. I worked at the church’s daycare center during Sunday school. It was very fun, and I learned a lot.”

“For how long? I don’t even like kids.”

“Five years but then I had to quit.”

I loved working at the church’s daycare but after my granny saw me getting attached to the kids, she wanted me to leave. She felt I would get the urge to have kids on my own and have pre-marital sex. I begged her to let me stay but she guilt tripped me for disobeying her wishes.

“Why? You got fired sitting on your ass?”

“Nope. I was one of their best workers, but my grandmother thought it was time for me to leave.”

“What? How old are you? You still taking orders from your grandmother? They call me crazy.” He chuckled.

“Don’t worry about my life when you don’t have yours in order, sir.”

Didn’t nobody have to tell me anything when it came to my grandma because I already knew how she was.

Rose drank the rest of her bottle and I handed her back to Sinful before checking on the pot roast. He seemed so uncomfortable sitting in the chair with the baby. Even though I couldn’t stand him, she was a cutie pie. Without asking for permission, I took her from his tattooed covered arms and curled her close to my chest to slowly rock her to sleep. Maybe if she was his child, he would finally find a reason to get saved and stay clean.

CHAPTER THREE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



No way I wanted the responsibility of being a father. I was eager to get that DNA test. After rocking baby Rose to sleep, I went outside in the backyard to get a moment and clear my head. If I couldn't drink, the least I could do was vape. I took a long pull, then Avery strolled out with her iPad against her chest. I could tell she was already in business mode.

"Baby Rose is kicking your ass already, huh?" She chuckled.

"Hell yeah. She is a bossy little thing. She always needs something."

"Welcome to parenthood." She smiled and patted me on the shoulder.

"Naw, don't put that energy on me. I hope she isn't mine. You and I both know a nigga like me doesn't need a kid. When are we taking that test?" I was ready to get the results asap.

She showed me a list of numbers on her iPad screen, but I was confused because I didn't know what they were for.

"All the DNA places I called in this area are booked. I'm waiting on one to call me back. Until then, we will have to wait."

“What the fuck is going on that we can’t get a DNA test right away?” I was frustrated.

“Fuckin’ and being irresponsible, like you.” She rolled her eyes.

“Did you tell them I would pay more for someone else’s spot?”

I figured my money was long enough to make people move faster. Avery thought otherwise.

She shook her index finger. “You know I don’t do bribery. I never want anyone to hold anything over my head.”

I grunted and raked my hand down my face. Avery always went by the book when it came to conducting business. She didn’t believe in doing anything that would jeopardize her career or integrity. That’s why she was one of the most sought out managers in the entertainment industry. The majority of clients that she represented had respectable images. If they were in the media, it wasn’t for unpleasant behavior. Except me, but she only took me on because I worked with Wolf. Nonetheless, that wasn’t going to stop her from firing my ass if she had too. The quality of her workspace meant more than a fat ass check. After Mary had assaulted me with that oil, my luck changed though. That was how I got Avery to be my manager again, under the condition that I wouldn’t press charges on Mary.

“I can’t keep this kid not knowing if she isn’t mine.” I hit my vape again.

“I got a million other things to do and you just sprung this on me, Sinful. You’re gonna have to give me some time to find a place that will keep your identity a secret without selling your story to the press for the highest bidder. We don’t need this getting out in the media. Like I told you, you can stay here until we get everything squared away.”

“Aight.” I nodded my head.

“Before I forget, it’s my anniversary so I am going away for the weekend to a Bed and Breakfast. If you need anything, Mary will take care of you.”

My eyes got bigger. “What? You’re leaving me with that crazy chick and the kid, while you go dick riding? That’s fucked up. I am paying you.”

Avery pursed her lips and cocked her head to the side. “Nobody didn’t tell you to be raw dogging women.”

“You’re my manager.”

“I’m closed for business for the next forty-eight hours. You can leave a message, or you can get help from Mary.”

“Your cousin doesn’t like me. She might toss me out when you leave. I can’t be alone with the kid.”

“Mary isn’t that bad. Just don’t play with her about her Jesus and you will be fine.” She chuckled. “If I hear anything back from a DNA place, I will contact you.”

Avery rushed off in a hurry. I was left shaking my head while taking another hit from my vape to calm the fuck down. Once I knew Avery was long gone, I went back inside with the intention to fuck with Mary while she was humming a song and folding clothes. She always seemed to be in a happy mood, as if life was never difficult. I crossed my arms over my chest and stared at Mary to make her uncomfortable.

“What are you looking at, sir? Don’t you have some sinning to do?”

I chuckled. “I only sin for twenty-three hours of the day.”

“You don’t sleep.”

“Even in my dreams, I sin.” I winked and grabbed my dick.

“You are just shameful. No wonder you are always in the news for your behavior. You got demon qualities.”

Just to get under Mary’s skin, I grabbed her big ass granny draws from the laundry basket and sniffed them lustfully. Gasping, she snatched them back with her eyes widened and I walked away laughing. There wasn’t really anything for me to do. I had got bored and walked down to the basement to play some pool. After racking up the billiard balls into the triangle, I grabbed my cue stick and focused on hitting the cue ball for

the break. I had the right shot, then Mary called my name and sounds of crying followed. Heavily sighing, I turned around to see Mary cradling baby Rose in her arms. We both stared at each other for a moment, then Mary said something.

“You are really down here living your best life while this beautiful baby is in her crib crying. It’s a shame she can’t depend on you, sir.” Mary had an attitude.

“She was supposed to be sleep.”

“Well, she is up now and needs to be changed. She is soaking wet.”

“Naw, I don’t feel comfortable doin’ that.”

“She can’t just stay like this because you don’t want to do it. That’s not right.”

“Since it seems to be bothering you, Lamb, you do it. I’m trying to play pool. Your voice is throwing my focus off.”

“Don’t you dare talk to me like that, Sinful Man. Now take your baby.”

“She ain’t mine,” I was convinced.

“Until the DNA proves otherwise, she is your responsibility.”

Mary placed Rose in my arms, then took off stomping up the stairs with her ugly ass green loafers. She was looking like Peter Pan in them shits. I didn’t know how I was going to change Rose’s diaper. I could feel sweat beads emerging on my forehead.

Even though I didn’t want to ask Mary for help, I put my pride away. She was sitting at the table holding baby Charlotte and watching Charlie color. Mary tried to avoid eye contact with me until I tapped her shoulder. She sighed, letting me know she was annoyed.

I hiked my right eyebrow. “You really gonna ignore a nigga?”

“What do you need, sir? Can’t you see I’m busy? And don’t say the n-word in front of these children.”

“My bad. I need help changing Rose’s diaper.”

“Do I look like a maid?” She scrunched her mouth up.

“Naw, but you look like somebody’s grandma.”

“Forget you. I will not help anyone who disrespects me. You demon man.”

“Why do you got to call me these names, Lamb?”

Mary proceeded to not help me as she placed Charlotte into her seat, then focused her attention on someone ringing the doorbell. She came back with that chick who was at the office working the front desk. I couldn’t remember her name, but she seductively walked over towards me. She had some nice size titties.

“Hey, Sinful K.” She waved.

“What’s up, thickness? I forgot your name, but I can never forget a beautiful face.”

I raked my eyes down her body and licked my lips.

“It’s Nevia,” she blushed.

“Oh, yeah. What brings you here?”

“I just came over to help since Avery is gone. Do you need help with anything? And I mean *anything*,” she purred.

Shorty was willing and ready to give me the pussy. When she batted her eye lashes and bit the edge of her lips, I knew I was gonna hit it. It was also a great opportunity to get her to help me with Rose’s diaper. Never thought I would ask a woman for anything else other than pussy.

“I do need your help changing this little one right here. You think you can do that?”

“I got chu, boo,” she blushed.

When Nevia was about to pick up Rose, Mary beat her to it with her nose hiked up in the air. She saw a little competition and all of a sudden wanted to help. I didn’t care who did it, as long as I didn’t have to change the diaper anymore.

Nevia grabbed my hand and pulled her lips into a smile. She was thirsty.

“Are you hungry, Sinful? How about I make you a sandwich?”

“Yeah. I’m eating whatever you’re making.”

When Nevia opened the refrigerator and pulled out some organic lunch meats, I went to the couch, kicked my feet back, and turned on the TV. As I was flipping through channels, Mary came and placed Rose into my arms before walking off, mumbling under her breath. She was just mad to see another woman taking care of me. I had finally found some good sports highlights to watch while Rose laid on my chest sucking her tiny fist. She was chilling, I guess. Even though I didn’t want her to be mine, she was a cute kid. I couldn’t deny that. Suddenly, I heard yelling. Nevia had a tight frown on her face when she handed me my sandwich on a plate and took Rose from me to put her into the swing. I took a bite from the sandwich and it was dry as hell. That bitch couldn’t even make a sandwich, so I knew she her cooking was some trash.

“Where is my drink? You’re gonna kill me with this dry ass sandwich.” I frowned.

“Sorry, Sin. Let me go get something for you to wash that down.”

“Yeah, do that.”

Nevia came back with a bottle of water and plopped down on the couch. She started rubbing my leg while whispering in my ear that her pussy was soaking wet. A groupie didn’t waste any time to get to the prize. She stood up, grabbed my hand, pulled me up from the couch, and led me upstairs to the bedroom. I licked my lips, anticipating how her mouth was going to feel wrapped around my dick. She dropped to her knees, ready to take my dick out. Of course, just when things were getting hot, there was a knock at the door. We tried to ignore it, but Mary wouldn’t stop knocking. Nevia rolled her eyes and opened the door. With her nose hiked in the air, Mary walked in holding a spray bottle. She trained it on Nevia who had her arms folded across her chest and sprayed her face.

“Mary, you messed up my hair,” Nevia was angry, wiping the water off her face.

“Good. I wouldn’t have messed up your hair if you weren’t up here being a heathen. What are you doing up in this room? I could feel it in my spirit that you are up here trying to do some ungodly things with this man. Not on my watch.”

“I’m gonna beat your holy ass,” Nevia slammed her fist into her hand.

Mary sprayed the bottle at her again and started praying out loud to take the lust away from us. They were both annoying the fuck out of me, so I tossed them out the room. My dick didn’t need to get wet that bad; not for all that shit they were going to put me through. I couldn’t wait to take that DNA test so I could get on with my life, because they were driving a nigga crazy.

CHAPTER FOUR



MARY LAMB

The sun was beaming through the window as I stood over the stove flipping Mickey Mouse pancakes. They were for Charlie. She was having a hard time with her mother and step-father being away for their anniversary trip so I figured it was the least I could do to cheer her up. After I was done cooking, I placed them at the table. Then, I opened the refrigerator to grab the orange juice container. Sinful came strolling in carrying Rose. Surprisingly, she had a big smile on her face. Sinful placed her into the electronic swing chair. Don't worry, it was for infants. Sinful was trying to warm her bottle up. I slightly chuckled seeing him get frustrated with the warmer and when he looked like he was about to break it, I stepped in to do it for him. He plopped down on a chair and stacked a couple of Micky Mouse pancakes on a plate like they were for him. I snatched that plate away from him so fast.

“I know you don't like Mickey Mouse pancakes, now do you? Aren't you too hardcore for that, Sinful K? Don't be making that face at me. This isn't your food.”

“Where the fuck is mine? A nigga is starving.” He had a scowl on his face.

“You have hands. Cook something.”

I surely wasn't going to be slaving over a hot stove for his behind. I wasn't his maid and he wasn't my man. If the big superstar wanted to eat, he needed to cook. He placed his hands on the back of his head with a smirk. For a superstar, he sure seemed useless. I couldn't stand that cocky heathen.

"Why should I? You need to take care of a nigga. That's what women do. They take care of man."

"No can't do, sir. You're not my husband. It's all biblical, but you wouldn't understand the statutes of marriage."

"But what does that got to do with anything, sling shot draws?"

"How dare you talk about my underwear? You are such a dirty nasty man."

"I'm a dirty man with a big dick though."

"Find Jesus, you nasty man."

"Either you make me some food, or I can eat you. I'm not hard to please." I licked my lips.

"You will **never** touch my body in that way."

I tossed my apron at Sinful's face and stormed off. That man really knew how to get under my skin. Avery really needed to hurry back from her anniversary trip to schedule that DNA test. I needed him out of my hair, ASAP. I picked up my cellphone and tried to call her, but the call went straight to voicemail. I plopped down on my bed, lowered my head, and began praying to God to give me strength to deal with three kids and a man-child for an entire weekend. During what was supposed to be my moment alone, there was a knock on the door. It's like no one respected anyone's privacy in that house. Charlie was standing at the door sobbing with her hands covered in chocolate, or so I thought. When I got closer to her, it smelled like poo and I started gagging with my hand over my mouth. At three years old, she was potty trained and had no reason for her pajamas to be ruined. I had to have a stern talk with her.

"Why do you have poop on your hands?" I was disgusted.

Tears glided down her cheeks. “My stomach hurts and I couldn’t make it to the bathroom, Aunt Mary.”

“Did you poop on the bed?”

“Yesssss. I want my mommy and Cupid.” She sobbed.

There was never a dull moment with children. I followed Charlie, who was hysterically sobbing, to her bedroom. Sure enough, poop was on the middle and edge of the bed. I stripped her soiled sheets and tossed them into a black heavy duty garbage bag to conceal the smell as much as possible. I ran her some warm bath water with bubbles. She climbed into the water and I let her soak for a few minutes. She said she wasn’t feeling good, so I grabbed a washcloth and gently cleaned her up from head to toe, then wrapped her up in a towel once I rinsed the soap off. When I had stomach issues as a kid, my grandmother would have me take a tablespoon of Pepto-Bismol, the kid kind, so I did the same for Charlie and laid her back down to sleep. And just in case she felt nauseous, I put a trash can next to her bedside. I left the door cracked as I left out to check on Charlotte, who was sound asleep in her crib. Once I knew they were good for the morning, I walked back down the steps and heard the doorbell ring. It was the nanny, Kelsey. I explained to her that Charlie had a stomachache and to keep a close eye on her. As for Charlotte, I let Kelsey know to give her a bottle when she woke up. She was thankful for the information and went upstairs to handle her duties.

Pepto-Bismol wasn’t going to be enough to satisfy Charlie’s stomachache, so I took a trip to the grocery store to buy ingredients for a homemade chicken and vegetable soup that would make her feel even better. It was early so I knew the stores wouldn’t be too crowded. On the way there, I put on some Gospel music and sang along to the lyrics. When I pulled up in the parking lot, I turned off the engine and climbed out with my reusable grocery bag. When I walked in, the first thing I saw was all the fresh produce stocked neatly. Vegetables, fruits, fresh squeezed juices, you name it. They had all kinds of varieties. As I carefully inspected which

tomatoes to pick, an elderly woman with wrinkled skin and big gray curly hair came up to me pushing her cart.

“Excuse me, baby. Do you mind helping me? I can’t find the cucumbers anywhere.”

“I sure can, ma’am. Are you by yourself shopping?”

“Yes. I am honey.”

“Oh, no. You don’t have any family in the area to help you?”

“I never been married, and I don’t have any kids. It’s just me and my blind cat, Chester. Of course, he can’t come with me. Pets are not allowed in here. I don’t want to get kicked out.” She chuckled.

“How about I help you shop? It can be easier.”

“Bless your heart. What’s your name? Your family must be so proud that you are respectful and helpful to your elders.”

“Thank you. And my name is Mary Lamb. And yours?”

“Martha Simmons.”

“I’m gonna take care of you today, Ms. Simmons.”

I was happy to lend a helping hand to such a kind woman. She reminded me of my granny. It tugged at my heart knowing she had no one to help her do things like shopping. The bags could get heavy. We were walking around the produce department and found the cucumbers. I grabbed a couple and placed them into a plastic bag. Ms. Simmons looked down at her grocery list and said the next thing we needed was some tomatoes. As we walked around the store grabbing the remaining items on her list, we talked about our beliefs and how she changed her life for the Lord. She told me how she used to be strung out on drugs for many years. Her testimony had my eyes watering. We made it to the line and Ms. Martha frantically searched for her wallet, but it was missing. She started to look and feel overwhelmed because she didn’t know if she was going to be able to pay for her groceries. Thankfully, I was there willing to pull out my debit card. I handed it to the cashier after putting my items with Ms.

Martha's to get rang up. As we made our way out, she kept thanking me for paying for her groceries, but I didn't think it was a big deal. To be godly was to help people.

"How are you getting home?" I asked Ms. Simmons.

"I got about six miles to walk up the road. If I start now, I will get there by noon."

"Oh, no. I can't let you do that again. I will take you home," I offered.

"Bless your heart, baby. You are really a child of God."

"Matter fact, when is the last time you had a home cooked meal? You can go with me to my place and I can feed you before taking you home."

"What about my groceries?"

"I can put them in the refrigerator at my place."

"Sounds like a plan, baby. Thank you so much for your kindness." Ms. Simmons placed both her hands on her chest with gratitude.

I opened the door for Ms. Martha, allowing her time to slowly slide into the passenger seat. Once she was settled, I put the groceries in the trunk. Then, I put the cart away before getting into the car. I turned up my Gospel music and we sang loudly, praising the Lord. When we pulled up to the house, Ms. Martha's eyes got big. I quickly got out to assist her as she carefully gripped my arm for support. We made our way inside the house and Ms. Martha glanced around before we made our way to the living room. I rolled my eyes seeing Sinful sitting on the couch writing in a notebook. He thought he was so cool bobbing his head. If you ask me, he looked like an idiot. When he looked up, he frowned his face and had the nerve to look poor Ms. Martha up and down like she was trash. Ms. Martha had to grip my arm even tighter and pushed her body closer to mine. I bet she felt the devil radiating from his body. After helping Ms. Martha to the couch, I went back outside to grab our groceries and put them up until I took her home. As I was finishing up, I turned around and jumped back only to see Sinful leaning against the counter.

“Who the hell is this old broad?” Sinful was blunt and disrespectful.

“Excuse me? That’s no way to talk to refer to your elders. Have some respect, demon man,” I sneered.

“Yeah, aight. Who the hell is this woman?”

“What does it matter to you? This isn’t your house.”

“And it’s not yours either, Lamb. Does Avery and Cupid know you got some random woman in their spot?”

I couldn’t do anything but ignore him and kept on putting groceries in the freezer and refrigerator. Sinful chuckled because he knew he had me. I faced him with my arms folded. He just looked at me with those hooded eyes as a smirk tugged at his lips.

“Helping people is the godly thing to do. You have all that money and give none of it back into your community, the people in need.”

“I donate to a lot of organizations.”

“Writing a check from a desk, liquor cabinet, or bar counter isn’t giving back, sir. You have to go out there and get your million-dollar hands dirty.”

“Stop all that preaching, Lamb. It doesn’t change the fact that you got that woman in here without Avery’s consent.”

I could care less if Sinful ratted me out to my cousin. It was only right to help people in need. I tuned him out and started making some food for Ms. Martha and Charlie’s chicken and vegetable soup.

Once I was done, I helped Ms. Martha to the kitchen. She was beaming when she saw the spread of food I had on the table. We ate together, conversating about how good the Lord was to us. After our bellies were full, I grabbed my Bible, we read the word for a couple of hours, and played with the kids for a bit. Sinful wouldn’t move a muscle. He was watching that poor old woman like one of those paintings that no matter what angle you’re standing, the eyes still followed you. When she was ready to go home, I packed her up some food to-go. I

was happy to help Ms. Simmons. She was a sweet lady and I planned to help her again in the future.



IT WAS after midnight when my alarm went off. I leaped up from the bed with my chest beating wildly and quickly rushed out my bedroom slamming into a Sinful's shirtless chest. We quickly went to grab all the kids before Sinful shoved us into a closet to check out the noises from downstairs. Charlie was laughing because she thought we were playing a game while the babies were crying. I was scared to death, but I was strong for the kids. The door was snatched open and I screamed, but it was Sinful with a scowl on his face.

“Bring your ass here now, Lamb,” Sinful spoke through his locked jaws.

“What did I do?”

We walked downstairs and my mouth flew open when I saw Ms. Martha dressed in all-black while tied up to a chair with a frown on her face. She didn't look like the sweet old lady I had helped out at the grocery store. On the floor next to her feet was a man sprawled out with his face covered in blood. Sinful kicked him in the stomach and Ms. Martha tried her hardest to break loose. She looked like she wanted to attack him. Sinful looked at her and laughed. Just as quick, his laughter turned to silence.

“I knew you were just pretending. I see through people like you, because I can be the same way. Now... what's to stop me from beating your old ass while you tied to this chair?”

“She shouldn't have been so gullible and friendly,” Ms. Marth said.

“You see, Mary? And this is why you don't help everyone. This is why you have to stay to yourself and mind your fuckin'

business! I told you this old broad was playing games!” Sinful yelled.

Ms. Martha really hurt my feelings. She took advantage of my kind heart. I grabbed my phone and called the police. Thirty minutes later, they arrived at the house. While they were being put into handcuffs, one of the officers recognized them for a string of robberies. They were a mom and son duo.

When the police left, Sinful kept laughing at me. He was so caught up in proving me wrong, I just knew he was gonna tell Avery and Cupid. As I was cleansing that deceitful spirit out of the house, Sinful came behind me and cleared his throat.

“I expect breakfast in the morning if you don’t want Avery and Cupid to know about how you almost got the house robbed and the kids hurt.”

“Are you blackmailing me, Sinful Man?”

“Yeah. That’s right.”

That demon man got on my nerves. Of course, he would kick me while I was down. I couldn’t wait for him to get out of my presence for good.

CHAPTER FIVE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Haunting thoughts from my troubling childhood were constantly creeping into mind. They overwhelmed me and gave me the urge to get high. With my chest pounding and sweat covering my body, I climbed out of bed and started anxiously searching around my bedroom for clothes. I needed a fix. That was the only way I felt I would be able to sleep without having any nightmares. After quickly getting dressed and slipping my cellphone into my pocket, I gripped my doorknob to leave. That's until I remembered that baby Rose was sleeping inside the portable crib next to the bed. I raked my hand down my face in frustration and sighed heavily. The kid was cramping my style, but my conscious wouldn't allow me to leave her by herself.

I decided to take her to someone who would keep her safe. Gently, I cradled Rose into my arms as she remained peacefully asleep. Then, I walked across the hall. I knocked twice, but Mary didn't answer. Taking a chance, I opened the door and strolled in with the baby cradled against my chest. Mary was laying on her back holding a bible with a smile on her face. She took her spirituality serious. When I approached her bed, she must've sensed my presence. She raised up like the wrestler, the Undertaker, and had me jumping back like she was a demon. She quickly turned on the lamp and stepped out

the bed, slipping her feet into her pink furry slippers. I knew she was about to give me some lip.

“What are you doing in here, Sinful Man? You’re trying to take my goodies.” She shielded her body.

I scowled. “Hell no. I don’t have to take any pussy. You’re tripping.”

She pointed at the door. “Get out of here now! Don’t make me get my oil.”

“Toss that shit on me again and you’re going back to jail,” I threatened her.

“Psssh. I will press charges on you for trying to get fresh. I knew you were a pervert. Leave now or I am gonna scream,” she threatened me.

“Stop playing with me, Lamb. I wouldn’t hurt anybody. Don’t call me that shit.”

It was true. Men in the entertainment industry did get their rocks off by using their power to take advantage of women, but I wasn’t one of them. I had respect in the bedroom. I knew what boundaries not to cross. Even when I was high, I knew right from wrong.

“What are you in here for then, demon? I know it’s not to pray so you must be in here trying to get my sweetness.”

“Nobody wants your inexperienced pussy. You can’t even take the dick.”

“Whatever.” She waved me off.

“I need you to watch the kid. I got to make a run.”

She looked at the alarm clock sitting on the nightstand and hiked her eyebrows. “This time of night?”

“Yeah.” I nodded.

“Nope. I can see it in your eyes you’re up to no good. I won’t be your babysitter so you can do ungodly things, sir. Now leave this room and go to bed.”

“What is it gonna take to change your mind, Mary? Name your price and I got chu. You know I am rolling in cash, right?”

She folded her arms against her chest and tapped her foot. “Try another, weasel. I can’t be bought.”

“You gonna do what I tell you to do. Do you know who the fuck I am? Nobody tells me no,” I spoke through my locked jaws.

Mary became nervous and clutched hold of her chest without uttering a word. When I laid baby Rose down on her back on the bed and left out the door, I mumbled under my breath talkin’ shit. Nobody was gonna tell me what to do. I was a grown ass fuckin’ man. As I walked down the steps, I felt something wet land on me. Flaring my nostrils, I turned around and Mary was cradling the baby while holding that same mini vile filled with oil. She had lost her damn mind.... Again. I made way towards her and pinned her in the corner of the wall as she tightly held Rose. Oddly enough, baby Rose was still sleeping, but Mary was really testing my patience. I had the urge to wrap my hands around her neck. She had a way of getting me amped up, but fortunately for her, I had enough self-control to not cross those lines.

“You better not put your hands on me,” Mary said hesitantly.

“I’m not a woman beater. Look, Mary, I just need some fresh air. All I wanted from you was to help me out. I will be back before it hits daylight.”

“What are you gonna do at this time of night, huh? Get high?” she was interrogating me like the damn FBI.

“I just need a fix. It’s the only way I will be able to go to sleep. This will be my last time, I promise. I am gonna get help.”

“That’s what all addicts say to make themselves feel better. Once you get high, don’t you come back here all messed up. We are not a drug house.”

I slammed my eyes shut and grunted, “Fuck you Mary! You think you’re so perfect. It’s not that easy to get clean.”

“Sinful, I bet you didn’t even try long enough to get it right. You just count yourself out and refuse to do the work. Conquering addiction is a lifelong journey.”

“How the hell would you know, church girl?! You don’t know shit about me except for what you read in the press!”

“I know you’re a hot head, a foolish man. The reason why you keep succumbing to your addiction is because you’re not taking God on the journey with you. You’re just like everyone else who calls on God... when they want something but not during their darkest times when they’ve hit rock bottom. Have you even prayed to God to take away your cravings to get high? I bet not.”

I massaged my pulsating forehead, “My relationship with God is complicated. You will never understand. Nobody will, so don’t you act all high and mighty with me.”

“God is amazing,” Mary was adamant.

“Well, he ain’t been good to me but my drugs have, so that’s who and what I worship.”

Mary looked at me with disgust and stormed off, still holding baby Rose in her arms. For some reason, I started to feel like crap and suddenly didn’t have the urge to get high anymore. I went back into my room and laid back on my bed, looking at the ceiling. While I was laying there, Mary knocked on the door and let herself in to place Rose into her crib. She left right out after that. I figured she was going back to her room for some alone time. Instead, she strutted back into my room with her prayer cloth, Bible, and some salt. She didn’t even acknowledge me and started praying with tears rolling down her face, tossing salt around my floor. As she was reading the word, my body started feeling weak. Yet, I had never felt so relaxed at the same time. After that, she sat on one of my chairs and softly sung gospel music. She had a beautiful voice and it captivated me so much that I ended up falling asleep.

A few hours later, I woke up to the sun shining through my window. I climbed out of bed to take a quick leak. Then, I went to get fresh before heading downstairs. Before I could even reach the middle step, the smell of bacon had my stomach growling. Mary was standing over the stove wearing an ugly ass flower dress that made her look like someone's eighty year-old granny, but I could tell she had a nice body. She hid it well enough, though. As I walked in the kitchen, baby Rose was sitting on some type of bouncing chair. I walked over to her, grabbed her tiny hands, and she gave me the prettiest toothless smile. She was a really cute kid, but I didn't see my resemblance in her. I already knew she wasn't going to be mine. Even if she was, she didn't need a drugged-out father like me. I was highly undependable and an addict.

"What's good, pretty girl? Did you sleep well?" I said softly and Rose smiled like she knew what I was saying.

"Rose needs a bottle," Mary said without turning her face to me.

"Why you didn't feed her?"

Mary turned around with the spatula in her hand and gave me the dirtiest look. I just chuckled. She couldn't stand my black ass, but I loved getting under her skin. She wanted to act perfect, but I knew she was cursing me out in her head. Sooner or later, she was probably gonna snap. And yet, that was what turned me on about her. Imagining her getting mad at me made me want to sex her up even more.

"Excuse me? While you were sleeping like a baby, I have been up with this pretty girl since five this morning. I already gave Rose her first bottle and changed two poopie diapers. It's your turn, daddy."

"Hold on with that daddy mess. We don't even know if the kid is mine."

Mary snaked her neck in my direction. "Are you blind? She has the same eyes as you."

"Where? I don't see them," I disagreed.

“You will see them when you feed her the bottle. Now get to it before she starts screaming her head off again.”

She picked up Rose and helped me with getting her comfortable being in my arms, then handed me a warm bottle filled with formula. I was not thrilled. Rose wouldn't suck the nipple of the bottle when I tried to give it to her. Mary thought it was funny as hell. Then I thought, maybe I just let Rose explore the nipple until she was comfortable to drink. Eventually, she drank her formula and passed out with formula still on her tiny lips.

“You got to wake sleeping beauty up?” Mary said softly as she put the rest of the breakfast food on the table.

“What? Woman you're crazy. She is quiet and I can eat now.”

“She needs to burp. I don't need her being fussy.”

“Aww shit! This is some bullshit.”

“You need to watch your mouth in front of this baby and me. It's really not good to have such a vulgar vocabulary. You need some class.”

“What if I don't want to stop cursing? What are you gonna do, Lamb?” I was trying to provoke her.

“I will wash your mouth out with soap. Don't test me.”

Chuckling, I burped Rose and laid her back in the bouncer. She seemed content so I was ready to grub. After grabbing a plate, I piled it up with eggs. They were so damn cheesy. As I piled some eggs into my mouth, Cupid strolled in looking like shit. The first thing he grabbed was the pot of coffee and poured some into a mug. Looking at him made me question fatherhood. If it meant looking like shit, fuck that. It made me hope that Rose wasn't mine all the more.

“What's good, Cupid?” I nodded my head.

“I'm good. I came down here to deliver a message from the boss lady. She has a migraine and will be staying in bed for a little. She still wanted me to tell you what was on your

schedule for today. You have an appointment for the DNA test at noon and Wolf Knight wants to see you at his office.”

“About what? I don’t got shit to say to that nigga until he is ready for me to record.”

“Wolf wouldn’t tell Avery the reason. He just wants you at the office around one, to talk. Since you are a loose cannon, Avery wants you to take Mary with you. She doesn’t need you getting assault charge on the CEO of the label.”

My relationship with Wolf was complicated but even I wasn’t stupid enough to assault him. Sure, many times I wanted to break his chin because he was a cocky mothafucka who acted like he could run my life by taking away my music.

“What? I am not a babysitter,” Mary inserted herself in the conversation.

“Naw, but you act like the bible police,” I chuckled, and Mary rolled her eyes.

“Don’t start Mary. You owe your cousin after that stunt you pulled *again* . You need to leave that oil here,” Cupid said firmly.

“What? I am not leaving it. Not gonna happen. I got to keep the demons away.”

“Here you go with that demon shit. You need to put it on yourself or leave it in the pan, you crazy bat,” I was blunt.

Cupid laughed and Mary frowned.

Even though I didn’t feel like having Mary tag along, watching me and acting like she was better, I had no choice. An hour later, we walked out to my Mercedes truck ready to handle some business. The first place we went to was the DNA testing place. When we walked into that building my heart was beating a mile a minute. There wasn’t anybody waiting to be seen in the lobby so my body slightly relaxed. I approached the front desk where a woman with an afro was typing. With my hands cupped into my pockets, I explained my reason for the visit. She nodded and escorted us to the back to get right to the testing since she was expecting us. We were

placed into a small room. Sweat beads formed on my forehead as I flicked them away.

“Are you nervous?” Mary asked.

“Yeah. I just want to know the truth.”

“Do you want her to be your child?”

“No.”

“If you felt that way, you should’ve put a cap on that thing.”

“Here you go again being judgmental. I don’t need that right now.”

A doctor knocked on the door and entered wearing a white lab coat. After we shook hands, she administered the test. It didn’t take long for them to swab my mouth and baby Rose’s. Since I was a celebrity, they were gonna get the lab to push my results. When we were done with the testing, we drove to Wolf Knight’s office. I didn’t want him to be in my business about the kid until I got the paternity results and told Mary to stay in the truck with the baby. She refused, talking about how she needed to keep an eye on me before I made any stupid mistakes. I just shook my head. Grabbing hold of the car seat, we strolled through the double doors and I could see Mary looking around in amazement at all the custom furniture, awards, and photos. One thing about Wolf, he made sure his space was fit for royalty.

Mary found a spot on the leather sofa and placed the car seat next to her and started softly singing gospel. I approached the desk and Wolf’s long-time receptionist leaped up from her chair, pulling me into a big hug. She gripped hold of my cheeks and kissed my forehead, leaving a lipstick kiss mark. She always showed so much love and was another big supporter. After catching up for a second, I headed to Wolf’s office. He was sitting at his desk, talking on the phone, and ended the call. He stood up to dap me up, but I left him hanging. Wolf chuckled. He knew our relationship wasn’t the same. I wasn’t gonna fake for his ass. All the money I made

for him and putting his company on my back, he was treating me like I was disposable.

“What’s this meeting about, Wolf? If we are not here to discuss my new album, I don’t want to hear anything from you,” I got straight to the point.

“Straight to business I see. I want my new artist, Drez, to sample your song, “With Me.” I already got Clay’s signature agreeing to this, but I need yours for the release too, since you also wrote on the track and made the beat.”

I placed my hand on the back of my head and put my shoes up on his desk with no respect for his space. Wolf swiped them away, giving me a dirty look, then crossed his hands together waiting for me to answer.

“I ain’t doing shit for you. That’s one of my most successful songs. I ain’t doing it until you let me record.”

“Get clean and I will allow you to make music.”

“Stop trying to control me, Wolf. I’m not your fuckin’ child or your science project you’re trying to save.”

“Someone needs to help you fool... before you die.”

“Can’t you see I want to die?” I banged on my chest.

Wolf warned me sternly, “Watch your words. They are powerful.”

Anger shouted throughout my body from the way Wolf called himself talking to me like I was a child. I knocked the stuff off his desk and started pacing the floor and mumbling under my breath. He had me fucked up. Everyone knew I was the face of his company. I did so much for his selfish ass. His millions were from my sweat and tears. When he tried to place his hand on my shoulder, I shoved him backwards and then balled up my fist ready to attack. He looked hurt. I understood why because he was like a father figure to me and tried his hardest to help me get my life straight. He was more of a parent to me than his own biological kids. Honestly, I knew if I crossed the line, he would never forgive me. The best thing I could do was leave before causing more destruction. For wasting my time, I grabbed a bottle of liquor from his mini bar

and stormed out of his office as he called my name. I popped the cork open and took it to the head, spilling it down my shirt. When Mary saw me, she was livid. She tried to wrestle the bottle from my hand, and I kept pushing her away. Unexpectedly, she pulled out that damn oil from her worn out looking brown purse. Since I didn't want to get wet, I handed her the bottle without putting up a fight and she tossed it in the trash. She then picked up baby Rose's car seat and grabbed my earlobe, escorting me out the building.

We stood in front of my truck. I refused to get inside, making Mary more upset. She properly put the car seat in the back and then slammed the door, getting in my face like she was running the show.

“What is wrong with you? It's not right to drink that in front of the baby.”

“I can do what the hell I want to, Ms. Saint. Stop judging me. That ain't my baby.”

“For Christ sake, this beautiful baby girl doesn't have a chance with you as her father. I hope the DNA test prove she isn't yours because she is better off being an orphan.”

“You can raise her. Now get out of my face.”

I wasn't fit for fatherhood, neither did I feel worthy to have a legacy of my own. I could only hope that another DNA test would lean in my favor, proving once again that I wasn't the father to another kid.

CHAPTER SIX



MARY LAMB

Heat flushed through my body as I slammed one of the doors of the truck from the way Sinful talked to me. He was a rude and disrespectful heathen. I couldn't wait to get away from his presence. It was clear that he didn't need a child. He had a lot of growing up to do and honestly, I didn't think he was fit to be a father. For the sake of Rose, I prayed for the best outcome. She was such a cute baby and deserved to be raised properly with love and endless possibilities, not with some egotistical man who went by the name, *Sinful*. I couldn't understand how her mother abandoned such an innocent baby who had no clue what was going on in her life. That thought alone had tears rolling down my cheeks, even more knowing that her future and well-being depended on Sinful. Hopefully, Rose would be the one to change the outlook of his bloodline.

I looked out the window so Sinful couldn't see me cry. After brushing my tears away, I softly hummed one of my favorite gospel songs to ease my nerves. Just as I was starting to relax, he called my name in his strong baritone, causing goose bumps to rise on my skin. I did my best to ignore him and he became livid. I could hear him mumbling under his breath. He hated that I didn't worship him like the rest of the world. No amount of money or fame would have me idolizing

another human being. I only worshiped the man upstairs. The Lord. And nobody was ever gonna be more important in my life than Him.

“I know you heard me call your name, Lamb. Look at me when I am talking to you,” he growled.

I folded my arms and hiked my nose in the air. “The only man I listen to is in the clouds.”

“Don’t start that shit, thumper.”

“Leave me alone before I get my oil,” I threatened him.

“You’re a feisty little Lamb. I like that shit. You just need to be tamed by a real nigga.”

My eyes expanded twice their size. “Tamed? I’m not a pet, okay.”

“You funny, Lamb.” He chuckled.

“I’m being serious. What type of women are you into, sir?” I was curious.

He rubbed his chin and smirked. “The kind of bitches who love to relinquish control when I am serving them this dick.”

I frowned. “Ewww. You’re disgusting.”

“Naw, baby. I’m just a freak,” he spoke proudly and then winked at me.

“You need some class. Stop talking so reckless in front this innocent baby.” I shook my index finger at him in a scolding manner.

“Oh, shit. I mean, my bad.”

I palmed my forehead. “Lord help me.”

Driving down the road, Sinful saw a McDonald’s and asked his driver to make a stop there. When we pulled into the drive thru, I figured that Mr. Moore was going to handle the orders. That way, Sinful could avoid any attention to himself, but that wasn’t the case. The moment Sinful rolled down his back window to pay, the woman at the cash register window hysterically screamed and fanned her face with her hands.

Watching that woman act like a complete fool over a stranger just made me shake my head. Sinful craved the attention and was smiling hard, showing that ugly grill of his. Her constant screaming attracted the rest of her co-workers to the window and they started pulling out their phones to take photos. They certainly weren't getting a photo of me. I made sure to drop my head down. I didn't want to be linked to a man with a sketchy background and a bad attitude.

Sinful's persona came out as he leaned out the window, showing that grill in his mouth and posing with his shirt off before paying for his food. I heard one of the lady workers asking him to sign one of her boobs like she was at a concert backstage. Of course, Sinful pulled a pen out of his pocket and signed right above her areola. I quickly pulled out the vile from my purse and sprinkled oil on him. Sinful turned around with his nostrils flaring, looking like he was gonna tear me into two. He had warned me many times, but he was making me sick with his behavior. Those lustful ways of his needed to be checked. When he snatched the vile from my hand and tossed the oil back on me, he pulled his lips into a sneer. He thought I was going to get upset, but I was a woman of God. He didn't know that I was baptized, and every day before I stepped out the house, I put that anointed oil on my head to keep me safe and protected.

“How do you like that shit? It's not that funny when it's you, huh Lamb?”

“Actually, no. There is nothing wrong with being anointed with oil. You're blessing me right now. I love to be delivered.” I smiled.

“What? You're one crazy ass chick.”

“I ride or die for the Lord.”

Sinful shook his head in disbelief. He paid, grabbed his food before we pulled out the drive thru, then rummaged through the bag and stuffed some fries into his mouth. I frowned watching him eat like a pig. That man truly didn't have any home training. When he tried to feed baby Rose two fries, I smacked his hand away. He slammed his eyebrows

together. He couldn't be serious trying to feed a baby McDonald's fries. He was going to give baby Rose high cholesterol before she turned one.

"What? I'm just trying to feed the kid." He was confused.

"She can't eat solid food yet! You're a foolish man!"

"Oh, my bad. More for me then."

"Where is my food?"

"Ask your God-fearing man to buy you some. Oh, I forgot, you ain't got one." He chuckled.

"You're terrible. I can't believe you're going to sit here and eat in my face."

"If you tell me how fine I am, you can get a bite of my burger."

"Never. I rather starve, Sinful Man."

He shrugged his shoulders. "More for me. No food for you."

"I can cook and eat at home."

For the rest of the ride back home, we didn't utter anymore words, but he did hand me a burger. It was so good. We finally pulled into the driveway and I climbed out before grabbing the car seat. As we made it through the door, I slammed it in his face to stop him from coming into the house. I quickly took Rose out, cradled her into my arms, and walked towards the kitchen where I smelled fried chicken. Avery was putting a fresh batch on a platter as she had her baby strapped to her chest while her oldest, Charlie, who was three years old, was sitting in her booster chair at the table, coloring. I smiled watching her with her beautiful children. She was an amazing mother. I loved how she gave her girls unconditional love and would stop whatever she was doing to tend to their needs. She was also a great bonus mom to Cupid's oldest daughter, who was a teenager. When Avery turned and saw me standing behind her, she smiled.

"Hey, cousin. How did things go at the DNA place? Sin wasn't a handful, was he?"

“No. Hopefully, the results will be back in a few days and he will get the answers.”

“Great. Thank you for going with him. My head was killing me earlier.”

“No problem. How are you feeling now?”

“Better. I think I have been working too late and not getting enough sleep. I will be doing better with that. Before I forget, Cupid is bringing some of his colleagues over to play poker.”

I clutched my imaginary pearls. “To gamble? They need to be putting that money in the collection plate and edify the church.”

“Mary, don’t start with that mess. You better not show your tail. Leave that prayer cloth upstairs. You need to wash it.”

“What do you mean? My prayer cloth is always clean. And what’s wrong with y’all fighting me over my Jesus?” I cocked my head to the side.

“That’s my Jesus too. Now come on and help me setup for the poker night.”

While Avery was making the appetizers, she had me straighten up in the basement. She had an extra carrier, so I was able to strap Rose to my chest. After I finished fluffing the pillows and sweeping, I lit a few candles to make the basement smell fresh. I glanced at the bar before I walked back upstairs and frowned my face after seeing all that devil juice sitting on the shelves. People needed to learn how to have fun without consuming alcohol. Suddenly, I was compelled to grab each bottle and pour all the alcohol into the toilet. Then, I went upstairs to the kitchen to make some Kool Aid. That was certainly better than ruining your liver. Nobody was gonna get tore up on my watch. Avery smiled big, thinking I was helping as I went back downstairs to finish up my plan.

When it was done, I felt satisfied and went to change Rose’s diaper. As she laid on her back, I softly talked to her. I could tell from her eyes she was sleepy, but I wanted to give

her a bottle first before laying her down for a nap. Once my pretty girl was nice and fresh, I warmed her bottle up. It didn't take long to get ready. I slid the nipple into her mouth, and she started slowly sucking. She finished it off before passing out into my arms. Sinful came to sit on the couch, but I didn't pay him any attention. I rolled my eyes and hurried upstairs to put her into the crib. Then, I clicked off the bedroom light. Walking out, I slammed into Sinful's strong chest. He towered over me with those dark hooded eyes and a smirk on his face. When I tried to get past him, he clutched hold of my arm.

"If the kid is mine, and you play your cards right, you can be my nanny and help me take care of her. I'll even give you some dick as a bonus, just like in the pornos."

"Please. I would never let you put your tainted hands on me."

"Lamb, I can see in your eyes you want me. I can smell your arousal through your skirt. You're wet, aren't you?"

"Leave me alone. You heathen."

"Don't fight me, baby. What you're feeling is natural?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, Sinful Man. Now get on somewhere."

"You always playing hard to get. Look at you, all work up. Your nipples are hard too."

"So, what. Lust is wrong. You need to get it out of your mind."

"Yeah, I know. That's why you got that guilty look on your face. You're feeling *lustful*."

He backed me against the wall and my breathing hitched. I didn't trust that man one bit. As he reached out to touch my cheek, I slammed my heel on his foot, making him yelp in pain before I ran into my bedroom slamming the door. I had to lock him out. With sweat rolling down my forehead, I plopped down on the bed in my wet underwear, feeling embarrassed. My body wasn't supposed to react to a man who wasn't my husband. Feeling stressed, I grabbed my prayer cloth and went into the closet to remove that lustful spirit off me. For as long

as Sincere Kennedy was in the house, I had to stay away from his presence because he was taking my pure body through some unfamiliar territory.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Bible thumping Mary really did a number on a nigga. I was in excruciating pain after she slammed her old ass heels on my foot. It wasn't my fault she was feeling me. The scent of her pussy exposed her sexual drive. All she needed to do was ask and I would have gladly served her the dick. We were both grown. No strings had to be attached. I didn't believe in committed relationships anyway. It took too much work trying to make another mothafucka happy. I was good with just fucking and leaving the emotions out. I always made that clear to the women I had in my rotation. They already knew how I felt about that. Of course, there were those who tried to get me to change my mind, but I didn't budge..... *Love* wasn't something that I was giving, let alone needed.

There was a small knock on the bedroom door. With every step I took towards it, I frowned my face in discomfort. I needed an ice pack on my foot to help ease the pain. When I opened the door, I saw little Charlie smiling and showing her white teeth before handing me a note. Then, she took off running and giggling. The note was from Mary. I chuckled. She was really trying to avoid me and had to send a little kid to do her dirty work.

Dear Sinful Man,

I am gonna need you to keep your distance. If you don't, I will have to use my oil. Just remember, you can always be saved. I didn't mean to hurt your foot. I already asked God for forgiveness.

Mary thought a note was going to stop me from getting under her skin. Hell no. I balled that note up and tossed it in the trash. I walked next door to the room she was in and knocked. She was trying to ignore me by not answering. I shook my head. I already knew she was in there. The poker game was about to start anyway, so I went down to the basement to try and win some money. Cupid insisted I join. He was a cool ass nigga. As I was walking down steps, his three colleagues' eyes got big. Cupid placed his hands on my shoulders and introduced me. After I dapped everyone up, I sat down at the poker table. We were given chips and our cards.

“What we drinking on, Cupid?” One of Cupid's boys, Sean, asked.

Cupid glanced at me and rubbed the top of his head, looking like, *should he really be pouring up in front of me* knowing that I was trying to get myself together. At the end of the day, I didn't want anyone to stop having fun on account of me. My demons were my problems and my responsibility.

“Listen fellas. Y'all don't have to not drink to appease me. It's poker night and we are here to have a good ass time. Pour them bottles up, man,” I was hyped.

“You sure? I don't want to tempt you bro,” Cupid was adamant.

“Yeah, I'm sure. I am trying to stop drinking; I will have some water.”

“We are about to get fucked up! I am gonna take y'all money!”

Cupid and his boys grabbed some liquor from the bar while I grabbed the deck of my cards and dealt them their hands. **SPAT!** As soon as Cupid took a sip of his drink, he spat

it onto the floor. Something was wrong because alcohol did not expire. **SPAT! SPAT! SPAT!** The rest of the fellas did the same thing Cupid did.

“You good?” I was trying to figure out what was up.

“Hell no. This shit tastes like Kool Aid,” Cupid took another sip to make sure he wasn’t tripping.

“Who do you think did that?”

“It *had* to be Mary.” Cupid chuckled.

I shook my head. “Has Mary always been high off the Lord? Is this new?”

“When Mary was five, she brought the Bible to show and tell. She always loved the Lord. She doesn’t mean to be in your face about it but she can’t help it. Her granny raised her like that.”

“I got chu. She learned.”

“Yeah, but she really is about that prayer life. When you need some encouragement and strength, she is the one to call to give you the word.”

“Good to know.”

It was obvious that Mary put Kool Aid into all the liquor bottles, but we couldn’t help but laugh at that shit. The joke was on her though because Cupid had stashed some liquor in one of the laundry baskets. He figured she would mess with his bar since she always complained about him drinking the devil’s juice. We resumed playing poker, but I folded after losing all my money. The fellas kept playing. I headed upstairs to the living room where Mary’s crazy ass was playing *Scrabble* by herself, writing her points down. I didn’t even know that was possible. She was a character.

“What are you doing, Lamb? You missed a nigga?” I goaded.

“Didn’t you get my note? I told you to keep your distance.”

“Yeah, I did, but I balled that shit up.”

“You are just rude.” She pursed her lips.

I sat down across from her and started making a word on the *Scrabble* board as she rolled her eyes at me. She did not want me next to her. We remained silent, creating different words while glancing at each other. She kept smirking like she had the game in the bag. I slammed one of the wooden letters down and she looked at me like I was crazy. No matter the situation, I was always competitive and wanted to win.

“This is not dominos. You need to calm down.”

“Hell naw. I’m about to kick your ass.”

“Are you always this competitive?”

“Yeah, even in the bedroom. I want the woman to tap out first.”

“Don’t you start that lustful talk. My oil will come out.”

“I think you’re turned on by doing that oil stuff.”

“You’re gonna burn, man.”

We kept on playing *Scrabble* for the next hour until Avery wanted to see me inside of her home office to discuss business. Rubbing my chin, I sat in front of her desk and waited for her to talk. She was on the phone, so she signaled for me to give her a second before ending her call.

“Sincere, I was just on the phone with the producer of Big Dollars and Jenny Martinez show. They really want to interview you. I think that’s great promo.”

“Hell no. I hate that fat mothafucka.”

Big Dollars was a straight up bitch. That nigga acted like a gossiping ass female. He always wanted to talk reckless shit toward people in the entertainment business, especially rappers. But when he was checked, he wanted to hide his hands. From the beginning of my career, I avoided coming on his show because I didn’t like how he operated. I wouldn’t hesitate to put my foot up his fat ass. It had been a minute since I did an interview because I was too busy in the press for my behavior. I was kind of rusty.

“This is a great opportunity for you. Right now, you don’t have any music and they still want to interview because of your legendary status. We can talk about how you are trying to get things together and what to expect in the future. Even though you don’t like his fat ass, him and Jenny got the number one show in the world. They are syndicated in so many places,” Avery was trying to convince me.

I dropped my head and sighed. “Aight. When do you want me to interview?”

“Tonight, it’s an opening. They have a morning and a night show now.”

I raked my hands down my face and agreed to do the interview. Avery smiled before picking up the phone to handle the details. I quickly got dressed and walked outside where a limo was waiting for me. As I slid into the backseat, Mary was already sitting there with a clipboard, writing something. She didn’t utter a word. I cleared my throat, causing Mary to stare at me. I could tell she was fighting with herself not to say anything, but she couldn’t help it.

“You will be fine. Jenny is great and very personable. She is a great reporter who just wants to have a great interview.”

“I’m not worried about Jenny. It’s that fat mothafucka! He think he some kind of funny guy,” I was blunt.

“Let me give you some advice, avoid any conversations about your addiction. Big Dollars wants to be messy so don’t give into it.”

“Aight, bet. Thanks for looking out, Lamb.”

“It’s my job to make sure all of Avery’s clients feel comfortable. If you need anything, I am the first person you reach out to, not Avery. I am her right hand. Just so you know, Rose is with the nanny, and she has already been paid.”

“Good to know, Lamb.”

Our conversation ended when Avery climbed into the limo and shut the door. Once she settled into her seat, she pulled out her iPad to go over notes about the do’s and don’ts of the interview. I was listening but kept my eyes focused on Mary,

who had another iPad taking notes too. She was really good at her job and seemed to keep Avery relaxed. We pulled in front of the large building with gigantic windows where the interview was being broadcast. The driver opened it and we all stepped out onto the curb. As I released a deep breath, Mary came behind me and patted my back. We entered the lobby where someone from the staff escorted us up to the tenth floor. Jenny Martinez was already sitting in front of the mic. She immediately stood up and pulled me into a big hug.

After she released me from her embrace, I licked my lips and took time to check out her body. She was a thick ass Latina. As I was taking in her beauty, I was damn nearly knocked over by Mary who pushed passed me with an attitude as she held her iPad up to her chest. While Jenny talked to Avery to go over some ground rules about what I wouldn't be discussing, Mary leaned over to speak with me.

"You need to be focused on this interview and not on trying to be lustful," she scolded me.

"Damn. Why do you care? You don't want a nigga, remember?"

"Please. I'm here to do a job and you better not make my cousin look bad with those heathen ways, sir."

She was sassy and I liked it.

"I know how to act, Lamb. Aight, I don't, but a nigga gonna try just for you." I winked.

Avery walked over to us and smiled. "We will be ready in two minutes."

"Cousin, I think I need to do a cleanse in this room. The spirit is off in here."

"Don't start that, Mary."

"I am telling you the truth, but do what you want," Mary said and put some oil on her head.

When Big Dollars strutted in the room sipping on a soda, everyone frowned their face except me. Nobody liked that nigga. He dapped me up before slipping on his headphones.

Jenny put hers on and put her finger up to wish me good luck. I appreciated it. The producer cued their opening theme music, and I was ready to kill it.

“This is your boy, Big Sexy Dollars,” he chuckled.

*“You already know this is your girl, the feisty and only, Jenny Martinez. Today, we have a special guest for the people. We got the talented and sexy **Sinful K** in the building. I am a fan girl who loves his music. Yes, ladies, he is even sexier in person.”*

“I appreciate you, baby. Thanks for inviting me to y’all show. Y’all doing big things in the industry. I am ready to interview with the best.”

“Let me get right to the questions. Sinful, are you a crackhead? Will you ever release music, or will you be a senior when it drops?” Big Dollars joked.

My body tensed up with rage and I felt like fucking him up. Cracking my knuckles, I stared him down with barring teeth, ready to smack that Kool-Aid grin off his fuckin’ face. Yet, I remained calm especially since Avery was on the other side giving me the look of death. She didn’t play and I didn’t want to be on her bad side. I had to answer the question but carefully thought it over in my mind. I leaned towards the mic and released a deep breath.

*“We all struggle with demons and make mistakes we are not proud of. But unfortunately, because I **am** a celebrity, my business is shared with the world. Let me say this, I am not perfect. I **do** want to get myself right. As of right now, I can’t release music until I am better.”*

“I appreciate your honesty, Sinful. How is your relationship with Wolf Knight? There are rumors that your relationship is strained?”

“Wolf is not only my mentor but a father figure to me. We have our ups and downs like anyone else. I know he wants what’s best for me. I can’t wait to get back to making music. He gave me a shot and pushed me to greatness. I will always be thankful.”

No matter if Wolf and I weren't in a good place, I would never disrespect him publicly. He had given me the world. I loved him for that shit. We just had our differences because of my addiction.

For the next hour, we talked openly about my career and what I planned to do when I was able to release music again. Even when I tried to be transparent and open about my issues, Big Dollars wanted to make me the ass of his jokes. Much respect went out to Jenny who kept it professional. She made sure to mention my accomplishments and my contributions to the music industry. I kept looking at Avery and Mary, who reassured me I was doing great. Once the interview ended, I snatched the headphones off my ears and clocked Big Dollars on his chin. His fat ass flew back off the chair as everyone gasped. Then I kicked him dead in his face. I didn't give a fuck who he was. I wasn't gonna take any disrespect. Suddenly, a security guard tried to rush me. I caught him twice with two hits to his temple before he crashed on the floor. To calm me down, Mary started tossing that oil and snatched my arms as she escorted me out the building down to the limo. We didn't even speak. I could tell she was pissed as she prayed loudly. Twenty minutes later, Avery climbed inside.

“Are you **crazy** ? I can't believe you hit that man. You really have anger issues.”

“I tried to be straight but he kept playing, so I had to check his ass. Next time, he will know better than to play with me. I ain't no joke.” I scowled.

“Do you know what we had to do to get you from going to jail or getting sued?” Avery said as she texted on her phone.

“What?”

“Wolf is gonna pay him two million to forget that you knocked his ass out. And now, you are no longer allowed to have any interviews with anyone.”

When Avery showed me the signed NDA by Big Dollars, I grunted. I didn't need Wolf Knight fighting my fuckin' battles.

All he had to do was let me record and I could focus on controlling my life.

CHAPTER EIGHT



MARY LAMB

My world-famous sweet potato pies were cooling down on the kitchen table and I couldn't wait to serve them at the church fair. The First Lady had personally asked me to bring them to the event because it was her favorite and I felt so honored. During my time in Houston, she was a godsend to my life. I was truly gonna miss her and the beautiful congregation after I went home for good. A part of me wanted to stay, but I knew my granny would just guilt trip me. After placing all the pies into pink boxes, I grabbed my cellphone and took a seat on the comfortable couch to call my grandmother. She had been calling me nonstop to see if I purchased my plane ticket. The moment I dialed her number, she picked up on the first ring and started scolding me like a child. I sighed heavily. At thirty years old, I had no control over my life.

“Mary, when are you coming home? You're probably doing ungodly things out there in Texas. Don't you let your cousin corrupt you.”

“I will be home in two weeks,” I blurted out.

“Why? You were supposed to be home this weekend. What made you change your mind?” Grandma Mable said angrily.

“Avery needs me to help with a few things at the office. The new girl who is taking my place is struggling.”

“Oh, really?” She sucked her teeth.

“Yes.”

It was my first time ever not telling the truth to my granny. Tears started to well up in my eyes because I felt like crap for lying, but I knew she would keep badgering me. I said a silent prayer for God to forgive me for my sins.

“ You need to get home ASAP so you can get back into our church and start working. I don’t have time for your games. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am. How is my mom?”

“YOU DO NOT REFER TO HER AS THAT!” Grandma Mable raised her voice and made me jump.

“Sorry, grandma. It won’t happen again. How is Phoebe?”

“She’s good.”

All my life, I had to call my birth mother by her name. My granny also forbade us from having a mother/daughter relationship because of the way I was conceived. At sixteen, my mother had been raped by a boy in the neighborhood. He took advantage of her because she had an intellectual disability. By the time granny found out about the pregnancy, my mother was ready to give birth. My mother was plus size, so nobody could tell a change in her figure. After I was born, my granny went to the courts and explained that her daughter wasn’t competent enough to raise a child, so they gave her full custody of me. Even though I grew up in the same house as my mother, we were raised like siblings. As a young girl, I always felt horrible because I never understood why my mother didn’t want me. That was until I got older, but I had realized she was still a child in her own mind. She could barely raise herself without her mother’s help and guidance.

“Mary, don’t you think about trying to get out of coming home especially since I need you to help with Phoebe. You know the Lord wouldn’t like that you turn your back on family.”

“You got my word. I am coming home.”

I ended the call and hot tears rolled down my cheeks. Sometimes, I just wanted to live by my own rules without having to listen to anybody, but I was afraid that my granny would hate me. I didn't want to risk her keeping my mother away from me. Granny Mable still had her under courtship.

When Sinful came into the living room, I brushed my tears away and cleared my throat. I didn't want him to see me crying. He stood there momentarily like he wanted to ask if I was okay, but he didn't. Thank goodness, I didn't want to lie again.

“Those pies smell good.” He sniffed and rubbed his belly.

“They sure do, but you won't be getting any. You acted like a fool doing that interview.” I pursed my lips.

“I didn't punch that nigga when we were live on the radio.” I chuckled.

“My pies are for good Christian folks and not sinners like you.” I poked him in the chest with a smug grin.

“Fuck you, and your shitty pies,” He said angrily and walked off.

His foul language had me dropping my mouth in disbelief. A man like Sinful had to be raised by wolves. After doing a little bit of research on the internet about him, I noticed his family wasn't mentioned. He didn't have any pictures of them on his social media pages. Yet, he had a million pictures with Rhythm Knight and her kids. They seemed like they had a great relationship, like siblings. So maybe, he wasn't that bad, but I still didn't like him. He was arrogant and rude.

I made my way upstairs and quickly slipped on my black dress. As I looked into the mirror, Avery knocked on the door and strolled in looking so beautiful in a red sexy dress. Even though we were only five years apart, I always admired and looked up to her as a hero. She always had so much confidence and embraced herself as a BBW. She didn't care about anyone's judgment, especially our grandma's. They

didn't have a close relationship because Avery wasn't afraid to speak her mind, nor was she easily manipulated, unlike me.

"Hey, cousin. I came to tell you I can't make it to the church bake festival today."

"What? Why not Avery? You told me you were gonna come so I didn't have to be alone."

"Cupid's new client invited us to his house for dinner. I can't miss it."

"Let me get this straight, you are canceling on your favorite cousin for your man? I can't believe this. What does he do for you that I don't?"

"It's pretty simple. He gives me bomb dick and the best tongue." She smirked and danced.

I placed my hand over my ears and scowled. I didn't want to hear any details about their sex life. It was bad enough I heard them every night. Their bed springs were probably all worn out from all that humping around like rabbits. After promising to make it up to me, she left me alone to finish getting ready. I grabbed my purse and headed downstairs to pack up the car with the pies.

Stepping into the kitchen, I jumped back in shock and placed my hand on my chest as Sinful K sat at the table with his belt opened and mouth covered in pie. Seeing me standing at the doorway, he winked before picking up a big glass of milk to wash down the pie. Not only did he eat my pie, he opened all the boxes and put his big handprint on each of them. He thought it was funny. I went for my oil inside my purse and he took off running like a scared child. As I chased him around, he laughed hysterically. He was too fast, but I wouldn't stop running. Eventually, I leaped on his back, causing us to crash onto the floor. We began wrestling. That demon man had me getting ready to ring his neck. As I was on top of his body, I felt something hard between his legs.

"Lord Jesus. How dare you bring a gun into Cupid and Avery's home?" I was frantic.

"That ain't no gun. That's *my dick*."

“Get your nasty hands off me.”

“Shidd. You got your hooves on me, Lamb.”

I leaped up and ran away from that nasty man. He really was sick in the head. There was no way, I would be able to spend another minute around a man that had so much lust in his body. As I stormed out the house without my pies, I felt like going back to jail for knocking him over the head. Never in my life had I ever wanted to be violent toward another human being, until I met that Sinful K. I sent my cousin a text letting her know what he did to my pies and she told me she would handle it.

Me: I am serious. Sinful is evil.

Avery: He isn't that bad, but he can be a trip. I will make sure he makes it up to you.

Driving to the church, my hands were sweating, and my heart was racing. I quickly parked before grabbing my purse. The fair was being held on the property, which sat on four acres of land. Eyes were on me as I sat at the empty table without any pies. People were starting to come into the event and I just wanted to crawl under a rock and hide. When Pastor Simpson and the First Lady came over to greet me with a hug, I broke down crying. They pulled me into a private room to get myself together and told me that everything would be okay after I explained why my pies were a no show. Their words were comforting, but I was still upset about not being able to contribute to the bake sale. They were gracious enough to allow me to help with the children's face painting. A cute little girl with pigtails and beautiful chocolate skin plopped down in the seat to get her face painted.

Even though I was sad, I wanted to do my best work. Once I was done, I handed her the mirror and she danced in her seat looking at her face. A few more kids came to get their face painted too, and I did my best to make them happy. As I was putting the finishing touches on some little boy's face that wanted to be the Joker, people started swarming and loudly cheering. I didn't have a clue what was going on, so I checked

to see what the commotion was all about. Making my way through the crowd, I saw Sinful K standing with the first lady and the pastor. He was posing for photos while shaking their hands like he was the mayor trying to get elected. He had a nerve to try to upstage me. Flaring my nostrils, I marched up to them and Sinful immediately pulled his lips into a smirk and pulled me close to take a picture. He smelled so good. I found myself melting into his arms before coming to my senses and distancing myself away from him. Sinful was given the mic and I had to brace myself because anything crazy could've come out of that heathen's mouth.

"I appreciate you for letting me crash y'all event. My home girl Mary told me it was alright, so I came through. I also brought some desserts that will lift y'all spirits up."

The crowd erupted in cheers as people brought boxes of dessert. Sinful then handed the pastor the mic and then placed his hand on my lower back, bringing a chill up my spine. We made our way to the wooden table to serve desserts. No way I wanted Sinful's help but I knew it would draw a scene if I asked him to leave. The line immediately got crowded with people wanting some sweet treats. His attendance made people want to take a picture with him. I didn't understand why people thought he was so special. All he did was write songs and they weren't even for the Lord.

"What are you doing here and where is Rose? God, please don't tell me you didn't leave her alone?"

"Naw, she with the babysitter. The same one who watches Avery and Cupid's kids."

"Oh. What are you doing here? I know it's not to get saved, Sinful Man."

"Avery told me I had to come apologize or she was tossing me out her house."

My cousin always had my back.

"Good. I can't believe you did that to my pies."

"Yeah, that was messed up. My bad, Lamb. I just wanted some pie. You wouldn't give me anything."

“That’s not an excuse to be mean. I bet your parents would be ashamed of your behavior.”

I could immediately see Sinful’s demeanor change after mentioning his parents. Sensing that was a sour spot for him, I changed the subject and started making conversation about baby Rose. We never had any issues when it came to her cute self. We were both going for a slice of pie to give to someone. Our hands accidentally touched, and I felt a shock. I quickly pulled away, not giving Sinful any eye contact. He just chuckled and kept on serving people.

“I am going to have to put some pie up for myself.”

“Yeah, this is the best pie in town. It’s better than yours too,” he was trying to insult me.

“Psss. Nobody can make pies better than me. I am the queen and have my own recipe.”

“If you say so, Lamb. I had better from the box. Shit, Pattie got you beat.”

“What?” I was offended.

“Naw, it is good as hell,” he chuckled.

“Got that right. My pie is so good, it makes you want to step on your mama.” I posed and Sinful shook his head.

“You mean your pie is so good, it makes you want to slap your mama.”

Clutching hold of my chest, I asked, “Why would I want to do that?”

“You need to get out more, Mary.”

For the next two hours, people came to the table for dessert and took more pictures. Sinful’s fans loved him to death. Most of them kept telling him that they were praying for him, which was nice. The mood was pretty good and Sinful wasn’t working on my nerves. As we were putting the last desserts on the table, a woman approached us wearing a tight dress with her big boobs on display like she was at a concert. I shook my head seeing her acting like a harlot. She was smiling so big in Sinful’s face like she wanted more than just dessert.

“What would you like, ma’am?” I was annoyed.

“Oh, I am getting the sweet potato pie,” she spoke without looking in my direction.

“Is that all?” I folded my arms.

“Ummhum.” She licked her lips.

“How about you get some of this pie and a side of my dick?” Sinful whispered low enough for the woman to hear.

I heard his filthy self too.

My eyes got big and I snatched Sinful away by the arm and took him in the back room to talk. There was no way I was gonna allow him to speak lustfully in the house of the Lord. He towered over me with those deep soulful eyes and for some reason, I wanted to give him a hug, along with shaking him. Yet, I did what needed to be done and gave him a tongue lashing.

“You are a nasty man. Do you want to burn in hell?”

“Hell yea. Did you see the ass on that bitch? I bet she can take some dick.”

I slammed my eyes shut. “That’s no way to talk about a woman. You got to do better.”

“Mary, that ain’t no woman. She is a cum eater.”

“Lord, you need help.”

The first lady came looking for us to ask Sinful to perform. At first, he was against the idea until she said he had so many fans who would love to see him live. As he got ready to walk on the stage, I clutched hold of his arm, giving him a pleading look to not embarrass me. He shot me a wink and took the mic. I knew he didn’t have any songs about Christ. When the beat dropped, he started rapping about the struggles and the sins of a man. He captivated the audience as they waved their hands and bobbed their heads. Through every word, I felt his pain as tears rolled down my cheeks. It was more to Sinful K that met the eye... I wanted God to hear his cries.

CHAPTER NINE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Nobody could fuck with me lyrically. I was considered one of the best MC's to ever pick up a mic. The stage was where I felt most alive. Hearing the crowd cheering my name always got me hyped. I even saw Mary bobbing her head as she listened to me rhyme about my inner turmoil. Despite my demons and how much I stayed in trouble, my fans were my biggest supporters. They constantly hit me up on social media asking when I would be dropping new music, but I didn't have an answer. I appreciated them for showing me so much love though.

I couldn't stop thinking about the chance when I would be able to record again. I was gonna kill it by releasing a double album, produced by my homie Nardo, who had taken over the music industry. With his beats and my lyrics, I knew it was gonna go straight to the top of the charts and secure me another Grammy.

The crowd continued to go wild after I stopped performing. As I walked off the stage with my adrenaline pumping and sweat beating off my forehead, Mary leaped into my arms, giving me a hug. She quickly realized what she was doing and jumped back, adjusting her shirt before looking down at the floor. I shook my head and chuckled after seeing her acting so embarrassed. She really didn't know how to act

towards a nigga. Mary needed to realize she could still love God without being so damn uptight.

She clapped her hands. “You did amazing. Thank you for performing.”

“No problem. I’m about to bounce. It’s this chicken spot on the next block that I want to try.”

“You can go on without me. I want to stay and help clean up.”

“I wasn’t inviting you to come, Lamb,” I was blunt.

“Oh.” Her eyes got bigger.

“I’m messing with you, Lamb. Come kick it with a nigga. I want to make it up to you for messing up those pies.”

“That’s a nice gesture, but I have food at the house.”

“Aight bet. You can cook for us.”

“Excuse me? I’m not your lady or your maid. If you want something to eat, we can both cook.”

“Hell naw. I got a chef for that, Lamb.”

“Good. Then, you won’t have any problem telling your chef to cook for you. Now if you’ll excuse me, I see a friend of mine. See you later, Sinful Man.”

Mary dismissed the shit out of me and had me pissed off. She strutted towards some corny looking, bald-headed nigga, who was wearing a tight ass gray suit. When he pulled her into a hug, I grunted with a frown. From the big Kool-Aid smile he had on his face, I could tell he was interested in her. Flaring my nostrils, I walked towards them to make my presence known. I gripped hold of Mary’s waist and pulled her body close to mine, making her eyes buckle. The dude didn’t even defend her honor. He just made an excuse about having to help stack some chairs and rushed off almost tripping over his feet.

“It’s time to go,” I was forceful.

“Get your hands off me, demon man. I can’t believe you ran my friend off,” Mary got all sassy and snatched her arm away from me.

“Keep calling me a demon and I’m gonna show you why they call me *Sinful* . Now bring your long skirt wearing ass on.”

She clutched hold of her chest. “I have never been talked to like this in my life. You really got some serious issues.”

“Blame it on me not taking my medicine.”

“Aww, now it makes sense. You might need to see a therapist or speak to the Lord but leave me alone.”

“That’s messed up, Lamb. You ain’t gonna get your prayer cloth and pray for a nigga?” I joked.

“Sir, please. You’re gonna need more than my prayers to get your head straight. I have to go help clean up.”

“Naw, we are bouncing. I’m not gonna tell you again,” I spoke through my gritted teeth.

There was a hesitant look on Mary’s face, but she didn’t put up a fight. We made our way outside where I called my driver. It didn’t take long for Mr. Moore to pull up to the curb. Before he got out to assist us, I opened the door and waited for Mary to climb into the truck. Yet, she remained standing there with her arms folded and pursing her perfectly shaped lips. Since I didn’t like to repeat myself, I lifted her over my shoulders as I placed her into the backseat. Then I climbed in and slammed the door with a brute force. Mary was clutching her chest and balled up like somebody was trying to hurt her.

“Why the hell are you looking all crazy for, Lamb?”

“You’re trying to kidnap me. I knew you were a problem. Don’t you try to take my goodies because I am going to have to claw your eyes out and the good Lord will have to forgive me.”

“You’re crazy as hell. I like to see you try.” I chuckled.

“Let me out this truck or I am gonna call the police, you ungodly man.”

“Call those pigs. A nigga is used to getting locked up. It won’t make a difference to me. I’ll just add another mugshot to my collection.”

“Lord Jesus.” She sighed.

“Why do you have to make things so difficult, Lamb? I only want to feed you.”

“I drove Avery’s car and don’t want to leave it unattended. She will kill me.”

“No problem. We can come back and get it.”

“Fine. I am only going because God just spoke with me and said you need some company.”

Mary put on her seatbelt and stared out the window. While we were driving, I heard her stomach growling like crazy. I knew her ass was hungry. When Mr. Moore dropped us off in front of the Soul Food restaurant, the people who were standing outside took their phones out and started taking pictures. I didn’t care about being recognized. Even though I was a celebrity, I never went out with security. My music company hated that shit, but I told them I loved being amongst my fans. They were more so worried about me getting robbed or hurt by some jealous stricken mothafucka, but I didn’t give a shit. I stayed strapped with my nine on my waist and was ready for any nigga. Mary seemed a bit overwhelmed by all the attention and shielded her face.

I tried to comfort her by placing my hand securely on her lower back as we made our way inside the restaurant. Surprisingly, she didn’t fuss about me putting my demon hand on her body. I figured it was because she was nervous as hell from all the people trying to get my attention. As I approached the hostess at the booth, more people showed me love by giving me head nods.

“Oh, shit. Sinful K. I love all your music.” The hostess greeted me with a half cheek smile.

“Preciate it, baby. How long it’s gonna take to get something to eat in this bitch? I’m starving.” I touched my stomach.

“We can get you seated right now. Follow me,” she said eagerly and picked up some menus.

We were taken to a table at the back of the dining area with a little more privacy. Mary seemed to be relaxed as she picked up her menu. We figured out our orders so when the waitress came, we were able to tell her what we wanted to eat. She was too focused on drooling in my face that she barely heard anything Mary had to say, and I didn't like that shit.

“Aye, I need you to stop looking at me and get her order right. I'm not gonna be understanding if you mess up,” I was direct.

“Sorry, Mr. K,” the waitress was apologetic.

“Naw, don't say it to me. You can say it to her.” I pointed at Mary who was sipping on her water.

The waitress apologized and then quickly walked away, damn near running into the next table. Chuckling, I picked up my water taking a few sips. I was craving a nice drink but decided against it. Mary cleared her throat and I looked up to see her staring at me curiously.

“What?” I rubbed my chin.

“You bring me out to eat and don't want to talk. I could've stayed to help clean at the church.”

“Since you think I am a demon, I didn't know if you wanted to talk with me.”

“Well, I can make an exception this one time. So, are you from Houston or did you move here for music?”

“I'm originally from Harlem, but I moved here when I was sixteen.”

“Wow, do you visit New York often?”

“Only for work.”

“What about your family?”

“I don't talk to my family.” I raked my hands down my face and then changed the subject. “What about you, Lamb? Are you staying here for good or going back home?”

She heavily sighed. “No, I am going back home to work at my church.”

“Damn. For you to love God so much, you don’t seem happy.”

“It’s not that. Honestly, I don’t want to leave. I love Texas and I love working for Avery. But I have to go back to help granny.”

“Don’t you think you need your life? Granny gonna be straight.”

“You aren’t the first person to tell me that. It’s not that simple. Family is everything and I can’t leave my granny. She’s getting older.”

“I’m sorry to break it to you, Mary, but family can be the worst. You need to really reconsider staying here and doing what makes you happy.”

“I’ll pray on it.”

Our food was placed in front of us and we kept talking. It wasn’t that bad spending time with Mary. She just seemed sheltered. We stayed for about an hour and a half before deciding to leave after Mary received a text from Avery asking to see if she could relieve the nanny. Her and Cupid were still out for the evening. I tossed some bills on the table and then took a picture with one of my teenage fans before we walked out the restaurant to get in our ride.

We swung back to get Avery’s car in the church parking lot. Then, Mary followed behind the truck. When we arrived at the house, the nanny told us all the kids were asleep. I gave her three hundred more dollars for watching Rose at the last minute. At first, she didn’t want to take it because she already got paid but I didn’t want to hear it. She was with two infants and a three-year-old. Shit, that had me stressed just thinking about it.

I plopped down on the couch and turned on the television. Most nights, I stayed up since I couldn’t sleep and watched old western movies. I was flipping through the channels when Mary strolled in wearing a fluffy robe with slippers. I figured she had gone to bed. She sat down on the recliner chair before putting something into her mouth.

“Do you mind having company? I am not tired yet.”

“You straight. What are you eating?”

“I had a sweet tooth and found these gummies in the refrigerator. They were in the vegetable bin. You want to try one? They taste so good,” Mary showed me the bag.

I recognized the package, and my eyes grew large. Poor Mary had no idea she was about to be floating on the clouds. She had eaten weed infused gummies. When she handed me the bag, I ate the rest of them. My tolerance was high, so I knew I wasn't gonna get too fucked up.

“Aww, man. You are just greedy. I said you can have some, not all. I only had two.”

“Trust me Lamb, that's all you need.” I smirked.

We got quiet and watched television. Thirty minutes later, Mary was high as a kite. She was staring up at the ceiling and laughing loudly. She sat next to me on the couch and rubbed the side of my face with her index finger. My dick jumped. Then, she hugged me before twirling some of my locks with her fingers while lust emerged into her eyes. Mary might've been saved and all, but her body was trying to betray her. I could smell the scent of her arousal and it smelled good. My dick was begging to be unleashed, but I had to get myself together. There was no way I would cross those lines with “holy” Mary.

She cocked her head to the side and smiled. “Sinful Man. You are very handsome.”

“Preciate it.”

“No, you really are nice looking and those pictures on your social media don't do you any justice. I think you look way better in person. Do you work out? Your arms are big.” Mary caressed my shoulders and then trailed my arm.

“Yeah, I do. But I mostly work out in the bedroom lifting up the ladies.” I licked my lips.

“Whatever you're doing, keep it up. You look so strong.”

“Thanks, Lamb.”

She touched my cheek. “I think you have the most beautiful eyes, but they are filled with so much pain. What’s your deal?”

“Everyone has pain, but we just deal with it differently.”

“I don’t have pain, but I do have frustration. My granny wants to act like I don’t know God because I want to live my life. I have my own walk with him, and I am tired of her trying to tell me otherwise. She really gets me so upset.”

“Why don’t you say anything? You don’t have to take her shit. Mary, you’re a grown ass woman, not a child.”

“I want to be respectful because she raised me since my mom didn’t have the mental capacity to do so. Sometimes, I think she uses that to control me. Growing up, I couldn’t do anything without her throwing God into it and telling me what I should be doing. I love her, but I just wish she would get off my back.”

“Seems like you should speak up or she will always control your life.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Do you hear that?” She whispered.

Mary looked around from side to side with her eyes spaced out like she heard something. She even had my high ass trying to listen. Suddenly, she dropped her robe to her feet and then stripped out of her nightgown before taking off running in just her bra and panties. Fearing she was going to hurt herself, I leaped up chasing after her as she ran through the kitchen towards the door. She rerouted towards the sliding doors that led to the backyard and cannon balled into the pool, splashing me with water. When she swam up smiling, I shook my head chuckling.

She motioned me with her index finger. “Come on Sinful Man. The water feels great. We are at a beach. Get in here with me.”

“Naw, I’m not getting in that water. Shit, you might try to baptize me.”

“You are silly.” She cackled and splashed me with water.

“Please, come in with me. I am lonely.” She bit the edge of her bottom lip.

I dove into the water headfirst and then swam up to the top to see Mary rubbing her fingers through her wet hair. She looked like a totally different person without those Shirley Chism curls. My dick was hard as fuck and I couldn't take my eyes off her. She had me in some type of trance, wanting to bend her over to serve her the dick.

She swam towards me and wrapped her arms around my necking with a big smile. We had no business being so close, but I couldn't help myself. I removed a wet piece of fallen hair from in front of her face. For some reason, I had the urge to kiss her lips. She kept moving closer to my face. As I grabbed her ass and got ready to stick my tongue down her throat, suddenly, the sound of Avery's voice made us back away from each other. She was standing in front of the pool tapping her heel on the pavement. Mary climbed out the water and leaped into her arms and wet her dress.

“Guess what, cousin? Sinful Man took me to the beach. He isn't that bad.”

“Oh, really. I see. Let's get you inside and into bed,” Avery gave me a dirty look but didn't say anything.

“Goodnight, Sin. I will see you tomorrow.” Mary waved and walked like she was floating.

Avery and Mary went back in the house while I climbed myself out of the water. I hurried back inside where Cupid was sitting at the table looking drunk and eating cake. After I dapped him up, I headed up the steps to get to my room. As soon as I gripped the doorknob, Avery emerged behind me, clearing her throat. I figured she wanted to know what the hell happened between me and her cousin.

“Was Mary high?” Avery asked firmly with her hands on her hips.

“Yeah, but I promise I didn't give her any drugs. She got some edibles out y'all refrigerator. Before I knew what she

was eating, she had already taken two of those gummies. I had some too.”

“Shit! I told Cupid to hide them. She is gonna have the munchies when she wakes up. We can never tell her about this... *ever* . She would go crazy and feel horrible about herself,” Avery was adamant.

“You don’t have to worry about me saying anything.”

“Yeah, whatever. You just better keep your hands off my cousin. I like you, but everyone knows you’re a bad boy, Sinful. As much as I want my cousin to finally get out of her shell and live her life, she doesn’t need you complicating her world with your mess. Have a good night.”

I walked into my bedroom and saw Rose sleeping in her crib. She was a cute little kid. I just needed the DNA results to hurry back to see if she was indeed mine. I quickly rubbed her little cheek before climbing into my bed. As I was staring at the ceiling, still unable to close my eyes, my cellphone started ringing. It was one of my jump offs, but I didn’t feel like speaking. I sent her ass straight to voicemail. That’s when I noticed my phone had a lot of text messages and my notifications were going crazy. I got on the internet and saw that pictures of Mary and I at the restaurant were trending. The comments people were making implied that they thought she was my lady. Just to fuck with people, I reshared our pictures on my social media. At the end of the day, I didn’t have time for a relationship or love. Mary needed to find herself a good man who could love her properly... not a *sinner* like me.

CHAPTER TEN



MARY LAMB

The cameras were flashing as I slammed my feet on the gas and sped out of the grocery store parking lot with my tires screeching to get away from the paparazzi. Within forty-eight hours, my normal life had turned into a complete circus after someone posted a picture with me and Sinful at the restaurant on social media. It didn't help the situation when he reshared the pictures on his personal page like he was confirming our relationship. Ever since then, I felt like I had been under a microscope. Honestly, I was sick of it and wanted people to leave me alone, especially the mean souls who had been making cruel remarks about my appearance. They were tearing me down in the comment section, calling me, "Little Bo Peep" and fat shaming me for my thick frame. I didn't even date the man. The world was full of wicked ways and it was a shame people only cared about looks and who was popular. We were doomed.

When I made it to the house, I slammed the grocery bag on the table and allowed my tears to fall. I was already depressed about going back home for good and they just added to my sadness. I really enjoyed being in Texas and wanted to stay. Yet, my guilty conscience over leaving my granny and mother wouldn't allow me to make the permanent move. No matter how much I desired to live my life freely, I was taught you

never turned your back on family. After swiping my tears away, I put the food into the refrigerator and headed upstairs to my bedroom to pack my luggage. I had an early flight the next morning and wanted to be prepared. The airport was a crazy place, and I didn't want to run into any issues.

I grabbed my luggage from the closet and started putting my folded clothes in neatly. There was a knock on the door, and then Avery strolled in pouting. She really didn't want me to leave. I opened up my arms to give her a big hug. She then sat on the edge of the bed with her arms folded and I knew it was coming.

"Cousin. You sure you don't want to stay? I can really use your help." She pouted.

"I need to get back home to help granny with my mom."

"Who is gonna help me with my hectic schedule or do my taxes? I don't trust nobody but you, cousin. You really need to open your own accounting business instead of going to work in that church. Granny can help herself with her mean ass. She just wants to control your life."

"We are not doing this, Avery. I don't want to spend my last night here talking about granny. We are gonna have some of my fried chicken and spend some quality time."

She snaked her neck. "Are you serious right now? You are not cooking for us. We are going to take you out on the town to party."

I shook my head and waved my hands. "Oh, no. I don't need you to make a fuss about me. We can have a simple dinner at home."

"Nope. We are going out tonight. Get your rest and be ready for a good time."

"Fine, but I need you to do my hair."

"Like what? Who are you trying to look cute for?" Avery pursed her lips.

"Nobody. I want to change it up for a day."

"Umhummm. You don't have to lie, cousin."

“I’m telling the truth. Where is Sinful?”

“Why do you need to know about my client? You no longer work for my company.” She chuckled.

“I am only asking to make sure baby Rose is okay.”

“Sin took her for a stroller ride. She was being very fussy.”

“Do you think that’s safe? I mean, knowing he wants to get high. Have the results come back yet?”

“We are still waiting. The place is backed up because it’s short staffed. I am trying to get the results quicker because of his celebrity status but shit is not going as planned.”

“Even when I am home, you need to tell me the results,” I was adamant.

“Look at you, wanting to know about your *step-daughter*. I knew you had a crush on Sinful. You like bad boys, huh cousin?”

“No. I don’t like Sinful. He is not my type,” I lied.

Avery laughed like she could sense my façade. She was right. I did have a crush on Sinful. He had been heavy on my mind. Every time he was in my presence, I felt butterflies swarming in the pit of my stomach and I couldn’t stop smiling. There had been a lot of men who I thought were very attractive, but Sinful *oozed* sex appeal. He had my body feeling hot and tempted. Truthfully, I felt so guilty because I knew lusting after a man who wasn’t my husband was wrong. Yet, I couldn’t help myself and wanted to taste the forbidden fruit.

“If you say so cousin. You’re gonna need to use that prayer cloth to make sure he doesn’t get your panties before you leave.”

“Be quiet, Avery. He isn’t even checking for a homely looking woman like me. And besides, I know his fans surely wouldn’t approve. They think I am fat and I dress weird.” My voice shattered.

“How do you know that?” she was curious.

I took out my cell phone and showed Avery all the horrible things that people had been saying about me online. She was ready to fight. After she logged onto her social media and broke a few people off under their comments, she gave me some words of advice.

“You’re beautiful, Mary, with an even more beautiful soul. Any man would be lucky to have you. I don’t care what these low life ass people think on the internet. They are just mad because you are living their fantasy and got a famous music artist all in your face. Now keep on doing you, Lil Bo Peep.” She joked.

I laughed and tossed my shirt at her face. Avery helped me finish packing and then we dragged my luggage down to the foyer next to the front door. While she did a little more work, I wanted to watch television. After I popped me some popcorn and poured it into a big bowl, I plopped down on the couch and grabbed the remote control to turn on the cooking channel. As I was engrossed into the show, I heard the door slam along with faint cries. Leaping up from the couch, I quickly rushed to see what was going on and saw Sinful scooping Rose out of her stroller, looking flustered. Poor Rose had pooped in her pink onesie. While Sinful calmed his nerves, I went to change my pretty girl. She was such a good baby, but she loved to give Sinful a run for his money. Once she was fresh, I cradled her against my chest and leaned down to kiss her cheeks. We then went back downstairs in the living room and I put her into the swing. Within seconds, she had passed out sleeping. I glanced over at Sinful who was in the reclining chair and texting with a scowl.

“You good over there? I know baby Rose can be a hand full.”

“Yeah. I’m straight,” he was brief.

“It doesn’t look like it. You want to talk. I’m a good listener.”

“I don’t need you to act like you care.” He grimaced.

It was part of my ministry to help people, especially when they were dealing with pain and turmoil.

“I want to help. Lay it on me.”

He raked his hands down his face. “I am not upset about Rose. It’s my career that’s got me feeling messed up. I am thinking about paying Wolf Knight to get out of my contract. It’s a couple of millions but I need my freedom to make music.”

“Are you leaving because you want to make music or because you don’t want to be told what to do? From what Avery said, Wolf cares for you like you are his own son. He just wants you to get clean and then you can go back to releasing music.”

“I don’t need a fuckin’ father. He needs to know his place and let me be.” He pointed.

I shook my head. “Here you go again with that foul language, acting like an entitled clown when things don’t go your way, Sinful. What type of name is that anyway? I know I keep asking but you won’t give me an answer.”

“I named myself *Sinful* because that’s all my father ever called me, a sinner. He was a pastor.”

“Aww, I can’t imagine how that made you feel. I am gonna do better about calling you ‘Sinful Man.’”

“I got to be real with you, Lamb, that shit is catchy though. When are you going back home?”

“My flight leaves tomorrow morning.”

“Do you have anything planned today?” He licked his lips.

My lower core got hot. I tightly closed my legs and stopped focusing on his juicy lips.

“Avery is taking me out, but I don’t know where,” I said nonchalantly, shrugging my shoulders.

“See, look at you. You’re doing everything that everybody else wants you to do. Avery isn’t the one leaving. If you could do one thing, what would you do?”

I loved how Sinful pushed me to make my own decisions without the influence of other people.

“You’re gonna think it’s silly.”

“It can’t be that bad.” He chuckled.

“I always wanted to do karaoke, but my granny told me my voice is only for the church.”

“Fuck that! We gonna do it tonight.”

“We? Who said you were coming with us?” I hiked up one of my eyebrows.

“Nobody, Lamb. I invited myself and you’re gonna deal with it. I’m gonna see if the nanny is able to watch Rose too.”

When Avery came down and saw me talking with Sinful, a big goofy grin appeared on her face. She really was trying to be up in my business. Once she got comfortable and placed the pillow against her chest, I told her my idea about wanting to do karaoke. She knew the perfect place. Since Sinful was going with us, she called in a favor to one of her buddies to get security. She didn’t want anybody trying to approach him for autographs. Sinful didn’t think it was necessary, but Avery didn’t want to hear it. She hated when he went outside without bodyguards. After everything was planned for the evening, Avery took me upstairs and glammed me up. She pulled out a red dress from a shopping bag. Placing my hand against my chest, I contorted my face after seeing how sexy it looked. I didn’t like to show skin. Growing up, I wasn’t allowed to wear jeans, show skin, or anything short so I kept the same mindset as an adult woman. At first, I was reluctant to wear it until Avery convinced me to live a little. The dress had my thick curves on display, and I felt beautiful. My hair was natural. All Avery had to do was flat it down. I checked myself out in the mirror and smiled so big.

“You are looking good. Yessssss,” Avery hyped me up.

“I do. Wow, I got a nice body.”

“Thick baby. You better work it,” Avery snapped her fingers.

I strutted down the steps to show off my new look and Sinful’s hooded eyes grew wide. While he licked his lips and

raked his eyes down my body, my face and cheeks got a little flushed.

“Damn, Lamb. You look sexy. I ain’t even gonna lie, my dick is hard.”

“You’re just nasty. How about you just say I am beautiful?”

“I ain’t into the romantic shit.” He laughed.

“Let me get you a leash because you are such a dog.” I joked.

WOOF!

WOOF!

He barked and I cracked up laughing.

Once Cupid arrived home and got dressed, we headed out for a night on the town. During the ride to the place, we laughed and talked. When the Mercedes Sprinter pulled in front of the building, we all climbed out to stand on the curb. Just like we expected, people started pulling out their phones and taking pictures of Sinful. He even stopped to pose for a few fans and Avery kept motioning for him to hurry. She stayed in business mode. I love how Cupid just let her be the bossy lady, but he wasn’t afraid to put her in her place. We strolled inside where it was a little foggy from cigarette smoke. It invaded my nostrils, making me cough slightly, but I was okay. We found a seat right next to the stage. One by one, people got up there to show off their singing abilities. It was true talent in the building. Sinful had his shades on looking so good. When he leaned over to whisper in my ear, a chill rolled up my spine.

“What are you waiting for, Lamb? Go blow these people away with your voice.”

“I am nervous. What if they don’t think I can sing?” I said, wiping the sweat of my forehead.

“Do you know who I am? I am a six-time Grammy award winner and you had me hooked with your voice. You got this.

I don't want to hear shit about what your wolf pussy grandma wouldn't approve."

"You are so wrong." I laughed.

"What song you going to sing?"

"You will see."

The mic was free, and I stood up from my seat. My heart pounded in my chest the closer I got to the stage. As I stood in front of everyone, my knees felt wobbly. I cleared my throat several times before giving them the approval to drop the beat. When I finally sang the first words to "I Will Survive," I started moving my hips and feeling the music. Avery even came on stage to be my backup dancer. The crowd of people loved it too and clapped along to my singing. I wasn't focused on anybody except the one in the black shades, Sinful K, who was bobbing his head. Little did he know, he sparked something inside of me and that was to live my life for me.

After I was done singing, everyone gave me a round of applause. Then, I rushed off stage with a huge smile. The first person who pulled me into a hug was Sinful and as always, his cologne smelled intoxicating. Next thing I knew, my lips were on his and he placed his hand on my booty. It was my first kiss and I felt like I was floating on air; that was until I heard my granny's voice in my head calling me a *fresh heathen*. My shame and guilt caused me to jump away from Sinful before rushing out mortified.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



The softness of Mary's lips had me feenin' for another kiss, but she immediately took off running to get away from me. There was no reason for her to be ashamed. We had every right to act on our feelings and desires. Even though I wasn't the type to chase after a woman, I did chase after her, but only so we could talk. I caught up to her, and she was standing on the curb hysterically crying. I tried to ease next to her as she wiped her tears away. She quickly dug into her purse and took out her vile filled with oil like she was gonna toss it at me. With a smirk on my lips, I raised my hands up surrendering. She wanted to play hard to get with a nigga, but I was up for the challenge. No matter how hard she tried to front, I knew she was feeling me.

"Get away from me, Sinful Man. You are not any good."

"What the hell did I do to you, Lamb? *You* kissed *me* ." I rubbed the back of my neck.

"That never would've happened if you weren't staring at me. My body feels different when you're in my presence and you're making me do stuff I have never done. It's like you have some type of hold on me and I don't like it. My granny surely wouldn't approve of our sin hood."

“I got that effect on all the ladies. They call me *slinging dick K*.” I grabbed my crotch in public.

She slammed her eyes shut and placed her hands on top of her head. “You are nasty. I don’t want to be another notch on your belt.”

“Listen here, Lamb, you’re not gonna be anything you don’t want to be. At the end of the day, you have the power and the control to tell me no. If you only want to kiss, I will respect that. If you need a nigga to bend you over and beat that pussy up until you explode on my dick, I can do that shit too. I’m down for whatever you want, sweetheart.”

“Stop it, Sincere! Your foul mouth makes my skin crawl.”

“No, it doesn’t, baby. You like how blunt I am. That shit turns you on, but at the same time, you want to pray for me to change my ways. I am who I am, Lamb. Nobody is gonna make me apologize for it. When are *you* going to be *who you are* and stop living for everyone else, especially your granny? You are too damn old to not have your own opinions, wants, or dreams.”

Mary avoided looking me in my eyes. I lifted her head up as tears sprung down her cheeks. She wanted to live freely and make her own choices. Yet, something was holding her back and had her fearful to explore the world on her own terms, good or bad.

“I am a woman of God. That’s who I am proud to be.”

“You can still be a woman of God and live.”

“Living isn’t being lustful. I shouldn’t be kissing.”

“The bible doesn’t say anything about not being able to kiss. You aren’t supposed to have sex before marriage. We ain’t doing that. Even if people do, that’s their business and not for humans to judge. How do you think you are gonna find a husband if you don’t show some type of affection? I’m pretty sure that ain’t how that shit works.”

“I will find a good Christian man with the same morals as me.”

“You might find one, but you *want* a nigga like me,” I said cockily.

“Psss.... You’re oozing with sin. You’re not my type.”

She turned her head away from me, but I gripped her chin softly to make her look at me again.

“You’re seeping with judgment, but as long as you got a real pussy, you’re my type.”

Pushing my falling locks to the side of my face with a smirk, I pinned Mary against a random car and the vile of oil slowly slipped from her hand onto the pavement. I gently trailed her neck with kisses as her body momentarily squirmed. She wanted me but also felt the need to resist. For once in her life, I wanted her to relinquish control and come out of her bubble. The moment our lips connected, I felt an electric shock. She wasn’t an experienced kisser, so I didn’t use my tongue. Last thing I wanted to do was scare her away again, so I took it slow. Through each kiss, she moaned and relaxed her chest into my arms. **HMMMM UMMMM!** We were deep into our kiss when we heard throats loudly clear from behind us. I stepped away from Mary who was still leaning up against the car in a trance, turned around, and saw Avery and Cupid staring at us with goofy faces. They tried to act like they didn’t see anything. Maybe they weren’t trying to freak Mary out, especially when they saw her fidgeting with the bottom of her dress like a nervous wreck.

There was still a good amount of the day to enjoy. We walked across the street to a hookah lounge to listen to some music and chill, but Mary didn’t seem too thrilled. It was obvious that wasn’t her type of vibe. She definitely wasn’t a party goer. Her granny probably didn’t even allow her to attend birthday parties growing up.

“Won’t you loosen up a bit and have some fun, cousin,” Avery slurred her words.

“If you call messing up your lungs with hookah a good time, then I don’t want it,” Mary grunted with her nose in the air.

Avery waved Mary off. “You know what? I am not babysitting you today. I am gonna have a good time with my husband. You figure it out, Mary.”

Avery and Mary were polar opposites as far as personalities. Fun had different meanings for the both of them. Before Mary could say anything, Avery had already started walking through the lounge doors with Cupid following behind her like a puppy. I just shook my head and chuckled. That nigga was more sprung than a slinky off that pussy. I never wanted to be like that over a woman. Mary was all in her feelings with her arms folded across her chest. If she wasn't comfortable going inside, I was going to gladly spend time with her in the limo. It wasn't a big deal to me because I could party anywhere. I was always a turnt up hood nigga.

“Why don't you want to go in, Lamb? You would have a good time.”

“This place got too much going on, Sincere, and I don't trust it. Look at these people, they look like trouble. My granny told me I shouldn't be in the company of people I wouldn't invite inside my home because nothing good can come out of it.”

“Here you go with that shit again about what your granny thinks. You sound like the waterboy right now. I bet her old ass had a life too before she got all saved and delivered,” I was blunt.

“Excuse me? Don't be talking about my granny. I like you and all, but she is off limits.”

“You like a nigga, huh? You finally admit it.”

“A little, but don't tell anybody.”

I cocked my head to the side. “Shidd. Every woman wants to be linked to me. I am a catch, Lamb.”

“What do you have to offer?” She clutched her hip and waited for me to answer.

“I got a big dick, long money, extensive vocabulary, and I speak two languages.”

“I am gonna ignore the other foolishness you said, but I had no idea you spoke two languages. Wow, that’s surprising. What do you speak?”

“Huh... ghettoneese and lieoneese,” I joked.

For the first time I made Mary laugh. She couldn’t help it. That’s all it took for me to convince her to step in the lounge with me. She made it clear that she didn’t want me to drink though. That wasn’t a problem for me, just as long as she let me place my hand on her lower back and walk her in like the queen that she was. We made our way through the doors with personal security shielding us from people who tried to walk up to me for autographs.

It was packed with people enjoying the subtle atmosphere. Avery and Cupid had booked a private section for us. The setup was pretty dope. Everything was red, including the chairs and hookah bongs. I got comfortable and Mary sat next to me, looking around anxiously like a fish out of water, so I placed my hand on top of hers to make her smile.

“Chill out, Lamb. Nothing demonic is going on,” I assured her.

Mary’s eyes got big. “Are you sure? Look at all this red. I don’t need no funny business. Me and my prayer cloth is getting up out of here.”

“You didn’t bring that thing, did you?” I was curious.

She pursed her lips. “I sure did. I never leave home without it.”

Mary pulled that prayer cloth out her bag and wrapped it around her body. I damn near fell off my seat, laughing. She didn’t play about her peace or spirituality. A waiter came over to the table to take drink orders. Avery, Cupid, and Mary were looking at me like, you know you’re not supposed to drink, right? Like I had promised, I was only drinking water. Mary had got a virgin pina colada. Cupid and Avery did it big by ordering a giant champagne bottle of Moet & Chandon. They were fixin’ to get lit. After a few glasses, Avery started dancing and shaking her ass up on Cupid as he sat down

bobbing his head to the music. Then, she tried to get Mary up in the mix.

“Come, cousin. I always wanted to party together. C’mon, dance a little. Please,” Avery was slurring.

“I don’t dance unless it is for the Lord,” Mary was resistant.

“Fine,” Avery pouted.

I whispered in Mary’s ear. “Don’t be like that, Lamb. Your cousin is always looking out for you especially when she didn’t fire you for tossing that oil on me multiple times.”

“Lord,” Mary mumbled.

I managed to guilt trip her into dancing, then she stood up twirling her prayer cloth in the air like a helicopter. Avery was hyping her up, shimmying her shoulders. They were all having a good time with each other living carefree. I didn’t expect Mary to grab my hand. She stood me up, wrapped her prayer cloth around my neck, and started dancing with me. We never vibed so good. R&B music may have been blasting, but in Mary’s head, she was listening to gospel. We stayed at the lounge until it was closing time, but when it was time to go, I found out that paparazzi were outside. Someone had to tip them off about me being in the building. I suspected the manager. It seemed logical because it would bring more attention to his establishment as a place where celebrities hang. We were quick to avoid all the flashing lights from the cameras and climbed into the limo. At thirty -three years old, it was my first time hanging out in a club without any drugs or alcohol in my system.

CHAPTER TWELVE



MARY LAMB

I made the final decision to stay in Texas. It was finally time to find Mary... My time to shine and live freely away from my granny's watchful eye. Whether she was thrilled or not, I needed my freedom. As a little girl, I always did what she expected of me. To suppress my feelings in order to not hurt hers, wasn't fair. I couldn't live that way anymore. As I was unpacking my suitcase, there was a knock on the door. Avery stepped into the room with a smile. She was happy because I decided to stay and that made me feel special. Eventually, I was going to have to find a place to live on my own. That was my plan. Last thing I wanted to do was wear out my welcome. Cupid and Avery were going to need their space and privacy back.

"Do you want me to help put your things away?" Avery politely offered.

"No, thank you, cousin."

"Girl whatever. I'm gonna help you anyway. How did mean ass granny take the news that you were staying here?" She stuck out her tongue.

I cleared my throat as I folded up another one of my skirts. "Uhhh. Granny was upset but not like I expected."

Avery snaked her neck. “You didn’t tell granny, did you? I knew your ass was gonna punk out. What are you scared for? Hurt her damn feelings.”

I sighed and shook my head. “I can’t do it. You know she got a bad heart.”

“That old heffa don’t have any health issues. The wicked live a long time. Stop letting her trick ya.”

“I’m going to tell her but not now. Give me time, Avery.”

“Fine, but when you do it, let me be on the phone. I want to hear her cry.” She smiled.

“You’re terrible.” I tossed one of my shirts at her head as she ducked and laughed.

“Psssh. I can’t stand that old ass lady. I live to see her miserable.”

Avery could be very harsh when it came to speaking about Grandma Mable. They just didn’t get along. When Avery was a kid, their relationship was complicated. Avery would only come to our house because she wanted to spend time with me. I decided years ago never to get in the middle of their drama. All I did was listen to them vent about each other, but I never uttered a word. I loved them both and refused to put myself in a position that would make me choose.

“Since you’re here, can I get some advice? But I don’t want the perspective from your first marriage because we all know how that ended. Even I knew Joshua had double the sugar in his tank.” I pursed my lips and looked at Avery.

She shook her finger. “Really? You are lowdown, cousin. All that time you suspected my ex-husband was gay and you didn’t stop me from marrying him? How could you tell anyway? I damn sure couldn’t.”

“I’m saved, not blind. He was tasting that rainbow before y’all met. Anyway, I really like Sincere, but I don’t know if I should let him court me or I do the pursuing.”

After kissing Sincere, I thought things would be awkward between us, but everything was fine. If anything, we couldn’t

keep our eyes off of one another. I was still dreaming about his soft lips against mine.

“If a man really wants you, he will show you his intentions from the door and won’t play any games. Look at my husband. Cupid loves me to death. I love me some him, but I got to be real. Sincere has a lot of issues, so it might be difficult for him to give you what you’re looking for. I am not telling you this to make you stressed or lose interest in him, but I want you to be careful,” she showed her concern.

“That makes sense. I appreciate your advice.”

“Whatever you do, don’t let him hit it without any commitment. You’re really gonna be gone. Word in the industry is, he is a freak,” Avery whispered.

“Stop being a fresh heathen, Avery.”

“Maybe you need to turn into one baby, because I can’t go without the dick for too long.” She stuck out her tongue.

“You are just nasty.”

“And I’m proud of it,” Avery shook her butt.

She sure knew how to keep things lively. Nothing but laughs when we were together. After putting up my clothes in the dressers, we went downstairs to find Sincere. He was sitting on the couch with baby Rose sleeping on his chest. At the rate we were taking care of her, she was gonna be spoiled rotten. He was always holding her little tail. Rose already had him wrapped around her tiny finger. I couldn’t wait for the results to say that he was indeed the father. When I was standing in front of him, he licked his lips and raked his eyes down my body. I grinned before taking a seat next to him. He smelled so good.

“What’s going on, lil’ Lamb?” he said in a low tone.

“Nothing much. I just finished unpacking. I’m not going home after all.”

“Oh, really? What made you stay?”

I wanted to shout from the top of my lungs that he was part of the reason. He had me wanting to live on the edge, but I

knew I needed to slow down. If I moved too fast, I would potentially end up getting hurt or most certainly disappoint God. I didn't want any of that.

“Many reasons.”

He nodded.

“I was thinking about getting something to eat. Do you want to join me?” he offered.

“Yes.”

“Alright. We can take the baby with us.”

“Okay perfect. What time are we going? I promised to help the First Lady at the church with something.”

“You can go handle that, Lamb. I'll pick you up at the church. Then, we can kick it.”

Something came over my spirit that made me kiss Sincere. Then, I leaped up from the couch walking away, cheesing really hard. After I grabbed my purse, I went outside and requested a Lyft. It didn't take long for a ride to pull up in front of the house. I climbed in the backseat and slammed the door but not before I noticed the heavy scent of weed. I couldn't help but scowl and rolled down the back window to get some fresh air.

When the driver pulled up to the church, I couldn't get out the car fast enough. I was surprised I didn't get out stumbling. As I made my way inside the building, I waved at Ms. Johnson. She ran the front desk. Then, I walked to the first lady's office. Her door was halfway cracked open, so I stepped inside with a smile. She was sitting at her desk jotting something down on a yellow note pad. As soon as she saw me, she stood up to give me a hug.

“Aww, Mary. Thank you so much for coming. I know it was last minute when I called you, but I really could use your help.”

“No worries, First Lady. I am happy to give any of my time when it deals with the church.”

“Mary, what did I tell you about calling me that? I am no more important than you, so call me by my name, Samantha.”

“Yes ma’am. I just want to respect your title.”

Mrs. Samantha placed her hand gently on my shoulder and smiled before escorting me to one of the conference rooms. She wanted me to get the financial books in order for the church. All the paperwork I needed was neatly stacked on a desk side by side with a calculator, pencils, and a laptop. The room was hot, so the first thing I did was take off my sweater, took a seat, and got to work. My day was going perfectly fine until Hanley came in to join me. Hanley was a member of the congregation and had a crush on me. I figured after Sincere scared him away at that church event, that he would no longer want my attention. Man was I wrong.

“Hey, Mary. How have you been? You look nice.” He licked his lips.

“Ughh, thanks.”

“I haven’t seen you since that rude guy interrupted our last conversation. Who is he? I heard he was famous, but I don’t listen to anything that isn’t Christ like.”

“He is a big artist and a friend of mine.”

“A friend as in your boyfriend?” he probed.

“No. But even if he was, it wouldn’t be none of your business. Are you here to help me work or ask about my personal life?” I was annoyed.

“I didn’t mean to offend you. I like you, Mary. I would just love to take you on a date. I am a good Christian man. I work hard and I can provide for you.”

I honestly felt bad hearing Hanley plead his case for a date with me. He was a nice person. He just wasn’t my type. The acne on his face wasn’t appealing and his breath smelled like a fresh fart. I was always giving him mild warnings by kindly offering him breath mints, but he didn’t seem to catch on. That man needed a dentist quick.

“You are a nice guy, but I don’t feel anything between us. God has guided me towards the soul of another.”

“That dude ain’t gonna treat you right anyway. Don’t be coming back to me. I am not a second option. You can’t say I never gave you a chance to be mine.” I could tell he had attitude.

Even the most devout Christian had a measure of pride.

I ignored Hanley and picked up one of the financial documents to look through. Every so often, I would look up and see him staring at me like a lovesick puppy. He thought wrong if he thought I would change my mind. After an hour, I decided to leave because he was making the hairs on my neck raise up and my skin crawl. He was being a straight up creep. I sent Sincere a text message with the address so he could scoop me up. I sat outside on the steps waiting.

In the meantime, I logged onto my social media to see what buzz was going around. Some people had tagged me in several posts and when I saw what it was for, I frowned. Pictures of when Sincere and I were out on the town were circulating on the net. They even caught us with baby Rose in a few of them. That darn paparazzi surely knew how to invade someone’s privacy. I had seen enough. I logged off and put my phone away. Suddenly, Sincere’s truck pulled up to the front of the church blasting loud rap music. Before Mr. Moore could get out to open the backseat for me, I climbed in with a frown. Sincere was laughing at me. He knew what he was doing playing that music. I grabbed the remote and turned it down, then slapped his arm.

“You play too much. Now my First Lady is gonna think I am hanging with a heathen.”

“Shidd, you are, Lamb.”

“Whatever. Where is my little Rose?”

“Avery wanted us to get some alone time, so she kept her. I think she knows you’re feeling a nigga.”

“Please. Avery just wants to send Granny Mable over the edge by me getting with you.”

“Stop lying, Lamb. You are addicted to Sin.”

“Nope,” I played hard to get.

The restaurant we were gonna eat at wasn't that far away from the church. We pulled off as Sincere pulled me close to lay my head down on his chest. He slowly rubbed his fingers through my hair. Then, we started talking and had a couple of laughs. His presence was gold to me. Once we arrived, we made our way through the double doors of the restaurant. As always, he had his hand protectively on my back. A host escorted us to a nice booth, and we sat down. We already knew what we wanted to eat, so we wasted no time ordering our food. While we waited, Sincere grabbed hold of my hands and leaned across the granite table to kiss my lips. Butterflies swarmed my stomach, and I couldn't contain my smile.

“I appreciate you blessing me with your presence. I like kicking it with ya.”

“Me too. You really have grown on me when you are not acting like a fool.”

The food had arrived fresh from the kitchen, hot and steaming. I didn't hesitate to pick up my fork and dig in. Sincere had stopped me for second, gently grabbed my fork from my hand, and fed me like a queen. Mac and cheese was rolling down the side of my face and Sincere swiped it off with his finger, then ate it. That was nasty, but we were having such a good time, until two chicks with their big boobs spilling out their dresses approached our table. They were familiar with Sincere. All the women seemed to be.

“Sinful, I didn't know you had a sister,” one of the girls looked me up and down with her top lip curved.

“This my friend. What you hoes been up to?” Sincere smirked.

“You know how we get down. We miss you. You don't come to the strip club anymore. We used to be your favorite duo, Chocolate and Honey,” one of those harlots sounded proud.

My eyes got big and I clutched my chest. “Strip club? You both show your bodies. Why?”

“Clapping ass gets me that cash... that’s why my name is Honey, because the money sticks to me, baby.”

I couldn’t believe those poor women would show their bodies to make money. It was sad to see two beautiful women who could’ve been anything in the world, only to be confined by the filthy riches of the world and lust.

“Oh my. You know it’s wrong to show your skin to men, especially when they aren’t your husband.” I shook my head.

“With a body like mine, I make a lot of money. Don’t feel bad for me,” Chocolate smacked her butt.

It was heart breaking how those women loved talking about the amount of money they made by shaking their booties. Seemed like that was a badge of honor to them. I needed to bring them to Christ. I pulled out two pamphlets from my purse about my church and handed it to them. They looked at me like I just handed them obituaries. Sincere thought it was funny and kept eating.

“Mary, sit your ass down. These hoes don’t want to be saved,” Sincere frowned.

“My granny said everyone is welcomed to the church, even hoes. We always show love to the sinner. As it is written in the bible, Jesus didn’t come for the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance.” I smiled.

“Bitch! Who you calling a hoe? I know you ain’t talking, with that Florida Evans dress you got on.”

Sincere almost spit food out of his mouth because he thought that was funny.

The look on those women’s faces didn’t look too thrilled. They both had their fists clutched. Guess I was going to have to suck it up and turn the other cheek. I wasn’t a fighter. But before I could do that, Sincere snatched me up, left three hundred dollars on the table, and got out of the restaurant fast. He laughed all the way to the truck, uncontrollably. And even

though things were about to take a turn for the worst, I had a great time. I couldn't wait to do it again.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Faint sounds of crying woke me up from my sleep. I looked at the crib and noticed Rose was not in there, so I climbed out of bed to look for her. Mary's bedroom door was halfway open, and I peeked in to see if she was in there. Rose was in Mary's arms getting serenaded and fed with a bottle in her mouth. Mary had an amazing voice. It was shocking how she hadn't shared it with the world. Mary looked up and smiled when she noticed my presence at the door.

"Hey, Sincere. I hope this pretty butterfly didn't wake you."

"Naw, I should've been up. What time is it?" I yawned.

"Noon. You were sleeping very peacefully, and I didn't want to wake you."

"What? I can't believe I slept that long. I never get more than two hours of sleep in one night."

"Wow. How do you function like that?"

"As long as I'm high, sleep doesn't matter. If I'm not sleeping, I'm in the studio."

She nodded. “Oh, when did you start having trouble sleeping?”

“A long time ago.”

“Why?”

Mary was trying to get up close and personal with me. That made me uneasy. I didn’t like talking about *the why*. I quickly diverted by asking if I could feed Rose. Mary’s eyes got large and gently placed her into my arms as Rose continued to drink her bottle. There was a knock on the door and Avery walked in cradling her baby girl, with Charlie behind her holding her teddy bear.

“Here you are, Sin. I need to speak with you about the DNA results,” Avery sounded frantic.

“What’s up? Is Rose mine or not?” I was desperate for the results.

“The lab just called and told me the results were contaminated.”

“What the hell does that mean?” I scowled.

“They can’t make out the DNA. One of their stupid workers mixed your sample with another person.”

“What the fuck? We have been waiting all this time for nothing,” I yelled and scared the kids.

“Language,” Avery and Mary scolded me.

“My bad...Damn... I have already been here long enough. Now, I gotta wait a few more weeks.”

“I know it’s not what you want to hear but I found another place. The man is already downstairs and can do the test.”

“Yeah, let’s get this shit done. I am tired of not knowing and taking care of a kid who probably ain’t mine.”

“Sorry to say, but Rose *is* yours, Sin. She has your eyes and your nose. You made her yourself, man,” Avery chuckled.

“That ain’t confirmed until I see some damn results, you feel me?”

“Keep your thing out of women you are not committed to without a condom and we wouldn’t keep having these problems,” Avery got sassy.

There was a man downstairs already waiting for me to take the test. He swabbed my mouth before putting the sample away properly. Then, he swabbed Rose’s tiny mouth and she didn’t even make a fuss. After signing a few documents agreeing to allow the lab to run the test results, he grabbed his stuff and left the house. I finished feeding Rose the rest of her bottle and Mary took a seat next to me.

“Since you all are staying a few more days, we need to buy some clothes for my little Rose. She can’t be around here showing her skin in some onesies.”

“Not the way you dress, Lamb. You look like you be herding sheep and raiding your granny’s closet. We need little mama to have some style like me.”

Mary grimaced. “Basically, you want her to look like a criminal.”

“What? I can dress. You act like I suppose to wear my pants past my belly button, close to my chest.”

“My style is vintage chic,” Mary defended her sense of fashion.

Avery and I glanced at each other with silent chuckles. We didn’t want to hurt Mary’s feelings over her dressing, so we kept our comments to ourselves. I finished feeding baby Rose and then handed her off to Mary who began patting her back to burp her. I headed to the bathroom to get fresh. I stripped out my clothes and stepped into a hot shower. As I stood under the shower head with my eyes closed, the water rolled down my body and I felt relaxed. That kind of felt weird because I was always tense. It had to be that damn Mary. She had a way of making me feel at peace. Once I took a little bit more time to relax, I washed my body and then grabbed a towel to wrap around my body.

I stepped back in the room and saw Rose sleeping in her crib. With water still dripping off my body, I rushed out and

knocked on Mary's bedroom door. She opened it and immediately slammed her eyes shut to prevent herself from seeing me in my towel.

“A nigga look good, don't I, Mary?” I teased.

“You're showing skin. That's not right.”

“At least I covered my dick. Listen, I need you to come get Rose so I can get dressed.”

“I just put her to sleep. It's not good for someone to wake a baby up.”

“I don't give a shit! She doesn't need to be in there when I am getting dressed. I am a grown ass man, and she is a child. I don't believe in that shit. Do you think I am some type of predator?”

I clutched my fists, feeling my anger boiling, but instantly calmed down noticing Mary looking petrified. She had no idea why I was about to go off. After taking a few deep breaths, I explained myself.

“Mary, I am sorry. I didn't mean to talk to you like that. I just want to be respectful and private about what I expose Rose to while she is around me. I don't care that she is a baby and is sleeping. Her being in the room with me while I have to get ready isn't right.”

“I understand. Let me go get her now.” She gave me a faint smile.

Mary respected my wishes and grabbed Rose from her crib. She was very careful not to wake her up. After I shut the door, I got dressed in peace. Once I was done, I slipped on my Cuban link chain. Suddenly my cellphone started ringing. Glancing at the screen, I noticed it was a number calling from an Arizona area code. At first, I wasn't going to pick up, but something told me to.

“Who dis?” I got straight to the point.

“Hey, Sinful. It's me. Kirsten.”

“Bitch! Where the fuck you at? You left me with a kid.”

“Excuse me? Your kid.”

“Naw, I ain’t claiming shit until that DNA come back. You was nothing but a groupie and now you trying to trap a nigga with a baby, for my money and shit? Bitch!”

“Please, I don’t need your money. I want Rose to have a relationship with her father. That’s you.”

“How do I know she is mine? When we fucked, you told me you had a boyfriend.”

“He is white. From what you can see, Rose is black.”

“That don’t mean shit to me. You probably had more black dicks, bitch.”

“Listen, Sinful. I don’t have time for your disrespect. I just called to see how my baby girl is doing and to let you know I am in a treatment center trying to get better. Once you get the results, I want an apology. I got to go.”

She ended the call. I walked out the room mumbling under my breath. Mary must’ve sensed I was upset because she so happened to step out holding a white hamper like she was gonna do some laundry. We looked at each other without speaking. She didn’t know what I needed, but she gave me a kiss before walking away. Little did she know, her calmness and presence were keeping my demons at bay..... But I didn’t know for how long?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



MARY LAMB

A sinner and a saint weren't supposed to connect. Yet, I found myself falling for Sincere. Every time he was in my presence, my body burned with lust. He was *everything* my granny warned me about growing up; a bad boy who could get me into trouble and lead me to temptation. Even though I knew it was best to stay clear from him, I couldn't help myself. As we were on our way to the mall to get Rose some new clothes, I allowed him to kiss my lips and to suck on my neck like a vampire. When I found myself sitting on top of his lap feeling his hardness, I knew I had lost my mind and I needed to get myself under control. Feeling guilty, I got off of him and closed my legs to stop the brewing between my thighs.

"Did I do something wrong, Lamb?" Sincere asked with concern.

"No. I just feel like we are moving kind of fast. You know this church girl haven't been around the block before?" I chuckled.

"A nigga got you scared now. I get it."

He was so cocky, but I liked it.

“You don’t scare me, but I want to be cautious. At the end of the day, I don’t want to jeopardize my relationship with God. The way you are kissing me, temptation is knocking on my door. I am gonna need a water hose to cool down.” I wiped the sweat beads off my forehead.

“I get it. We can kiss when you initiate it.” He gently kissed my cheek.

“I appreciate you for being so understanding.”

“I might be a little touched in the head, but I respect your decision.”

Sincere was very understanding. That was what I loved about him. He didn’t pressure me. He allowed me to lay my head on his chest and we could just talk. Sadly, the media didn’t show his soft and gentle side. They only wanted to showcase his aggressiveness and fallacies. Negative press sold better than positive. It was a shame because so many celebrities lost a lot from stuff like that.

The truck pulled up in the mall parking lot and Mr. Moore helped us out before grabbing the stroller from the trunk. Sincere placed Rose’s car seat on top and made sure it was safely secured. Then, I rubbed her little cheek. She gave us a cute toothless smile. When Sincere knocked on the window of the Suburban that was next to us, two bodyguards climbed out ready to escort us. They were big with swollen muscles even on the back of their necks. The scowls on their faces made them that much more intimidating. While I pushed the stroller, Sincere placed his hand protectively on my back, making me smile. Soon as we walked into the entrance of the mall, fans ran up to get autographs. The bodyguards stepped in front of them and kept them at a distance. Like always, people started taking pictures on their phones. It was a shame Sincere couldn’t just go to the mall without his privacy being invaded. They always wanted his persona... Sinful K.

“Where are we shopping first?” I looked up at Sincere as he towered over me.

“I want to get you some new clothes too.”

“What? I don’t need anything. My clothes are fine. We are here for Rose.”

“Naw, Lamb. Those tablecloth skirts got to go. You be looking like an extra on *Little House On The Prairie* , like you ready to churn some butter or something.”

“You make me sick.” I chuckled.

I was reluctant for Sincere to buy me some clothes. He walked in the store anyway, and I followed behind him without putting up a fight. While I pushed the baby around in her stroller, looking at the different clothes on the racks, he approached a male sales associate who had just finished ringing up some customers. From the tight clothes he wore, I knew he batted for the other team like Avery’s ex-husband. They had a brief conversation before the two of them approached me. After the guy politely introduced himself to me with a handshake, he asked me what my style was. I just shrugged my shoulders before telling him I preferred not to show any skin. He nodded his head and then began pulling items from the racks for me to try on. He then showed me the dressing room and Sincere sat outside of it on a chair holding Rose who was up and alert. I stepped out in my first outfit that was tight fitting like it was painted on my body. As I stood in front of the mirror, I tugged at it with a frown.

“What do you think?” Sincere asked.

“I don’t know. I guess it’s okay. This isn’t how I am used to dressing. I am not comfortable.”

He licked his lips and raked his eyes down my body. “You look good. Fuck that! Sexy as hell.”

“I don’t think so. I am a little too big for this outfit.”

“What? You are tripping. That ass looks like a million bucks. I am gonna need you to get some confidence, Lamb.”

I sighed and wrapped my arms around my body. “Growing up, people made fun of me for being thick.”

“Fuck them! I love me a thick woman.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. My last video had nothing but big beautiful women.”

“Can you help me find something that’s nice? I want to try to change it up.”

“I got chu.”

I tried several more outfits and Sincere kept giving me sexy looks along with compliments. He even pulled me into his arms for a kiss, taking my breath away. He helped me pick my outfits and we approached the desk to ring them up. Sincere then pulled out his black card to pay. That was actually very kind. A few customers noticed him, but they didn’t take out their phones. After grabbing my bags, we walked to the next store that was for babies. We strolled in and the woman sales associates, who looked like a bombshell model, stepped from behind the counter with her heels clicking with every step. She was thin with beautiful smooth skin that didn’t have any blemishes.

I figured she would acknowledge me since I was pushing the baby stroller, but her eyes landed on the superstar. When she hiked her boobs in the air, I rolled my eyes. Just like a dog in heat, Sincere fell for her lustful trap. Of course, Sinful K’s persona came out and he flashed those ugly grills. He even removed his hand from my back like he was ashamed of me. My heart sank.

“How may I help you?” The woman smiled.

“I’m looking for some baby clothes for my niece,” Sincere lied.

“Your niece?” I was shocked and he gave me a look to shut up.

Sincere referring to my little butterfly as his niece didn’t sit well with my spirit. I understood he wanted to protect his privacy, especially when we still didn’t have the DNA results, but he could’ve said nothing at all. The sales associate walked us over to some luxury brand clothes and I frowned. Everything was about money. As I was trying to find some clothes for Rose, that heathen sales lady kept being around us.

It made me upset when she was smiling in Sincere's face, but I didn't say anything. We found a few outfits and purchased them. After that pesty woman finished ringing up our stuff, she wrote her number on a card and handed it to him. The nerve of her to be so scandalous and outright disrespectful. She didn't know if I was his woman and she didn't care either. I figured Sincere would've ripped the card up, but he slipped it into his pocket. When we made it back to the truck, I didn't want to talk. I just stared out the window.

"You good? The cat got your tongue."

"I am fine." My voice shook.

"You are not a good liar, Lamb. Tell me what it is?" he probed.

"Are you going to call that lady? I saw you put her number in your pocket."

"I might call for the head. Why? You ain't my lady."

"I know, but I thought you liked me."

"You aight. But we ain't a couple. I don't do relationships, Lamb."

"Neither do I. Especially, not with sinners like you. Now stop talking to me before I get my oil."

"I don't got time for your shit, Mary."

I could feel the tears brewing up in my eyes, but I refused to allow them to fall in his presence. It was stupid of me to believe that Sincere would want to build anything with me. He had women begging to get his attention, so I needed stay in my place and keep living my sinner free life.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



“**W**hat the fuck you do mean we got to wait five more days for a DNA results? You need to get back on the phone and get shit done, manager!” I angrily yelled and hung up the phone in Avery’s ear as she was still talking.

Fame and money had turned me into an entitled asshole who didn’t like to answer to anybody. No matter the situation, I felt like I was right. I always wanted the last word. With a scowl on my face, I stood up and opened the refrigerator to grab me a beer. After Avery dropped that news on me, I needed a cold one. As I twisted off the metal cap and quickly sipped, Mary walked into the kitchen, holding her bible with her nose hiked in the air. Without warning, she placed her bible down on the table before snatching the bottle from my hand and poured it into the sink. I was pissed the fuck off. She wasted good ass alcohol that I bought.

“What the hell are you doing, Lamb? I was drinking that,” I spoke through my gritted teeth.

“You’re not allowed to drink the devil’s juice in this house. Now where is the baby?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know, shit. She is in the crib.”

“What! Did you give her a bottle and change her diaper?”

“Oh, shit. My bad.”

“Good Lord. Give me strength.”

One minute, Mary hated my guts and was calling me a demon, and the next, it seemed like we were vibing. Our relationship was complicated especially after I got that chick’s number at the mall.

When Mary walked off fussing, I chuckled. She was a fuckin’ trip. I definitely thought she needed some dick, then maybe she would relax. Eventually, she came back with the baby. Rose was crying like hell. I watched Mary warm a bottle and then cradled baby Rose into her arms to feed. Since she had the kid, I went to the living room to watch some television. Cupid and Avery’s flat screen wasn’t as big as mine, but I guess it had to deal with it because I was bored as hell. I was flipping through the channels when Mary came in and handed me the baby like I wasn’t busy.

“What am I supposed to do with this kid?” I looked down at Rose whose eyes were hanging low.

“You can read her a book. Well, that’s if you know how to do that.” Mary dropped her head back laughing and slapped her knee.

“Very funny. How about I pay you to do it?”

She folded her arms across her chest. “Nope. I am busy.”

“Doing what? It’s not like you have any place to go looking like that.”

I looked Mary up and down with a tight frown. She had an ugly ass long skirt on that was baggy as hell. No way she was ever gonna going to get some dick looking like somebody’s grandma.

“If you must know, Mr. Sinful Man, I have to listen to my Christian music to cleanse my soul. Now give me the remote and leave. I need my privacy.”

“Lamb, I ain’t going anywhere,” I said, rubbing my beard.

“Fine. You better not be looking at me with any lust.”

“My dick ain’t that desperate,” I chuckled, and she shot me a dirty look.

“You’re a dirty Sinful Man who needs prayer.”

“Yeah, I do,” I agreed and placed Rose into the swing.

Hiking her nose in the air, Mary turned her back on me and took out some colorful scarves from her duffle bag that was next to the wall before kicking off her ugly flats. When she turned that Christian music on her Echo Dot, I grunted because she knew I was watching television. Just to get under her skin, I turned the volume up on ESPN to cancel out her music, but she didn’t even seem fazed. She twirled around, waving her scarves, doing some type of praise dance. As she gyrated her hips, my dick started reacting in my sweats. Since she was in my space, I decided to enjoy the free show. I got so into the performance, I pulled out some money from my pocket, acting like I was at the strip club. As I made it rain on her with some crispy bills, Mary gasped and tossed the scarves at my face before turning off the music.

“Have you lost your mind? I am not a stripper. How dare you toss that dirty money at me?” She pulled her lips into a sneer with her hands on her hips.

“I was trying to pay for that dance. Let me find out you got a little freak in you, Lamb.” I licked my lips.

“You’re such a dirty man,” she sighed.

Mary stormed off, covering her body. Shrugging my shoulders, I grabbed the remote control and started watching television again. For two hours, I just chilled with the baby until I got a call from Rhythm asking me to meet her at her father’s studio. At first, I was gonna decline her offer, but I needed to see my little sister, especially since she temporarily stopped her tour to come home just to check on my mental health. As I was putting Rose in the car seat, Mary strutted in drinking a smoothie. She halted her stops and looked at me strangely.

“Where do you think you’re going with that baby?” Mary asked with her nose scrunched.

“None of your business.”

She stood in front of me and protectively gripped hold of the car seat handle. I didn’t understand why she was so fuckin’ nosey. The kid didn’t even belong to her. I lifted up the car seat and she tugged it towards her body.

“I need to know where you are taking this baby. Avery doesn’t want you out my sight while she is at work.”

“What’s it to you, Lamb?” I hiked my eyebrow up.

“Rose’s safety is my priority and with your substance abuse problems, I can’t take a chance.”

“I’m going to the studio. Shit! I am not a child.”

“That’s debatable,” she said in a snarky tone. “I will go with you then, so I can make sure the baby is okay.”

I didn’t have time to delegate with her nosey ass. If she wanted to be a free babysitter to the kid, it was fine with me. After grabbing the diaper bag and putting it on my shoulder, we walked out to the Mercedes Truck where Mr. Moore already had the doors opened for us. We got the baby situated before we climbed into the backseat. I slipped on my shades and laid my head back to rest. Suddenly, I heard gospel music playing and lifted my head up to see Mary holding the car radio remote with a smile on her face.

Thirty minutes later, we pulled up to the studio. I climbed out, slamming the door and started walking ahead of Mary, leaving her with the baby. Eventually, they caught up and followed me inside the building. Then, I headed into the Studio B control room where Nardo was sitting in front of the mixing console while Rhythm was singing inside the booth. They were always working on music. I respected the grind. Nardo dapped me up and then I took a seat on a stool. When Rhythm finished up a verse, she rushed out to give me a tight hug. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Yet, I felt like crap. She loved me to death, but I hated myself.

“Sincere, I’ve been worried about you.” She cupped my cheeks.

“I’m straight. You know how it is. I’m good, sis.”

“I think you need to go to rehab. Let’s go get you some help.”

“That shit doesn’t work. I’m gonna be good though.”

Rhythm was wasting her time trying to get me to go to rehab. My mind was already made up. I had almost forgotten about Mary and the baby until Rhythm motioned her in their direction. I introduced Mary to them, and she tried to act nice, giving hugs. Since I considered Rhythm and Nardo family, I decided to let her know that baby Rose could possibly be my child. Like I expected, Rhythm was super excited about the news and picked Rose up from her car seat, cradling her into her arms with a huge smile.

“Aww, I hope she is your baby. Our kids can be close like us.”

“You know I don’t need any kids. Don’t get your hopes up. I am still waiting for the results to confirm paternity.”

“You never know, God might be giving you a gift,” Mary added her two cents to the conversation.

“Nobody is talking to you, Lamb.”

“Don’t be mean, Sin,” Rhythm playfully hit my arm.

We ordered some take-out to catch up, but Mary decided to leave to take baby Rose to the crib for a nap since she was getting fussy, so I walked them outside to the truck. As Mary was strapping Rose into her car seat, I found myself looking at her ass again. I needed to get some pussy since I was starting to find holy Mary attractive. When they pulled off, I quickly rushed back inside to eat, crushing my entire meal. While I sat on the couch, I rubbed my full-stomach and listened to the new track Nardo was working on. That shit was cold. I got into the booth to freestyle on that mothafucka. The adrenaline was pumping throughout my body as I was spittin’. It felt good to be doing music.

My excitement quickly turned into anger, thinking about how Wolf Knight's bitch ass was trying to take everything away from me. All twenty of my albums were created in his studio and I couldn't believe he was doing me dirty. Just thinking about that shit made me snap. I picked up the mic stand and tossed it on the booth glass, shattering it. Nardo and Rhythm's mouths opened as they looked at me like I had lost my mind. I didn't give a fuck. If I couldn't record, nobody else could either.

I walked out the booth and grabbed a bottle of water from the mini fridge. Then, I tossed it on the mixing console. Feeling a little better, I made my way to the instrument room. I started smashing guitars up. That's when Nardo shoved me back, trying to stop me. **CRACK!!** Without warning, I bashed him in the jaw for putting his hands on me. Nardo got slightly dazed and balled up his fists. He caught me with a slick right hook on the side of my temple. Blow by blow, we fought like enemies. Rhythm was screaming and pleading for us to stop as we started knocking over instruments. When Rhythm tried to pull us apart, she got knocked to the floor. It was so bad that she had to call her security for help. Both Nardo and I were bleeding from our mouths and noses as we were pulled apart. He was fighting to protect his livelihood while I was angry that my mine was being taken away.

"You better watch your back, nigga. Every time I see you, it's on sight," Nardo threatened me as his security held him against the wall.

I spit blood from my mouth onto the floor. "Fuck you nigga! I stay ready. I'll lay you out anytime, anyplace!"

After shoving off the security, I took off my bloody shirt as Rhythm refused to look at me. She then followed behind her husband and grabbed his hand to leave out the door. I was no longer the main man she had to protect, and it stung like hell. From the looks of things, I didn't have my music or my relationship with Rhythm. It had all gone up in smoke. My entire world was closing in on me and I didn't know how to stop it. I needed to get high. After hitting up my childhood friend, Bug, he met me a few blocks away at some hotel. He

strolled into the room and handed me a bag of coke and perc. I licked my lips, anticipating how the drugs were gonna feel in my system. After taking the perc with some water, I formed two lines of coke on the table. Then, I rolled up a one-hundred-dollar bill, sniffed it all up, and took some tequila straight to the head. Once I was feeling right, I pulled up Spotify and Bug and I listened to some music. Those new rap artists who were coming up were some trash. They couldn't keep up with me, even if I wrote the lyrics for them. I turned that shit off to make my own song in my head. As I was rapping, my vision started to get blurry. Suddenly, I felt a tightness around my chest and dropped down to my knees. The last thing I remembered was Bug calling my name.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



MARY LAMB

The devotion of Sincere's fans were almost biblical. I never saw anything like it. They were standing outside of the hospital holding signs with his music blaring in the background as he laid fighting for his life. Ever since he was admitted a week ago, they had been coming out in large numbers to show their love and support. With each passing day, they grew louder, wanting him to feel they were rooting for him to pull through. People around the world had also been sending him get well cards and his room was covered in flower arrangements.

Tears skated down my cheeks as I stopped looking out the window and sat next to Sincere's bedside. I never should've left him alone, knowing he had so many demons. Regret was tugging at my heart because of my decision. To keep my sanity, all I could do was pray and read the word daily. During my dark times, I heavily depended on my relationship with God to keep me from my breaking point. As I was in my deep thoughts, I heard Rose fussing as she laid in her Elmo baby bouncer. At four months, she had endured so much hardship and had no clue. Sadly, we got the news that her mother, Kiersten, had died from an overdose three days ago after checking out of rehab. If Sincere didn't survive, Rose would

be an orphan. The results had finally come back, and he was *indeed* the father.

“Mary, do you need me to take my niece so you can get some fresh air?” Rhythm asked after she handed Nardo their son.

Nardo and Rhythm had been at the hospital since they got the news about Sincere. They had temporarily postponed Rhythm’s world tour just to be by his side. I could tell they were truly hurting and loved Sincere deeply. From a conversation we had, I learned they had an ugly blow up and fight after I left the studio. They felt guilty because they believed that’s what caused him to get high. Honestly, it was only a matter of time for Sincere to allow his demons to consume him. He wasn’t ready and strong enough to stay clean.

“I’m okay.” My voice choked as a few more tears rolled down my cheeks.

“I am not taking no for an answer. You need to get some food in your system to gain some energy.”

“I don’t have an appetite.” I sighed.

“You have to try to eat Mary. We don’t need you passing out.”

“What if Rose needs me while I am gone?”

“She is in good hands. Nardo and I have four kids. We know what we are doing,” Rhythm said.

I handed Rhythm my sweet pea and grabbed my purse to head down to the hospital cafeteria. As I got on the elevator, I heard my phone ringing, and I took it out. Looking at my screen, I saw it was my granny and sent her straight to voicemail. She had been calling me nonstop since I decided not to come home. Eventually, I would gain the courage to call but I needed some time, so she didn’t try to guilt trip me into changing my decision.

It was pretty crowded in the cafeteria and I didn’t feel like waiting in the long lines for the grilled food. The best thing I could do was grab some soup. I quickly poured me some into a

container bowl and then approached the cashier who looked very familiar. We both looked at each other and then it clicked where I recognized her from.

“Brooklyn. How are you?” I smiled.

“What’s going on, Mary?” She was excited.

“Nothing much. How have you been? I hope you didn’t get in too much trouble for helping me out.”

“Girl no. I had to pay a fine and I got to do some community service hours. But other than that, I’m straight. How have you been, pooh?”

“I have been okay. I am taking it one day at a time.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“I am glad we ran into each other because I don’t know the area since I just moved here. Maybe we can hangout. That’s if you want, no pressure.”

I didn’t want to seem pushy or weird.

“I got you, boo. Lock my number in and text me yours.”

I sat my soup on the metal sliding stand and took out my phone to program her number. People behind me started huffing and clearing their throats from me holding up the cashier line. After paying, I quickly apologized before waving goodbye to Brooklyn. There weren’t that many tables, but I managed to find a spot by the window. I lowered my head to pray for my food before picking up my spoon. Sipping on my soup, Brooklyn approached me with a smile and sat down on the chair in front of me with her lunch.

“Hey, Mary. You mind if I join you for my lunch break?”

“Sure.” I nodded.

“What’s been up? Why are you at the hospital?”

I didn’t feel comfortable telling Brooklyn why I was there, so I made up a story. She didn’t ask any more questions and we changed the subject. We talked until her lunch break was over and planned to meet up for a girl’s day. It felt great that I met someone to hang out with in Houston. When I was done

eating, I headed back to the room. Walking in, my eyes popped open seeing two police officers standing next to Avery, who looked stressed as she talked on her cellphone. I glanced over to see Rhythm crying as she cradled my sweet pea. She went to hand the officers Rose and I rushed over with my heart pounding. I was immediately grabbed by my cousin who had dropped her phone on the floor. The two officers stared at me like I was crazy, and one even had his hand on his holster ready to shoot. Without uttering a word, they walked out with Rose. I attempted to chase after them and Avery pinned me against the wall to stop me from getting hurt. I swung my arms to get her off me, but she wouldn't let me go. Eventually, I grew tired and out of breath. I dropped to my knees with tears rolling down my face, feeling defeated.

“Please, calm down, Mary. I will explain everything to you.” Avery spoke, trying to catch her breath.

“I am calm. Now tell me why they are taking Rose?” I sobbed.

“Rose's mother didn't have custody of her. Her parents did and they want her back with them.”

“What? They can't do that. She has a dad.”

“Yes, they can because she was taken without their permission. Even though Sincere is the father biologically, it doesn't mean anything unless it's proven legally. With Sincere's reckless ways and his addictions, no judge in their right mind will grant him custody of Rose. He will have to prove to the courts that he's fit.”

I grabbed my head and cried even more. “That's not fair. Rose has a right to be with her father.”

“Life isn't fair, cousin. We can't just wait around and see if Sin is gonna get his shit together. Her grandparents are highly respected in the community. The grandfather is a retired judge, and her grandmother is a former district attorney.”

“Who told you all this?” I probed.

“Cupid. He has been working his ass off behind the scenes trying for this not to go down. But as you can see, our client

isn't in any shape to prove he can be a father because he is in a fuckin' coma and has years of shit against him. As much as I don't want to see Rose being taken away, she needs stability."

"I can't believe this crap. You are supposed to help manage Sincere."

"**I am**, Mary! But *he* has to manage his life and I am in charge of his career."

"Ladies. I know this is difficult, but we got to stick together," Rhythm sobbed.

Needing some fresh air, I stormed out and headed to the car. I grabbed my prayer cloth, placing it next to my chest. I just spoke to the Lord. By the time I was done praying, it was dark outside. That's when I received a call from Avery crying. My heart sank thinking she was gonna tell me that Sincere was dead, but she told me he was awake. I headed back to the room and Sincere was alert. Tears rolled down my cheeks. I didn't know why I cared so much for his well-being, but I did.

"Why does God keep saving me!" Sincere yelled out with tears rolling down his cheeks.

My heart broke for Sincere because he had no idea of his purpose on earth. As he sobbed and yelled out four names: Sana, Sydney, Sasha, and Ruth, all of us looked at each other. While he continued to cry, we gathered around Sincere in prayer. He truly had a long road to beat his addiction.

A few days later...

A PLATE of food flew towards my head as I walked towards the bedroom door to leave. I quickly turned around with my nostrils flaring and saw Sincere folding his arms in front of his chest. From the moment he was released from the hospital, he had been acting like a fool and being so nasty. Despite everyone trying to alter their lives to help him, he wasn't appreciative. All he did was complain and continued to drink. Honestly, I was losing my patience. The worst part was that Sincere would rather stay in his darkness than to get help so he

could get Rose back. That made me angry. I didn't understand how he could be so selfish. When he picked up the liquor bottle from the nightstand and started gulping it, something in my spirit snapped. I marched over towards the bed and snatched that bottle away.

"Leave me the fuck alone! I want to drink. Give it back." His spit flew out of his mouth.

"This right here will get you back in the hospital."

"I don't care anymore. My life ain't shit without my music," he complained.

"Music? Is that all you care about Sincere? What about Rose? She needs you as her father. You need to get help," I pleaded.

"Don't you see? Rose is better off without me. I'm nothing and don't deserve the blessing of being her father." He banged on his chest through every word.

"Why?" My voice collapsed.

"The blood running through my veins is no good. I don't want to poison her. To show you how serious I am, to make sure she doesn't get messed up by me, I need to sign my rights away."

He climbed out of bed and stumbled towards the dresser. When he started ransacking the drawer, I stood quietly. After finding what he was looking for, he pulled out some documents and grabbed a pen. Sincere had lost his mind. I tried to snatch the papers away and he shoved me down to the floor. While he towered over my body, he placed his hands on top of his head in disbelief.

"Mary, I didn't mean to hurt you. But I told you, I am bad."

Sincere tossed the liquor bottle against the wall and then started tearing up the room in a fit of rage as I held back my tears. He collapsed to his knees and covered his face. I rushed towards him, feeling sorry, and pulled him to my hug. For some reason, I couldn't abandon him. He needed my prayers and my spiritual guidance. Even though he hated it, I went to

grab my oil and rubbed some on his forehead before putting him in the bed. I gently rubbed his locks and he slowly closed his eyes. Eventually, he went to sleep. Then I sat on the chair next to the bed to be close to him for comfort. Within five minutes, he tossed and turned, calling out those same names like he did at the hospital. As tears rolled down his face, I wiped them away. Then, I grabbed my bible and loudly read the word. I needed whatever demons that were latched on to his spirit to remove themselves, so he could find peace and heal.

After I read the Word of God to him, he seemed to settle into a deep sleep. I needed some fresh air and went out to sit by the pool. Sincere's mansion was beautiful. It had so many cool artifacts. The space was too big for just one person to live. As I was staring at the water, Avery came to stand next to me. She had a key to his place, so I didn't even hear her come in. We embraced with a long hug before she gave me an update on Rose. She even had some pictures on her phone. I missed my little butterfly. We were chatting when Cupid strolled out. We went inside so they could eat my cooking. They settled at the table and stuffed their faces. I was fasting.

Sincere came in rubbing his head and sat at the table. I brought him a cup of coffee, then placed a plate of food in front of Sincere. We didn't really talk until he mentioned baby Rose. I could tell he was feeling some type of way. Tears rolled down Sincere's cheeks.

"I need help. I just don't know where to start because my life is so fucked up. I don't want to lose Rose, but I can't do this alone."

"Even if it's hard, you got to do the work," Avery said.

"I will be your attorney to bring Rose home, but you got to be ready. You got to grow the fuck up! This little girl needs you," Cupid was straight up.

Clearing my throat, I stood up to face everyone and all their eyes were on me.

"For the past three days, I have been fasting, praying, and going to church. God told me I need to marry Sincere."

“What the fuck?” Sincere said.

The blood drained from everyone’s face. I could tell they didn’t understand my reason for wanting to get married, but my God told me to trust him in order for us to bring my butterfly Rose home and to change Sincere’s life.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Lamb had lost her mothafuckin' mind. She was gonna have to grab her prayer cloth and ask God for another message because she was tripping. I wasn't husband material. No matter how much I wanted to get my daughter back, I couldn't bring an innocent woman into my chaotic life, especially with a fake marriage. Hell naw, I wasn't *that* desperate. My demons were too much for anyone to deal with. Shaking my head, I stood up from the table to get ready to stroll out the kitchen to avoid the conversation. That's when Mary gripped hold of my arm. I sighed heavily while looking at the desperation in her eyes. She was a good person, who was faithful in my ability to change my destructive ways.

"Did you hear me, Sincere? I am destined to be your wife," she felt strongly about that.

"You thumped your head on that Bible one too many times."

"God calls his strongest soldiers for his toughest missions."

"I ain't a soldier for Christ," I scoffed.

"But *I am* . God would not send me this message if it wasn't needed," she was adamant.

I chuckled. “God must not mess with you for real. Ain’t no way he would tell you to marry a drug addict with bipolar and insomnia.”

“If you confront your past, you will heal. Everything in your life wasn’t your fault.”

Mary didn’t know anything about my dark childhood, and I figured she was trying to snoop for information. Yet, I couldn’t give her anything. My past was going to remain hidden until I took my last breath.

“Stop trying to save a nigga. I’m destined to be in the dirt before I turn forty.”

My words cut Mary deep and she gasped loudly as tears rolled down her cheeks. She really wanted to save me, but I didn’t feel I was worth the sacrifice. My past was too deep to swim out of. That’s why I did drugs. The feeling of being high felt better than being in emotional pain every day.

Avery finally spoke up with a penetrated scowl. “Cousin, you are too far gone. I understand you miss Rose but marrying her father isn’t the answer.”

“I know what God told me,” Mary said firmly.

“Cupid, you’re gonna just sit here and not say anything?” Avery was looking for Cupid to back her up.

He cleared his throat. “You ain’t gonna want to hear what I got to say Avery.”

“What’s that?” Avery frowned.

“I think it’s a great idea. The courts will eat it up because they love stability. Mary is stable and damn near a saint on paper. Since they have already been seen in public with photographs, it doesn’t look like a sham.”

“Why the fuck would I trust a nigga named Cupid? You’re all about love,” I spoke through my clenched jaws.

Avery touched her head and then looked up at me like a light bulb turned on. “I can’t believe I am saying this, but after listening to what Cupid said, it makes sense. A judge will surely give you the baby with Mary as your partner.”

I slammed my eyes shut, flaring my nostrils. “Get out my house. All you mothafuckas are crazy.”

“Nigga, hit me up when you want to listen and ready to get your life straight. Nobody is gonna cater to you. I don’t care that you’re a superstar,” Cupid grabbed Avery’s hand and left.

I opened the refrigerator to grab a cold beer. Mary stood around looking like she wanted to say something, but she just started putting up the food. My appetite was gone anyway. I pushed my plate to the side and started sipping on my beer. As I closed my eyes feeling refreshed, Mary began quoting scriptures. I frowned my face and told her I didn’t want to hear it. She wouldn’t stop and followed me whenever I tried to walk away from her. Suddenly, I snapped and turned around with my eyes bugging out, pointing at her face. She wouldn’t let up and kept on preaching with tears rolling down her face. The only way I was able to get away from Mary was running to my car and recklessly driving down my driveway. There was no place I really wanted to go except for Wolf Knight’s studio. I left my cocaine-colored Lexus running and climbed out, not giving a fuck if it got stolen. As I made my way inside the lobby, my phone started ringing loudly. It was Rhythm. After getting out the hospital, we made amends for how I acted, and I even squashed shit with Nardo.

“What’s good, baby sis?” I picked up on the second ring.

“Where are you, Sin? I am at your house. Mary told me you stormed out and she didn’t know where you went.”

“I needed some fresh air.”

“Fresh air. Are you out getting high right now?” I could hear the wariness in her voice.

“No, I promise. I am at your father’s studio.”

“What? Please don’t do anything crazy. Do you need me to come?”

“I am straight. You got my word.”

“Please don’t do anything crazy.”

“I won’t, baby sis. Is Big Mama’s number still the same?”

That was Nardo's grandma.

"You already know it is. Call her. She misses you."

I ended the call and walked inside studio B. I clicked the lights on and looked around at the new equipment they had just got. Rubbing my fingers on the new SSL console, I felt pain and joy. I wanted to get back to making music, but I knew I wasn't healthy enough to get back in the booth. While I was deep in my thoughts, I heard someone clear their throat and I turned around to see Wolf with one of his new artists, Drez. We all stared at each other without uttering any words. Flaring my nostrils, I mugged them down before bumping that bitch nigga, Drez, to the side. I was going to beat the smirk off his face. He had taken shots at me on social media, talking about how he was the new prince of the label. There was a lot I had to do to get back in the game and whooping Drez's ass was going to hold me back even longer, so I walked off with my teeth barring. Wolf followed behind me.

"Don't you walk away, Sincere," Wolf said with bass in his voice like I was a child.

"What? Don't you ever call me that. You ain't my father, nigga," I swelled up my chest and balled up my fists.

Wolf rubbed his big ass bald head. "I don't understand why you're so angry with me."

"Mothafucka, you took away my music... the only thing that was good in my life." I angrily banged on my chest.

"I am trying to save you, son."

"For what, nigga? You didn't invest that much into your biological kids. They are the ones who needed you to be a good pop, not me. I'm not straight. All I want from you is to let me record music."

"I can't let you do that, son."

"You can't or you won't? There's a difference."

"I won't allow you to record under my company. You need to get clean."

"Fuck you!" I grunted and spat at his feet.

“No more chances. You are **FIRE!**” He yelled.

“Nigga! You can’t fire me. We have a contract.”

“Fuck that! You broke the clause a million times with your antics. I am *done* cleaning up your shit.”

Our business relationship was *officially* fuckin’ broken. **WOP!** I slammed my fist into Wolf’s jaw, then smashed a good hook into his temple, knocking him onto his back. He groaned as I towered over him, barring my teeth. No way I was gonna allow that nigga to disrespect me after investing so much time, sweat, blood, and tears into his company. After leaving out the building, I climbed back into my ride and hit up Big Mama to help me clear my head. She was a granny to many, regardless of blood. The moment she heard my voice on the line, she told me to drop by her crib. Since I didn’t have any family, she was the one who always looked out for me and prayed for my well-being. Despite the short comings in life, she never judged me and gave me words of encouragement. Every phone call and visit were well appreciated, especially when I was going through legal troubles.

When I pulled up at the house, I climbed out and rang the doorbell. They lived in a nice neighborhood with a lot of retired folks. Big Mama opened the door with the biggest smile and pulled me into a hug. Then, she clutched hold of my hand and pulled me inside as the door shut behind me. We made our way to the kitchen where she instructed me to wash my hands at the sink. I dried them off with a paper towel as she grabbed a roast out of the oven. That mothafucka smelled good and looked tender. I found myself licking my lips, ready to crush some food.

“Sit down, baby. Let me feed you.” She smiled.

“Thank you, Big Mama.”

She sat a plate filled with roast in front of me and I picked up my fork.

“How are you feeling? You know I have been praying for you.”

“I appreciate it, but you can save those prayers.”

With a frown on her face, Big Mama's gigantic hand swiftly smacked me upside my head. She didn't tolerate back talk. I should've stayed silent.

"Don't test me, boy," she warned.

"Sorry, Big Mama."

"You can be saved, baby. All you have to do is allow the Lord in your life. I see the good in you, my child. You're stubborn and foolish just like my Bubby was."

"I don't feel like I am anything but a failure."

"You are amazing and a child of God. You're a warrior who has been through trials and tribulations. However, your testimony will change people's lives. Let God use your words and pain for greatness. I heard you have a baby. You didn't introduce me to my grandchild."

"She is not in my custody right now," I sighed.

I missed Rose and her little toothless smile. She was the sweetest baby. I couldn't believe something so pure and innocent came from my DNA. Even though she wasn't with me long, I felt like we had a bond. From the moment I cradled her into my arms, she knew I was her dad before the test ever confirmed it. We were separated because I couldn't get my shit together. It pained me to know I could be the first man who failed her in life, and she didn't even know it. As much as I wanted to gain custody, no judge would trust me enough until I got cleaned. I was afraid it would never happen. Tears rolled down my cheeks and I dropped my head down to hide them from Big Mama. Her heart was always full of love. She raised my face up with her index finger.

"You don't have to be ashamed to show that you care. Tears cleanse the soul and makes us feel better. I understand you are in a lot of pain. But when are you going to deal with it? Stop letting it consume you, Sincere. Step up and become a man. Be a father to your child and don't let addiction rob your opportunity. My only living son is still trying to make up for not being there for Nardo, but through the grace of God, they are in a better place. They are able to talk for once. It looks

like it's time to get to that point. You don't want to look back at life and know that you disappointed your child without every effort that you knew you could."

We were talking when Mr. Lee strolled in with his Bible and kissed Big Mama on the cheek before giving me a dap. He was a really good dude who changed his life after serving years in prison. All of us sat down at the table and ate some food. We talked about life. I had no idea Mr. Lee was an addict until he shared that with me. After we were nice and stuffed, we watched old western movies. Two hours later, I was walking out the front door with leftovers.

It didn't take me long to get back to my spot. There was some mail and I collected it before opening my house door. I kicked my shoes off in the foyer and went to look for Mary. I found her in the living room listening to Gospel music that was softly playing in the background. She was on her knees with her prayer cloth wrapped around her body as she read her Bible. Once she finished praying, she looked up and jumped after seeing me sitting on the couch. I smiled at her to make peace, but she refused to look me in my eyes. She really was in her feelings about denying her message from God. With her nose hiked in the air, she walked away, and I followed behind her, grabbing her by the arm. She snatched away, giving me a dirty look.

"What do you want, Sinful Man?"

She had an attitude.

I chuckled. "Here you go with that shit again. Every time you are mad, you call me that. I like when you call me Sincere. You don't see me as an entertainer. You acknowledge me as a man. That shit means the world to me."

"I'm glad. Is there anything else?" She tapped her foot.

"I want you to help me get my daughter back. You're the perfect person to keep me on the straight and narrow. We will live together and pretend to the world we are married until I get awarded custody. Then, we will get an annulment and do a joint statement that's for the best."

“I am willing to walk for Christ and obey his message,”
Mary said.

Mary walked off singing a familiar gospel song that happened to be my favorite as a kid. The song made me smile. I didn't know if our arranged marriage would help my custody case, but I was gonna do everything to conquer my addiction and become a good father.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



MARY LAMB

Most people married for love, but I was doing it for the Lord. Our marriage was arranged, but it didn't stop Sincere from hiring one of the best celebrity wedding planners to make my day special. We were sitting at a dining table discussing some ideas and I couldn't contain the smile on my face. Mrs. Toya was very kind and listened to my ideas without judgment. We talked about my style and what I desired for the wedding before she had to quickly excuse herself to take another client's phone call. As I flipped through the bridal magazine and admired all the beautiful dresses, Sincere placed his gigantic hand on my back, bringing a slight shiver up my spine. He was looking at me with a smirk, making my breathing hitch. He was so handsome. No matter how hard I tried not to fall for him, he had me in an emotional chokehold, but I wasn't trying to cross those forbidden lines again. No kissing, touching, or connecting emotionally. We were simply united through our love for Rose. Sincere was saying something, but I was too deep in thought thinking about her well-being that I was just nodding my head in vain to everything he said. I couldn't rest until she was home where she belonged, with her father.

Sincere hiked his eyebrow in the air, "Did you hear me, Lamb?"

“Yes,” I lied.

He rubbed his chin with a smirk. “Aight. What did I say?”

I heavily sighed. “Sorry, I wasn’t listening. What did you say again? You have my full attention.”

I smiled, hoping to smooth things over between us. Sincere just shook his head and slightly chuckled.

“I wanted to know, do you like this dress?” He cocked his head to the side, waiting for me to answer.

I rubbed my fingers across the page that had the wedding dress. “It’s very pretty. I love how it doesn’t show too much skin. “

“If you want it, I got chu.”

I snaked my neck and looked at him with my eyes bulged out the sockets. “Do you see the price? It’s a half a million dollars. This is too much money for a dress that will only be worn for a day. I can find something else for a reasonable price.”

He nonchalantly shrugged. “Money isn’t a problem. You can have whatever makes you happy, Lamb.”

“You do know this marriage is fake, right?”

I chuckled. “Yeah, but I figured since this will be my only wedding, I might as well treat my *temporary* wife like a queen. I think you would look sexy in that dress. You have nice curves for it.”

The way his eyes landed on my boobs had me squirming in my seat. I found myself biting the edge of my lips as my lower core started throbbing. My kitty was starting to have a mind of my her own, especially when she heard Sincere’s voice. Many times I had to pray my lust away and change into another pair of panties because I kept soaking them. I didn’t know sexual temptations were so out of control. Every woman have needs, but I couldn’t disappoint my Heavenly Father. I took a vow to never have sex before marriage. Even when Sincere became my husband, I wouldn’t allow him to touch my body. One

thing I learned from Avery was that sex carried too many emotions. Sincere and I didn't need that baggage.

We kept on looking at the different dresses before Mrs. Tonya came back to the table. I showed her the wedding dress that I wanted to wear. She had a big smile on her face when she saw that price tag. Next, we went over the color schemes and how we thought the reception should look like. I didn't know too many people that I could turn to for such a thing. Since Sincere was the closest thing I had, at least physically, I left that part up to him. After all, he was a celebrity who knew a lot of people. Like a typical man, he just nodded and agreed with everything the wedding planner picked. He didn't even look at the prices. I shook my head and didn't bother to make a fuss. It was his money anyway. Once Mrs. Toya had everything written in her iPad, she promised to get back to us for an estimate after some thorough planning. When she left, I walked to the kitchen to prepare some lunch. I opened the refrigerator and grabbed a pack of chicken, as Sincere walked in with his hands cuffed into his pants pockets. From the corner of my eye, I saw him leaning against the counter watching me with a lopsided smirk on his face.

“Do you need anything, Sincere?”

“Yeah. Instead of cooking, do you want to go out and eat?”

“What's the catch? You're not getting any of my goodies.”

“Nobody is thinking about sex, Lamb. I was hungry and wanted to try something different. I want you to go with me. That is, if you want to. I ain't on no creep shit, for real. This is regular nigga shit.”

“Well..... If you insist on taking me out to lunch, I don't want to hear your mouth about it later.” I pursed my lips.

He waved me off. “Naw, you ain't gonna hear shit from me.”

“Sincere, your mouth is just terrible. Do you have to always use profanity?”

“Hell yeah. Stop acting like you don't like that shit, little Lamb.” He chuckled.

“I certainly do not like it.”

“Yeah aight. You know your churchy ass like bad boys.”

“Nope. Bad boys are not for me. I’ll be ready in thirty minutes and meet you downstairs.”

“Aight. Don’t wear those ugly ass skirts. While I am eating, I want to see some legs.” He chuckled.

I didn’t pay that heathen any mind. I went upstairs to my bedroom that was on the other side of his mansion. After getting dressed, I grabbed my purse and slipped my prayer cloth inside, along with my oil. Sincere was downstairs waiting by the door in a gray sweatsuit and Nike shoes, ready to leave. I raked my eyes over his body and then landed on his face.

“You ready to go eat?” I smiled.

“That pussy? Yeah. I’m always down to put my face into that.”

I smacked his shoulder. “Stop talkin’ dirty you heathen.”

“That’s what your mouth is saying, but your pussy is thinking differently. I can smell your sweetness, Mary.” He sniffed.

“Don’t start with me or I am not going out with you,” I tried to keep him from flirting. “What restaurant are we going to eat at?”

“Actually, I was thinking we can do something differently. You down?”

“I thought going out was the difference. What do you have planned? I don’t like surprises.”

“I wanted to go to this indoor rock-climbing place. I heard it’s fun.”

“Rock climbing? I don’t know about that. I am not trying to get hurt,” I was skeptical.

“You need to learn to live a little, Lamb. This place is safe and will have instructors to help.”

“Fine, but I don’t have any sports clothes.”

“We can swing by the mall and I got you.”

“Thanks.”

I agreed to get out of my comfort zone for once. Walking out the house, the truck was already waiting. Mr. Moore greeted the two of us with a smile before opening up the doors as we climbed into the backseat. As we were driving to the mall, I reached inside my purse for my cellphone to text Avery of my whereabouts. My eyes got huge when I realized it was missing. The only other place that I thought it could be was back in my bedroom.

“You good?”

“No. I left my phone. No one is going to be able to get a hold of me.”

“That’s not a problem. You can use my mine.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, it’s not a big deal.”

He handed me his cellphone and with Avery’s contact information already pulled up, I quickly sent her a text. She immediately called back to hear my voice. We chatted briefly before ending our call. To my surprise, Sincere and I were able to have a civilized conversation before we got to the mall. It was nice to not see him acting like an intolerable heathen. Honestly, Sincere was wearing me down and I was starting to enjoy being in his presence.

Once we got to the mall, we stepped out of the truck. The two security guards who were in the next vehicle joined us. I politely smiled and waved at the two big gentlemen. They just nodded their heads without cracking any smiles. It had to be tiresome being scary all the time. We made our way through the sliding doors of the mall entrance and Sincere placed his gigantic hand on the arch of my back, walking with me as people watched us. I loved that he always made me feel safe. Truthfully, I didn’t think I could get used to being in the spotlight. It was stressful knowing that people could invade our privacy and plaster our pictures all over the internet

without permission. I surely wasn't trying to be seen. I kept trying to hide behind Sincere's shoulder blade while covering my face as we entered an athletic store. With my purse hiked on my shoulder, I made my way towards a section where they had different colored leggings hanging on a rack.

"I think the pink ones will look good on you. It's gonna show off those curves nicely." Sincere emerged from behind me, licking his lips.

"You know I don't like showing off my body."

"Naw, you still leaving it up to the imagination, but you just giving me something to fantasize about."

He had me blushing like a little schoolgirl from the way he was lustfully looking at me, and I couldn't stop smiling. After paying at the register, we walked out the store. My eyes flew open when I saw a mob of people surrounding the front of the store chanting Sinful K's name. Everyone had their phones out. Again, as we walked away, I had to shield my face. Then, the crowd started pushing and trying to grab Sincere. Security were doing their best to contain them, but it was getting out of hand.

In the mist of the pandemonium, Sincere remained calm, kept his hand encircled into mine, and kept me close. My heart was pounding in my chest, especially when some fresh tailed woman managed to break through the crowd and pounced on Sincere's back like he was a horse, trying to give him a kiss. Security couldn't knock her off fast enough, so I did.

"Get on somewhere, ya heathen," I raised my voice.

Sincere was laughing and kept pulling me towards the direction of the mall entrance. Eventually, we made a run for it as the crowd chased after us screaming. We made haste towards the truck and climbed into the backseat safely. I laid back on the headrest trying to catch my breath.

"You should've seen your face, Lamb. You look like you shitted on yourself." Sincere couldn't stop laughing.

"I might need to check because I think I did," I joked.

"With those big ass draws, you ain't gonna notice."

“You’re a mess.” I laughed.

For thirty minutes, we were idle because the crowd would not move away from the truck. Eventually, the police got called. Once they came, we were finally able to pull out of the parking lot. Out of fear that we would get mobbed by another crowd, I asked Sincere to contact the rope climbing place to see if we could rent it, just for the two of us. He got a hold of the manager who agreed to close early. It was gonna be great spending time with Sincere.

WE STROLLED into the lobby greeted by polite staff members. A woman handed us a couple clipboards with waiver forms. After we filled them out carefully, they gave us climbing harnesses. They laid out the rules and then we were escorted to a gigantic room with different rock-climbing walls. Sincere was a daredevil. He wanted to go up first and made it look easy going up one of the high walls without breaking a sweat. When he made his way back down, he started acting cocky by flexing his muscles. I dropped my head chuckling. I wasn’t as tough and needed some words of encouragement. Breathing heavily, I carefully gripped a yellow rock and made sure my feet was steady enough to not fall. It was actually thrilling doing something out of my ordinary routine. Sincere was trying to race me on the other side of the wall to see who would get to the top first. He was ahead of me, but to spare my feelings, he pretended to trip so I could ring the bell at the top. Once we got down safely, we ordered some food and got it delivered to the place. Even though that wasn’t their policy, they gave us that special privilege. All the staff were really nice and treated us well. They even offered us a spot for us to eat. I sat down at the table in front of our food and grabbed Sincere’s hand to bless it. At first, he didn’t want to, but I gave him a stern look. He knew I didn’t play about praying to my Jesus. Through our bites, we made conversation. Even if our marriage was gonna be somewhat pretend, I wanted to get to know more about him, so I asked about his family. It was strange that I had seen none of his family members show up when he was at the hospital.

“Is your family coming to the wedding?” I probed after wiping my mouth.

“Naw, I don’t have a relationship with them.”

“Why?”

“It’s personal. How does your steak sub taste? Mine is good as fuck.”

He tried to change the subject quickly.

“The steak is great. I am gonna have to get another one.”

I didn’t want to ruin the mood after I saw how uneasy he became. After we were done eating our subs, we did a few more rounds of rope climbing before deciding to leave. Sincere signed autographs and took pictures with the whole staff. They were so happy and appreciative for a moment of his time. When we finally arrived home, we kicked off our shoes. Then, I gave him a hug. I could tell by the stunned look on his face that he didn’t expect that gesture. As we got ready to go to our separate quarters, Sincere cleared his throat like he wanted to say something else. He was so freakin’ handsome. I couldn’t take my eyes off of him.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m straight. I wanted to see if you had some energy left to watch a movie.”

“Yeah. I would love to watch with you. Let me go upstairs and change into my pajamas.”

I made my way up the steps and felt like he was watching me. I looked back and caught him checking me out with a smirk on his face. I walked away slowly, giving him a longer look before heading into my bedroom. The first thing I did was grab my cellphone off my charger. I had several missed calls from my granny and a voicemail. She wasn’t thrilled that I chose to stay in Houston. Every other day, she made it her mission to contact me to make me feel guilty. Even though I knew the voicemail would put me in somber mood, I played it anyway.

Voicemail: *Hey, Mary. It's Phoebe. I know you are busy living your new life, but can you pick up? My mama is sad and said you don't love us anymore. I don't know what we did, but we are sorry. Can you please come home so we can be a family again? We love you.*

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I dropped to my knees and released a gut-wrenching hurl. I never wanted my mother or granny to feel that I didn't love them. All I ever desired to do was live my life. The fact that they felt I hated them had me heartbroken. Laying across the floor, I just sobbed. I didn't move until Sincere came to check on me. I had got caught up in my phone. He rushed to my side and helped me up off the floor. My body was shaking as he laid me onto the bed. All I did was continue to cry, feeling guilty for leaving my granny and my mother. That wasn't a godly thing to do, to abandon my family.

“What's going on, Mary? Why are you crying? Talk to me. Did something happen?”

“No. I'm just a bad daughter and a bad grandchild,” I sniffled.

“How?”

“My mother called and left a voicemail saying how she wants us to be a family again. She wants me to go back home. It broke my heart listening to that voicemail. I can't believe I just left them without thinking about their well-being.”

“You have a right to live your life, Mary. I don't know why you can't see that. You aren't any good to them if you're unhappy. From what you told me, you were just existing and not doing what you love. How fair is that to you?”

“Living my life doesn't mean anything, if I don't take care of the ones who I love. My granny gave up her life to raise me because my mother was unable to, and I turned my back on her when she needed me the most. I don't care what you say, that's wrong and cruel.”

“Naw, your granny is wrong. She is trying to manipulate you by getting your special needs mother to do her dirty work.

She knew that would make you feel bad and took that as an opportunity to hurt you. That's not how family treats you."

I frowned. "What do you know about family? You don't even talk to yours so why would I get any advice from you?"

A mixture of pain and anger emerged on Sincere's face. He didn't say another word to me before he left out slamming the door. More tears rolled down my cheeks. My words had cut him deeply. I felt terrible and compelled to give him an apology. I searched around the entire mansion calling out his name, but he was gone. When I stepped out the front door, I saw one of his luxury cars missing. I figured he went to take a drive to cool off. I waited up but he never came back home. I laid down on my bed with a lot of stress on my mind.

It was going on ten in the morning and my eyes were heavy from lack of sleep. I was worried about Sincere's well-being and the police had just left. They refused to put out a missing person report because it had only been a few hours since he left. Feeling frustrated and stressed, I broke down crying. After getting myself together, I called his phone, but it kept going straight to voicemail. I reached out to Avery. She picked up on the first ring and I immediately started crying while telling her what I had said to Sincere to make him not come home. At first, she allowed me to talk but then she got stern.

"I am glad you are stressed. It serves you right for being so mean. You really need to check that mouth, Mary. I understand that Sin is a trip, but you have no right to talk about his family. I work for him. I don't even get that personal."

"I know, cousin, and I am sorry. Granny just got me in my feelings. I took it out on Sincere for no reason."

"Granny will continue to do that because you ALLOW her to but that's no damn excuse. You're wrong and you've crossed the line!"

"Don't you think I feel crappy enough? I know I am wrong. Can't you see that I am sorry? I want to make it up to him. If you know where he is at, can you please tell me? I want to apologize."

“Please, I will do no such thing, Mary. I don’t need to be getting a lawsuit because you want to toss that oil. You will have to wait and see if he comes home. Have a good day,” Avery hung up in my ear.

I looked at the phone screen in disbelief and sighed heavily. She really wasn’t going to help me. Without Avery, I had no clue how to find him. Even though I did have Rhythm’s cell, I knew she wouldn’t tell me his whereabouts. She was loyal to him like a sister. The only thing I could do was wait until he returned home. For the next several hours, I paced around the mansion. The bottom of my heels were aching so bad. Yet, I couldn’t take a seat to relax. The sound of the front door slamming had me rushing into the lit foyer where Sincere was kicking off his shoes. When I cleared my throat, he refused to give me any eye contact. I dropped my head to the floor, feeling awful. He walked past me, and I gripped hold of his arm. Flaring his nostrils, he snatched away, giving me the dirtiest scowl. As he made long strides up the steps, I followed behind him with my chest beating wildly. When we reached his bedroom door, he went inside and slammed the door in my face, causing me to jump.

Against my better judgement, I knocked but eventually he turned up some music to block me out. My begging and pleading were futile, so I went back to my bedroom and gave him his space. As I was laying on my stomach reading my Bible, I received a text message from Brooklyn. That made me smile.

Brooklyn: Hey honey. How have you been?

Me: I’m doing fine. Just here reading the word and trying to get my soul right.

Brooklyn: I feel you boo. I need to get mine together. But baby, it’s hard. You are gonna have to help me out. Lol.

Me: I truly understand. I will when you are ready. How have you been?

Brooklyn: Working like crazy. I was thinking about going out today, but I am too tired. Do you want to come over my place and chill?

I hovered my fingers over the keyboard and thought about it. At thirty years old, I didn't have too many friends. I really needed to get myself out there and get to know people better. Brooklyn seemed like a nice girl, so I decided to take her up on her offer.

Me: Sure. Send me your address.

I quickly got dressed and pulled my hair into an upwards ponytail. After checking myself out in the mirror, I grabbed my purse before heading out the bedroom. I thought about telling Sincere that I was leaving but decided not to bother him. When I opened the front door, the alarm sounded. I had no clue on how to stop it, so I wildly started pressing buttons. Eventually, Sincere strolled down the steps shirtless, showing his muscles and tattoos. He quickly disarmed the alarm before turning to face me.

“Where do you think you're going, Lamb?”

“I'm going out with a friend.”

“What friend?”

“Uhh. Does it matter?”

“Yea! It fuckin' does! You're gonna be my wife and I need to know who you are hanging with.”

“My friend Brooklyn. She wants me to come to her house.”

“Where does she live?”

“A place called Sunnyside.”

He shook his head with a frown. “You're out your damn mind. That's the gutter. You, your Bible, or your prayer cloth won't stand a chance in that neighborhood. I'm not letting you go there.”

“Please, I walk with the Lord. Nothing scares me.”

“Yeah, aight. I’m still not letting you go.”

I folded my arms across my chest. “How am I going to see my friend? I know you won’t let her come here after I left that old woman trick me at the grocery store.”

“You mean when that old lady convinced you she was a saint.” He laughed.

“That’s not funny. I still feel awful.”

“As you should, because you can’t trust everyone.”

“I feel Brooklyn is nice. I wanted to hang out with her.”

“You can bring her here but if she gives me a bad vibe, I am tossing her out my crib.”

I leaped into Sincere’s arms and thanked him with a big hug as the scent of his cologne traveled up my nose. After separating my body from his, I took the time to try to apologize about my comment regarding him not having a relationship with his family. He placed his hand on my lips, not wanting to hear it before walking away. It seemed like a touchy subject and I was going to respect that he didn’t want to talk about it. I quickly pulled out my phone and texted Brooklyn to ask if she could come to me instead and she agreed without any hesitation. An hour later, Brooklyn showed up with her two little girls, who looked like the splitting image of her except they had lighter skin. She pulled me into a hug before introducing me to her beautiful daughters, Ocean and Phoenix, who were identical twins. They politely waved and then got onto their iPads. We headed to the movie theater inside the mansion and got comfortable on the leather seats with our individual popcorns. While the girls’ eyes were glued to their screens, Brooklyn and I just talked.

“Hey, Mary. I’m sorry I had to bring my kids. Their dad is tripping and didn’t want to come get them. I hope it’s not a problem.”

“No worries. I love kids.”

“Aww, thank you. I’m glad we finally get to hangout.”

Our personalities were complete opposites, but we vibed nicely together. Brooklyn was very sweet. When Sincere stepped into the theater, I swallowed hard. I glanced over to Brooklyn who didn't act all star-struck. She shook his hand and treated him like a regular person. I could tell Sincere appreciated that. He seemed so relaxed.

“Alright, it was good meeting you. You and your girls make yourself at home.”

“Aww, thank you so much. I appreciate this, Sinful,” Brooklyn said.

“Aye Lamb. Order y'all some food on my card. I'm heading upstairs. Call me if you need anything.”

Sincere pulled out his black card and left us alone to have our girl time. It was such a vibe living for me. My good day didn't last too long because two hours later, I received a phone call from Avery telling me to get to her place. Sadly, I had to cut my time with Brooklyn and her kids short. We promised to get together soon as I walked them to the car. As they pulled away, I received an odd text message from Cupid.

Cupid: I think you need to get here now before you are visiting your cousin in jail.

Seeing that message put me in distress, and I quickly headed inside to grab my purse. I immediately started to feel a tightness in my chest as my breathing increased. Sincere must've sensed something was wrong because he came down the steps. He approached me and cupped the side of my face. After I explained to him about the call from Avery and the text from Cupid, he grabbed his keys. Then, we climbed into his car and we made our way to their home. Within thirty minutes, we pulled up into the driveway. I quickly leaped out, leaving the car running as Sincere rushed behind me. I frantically knocked on the door.

It swung open and I saw Cupid with a pulsating vein in the center of his forehead. He stepped to the side to let us in. I could hear two people loudly yelling. Sighing, I immediately

recognized the voices. The closer I got to the argument, the palms of my hands became moist.

I stepped into the kitchen to see my Granny Mable standing in front of Avery, pointing her finger. For as long as I could remember, they didn't have the best relationship. Despite being the youngest grandchild, I was the glue that kept them together. When granny saw me, she hiked her nose in the air and clutched her Bible close to her chest. I could already see the judgment brewing into her deep brown eyes. No matter what she said, I had to stay strong and I wasn't going to allow her to guilt trip me into going back home.

Granny pointed to the chair, signaling me to take a seat like I was a child. To keep the peace, I obeyed her, causing Avery to suck her teeth and leave. She loathed that I was submissive. Granny pulled out her oil and made a cross on my forehead.

"I can't believe you would disobey me and not come home. After everything I've done to raise you right, you would turn your back on me."

"Sorry, grandma." I apologize as my voice softened.

"You sure *are* sorry. Look at you, forgetting everything I taught you and living in sin. I raised you better than this, Mary Elizabeth Lamb. You don't know how disappointed I am and how you disappointed God with your foolishness! Why did I hear that you've been spending your time with some trouble rapper? Didn't I tell you these men ain't no good? Let me guess, you gave him your virginity? I knew I should not have trusted you to come up here with your fast ass cousin. She always wanted to corrupt you."

"No, Sincere has been gentle and very kind to me. Avery is always respectful and loves me," I defended them.

"He is only being nice to have sex. That man doesn't care anything about your narrow tail. Your cousin just wants you to be her flunky and watch those kids. She's always been a trip. I don't care nothing about her being my granddaughter. She is a heathen too."

“That’s not fair to judge people who have been nothing but nice to me.”

“**Foolish child!** Can’t you see I am trying to protect you? You and your mother are the same. People don’t understand people like y’all.”

“I am *not* my mother. She has special needs. I am just sheltered because you want to control my life. Being away from your hold, I finally see that, and I don’t like it. I am a grown woman. I deserve to be respected and treated as such.”

SMACK!

Grandma Mable smacked me across the face with her Bible and started praying over me as tears rolled down my cheeks. Suddenly, Sincere strolled into the kitchen and stood next to me. My granny looked at him with so much disgust. As he planted his feet firmly, I didn’t know what was going to happen between them. I wasn’t trying to stick around and find out. I leaped up from the chair I was in and rushed out, feeling like a sinner who broke my granny’s heart.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Respecting my elders didn't mean anything when they were being disrespectful. The way that old hag was talking to Lamb had my adrenaline pumping and my chest tight. Even though it didn't have anything to do with me, I marched in the kitchen ready to defend her, but that's when Mary ran off crying. She seemed torn between trying to live for her grandma and living for herself. It was obvious she had been sheltered and wanted to finally see the world for what it was. Yet, I had those freedoms she yearned, but I didn't appreciate them. I was definitely feeling like shit myself. As I got ready to chase after her, Mary's mean ass grandma pulled out some holy oil and started sprinkling droplets at me. Pushing my dreads out my face, I glared at her like she was fuckin' crazy. Then, she swung her Bible and started pounding me relentlessly on my back. That shit hurt like hell. I wasn't trying to go to jail for knocking out a senior who was also a lady. I ran around the table to get away from her. She gritted her teeth. Looking at her soulless dark brown eyes, I could tell she was a piece of work. For her to be so delivered, she sure was acting like she needed to be sent back.

"What the hell is wrong with you, lady?" I frowned.

"You better stay away from my grandbaby. She is precious and doesn't need an ungodly man like you ruining her life. I

did my research on you, Sinful K! You are bad news.”

“Naw, *you* already ruined her life by not letting her be an adult and learn from her mistakes. Isn’t that the reason why we are human?”

“Foolish child. You don’t know anything about me or what I have sacrificed to raise Mary.”

“Fuck that! You only want her home to be your chauffeur and maid!”

“What does it matter to you? We all know you don’t care! You only want her for the sex.”

“Naw, I want Mary for her mind, body, and soul. But when I do get the chance, I am gonna beat that pussy up,” I was trying to get under her skin.

A grimace emerged on Mable’s face. She hiked her nose in the air and clutched hold of her Bible while I stood there chuckling. She reminded me of my father’s mother; a holy hypocrite who thought she was better than everyone because she had perfect attendance in the church. But just because someone went to church didn’t mean they were saints.

“If she is attracted to a disgusting man like you, I failed at my job.”

“Now Grandma Mable, is that anyway to speak to the man who is gonna to marry your granddaughter?”

I knew her name because Mary always talked about her.

She clutched hold of her chest like she was going to faint. “No way she would agree to marry some heathen like you. I know that’s a lie.”

“You’re wrong. She accepted my proposal and has agreed to be the stepmother of my beautiful daughter.”

“Over my dead body!” she yelled and stomped her feet.

I chuckled. “Shid, you might as well start digging up your grave, cuz we are getting married with or without your blessing.”

“If Mary wants to marry a man like you, then she no longer needs me in her life. And another thing, you can also take her special needs mother since you’re gonna be her husband. I am done putting my life on hold.”

She was so annoyed with me and strolled off with her Bible tucked under her arm, mumbling under her breath about how much of a demon I was. I didn’t give a shit about her feelings. My main concern was checking on Lamb. At the end of the day, she loved her grandmother even though she had fucked up controlling ways, and their bond was based upon how she raised her when her mother wasn’t equipped to do the job.

I found Mary sitting on the porch sobbing with her hands covering her face. I cleared my throat to get her attention and she looked up at me with tears running down her face. When I grabbed her hand to pull her up to her feet, she collapsed into my arms sobbing even more. I gently rubbed my fingers through her hair. Our relationship was complicated. Yea, we had a rocky start, but I considered her a friend. I wanted to be there for her without judgment. After she removed her head from my chest, I wiped her tears away with my thumbs. She was so ashamed that she couldn’t look me in my eyes, but there was no need to be because we all had issues, especially me.

“Don’t tell me your grandma got you second guessing your decision to stay? You have a right to live your life,” I assured her.

A selfish part of me didn’t want Mary to leave because I knew I wouldn’t be able to get my baby girl without her help. No judge was gonna take my case seriously with all my issues shown in the media. More importantly, I didn’t know how I would function without her. She was a good person with a pure soul. And even though I was the opposite, her positivity somehow balanced me out. I never admitted that to her.

“No matter how she feels, I can’t leave. I am on a mission to help you get Rose. No one is more important than pleasing God. His message was loud and clear. I understand my granny is hurt, but I have to do what’s in my heart.”

“Did your granny leave?” I probed.

“Yes, she went back to her hotel. But she left my mother here with me. I know she’s doing that, thinking I am going to fail and come back home with my tail between my legs. I am gonna prove her wrong.”

“Shid, you can do that now. You need to do what makes Mary happy.”

“For once, you’re right. Do you want to meet my mother? I figured you should, since she will be living with us.”

“Hell yeah. You know I got to meet my mother-in-law.”

Mary clapped her hands with excitement. “Great. She is kind of shy with people, especially with men. Don’t take it personal if she doesn’t talk much.”

I nodded my head with understanding and followed Lamb back inside the house. We went outside to the backyard where her mother, Phoebe, was sitting at the table eating watermelon and talking with Avery, who was rocking her baby girl to sleep. When Mary approached her mother, she smiled big, showing all of her teeth. They looked just alike and even had the same body frame. For some reason, it made me nervous having to meet her mother. Phoebe didn’t know anything about my music, so I couldn’t charm her with my Sinful K persona. The palms of my hands were sweating as I stood to the side watching them talk. Mary motioned me over. As soon as I approached Phoebe, her eyes got big and she refused to give me any eye contact. Mary placed her hands gently on her shoulder.

“Phoebe, this is my friend. His name is Sincere,” she introduced us.

I smirked and Phoebe shyly waved before picking up her watermelon to take another bite. She had childlike qualities.

“It’s nice to meet you. That watermelon is good, huh?”

Phoebe pulled her lips into a smile and her eyes started to glow. “It’s so good, but I love sweet potato pie even more. My Mary makes the best pies.”

“Those pies be hitting. I’ve had some before,” I agreed.

“What’s those gold things in your teeth?” Phoebe asked curiously.

“It’s called a grill,” I showed her.

“That’s cool. I want one too,” Phoebe was intrigued.

“Nope. You do not want that in your mouth. I won’t be having you look like a heathen,” Mary got sassy.

“Stop hating, Lamb. You know you want to get a matching one like me,” I was joking.

“Your teeth looks like melted butter. They’re a hot mess. I don’t know why you got those,” Mary fussed.

Everyone started laughing. She roasted the hell out of my ass. I sat down at the table and Phoebe extended her hand to give me a piece of watermelon. She started talking to me about her favorite shows and animals. I just listened and enjoyed her company. After chatting with Phoebe, I went to talk to my homie, Cupid, inside of his home office. I plopped down on the chair and he pulled out some documents sliding them in front of me. I frowned seeing that Rose’s grandparents had petitioned the court for full custody.

“What you gonna do, man? You gonna let them take your daughter or what? They are coming for you. Let’s be real, these white mothafuckas got money and have people in their pockets.”

“I’m ready to fight.”

Cupid rubbed his hands together with a smirk. “I’m glad to hear that shit. I will be handling your case personally and will draw up the paperwork requesting full custody. Once I do that, you have to keep your nose clean. I can’t be fighting for you if you ain’t living right.”

“You got my word.”

Then, Cupid brought up fatherhood. I heard it in his voice that he loved his children. Charlie wasn’t his biological child, but he gave her the world like he did for his biological girls. When she came knocking on the door for him to play, she

leaped on his back. Cupid played along and started galloping around like a horse. Fatherhood was priceless. I went back out in the yard to chill. Since we were all together, we decided to fire up the grill. I hit up Rhythm and Nardo up to kick it with us. They brought all their damn kids, looking like the black “Brady Bunch.”

“What’s good, nigga?” Nardo dapped me up and then Cupid who was sipping on a beer.

“Ain’t shit. I heard that new song you produced on the radio. That shit dope,” I gave him props.

“You already know I had to kill it. I can’t wait to get you in the studio,” Nardo said.

“Now that’s a song I am waiting to hear,” Cupid got hype.

“That ain’t’ gonna happen any time soon. Wolf finally got sick of my shit and fired my simple ass and I punched him in the face for it,” I confessed.

“Get the fuck out of here! You did that shit to his eye. That nigga told us he got robbed. I knew he was lying. He was stuttering like shit,” Nardo laughed with his fist up to his mouth.

“Yeah. I ain’t proud of that shit, though. Now I’m sitting here looking like a fool.”

“Listen, you and I both know Wolf is a dick. Someone was bound to rock that nigga’s shit sooner or later. How did it feel?” Nardo was intrigued.

“You ain’t shit man,” Cupid chuckled.

“I feel bad about it, but it’s time for me to fly away and become my own man. One day, I hope Wolf and I could fix things on a personal level.”

The food was finally ready. We all said our prayers and made our plates. I was ready to grub. I watched Mary take care of her mother. She made sure she got fed before she turned around to help with the kids. Eventually, Mary sat down to rest her feet. Seeing that she still didn’t make her plate, I decided

to do it for her. She smiled when I handed her the food and sat next to her to chill.

“Thank you for making my plate. What do I owe you for being so nice?”

“Nothing at all. I wanted to make sure my friend was straight.”

“Friend?” Mary sounded surprised.

“Yeah, I mean. We ain’t start off that way but I feel we are in a new stage. You are willing to marry me and help get my daughter. If that ain’t being a good friend, I don’t know what is. You know we got to pick out your ring. I know you don’t like getting a lot of money spent on you, but you’re gonna have to get a big rock. You can’t have your boy looking cheap in the press when the story breaks about us being married and they see that ring.”

“I have the perfect ring.” She smiled.

When it was time to leave, Mary explained to her mother that she would be staying for a while in Houston and they were gonna be staying at my house. At first, Phoebe looked scared but then Mary promised her that she would buy more watermelon. I decided to do one better and told Phoebe she could pick her own room with a big television. Her eyes lit up and she clapped her hands. We got into my car and Phoebe rubbed her fingers on the leather interior as she curiously looking around. I started up my engine and then turned on some rap music. As I bobbed my head, I saw Mary from the corner of my eye, frowning. When she tried to change the station, I pushed her hand away. Mary clicked her teeth and folded her arms across her chest.

“I know you don’t got an attitude when you always got me feeling like we in church, playing gospel.”

“Gospel music cleanses my soul but when I listen to your type of music, I want to shake what the good Lord gave me.”

“You got to let me see that, Lamb.”

“Pssss. You’re terrible Sincere. I’m not going to let you turn me into a heathen,” she chuckled.

“I like when you call me Sincere.”

“You have a beautiful name. I don’t care for the name Sinful.”

“Ay listen, that name has made me millions.”

“How about you change your name to No Sin? That is, after you finally change your ways.”

“Hell naw. That ain’t me.”

“You won’t know until you try, Mr. Sincere.”

We arrived at my crib and I pulled up to my driveway. All of us climbed out and headed inside my spot. While Mary showed her mother around the property and helped her pick out her bedroom, I went to sit by the pool to make a much-needed phone call. The woman who answered was very helpful and gave me all the information I needed regarding my decision. After ending our call, I quickly headed upstairs to write Mary a letter, grabbed a few important things, and then packed a bag. There was a slight knock on my door, and I answered it. It was Mary. Her eyes immediately dropped to the bag I was holding. I could immediately see the panic on her face. When I handed her the letter, she hesitantly opened it. After she finished reading it, tears rolled down her cheeks, but a smile also emerged on her lips. I kissed her forehead and made my way outside to my ride as my cellphone began to ring. Before Mr. Moore could get out to open my door, I climbed into the back seat. Mary stood in front of the doorway next to her mother, waving.

“Where am I driving you, Sinful?” Mr. Moore asked as he looked in his rearview mirror.

I cleared my throat. “I’m going to rehab.”

For the first time in my life, I wanted to take accountability and seek help. I wasn’t doing it to appease other people or to be able to make music. I just didn’t want to die that way. My will to live had to be *stronger* than my demons.

CHAPTER TWENTY



MARY LAMB

I was missing Sincere deeply. It had only been two weeks since he left for rehab and without his presence close to me, made me sad. The scent of his cologne was on everything in the house and the atmosphere. It was difficult not to think about him. We had talked on the phone a few times, but he wasn't allowed to have it in his possession. The staff didn't want any outside influences jeopardizing their sobriety while they were undergoing treatment. More often than not, we had to resolve to writing letters to each other. Sincere had a poetic way with words. They flowed off the pages like streams of water. I couldn't contain the smile on my face when I was reading one of his latest letters, referring to me as his *little Lamb* that made him see the light. No way did I ever believe we would become each other's support system and motivation. Yet, we bonded and connected. I was honored to call him a friend.

After storing his letter in between the pages of my Bible, I grabbed my prayer cloth and got on my knees. Tears rolled down my face as I called out to my Heavenly Father to take away Sincere's demons and make him a better man. Once I prayed, I sat down and read the word.

BRRRNNGG!!

BRRRNNGG!!

Suddenly, my phone starting ringing. I smiled big seeing the number from the rehab center. The moment I picked up, his smooth voice had my lower core hot. I tightly closed my legs to get my hormones under control.

“What you doing, little Lamb? You miss me?”

“I was about to read my Bible. Yes, I do miss you, but I am glad you’re getting help.”

“You don’t take no time off with that, do you?” He chuckled.

“Nope. I got to stayed prayed up and do it for the people I love too. How is your day going?”

“It’s been alright. I’m bored as hell but I’m learning to become one with nature. They even got me doing yoga.”

“That sounds relaxing. Have you done group therapy? Did you share?”

“Yeah, a little about you and Rose in the big group. But I don’t enjoy the individual therapy. They want you to get in touch with your feelings. I ain’t for that bullshit.”

“Don’t you start, Sincere. Therapy can be great to help you with your treatment.”

“I know, Lamb, but I don’t want to go back to my past. It’s too messed up.”

“Does it have to do with your childhood?” I probed.

He sighed. “Yeah.”

It was risky bringing up his childhood, but I needed to get into his mind. As much as he trusted me, I could tell he still had his guards up. His childhood was a touchy subject and refused to discuss it. We didn’t all have fairytale upbringing, including me. My biological father was an evil bastard. He took advantage of my mother with special needs. Since I was a child, I always felt like I was sin because of it. Granny didn’t even allow me to celebrate my birthday because it was a reminder of how I was conceived.

“How about you write your feelings down. You can be poetic about it, if that makes you feel more comfortable. Maybe that can be the first step in taking advantage of your therapy.”

“ You enjoy my letters, huh? That’s Grammy award winning shit.”

“You are so cocky.” I bit back my smile.

“And, you like that shit.”

I heard Sincere shuffling around on the phone. It sounded like he was peeing. He was nasty.

“I need you to put me on hold next time you want to handle your business. Nobody wants to hear you pee.”

“Yeah aight. We both know you want to see this big ass dick. You know it got a curve, right?”

I bit the top of my lips, not responding to his question. Sincere’s dirty talk had me drenching my underwear. He knew I was hot from the way he laughed. I did my best to brush it off.

“ I don’t want your hands on me.”

“Fuck it. How about I use my tongue? I want to taste your body and lick all off those curves. You want me to do that, Mary?”

“Nope. That’s wrong. You’re not my husband yet.”

“Aight. When I put that ring on your finger, you will let me explore your body?”

“Yes.” I admitted.

“Now was that so hard to admit?”

The sexual tension that was brewing between us had my body on fire. We talked for a little bit before it was time for our phone call to end. He hung up and I placed my cellphone against my chest with a big smile on my face.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

There was a knock on the door. I stood up from my chair and answered it. It was my mother who was holding a big slice of watermelon. As soon as she saw me, she showed her teeth. Surprisingly, she adjusted quickly to living in a new house especially when she saw the big flatscreen and refrigerator stacked with endless watermelon slices. She acted like she was in heaven.

“Mary, I want to watch a movie in the theater.”

“Okay. Let’s go do that. Are you hungry?”

“I’m eating my watermelon. It’s so juicy.”

“I know you are, but you have to eat food too. What do you want me to make you for lunch?”

“Pie.” She licked her lips.

I placed my hand on my hip and shook my head. “Nice try. You need food.”

“I made jelly with toast and had it with my watermelon.”

“That’s fine, but next time you need to come get me so I can cook.”

“I’m not a baby, Mary. *You are* , so I tell *you* what to do. Okay?”

“Alright.” I smiled.

Even though I wasn’t allowed to call her *mom* because granny used to have a fit, she knew I was her child. She always made that clear. She told me what to do and I thought it was cute. I wanted her to feel like she had some type of say, since her parental rights were stripped out of her control.

“Maybe you can make some pie later on. Please, my Mary.”

Her smile was so big it reached her eyes. I couldn’t resist making her happy and agreed to make her a sweet potato pie. With excitement, she clapped her hands. We then made our way to the movie theater and I turned on a kiddie movie. While my mama got settled on the comfortable recliner chair and pulled a blanket over her body, I went to pop us some

popcorn. I grabbed a pack from the box in the cabinet and put it into the microwave. After it was done, I poured the popcorn into a gigantic red bowl before getting two waters and a slice of watermelon from the refrigerator. Once I put everything on a tray, I made my way back to the theater where my mama was cracking up. She eagerly took the watermelon and focused her attention on the screen. I plopped down next to her on the other recliner and put my feet up, relaxing. Since I wasn't really into watching movies, I decided to take out my phone to text Avery. She had given me some time off work until I figured out an adult program to send my mama to during the day so she wouldn't be bored. There were so many good ones in the area, but they were extremely costly.

Me: Hey cousin. What are you doing? Do you miss me?

Avery: Yes. I'm at a press conference for my new client, Harlem James. He just signed a three-year deal with the Houston Razors after leaving his team in New York.

Me: Wow, you are really growing your company. I'm so proud of you.

Avery: Thank you. I'm proud of you too, for not allowing granny to bully you into coming home. Has she called?

Me: Nope, but I am okay with that. I am going to leave it in God's hands.

Avery: Good for you. Let me know if you need any help finding your mom a program.

Me: Will do.

Avery: My mom is willing to come help you if needed to make sure her baby sister is fine. We all are here to support. Love you.

Me: Love you too and kiss the kids for me.

BRRRNNGG!

I got ready to put my cellphone down and it started to ring. A smile spread across my lips seeing Brooklyn's number flash across my screen. We were becoming fast friends and talked mostly every day. I picked up and placed the phone against my ear. Suddenly, the sound of a man yelling caught my attention. The hairs on the back of my neck immediately stood up as my heart started pounding. When the call ended, I quickly dialed her number back, but it went straight to voicemail. I prayed everything was okay with my friend. Hearing that angry voice didn't sit well with my spirit. I quickly sent her a text so when she turned her phone back on, she could call me. Then, I put my phone to the side to attempt to watch the movie. That was futile because I closed my eyes and passed out fast asleep. My ringing phone was the only reason why I woke up. Seeing that it was Brooklyn calling again, I picked up. There was crying on the phone.

"Hello," I said nervously.

"Ms. Mary. My mommy needs help. Can you please come to our apartment?"

It was one of Brooklyn's children, but I didn't know who since they didn't tell me their name before speaking.

"Yes. Do you know your address?"

"I can send it. Please hurry," she sounded frantic.

I ended the call and quickly dialed the two security guards who were responsible for taking me out. They agreed to meet at my place in twenty minutes, but I couldn't wait that long. Instead, I told them to go to the following address. My mama was focused on watching the movie that I had to pry her from the recliner. She had an attitude and folded her arms against her chest as she refused to put on her shoes. I didn't have time for her foolishness, so I bribed her with an iPad. She slipped on her little loafers before slipping on her sweater. We made our way to the car. After I secured her safely in the backseat, I handed her the iPad and she put on her headphones. With haste, I climbed into the driver's seat and slammed my foot on the gas, zooming down the driveway. I had no idea what trouble was waiting for me, but I needed to make sure my

friend was okay. Sincere would kill me if he knew that I was going into a hood with his snow-white colored Lexus.

I pulled up in front of the worn-out looking apartment building that had bars on the windows and turned off the engine. There were a bunch of dudes with baggy clothes standing and shooting dice, looking like heathens. I took a deep breath before stepping out the car, holding my purse.

“Damn baby. You’re in the wrong neighborhood with that car,” a deep raspy voice spoke from behind.

I turned around and there was a man staring down the Lexus. His skin was so dark, and he had a deep scar on the side of his face that wasn’t appealing. I ignored him and helped my mama out the backseat. She quickly gripped hold of my arm, sinking her nails deeply into my skin. From the look on her face, she was petrified. After clicking the key fob to turn on the alarm, we made our way past the group of men that started whistling at us like we were fresh meat. Stepping into the hallway, the smell of urine traveled up my nose making me frown. There was an ‘out of order’ sign on the elevator so we made our way up the steps. I kept my mama close to my body. When I got to Brooklyn’s apartment, the door was half-way open. I slowly crept inside, still holding my mama’s hand, and saw that the living room was destroyed. Furniture was flipped over, pictures were shattered, and blood trailed the floor.

The sound of something falling had me about to jump out of my skin, but I immediately calmed down seeing one of Brooklyn’s daughters holding some ice. She didn’t utter a word but swiftly pulled me by my hand. She took me to the bathroom where Brooklyn was laying in the tub with blood covering her face and her lips swollen as her other daughter sobbed while rubbing her head. Tears rolled down my cheeks and I wanted to break down for my friend. Yet, I had to be strong for my friend, her daughters, and my mama.

“I need you to grab your shoes and some stuff to come with me while I take care of your mom,” I explained.

“Can we bring our puppy too?” one of the twins asked.

“Yes, but you have to hurry. Now go quickly.”

The girls ran off after I gave them instructions. Then, I sat my mama down on the toilet. She looked so stressed out. With all my strength, I grabbed a battered Brooklyn from the tub as she flinched her bruised face in discomfort. I wrapped her arms around my shoulders and we slowly walked out the bathroom as my mama followed on the side of us. We waited by the door until the kids rushed out with two book bags and holding a puppy. After leaving out, we made our way through the hallway and then down the stairs. Even though Brooklyn was weak, she did her best to move without putting all her weight on me. As we were close to the exit of the building, a raspy voice spoke aggressively, causing us to stop in our tracks.

“What the fuck is going on here? Brook, you really trying to leave a nigga!” the man yelled.

The kids got behind me and my mama stepped back, looking crazy at the rude man. It was the same heathen who complimented the car outside. When he approached us barring his teeth, I had no idea what to do. He could sense our fear as he towered over us.

“We are leaving. Now move before I call the police,” I stood firm.

He cracked his neck and smirked. “Listen. I think it’s best for you to go before this bitch get you hurt.”

“I’m not going anywhere, you heathen,” I said firmly.

God was on my side and he was going to get us out, untouched.

“This wasn’t a request, bitch. You better take your ass on or I am going to do you like I did this bitch,” he threatened.

That demon man shoved me like a sack of hay onto the floor and then clutched hold of Brooklyn’s hair, trying to drag her back towards the steps. The kids pleaded for him to stop but he wouldn’t listen. After getting back to my feet, I quickly dug into my purse and pulled out my mase, spraying his face. He released his grip from Brooklyn’s hair and raked his face, grunting. Seeing him vulnerable, I grabbed my prayer

cloth out of my purse, leaped on the evil man's back, and wrapped it around his neck, punching him nonstop. Even though he couldn't see, he managed to fling me off. My body hit the floor with a loud thump. I quickly stood up with the right side of my body stinging and kicked that heathen directly in his balls, making him fall to his knees. Finally, the two-security guards arrived and jumped on the man with so much force while he pleaded. We made our way to the Lexus and got in. Once I was behind the wheel, I peeled away from the building to get everyone to safety.

“God forgive me for what I had to do,” I softly prayed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



The silence was agonizing as I stared at the ceiling with my hands tucked underneath my head, laying on the therapist couch. I hated being in those “therapeutic sessions” because they always put a nigga in a somber mood. No matter how many times I told that bitch ass therapist I didn’t have anything to discuss, he wouldn’t stop pushing me to tap into my fuckin’ feelings. The trauma from my childhood was painful and something I wanted to forget. Drugs and alcohol temporarily helped, but I realized that those things weren’t good options. If I ever wanted to gain sole custody of Rose, I couldn’t keep living a reckless lifestyle. No judge in their right mind would allow me to raise her. With Cupid representing me in court as my attorney, I was gonna have to prove to them that I could be an active and responsible father. Going to rehab on my own was the first positive step to redemption, but a nigga had to make it through therapy too. Participating was a requirement in order for me to complete the program. It wasn’t going well. Most sessions, I just stared at the wall or looked at the floor without saying a word. Phillip was doing everything in his power to get me to open up, but he was failing miserably. I didn’t believe therapy could help a nigga like me.

He cleared his throat. “We have been here for thirty minutes and you still haven’t spoken.”

“I’m just here, so I won’t get put out of treatment, but I don’t have to speak to ya about my life. We can talk about sports and shit.”

“That’s nice, but I don’t think talking about sports with me is gonna help your recovery, Sincere.”

“Don’t call me that.” I glowered.

“My apologies. I’m meant Sincere. The only way these sessions will help you in your recovery is if you talk to me. What are your most memorable childhood moments?” he asked me.

I remained silent.

“Were you close to your parents? Do you have any siblings?” he continued to probe.

Phillip was irritating me with his same fuckin’ questions. I clicked my teeth and raised up off the couch to look his pasty ass into his eyes.

“Mothafucka! I don’t know you like that to be telling you my fuckin’ business,” I snarled.

“Tapping into your feelings has nothing to do with your business. I’m trying to get to know you so I can help. By doing that, we have to go back to your childhood.”

“Naw, I’m straight. We can talk about who I am now. A six-time Grammy award winning rapper who got that paper,” I said, deflecting from the conversation.

Dr. Phillip nodded his head and jotted down some notes on his pad before looking back at me with a neutral expression. It was hard to read his body language and what he was up too. I guess that came from years of experience in his line of work. Seeing people go through their emotions so much, probably made him immune to his own. Even when I was acting like a jackass, he showed no signs that he was annoyed. He was calm, persistently trying to get me to open my heart. Not to that mothafucka. I had Mary for that.

“Since you don’t feel comfortable talking about your inner feelings, how about we discuss your friend, Mary? You’ve mentioned her a couple of times. She must be a love interest of yours, perhaps?”

Part of a psychologist’s job was to get inside your head somehow, but I was already in my own head. There was no room for Dr. Phillip. I chuckled very subtly.

“Mary is alright,” I was very casual.

“How did you two meet?”

“Her cousin is my manager, so it kind of just happened.”

“I see. You all started spending time together and it grew into a friendship.”

“Hell naw. Mary thought I was demon from hell, tossing oil on me on a couple of occasions. I called the police to lock her up for that. I was only trying to teach her a lesson not to fuck with me. Needless to say, I didn’t press charges.” I rubbed my chin and chuckled. “After we got to know each other, we became cool. She is really a good woman with values. In the industry I am in, there ain’t that many chicks around like her.”

“Sounds like she may be more than a friend.”

I swallowed the large lump that formed in my throat. There was no way I would admit my feelings out loud for Lamb. I wanted her. Naw, I *needed* her, but I didn’t know if I was mature enough to commit to a woman as good as her. She seemed to have all the faith and belief that I could walk in the paths of righteousness before God while loving her. Yet, all I could see was the pain that I had walked in for so long.

“Yeah, possibly, but I’m not in the head space to pursue a relationship.”

“Understandable. What provokes these thought and feelings about her?”

“I ain’t no bitch or nothing, but for some reason, she makes a nigga feel safe. I never felt that way about any woman.”

“As a kid, you didn’t feel safe?”

“Naw,” I started clutching my fists and getting angry.

“What made you feel that way? Did you not have a happy home?”

“My mother tried her best to make it one, but my father had a way of ruining things,” I spoke through my locked jaws.

He nodded. “Your mother was good to you?”

“Yeah, and my big sisters, but they couldn’t make him be good to me.”

“Who?”

“My father.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, mothafucka. You’re the doctor.”

I started zoning out, looking at the wall with my face twisted and my knuckles balled up. **Samuel Kennedy** was a *terrorizer*. I hated that man with a passion! I never understood why he didn’t love me! His own son!

*THE SCREECHING SOUNDS of those old Honda tires pulling away from my house had me releasing a slow breath as I watched it drive away. No way I could ever go back to that church with an evil bastard apart of the congregation. I dropped my book bag to the ground as tears rolled down my cheeks. I thought churches were supposed to help you find peace in God and make you a better person, but I **hated** that place! I didn’t feel safe! I was mad at God because he wasn’t listening to my prayers. The people I was surrounded by were hypocrites and they all needed to burn in hell. I had to conceal my tears when my older sister, Sydney, came behind me wearing her gold praise dance dress. She immediately placed her hand on my shoulder. I jumped away, looking at her funny. I didn’t want anybody to touch me.*

“What’s wrong, Sincere? Why didn’t you wait for me after church like mama told you? You know she doesn’t want you

walking home alone. I could've driven you."

"I'm not a baby. You don't need to worry about me. I got it."

"You're always gonna be my little baby. I got to keep you safe. Next time you need to wait for me, okay?" She smiled and pinched my right cheek.

"I got a ride."

"From whom? You know mama doesn't want us getting into anybody's car without her permission."

"Assistant Pastor Thomas."

"Oh. That was nice of him."

"Yea. I guess so." I looked to the ground.

I hated Pastor Thomas! I wanted him to die so he could get out of my life for good. He had everybody fooled with his good guy act, but I knew the truth. That man was **the devil** wearing a suit. He didn't deserve that assistant pastor title.

"I don't think that's a big deal. You just need to make sure you tell mama first."

"Dad gave him permission to bring me home."

"Long as mom or dad knows, that's fine. I was just worried when I didn't see you outside the church. You're my baby."

"I'm your brother. Not a baby."

"I was thinking about taking you to get some ice cream tomorrow, but it sounds like you are too old for that. Big boys don't eat ice cream."

"No. I can eat ice cream." I rubbed my belly.

I pulled my lips into a grin when Sydney slid her fingers through my curls before she pulled me into a hug. She was going to college in the fall and I was gonna miss her a lot. We went our separate ways and I headed upstairs to my bedroom. Since I was the only boy and the youngest, I didn't have to share with the girls. It didn't stop my sisters from taking over my space when they didn't want to be bothered with each other

after their arguments. Mama blamed their moods and attitudes on their teenage hormones. I slightly chuckled to myself about how much they fought every day. They were like two cats fighting for their owner's attention. I opened my door and saw my other sister, Sana, laying back in my bed reading. She wanted to be an author, which was why she was always at the library. If she wasn't at church, she was there. She looked up from her book, gave a big smile, closed her book, swung her feet over the side of my bed, and slid into her slippers before standing up in front of me. She was fourteen and the tallest out of all my siblings. People thought she played basketball for her school, but she wasn't coordinated enough for that.

"What are you doing in my room? I know you saw my sign on the door. Y'all need to respect my space."

"My bad, baby bro. I just needed to get some reading done. You know I can't when Sasha is singing all day." She rolled her eyes annoyed.

My sister Sasha was the baby of the girls. Her dream was to be a famous singer. She was the entertainer of the family and loved being on stage performing. All the kids in her choir were jealous because she had a voice like an angel. They believed she only got the lead parts because our father was the pastor of the church, but that wasn't the truth. She had pure talent and didn't need special treatment.

"When she gets rich and famous with her voice, you won't be complaining," I joked.

She moved her neck in my direction with her lips spread wide. "I sure won't. I'm gonna tell everyone I am her big sis. And I will be in those industry parties trying to meet all the celebrities to get them to read and promote my books, especially Wolf Knight. I love all the music he produces."

"Dad said we can't listen to that," I whispered.

"So what. I love all types of music. Gospel isn't the only music genre that exists. We listen to that all day long. I love the Lord, but I also want to be a kid."

"Wolf Knight doesn't produce kid's music."

“I know but it’s so dope.”

She grabbed my hand and started dancing wildly. We both didn’t have any rhythm. I’m sure we looked like two rubber chickens trying to dance. Suddenly, Sasha came in singing with a hairbrush like it was a microphone. Like always, we had to be the background dancers as she stood in front of us. When Sydney heard us singing and laughing, she came in to join the fun too. Since I was the only boy, they always made me the rapper. From time to time, I had some nice bars that I would spit, but I didn’t take it seriously. Sasha tossed me the hairbrush and I waved my hands in the air rapping as they cheered me on like I was a real superstar.

“Go Sincere! Kill it, baby bro!” Sasha was hyping me up.

“That’s right, baby bro. You got the flow!” Sydney yelled with excitement.

“You are gonna be a famous rapper one day and everyone is gonna know your name,” Sana bobbed her head.

We were having a good time bonding until our father’s loud voice echoed throughout the house and into my bedroom. We all froze in place when he stepped in and glared at us with his mouth twisted. He yanked me up by my collar and slammed me against the wall. The impact was so hard that my breath temporarily left my body, but he wasn’t finished. He clutched my neck with his big hands. My sisters gasped before pulling him off me and he made them regret it instantly. He smacked them across their faces. Nobody was allowed to challenge his authority, but I refused to let him put his hands on my sisters. I gained the courage to tackle him. It was the least I could do, but he flung me on the floor like a rag doll.

“You think you’re a man? You think you tough, huh? Boy, I am gonna tear your ass up,” he stood over me.

My dad took off his belt, gripped hold of my arm, and repeatedly struck me on my back like a slave. It stung so bad, but I refused to let any of my tears drop, showing weakness. I refused to give him any satisfaction. He hated me and always said I didn’t act or look like him. As he continued to strike my flesh, the sounds of my sisters sobbing in the background

echoed off the walls. Once he decided he was done, he tossed me down on the floor and dropped the belt. That man swiped the sweat off his forehead like he had just finished working out.

*“You aren’t allowed to rap and sing that type of music in my house. We are good Christian people. We are a Christian family! Not some thugs! If you don’t like what the hell I am saying, you all can leave, **especially** you, Sincere. **You** are the biggest sin of my life,” my father spoke angrily with spit building on the sides of his mouth.*

He stormed out the room and slammed the door. I was left sprawled out on the floor, unable to move a mere muscle in my body. My sisters rushed to my side, but when they touched me, I flinched my face in discomfort. They were always trying to keep me away from getting on our father’s bad side because he was always physically abusive towards me. However, they couldn’t always prevent it. I sat on the edge of my bed with my hands covering my face. At that moment, I allowed my tears to fall.

“Don’t cry, Sincere. I am sorry that dad did this to you,” Sydney patted my back with a somber tone of voice.

“I hate it here! He is never going to stop hurting me! I am gonna run away and never come back!”

“He is just mean. I don’t like him either,” Sasha sobbed.

“I don’t understand why he only hurts me.” I wiped my tears.

“He hurts us in other ways,” Sana cried.

“Shut up, Sana! Don’t tell him that,” Sydney scowled.

“What does he do?” I looked at Sana with my eyes popping out of my head.

They all looked petrified.

“Nothing. Let’s play games. You aren’t leaving us. Not now or never because you are our baby,” Sydney said.

We all grabbed each other into a group hug and spent some time in my bedroom playing board games. Our mama

Ruth came home after helping with the church bake sale and cooked dinner. I barely talked at the table and sat quietly pushing peas around my plate with my fork. I didn't really have an appetite. When my mother placed her hand on my shoulder, I gave her a faint smile. She was beautiful and always smelled like lavender.

"Sincere, baby. You know you're gonna have to try some of those peas to get some dessert? I made your favorite... sweet potato pie."

"Do I have to eat them, mom? I don't like peas." I frowned.

My father smacked the table. "I don't care what the hell you don't like, boy. Eat it now!"

"It's fine, honey. He doesn't have to eat them," my mother tried to defuse the situation.

"Shut up, Ruth! You're always babying that little bastard. He is gonna eat those peas or I am beating his ass. I work too hard for some child to tell me what he ain't doing in my house!"

"Sincere, baby. Please, eat your peas," my mother pleaded.

"I don't like peas. I ain't eating them," I stared my father down.

The so-called "great pastor" leaped up from his chair, grabbed my arms, and shook me. With tears drenching her face, my mother did her best to pull him off, but she couldn't stop him. I was starting to feel dizzy when he tossed my body on the floor. Then, he set his sights on my mother and backhanded her face. It wasn't the first time he put hands on her in our presence and we knew it wasn't gonna be the last. If that wasn't enough, he clutched hold of her neck, choking her until her face turned a different color. My heart sped up and the look of horror emerged on all of our faces. We thought he was going to kill our sweet mother. After snapping out of his evil trance, he removed his hands from around her neck. She slid down the counter onto the floor gasping for air. He

stormed out after causing chaos, and we rushed to her aid pleading.

“Mama! Why won’t you leave him? He isn’t gonna change. We hate him,” Sydney spoke up.

“We don’t have anywhere to go, babies. He already said that he will take you all from me. I love you all so much and can’t bear the thought of losing any of you.” Tears eased down her face.

“We can go to the shelter, mom. As long as we are away from him. Let’s go, ma,” Sana was sobbing.

“As long as we have each other, that’s all that matters,” Sasha said through her sobs.

“We will never be apart,” I was confident.

The moment we heard the front door slam, we figured our father was going to take a drive like he always did after causing hell.

POW!

*Suddenly, he came back in shooting a gun, putting a bullet through my mother’s head. Her brain matter splattered all over of our faces as her body collapsed to the floor. We all screamed in agony for her to wake up but we knew she was gone. Next, he turned his gun on my sisters, hitting them one by one as they tried to run away. Sydney was the last to be hit because she shielded me with her body. I was in so much pain from what I had witnessed. My mother, my sisters... all laid out on the floor in cold blood. I was the last one left. When my father pointed the gun at me, I was ready to die. I **wanted** to die. It would have been better than to live a life of suffering and torture. **POW! POW! POW!** He shot me three times. One in my stomach, one in my chest, and one in my shoulder. Everything was moving in slow motion like I was in some type of dream. By the time my body hit the floor, I took one last look at my father and the last thing I saw him do was turn the gun to his head, then **BAM!** He pulled the trigger like the coward that he was and collapsed flat on the floor. I was in a pool of*

blood. I turned to look at Sydney and blood was coming out of her mouth. Suddenly, I saw her breathing.

“Go get help, baby brother. I love you.” She closed her eyes.

I slowly crawled towards the living room with the little bit of strength I had left and grabbed the phone to call 911. Everything was still moving in slow motion and I could hear my heartbeat getting faint.

DAMN... The memories were so painful, I couldn't help but release a waterfall of tears when I thought about the faces of my mother and my big sisters. I missed them deeply. They were my whole world. My reason for living. **FUCK MY FATHER!!!!** That mothafucka took **everything** from me!!!! He took my world away!!! And all that kept going through my mind was... why?..... **WHY!!!!** I felt a hand on my shoulder and I instantly snapped in a fit of rage. All I could think about was my father and squeezed the person's neck with intentions to kill. Then, I realized it was Dr. Phillip. I immediately removed my hands from his neck and ran out of his office all the way to my room on the other side of the rehab facility. I started packing my duffle bag. It was evident that no one was safe around me. Dr. Phillip came in my room with open arms and I couldn't accept him.

“Where are you going, son? You can't leave. You're doing amazing in the program. Sometimes therapy can be stressful and difficult.”

“I don't want to go back there again, man.”

“Why? You are doing great! I understand that's it scary talking about what you have been through, but I see you're doing well. We have to break through those walls of rage. You are doing that.”

“Fuck that! I need my Lamb to tell me that this is normal, and I am gonna do great in this program.”

“Who is my Lamb?”

“It’s Mary.”

“Would you like to call her now?”

“Yea,” I was eager.

Dr. Phillip pulled out his cellphone and I snatched it before rushing into the bathroom for some privacy. I sat on the floor damn near hyperventilating. I needed to hear Mary’s voice. I don’t know why I started to feel connected to her soul. The moment Mary’s face appeared on the screen, my body abruptly stopped shaking.

“What’s going on, Sincere? Are you okay?”

“I need you Mary.”

“I’m here. What’s going on? You know you can always talk to me. We are friends, right? With our friendship, comes trust.”

“Yeah. I trust you.”

“Now what’s going on? Why does it look like you are about to hurt someone? Talk to me.”

“Tell me that I can do this therapy shit... that it’s gonna help me be better.”

“You can Sincere, but you Have to do the work. All you have to remember is that you’re strong. You can conquer Whatever is haunting your spirit. Does it have to do with your family?”

“Yes,” I released a breath I didn’t know I was holding.

“What happened?”

“My whole family is DEAD! They ain’t NEVER coming back! I don’t know why God didn’t take me with them! I can’t do this shit no more! The pain, the rage, it’s Too much!”

“NO, Sincere! I’m so sorry. Oh my Lord... I didn’t know you were carrying around that kind of pain. I’m here for you, okay. I Won’t let you get off this phone until I see that you are strong enough to keep moving forward. As bad as this hurts, this is the Beginning of your healing. No, you won’t forget, but you will learn to live with it. You are here for a reason, but

you HAVE to find your purpose. Do you want me to sing for you?"

"Yes."

The most painful feeling I ever experienced was laying on top of my mother's and big sisters' caskets. By the age of ten, I was an orphan and grew into manhood before I knew how to survive in the world.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



MARY LAMB

Tears washed down my face like a waterfall as I sang Sincere a gospel song. I wanted him to feel some peace and comfort after his emotional breakthrough in therapy. It broke my heart to hear him sob, but I knew he needed to relive his trauma in order to heal. Losing his family had rocked him to the core, shaping him into the man he was because he didn't have any guidance. The larger-than-life persona he created for his music only temporarily masked his pain. Once the flashing lights, studio sessions, and award shows were done, he was left to deal with the demons from his past, alone. At heart, he was still a vulnerable child who needed to feel safe. I wanted to protect him from the world and give him the unconditional love he was yearning for. I wanted him to see that he was always gonna be able to count on me for emotional support.

I loved Sincere deeply. I never said it to him though. He was the first man I ever had romantic feelings for. In such a short period of time, he came into my life full of chaos. And yet, he made me feel wanted, needed, and completed. If we ever crossed those lines again, I would never turn my back on my friend. After I sang the last verse, I brushed my tears away and took a deep breath as Sincere stared at his phone screen. His eyes seemed full of regret.

“I’m sorry, Lamb. I didn’t mean to make you emotional with my fucked-up life.”

“Nooo. You don’t ever have to apologize for being vulnerable. I want you to be able to openly share your feelings with me. We are friends. We are supposed to listen to one another.”

“Naw, you probably think I look like some bitch ass nigga crying and shit. Don’t lie.”

“No. Crying is good for the soul. You need to let it out, Sincere. You don’t have to be embarrassed. I am so proud of you for taking the necessary steps in therapy.”

“I don’t like the shit.” He grimaced.

For many, therapy had a huge stigma behind it, especially in the African American community. We were brought up, to not tell your business to strangers. What happened in the house should not leave the house. It better had not. We understood that concept, but a lot of people grow up harboring unresolved issues and dealing with pain because they were told not to openly express their feelings. My granny Mable did the same to me growing up. That’s how I knew.

“Therapy is needed for you to heal. You can’t be good to Rose if you don’t get help. Give yourself some grace, Sincere. You experienced something horrific and heartbreaking as a child. I bet that’s not the half of the stuff you’ve been through in your life.”

A huge part of me felt like Sincere was sexually abused when he was a little boy. Although, he never verbally said it, his actions screamed *victim*. He avoided changing Rose’s diapers and almost threw a fit for not getting her out her crib fast enough when he wanted to change into his clothes after he got out the shower.

“My childhood was just fucked up. I don’t know how I even survived this far.”

“You are MEANT to be here.”

“What are you trying to say, Lamb? My sisters and my mother weren’t supposed to be? They should be here too,” he

gritted his teeth.

His tone of voice was laced with anger. I knew I had to be careful with my words. I didn't want to set him off, especially after an amazing breakthrough.

"No. All I am saying is therapy is your safe place because you can speak openly. You have the control to say what you want to say when you're not comfortable. I'm here anytime you're ready to share more about your life. I care for you. I want to see you better. We are all rooting for you, including your fans."

"I appreciate you, Lamb. You really got a nigga back." He raked his face with one hand to wipe his tears.

"Always. You're gonna be my husband so I must show my love."

He hiked up his eyebrow. *"Being my wife ain't for the weak. Are you sure you're willing to put up with me for a lifetime? This job doesn't end until one of us dies you know. Or, should I send applications somewhere else?"*

Sincere's mood had shifted for the better. I could see that he no longer wanted to show vulnerability. I had to respect it.

"Don't make me get my oil on you," I joked.

"Look at you, Lamb, you're jealous already. I didn't even give you the dick yet." He dragged his long tongue across his perfectly shaped lips.

"I'll gladly take it. I mean, Lord, I need to get my prayer cloth and get this lust off me. You are the only one who gets me this way and I don't like it. You got me acting like a heathen."

"We all got a little heathen in us, begging to be unleashed Lamb." He chuckled.

I shook my head disagreeing. *"Nope. I'm a good girl."*

"Yeah, that you are. But I want you to be my BAD girl in the bedroom. Can you do that for me? You're so sexy and I love the way you smell when you get aroused. It gets my dick hard. Tell me you're gonna be my Bad girl."

My lower core started to pound as it leaked with wetness. I could feel my nipples slowly rising underneath the pink night gown I was wearing. My breathing intensified with lust trailing throughout my body. Once again, Sincere knew he had me with his lustful talk and smirked deviously.

“Yes,” I croaked.

He winked. “*Good girl. I’ll talk to you later, Lamb,*” he ended the call.

I sat up on the bed with a bewildered facial expression. I couldn’t believe I told him I would be his bad girl in the bedroom. Sincere was the only man who could get me sexually aroused. As much as I felt guilty, I liked it at the same time. Looking at the alarm clock, I saw that it was only seven in the morning. I could’ve laid back down for more rest, but I called room service for some breakfast instead.

For a couple of days, my mother and I were staying in a double suite at a hotel with Brooklyn and her beautiful children since she was afraid to return to her place. They needed my support, and I couldn’t abandon them during their time of need. If Sincere knew I wasn’t at his house, he would be so upset. He had to stay focused on his sobriety, so I didn’t tell him anything. After I had ordered my breakfast, I climbed out of bed and quickly took a shower before putting on my clothes. I had a cute dress that highlighted my figure and showcased my legs. I skipped the usual long skirt. I was starting to feel confident and very comfortable in my skin. Since I was no longer under my granny’s judgmental eyes, I was trying to find my own style of look.

As I stepped out of my room, Brook was walking around with a smile. The bruises on her face had finally disappeared and I was happy for her. She gave me a hug and we settled on the couch to chat. I didn’t know the history with between her and that mean man. I desperately wanted to pry for information. And even though we were friends, I left it up to her to discuss if she felt comfortable at all. I respected her boundaries. Brook grabbed my hand as tears slowly trickled from her eyes. I couldn’t hold back my tears and I started crying too.

“I just want to thank you for your support. You don’t know how much this means to me, especially since I don’t have any family.”

“I am glad I can help. Do you want to get some things from your place?”

“I prefer not to go back to that place.”

“I truly understand.”

“Do you think you’re able to get me a computer? I have to find a new job since I got fired from the hospital.”

“Oh no. What happened?”

“My kids’ father kept coming up there making trouble, so I got fired,” she sighed.

“I’m sorry that happened. I can bring you a laptop. I will also buy you and the kids some clothes until you land back on your feet.”

“You have done enough. I don’t want to take advantage of your kindness.”

“Don’t be silly. We are family now. I am going to help you.”

“Thank you for being so kind. This means so much to me.”

We embraced one another with a big hug, and I allowed her to cry on my shoulder without judgment. Brook wanted to be strong, but her pain made it difficult to be. It made me sad to know she was afraid to seek help from even the authorities because she felt they wouldn’t have done anything to protect her as a domestic violence victim. She had explained to me how her mother got a protective order and was still attacked by her ex-boyfriend, with acid, leaving her disfigured. I understood her position and why she didn’t trust anyone to help her with her situation.

Unexpectedly, there was a knock on the hotel door. Brook immediately jumped, gripping hold of my arm until she realized that I had called room service for some breakfast. The man politely smiled and wheeled a cart inside that had our food on silver trays. Before he left, I gave him a tip and he was

very grateful. Since the kids and my mom were still sleeping, Brook and I ate our omelets on the balcony where there was a small table, chairs, and a beautiful view. Through every bite, we made conversation and talked about our lives. We came from totally different backgrounds, but one thing we connected with, was wanting to finally be free to live our lives the way we wanted.

“How did you meet your ex?”

“At the strip club. I was a dancer, and he would always come in to see me. He was a faithful customer. At first, he was nice, but you know how the story goes. He changed one day. Since I didn’t know anything else and I didn’t have any family, I stayed with him for years, only to endure abuse. Eventually, I had got tired of it, especially when my girls started seeing him put his hands on me. I didn’t want them to grow up and think that was how a man was supposed to treat them. I left the home we shared and found me a place. Eventually, he found me.”

“Nobody has a right to put their hand on you ever. You’re so brave for finally leaving.”

“I understand that now. What’s going on with you and your man, Sinful?”

“Sincere and I are not dating. We are just friends,” I blushed.

“Girl whatever. That’s your man. Claim it proudly. I can’t wait to see you both on the award shows.”

We had finished eating and Brook’s beautiful girls finally woke up from their sleep. They rushed on the balcony to give their mom a hug and attacked her cheeks with kisses as she chuckled. I could tell they loved each other deeply. When the twins came to give me a double-mint twin hug, which they referred to it as, I gladly accepted them with opened arms with a smile on my face. Then, I left them alone to get some bonding time. I had to go to Avery’s office to do some work. She had several potential clients and needed my assistance.

My mother was in the next room, and I checked on her. She was sitting up on the bed with her back against the headboard with the remote in her hand, flipping through channels on the TV. She was smiling so hard when she saw me at the doorway. I walked over to her and gave her a hug and a kiss on her cheek. Despite so many changes since she had arrived, my mother had been a champion going with the flow. I was thanking God she wasn't putting up a fight.

"Are you hungry?" I asked.

"I want some watermelon." She licked her lips.

"You can have that, but I got you some pancakes too."

"Okay. Can I call my big sister today? I miss her."

She was referring to Avery's mom. They had a great relationship. I loved my auntie too because she always advocated for me to live my life. My granny and Avery's mom didn't get a long because Granny Mable was too controlling.

"Yes. We will call her when we get to Avery's office. Do you want to be my assistant today?"

She clapped her hands and smiled. "Yes. I can help. You know I always listen."

"You sure do. That's why you are always my special helper."

My mother climbed out of the bed and slipped on her slippers, walking off into the bathroom. Even though she had a disability, she was fiercely independent and loved to do things on her own. While she was getting ready, I sent Avery a text.

Me: I'm on my way cousin.

Avery: Please hurry. I need you. Nevia is getting on my nerves with her slow ass. I don't know why I gave her ass a job. She barely passed kindergarten.

Me: Oh Lord. Don't stress. I am on my way with my mom.

Avery: Thank goodness. Can you bring me a latte?

Me: Already ahead of you. I will pick it up on the way.

Avery: You're the best. I don't know what I would do without ya.

I sent a smiley face emoji. An hour later, my mother and I left out the hotel. I handed the ticket to the valet driver who was sitting in his booth wearing a hot red jacket, profusely sweating. Within minutes, he pulled in front of us with my vehicle and handed me the key fob. I grimaced from how sweaty his palms were, but I quickly changed my face before he noticed. Then, I gave him a tip before I helped my mother inside the back seat. She slipped her headphones on and focused her attention on the ipad.

We made our way to the office and I pulled into my designated parking space. After opening the door for my mother, we walked into the lobby where Nevia was at the front desk talking on the phone like she wasn't at work. She was a nasty heathen and needed to find God. When she saw me, she rolled her eyes, but I just chuckled. Since I interrupted her trying to sleep with Sincere, she had an attitude. I placed my elbow on the counter, giving her a look.

“Can I help you, Virgin Mary?” She smacked her lips.

She wanted to throw insults at me, but I didn't care. That smirk on her face would disappear soon enough.

“I might be a virgin, but I know someone who likes it.”

“Who?”

“Sinful K. He loves that I am not a ran through heathen. Every woman doesn't have to give up the panties to get a man because I didn't.”

“Girl please. That man doesn't want you. He feels sorry for you. You dress like somebody's grandma.”

“Maybe you need to start dressing like me and you can get millionaire's attention too.”

“Nobody is checking for you, bitch. You’re boring and ain’t even cute.”

“Sinful K doesn’t think that because I got *his* attention.”

“You better go Mary before I beat your holy ass.”

“I want to see you try.”

I was sick of everyone trying to bully me. Nevia came from around the desk and got in my face, pointing her index finger at me. When she placed it on my forehead, I shoved her back, and her eyes buckled. She was surprised I stood up for myself. Suddenly, I saw Avery rush off the elevator with a scowl. She had cameras in her office and most likely saw us. Without warning, she yanked Nevia up by her hair and made her scream out in pain. Avery didn’t play games when it came to me. We were more like sisters than cousins and she always had my back.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



As I was laying on my bed staring at the ceiling, an image of Mary appeared in my mind. It had been thirty long days since I physically laid my eyes on her. I would see her through FaceTime, but it wasn't the same. I missed her *actual* presence and there was nothing like having her in my arms. Family weekend was our time to spend with each other. It was something the treatment facility had once a month, where patients' families would come visit and stay at a ranch styled mansion that was next to the treatment facility. We were gonna participate in some "family" team bonding exercises and talk about how she could support me with my sobriety outside of the program before I graduated. I felt honored that Lamb was in my corner. She always made sure I was straight. She had no idea what it meant to a nigga. I would forever be indebted to her.

There was a knock on my door. It was my therapist, Phillip. He had an unreadable facial expression. I stepped to the side and allowed him in my room. It was the size of a box, but it was good enough for me. He remained standing until I motioned my hand for him to take a seat on the chair next to my wooden desk. The palm of my hands slowly began to sweat with moisture as I leaned my back against the wall,

waiting for him to speak. It couldn't be any good news if he wanted to chat early in the morning.

“Why you here so early, doc?” I got straight to the point.

“The progress we have made over the last few weeks in your recovery have been amazing, but I still feel like there's much more work to be done in order for you to stay sober. I strongly recommend getting into an outpatient facility in Houston after you're done here. I know the perfect place to help keep you on a straight path and give you the tools for success. All I have to do is make one call and it's done.”

“That sounds good, doc. Can I get back to you after the family weekend is over? I kind of want to focus on that right now.”

“No pressure. Let me know what you decide, and we can go from there.”

“Preciate it.”

“I would love to do a therapy session with you and Mary, if possible?” He rubbed his chin, waiting for me to answer.

I nodded my head. “Yeah. I think that's cool, but let me talk to my Lamb first, to see if she is up to it.”

“Perfect.”

“Doc. I got a question for ya.”

“Sure. What's on your mind, son?”

“I always have these dreams from my past. Will they ever go away?”

“The dreams are from the trauma you have experienced in your life. Once you work more through the pain, then they will lessen and go away. Just keep working towards a better head space and keep doing your meditations. Oh yea, and don't forget to give yourself grace.”

“Appreciate the advice, doc.”

“No problem. My job is to help you become a better version of yourself and to give you the tools to live a

rewarding drug free life.” Dr. Phillip smiled and firmly shook my hand before leaving out my room.

He was a cool white dude, but I wasn't going to tell him that. Families were going to arrive soon, and I wanted to be waiting for Mary when she pulled up with them. I found some threads to wear from my duffel bag and got freshened up in the bathroom. I quickly stripped out my clothes, tossed them on the floor, and climbed into a hot shower. As I stood under the shower head, I closed my eyes to meditate for a moment. Then, I picked up my soap bar, wash cloth, and began to clean the dirt off my body. Once I was nice and fresh, I grabbed my towel and dried myself off before getting dressed. The last thing I did was spray on some Creed Aventus, cologne and headed out to wait for Mary.

Other patients were sitting around, lounging, and talking. As I walked past with my hands cuffed into my sweatpants, they smiled politely while I gave them head nods. I really stayed to myself. I didn't know anybody's names. There wasn't any point in getting to know them when we only had one thing in common, and that was getting high. I didn't need the company of more addicts. I was bad enough by my damn self.

I plopped down on a couch cushion and a blonde chick with a bunch of piercings came to sit next to me, smiling hard as fuck. I thought she may have been a fan. When she tried to speak to me, I turned my head and tuned her the fuck out. It was obvious I didn't want to be fucked with, so she got up and left. There was a magazine sitting on the table and I picked it up. I was flipping through the pages when one of the residence counselors let us know the visitors had arrived on the property. With a smirk on my face, I leaped up, tossing the magazine, and rushed towards the door, trying to be the first person outside. I waited for my little Lamb with my hands stuffed in my pockets as families got out the white shuttle van eager to see their loved ones.

The moment Mary stepped off wearing a pink dress that hugged her curves, my heart sped up. I ran over to give her a lifting hug. She squealed with laughter before she wrapped her

arms around my shoulders, pulling my body closer to hers as she smiled. When she cupped the right side of my cheek and kissed my lips, my eyes grew like two saucers. Honestly, I was shocked by her forwardness. We greedily kissed as I rubbed my fingers through her curls. The scent of her perfume made me want to suck on her neck, but I had to be calm. She wasn't the type of woman I could move too fast with. I had to be gentle. My dick was starting to grow inside my sweatpants, and I needed some personal space at that point. I pulled my face away from her before touching my lips as Mary smiled innocently with her hands cupped in front of her body.

“Damn, you look sexy. You're glowing and shit,” I complimented Mary.

I couldn't stop checking out her body in that pink dress.

“Aww, you're so sweet. You look great too, especially with those yucky grills out your mouth.”

“That's cold. You're always hating on my grills.” I chuckled.

“I'm just saying, you look great without them. Your teeth are so beautiful, so I don't know why you don't show them.”

“I paid big money for them, so everyone can see those bitches.”

“I see you still got that foul mouth. Rehab isn't helping much with that.”

“Yeah, but you like that shit. Now come here and give me another kiss. I missed you like crazy.”

“Are you asking or telling me heathen? Don't make me get my oil,” she joked around.

I placed my hand on Mary's lower back, pushing her closer to my chest as a playful smirk tugged on her lips. I would do anything to feel her lips again. They were so damn soft, and her breath smelled like fresh mint. Lamb tried to play hard to get like she wasn't willing to give me a kiss. She turned her head away slightly chuckling, so I leaned down to kiss the crook of her neck, making her blush.

“Don’t do me like that, Lamb. I need another kiss. Please,” I begged.

“Psssh. You’re gonna have to earn them, Sincere. Do you think you’re able to do that?” She hiked up her eyebrow.

“Yeah.” I nodded my head.

“Great. Now be patient.” She rubbed the side of my cheek. “I am so glad I am here. Everyone sends their love.”

Everyone who I considered important in my life showed me great support. They were always writing me letters and sending positive quotes to keep me lifted up. I was certainly appreciative. I needed all the support I could get while I was suited up in my armor to conquer my demons.

“Thanks for letting me know, Lamb. How did your mom handle you leaving to come visit me?”

“She loves Avery and Cupid, so it wasn’t a big deal. I just have to bring her some watermelon back or she is gonna have an attitude,” Mary chuckled.

I grabbed Mary’s hand and entwined it with mine before we walked into the facility. The supervisor, Krissy, was already there, telling everyone what we would be doing for that entire first day. Once she was done talking, we were allowed to go on our own to explore. Mary followed behind me to go to my room. She stepped in looking around the tiny space without any judgment. She then touched the pictures I had taped up to the wall of everyone who I loved. I even had one of Rose that Cupid was able to request for me to get. My baby girl had grown a lot since I last held her in my arms. I missed her a lot and couldn’t wait until we reunited with her again.

“I know it’s not the big mansion you’re used to, but this is nice. Do you sleep well here?” She placed her hand on my shoulder with her head cocked to the side, waiting for me to answer.

“Yeah, a little but I am still having nightmares.”

“About what? Do you want me to take out my prayer cloth and pray for you?”

“You always got that thing with ya, Lamb. I am alright though.”

“Let me know if you need me. What are the nightmares about, Sincere?”

“One is about my family being killed and that’s starting to happen less. The one I keep having is about.... I’m not ready to say that shit but just know it ain’t good.”

“I’m sorry you are going through that. Can I give you a kiss to make you feel a little better?” Mary offered.

“Yeah. I would appreciate that.”

I smiled big when Mary wrapped her arms around my shoulders and stood on her tippy toes to give me a long kiss. She knew all the ways to make a nigga happy and I couldn’t wait for her to become my wife. Little did she know, I wasn’t ending our union once we got married. She was gonna be mine *forever*. I loved her. No matter how many times I tried to convince myself differently, that same feeling in my heart came back. She was my one and only love. I wasn’t going to allow her to walk away that easily.

We left my room and joined the other families for our first activity. They took us to a space where we held our big group sessions. There were wooden tables setup with art supplies and canvases on top of them. I looked around at the stuff with a slight frown until Mary placed her hand on my back smiling. She seemed to be interested in what was about to take place. We found two stools next to the instructor who had a very soothing and calming voice.

“Hello everyone. My name is Tandi and I am gonna be leading your first team building activity. We are gonna be painting naked. So, let’s strip out of our clothes.”

Mary gasped and leaped up from her stool looking at Tandi like she was crazy. She didn’t play about living that sinner’s life.

“What type of rehab is this, ma’am? Y’all are supposed be helping them heal, not making them freaks. Lord Jesus fix it.

Let me get my prayer cloth. Sincere, let's go now," Mary tugged at my arm to get up.

"Calm down, Lamb. She was joking," I said.

Everyone laughed at Mary, including me. After we settled down from the joke, the instructor resumed talking about our activity. She wanted us to paint on the canvas the first time we ever experienced pain and how we thought it might've led to our life choices. My stomach began to feel sour and I felt like throwing up after standing up from the stool not being able to participate. I refused to tell my second biggest secret to a group of people I didn't even know. Apparently, I wasn't the only one with an issue regarding the activity because a lot of people got up and left. As I walked towards the door to follow them, Mary chased after me and gripped hold of my arm.

I snatched away, giving her a look to leave me the hell alone. Yet, she refused to allow to me go into self-hate and anger mode.

"Why don't you want to do this activity? It's gonna help you with your pain."

"I don't want to talk about my pain. So, I know damn well I don't want to paint about it."

"I think it will do some good to express yourself in an art form. Don't allow whatever it is to mess up your sobriety. The devil stays working and putting obstacles in your face. I believe in you, Sincere. You can do this for sure."

After Mary managed to talk me into doing the activity, I sat back down on the stool and grabbed the paint brush. I took a deep breath before expressing my pain on the canvas. I tried to be tough, but I couldn't help the tears welding up in my eyes. I didn't want to appear weak and quickly blinked them away. When I turned to look at Mary as she painted, tears rolled down her cheeks. I didn't like seeing her emotional and whispered in her ear, asking her if she was okay. She nodded her head and kept on painting without lifting her head up. I figured she was doing the opposite of the project and was talking about how God was good to help people with their pain. Once we were done, the instructor asked for two brave

people to come up and share their canvas paintings. Mostly everyone squirmed in their seats not wanting to speak. Mary stood up and approached the front. All eyes were on her, waiting to see her canvas. When she turned it around, it was a picture of a church and a little girl standing next to it with a Bible. Little did she know I had the same exact painting except mine was a boy, but I'm sure they had different meanings.

“Can you explain your picture?” the instructor asked.

“The first place I ever felt pain was in the church. But, my love for God helped me through it.”

We all clapped for Mary for being brave enough to share and then more people came up to the front to speak. I didn't feel comfortable and kept my canvas hidden. Eventually, we ran out of time, so I didn't have to share, which was good by me. Since the activity was tough for a lot of people, we were allowed to take a break and the counselors came to speak with anyone who needed support. Mary and I headed outside for some fresh air. On the property, they had planted a hope tree that was next to some benches. We took a seat, and I pulled my Lamb close to me as she stared off in thought.

“Are you okay, Lamb?” I said in a calm tone, kissing her forehead.

“Yes. I am fine.”

“You sure? I hope you ain't mad at me because I didn't want to share. At least, I did the painting.”

“That you did. I'm so proud of you.”

“Alright. If you're not mad at me then why are you so quiet? You're not acting like yourself and I am worried about ya.”

She sighed. “The painting exercise really got me in my feelings. I just need time to collect my thoughts and pray. That question about the first time we experienced pain was very hard for me.”

“What pain have you experienced in the church other than not having enough bibles?” I joked.

Mary didn't seem to be in the mood for jokes.

“A pain that my granny told me never happened after she beat me with her switch. A pain that I have to deal with every time that person comes into town to visit and I got to pretend it didn't happen. It's the same pain you feel, and you refuse to talk about it because you're ashamed. We all have secrets, Sincere, even a person who loves God as much as me.”

When Mary broke down sobbing, I pulled her close to my chest. All I wanted to do was protect her from the pain, but I couldn't do that until I came to grips with what happened to me. For years, I was abused by a prominent male member of the church and it made me turn my back on God because I felt he didn't love me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



MARY LAMB

It felt amazing exploring outdoor trails in the woods with Sincere. The lush green grasslands were beautiful. Birds were chirping, squirrels ran up the trees, and mosquitoes were trying to bite us. I loved a good nature walk. When we stopped for a water break, I pulled out my bottle from my backpack to quench my thirst. The coldness of the water was refreshing as it trickled down my throat and splashed my lungs. Sincere came behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist, and kissed the nape of my neck. His lips felt soft against my moisturized skin and I couldn't contain my smile. His presence always made me happy. I took out my cellphone to capture a selfie of us. As we posed, he pulled me closer to his side and smiled big, showing his perfect white teeth. He looked even more handsome without those ugly grills in his mouth.

“We are a nice-looking couple,” he was adamant.

“Couple? I didn't even know we were dating.”

“Lamb, you're tripping. You always been my lady. That shit gonna be *official* when I put that ring on your finger.”

I curiously hiked up my eyebrow. “What do you mean? You are not marrying me just to get back Rose?”

“Naw, I’m really going to make you *my wife* because I love you. I want to spend the rest of my life getting to know you and catering to your everyday needs. I may not be the ideal husband you’ve been looking for, but I will do everything in my power to be a good man to you. All I am asking is for an opportunity to secure your heart. You are too precious and special to let get away.”

“Are you able to handle that, Sincere? My heart is delicate and needs a lot of love. I can’t give it to you if you’re not gonna protect it.”

“You got my word, baby. I will do everything in my power to keep you in my life. You don’t have to worry about me trying to persuade you away from God either,” I assured her.

“I might love you, but I surely won’t let anyone take me away from Christ. He is the first man in my life.”

Then, it hit me. I realized what he had said about how he loved me. “What? You love me?”

“Yes, I love you. It’s alright if you don’t feel the same way.”

“Sincere. I love you too. I really do.” She palmed my face with both of her hands. “Never in my life, have I felt so alive. You taught me how to stand up for myself and take risks. You bring me joy that I have been looking for.”

“You showed me how to love life and not be ashamed of my past... that it is alright to move forward and start a new chapter. We all got a story and I want you to be a part of mine, forever.”

Tears trickled down my face. At that moment, he was actually living up to his name. He was very Sincere in the way he confessed his love for me. He wiped my tears away with his thumbs, placed his hand on the arch of my back, and pulled me close to his chest before slipping his tongue into the slit of my mouth. The kiss we had was so passionate and long. I loved every moment of it. Once we separated our lips, he grabbed hold of my hand and we continued to walk the trail in the woods, enjoying the sights of God’s nature. Suddenly, I

heard movement in the bushes and stopped dead in my tracks. Sincere became alert, then he started laughing because of how I clung to his arm looking around with my eyes widened. However, I didn't find anything funny. *What if it was a large brown bear with sharp fangs that came out the bushes roaring?* Panic clawed at my throat and sweat emerged on my forehead, just thinking about it.

"Lamb, stay calm," Sincere was trying to keep me from panicking.

"I heard a noise in the bushes. We need to slow down. I think it's an animal."

"It's probably a little rabbit or something."

"You sure? I don't got time to be getting eaten."

"The only thing that is gonna eat you... is *me* ." Sincere lustfully licked his lips.

"You're nasty." I smacked his arms.

"We got to get back to the facility. They only gave us two hours to hang out. Mr. Phillip wants to meet with us before the big dinner."

"I can't believe today is my last day. I am gonna miss you." I pouted.

"Don't even trip. I will be back home before you know it."

I was sad about leaving Sincere, but I felt grateful that he was in rehab getting help. I could already see the change in his personality. He seemed happier. Spiritually, it looked like he had a long way to go. His relationship with God was affected by traumatic experiences from his childhood. Deep down in my heart, I knew he was gonna find his way back to Christ. In the meantime, my plan was to keep praying for his spiritual wellbeing.

"You're right, baby. I can't wait." I smiled.

I stood on my tippy toes, wrapped my arms around Sincere's shoulders, and pulled his head down for a kiss. I just couldn't get enough. His tongue danced around mine while he gripped hold of my booty. Suddenly, he stopped and quickly

snatched me by my arm. A skunk came out the bushes with its tail up, and we started running. Sweat emerged on my forehead as we tried our best to outrun the stinky animal, but it was right on our backs. If things couldn't get any worse, we tripped over a log and fell on our stomachs.

"It's okay, Sincere. Go without me. I will just get my prayer cloth."

"What? Stop tripping. Let's go, Lamb!"

Sincere lifted me up from the dirt and took off running down the trail holding me against his chest, breathing rapidly. Thank God we were able to escape without being sprayed. Once we were away from the trails and close to the facility, Sincere gently put me down and dropped to his knees to catch his breath. Fearing that he was dehydrated, I quickly went inside my bag and gave him some water to drink. He drank that water like he just finished running a marathon. I helped him back up to his feet before wrapping his arms around my shoulder as we entered the facility. He was so exhausted, the only thing he wanted to do was relax in his bedroom. He fell backwards on his bed and motioned me to come to him with his index finger. Kicking my shoes off, I got on the bed and laid my head on his chest as he gently rubbed his fingers through my hair.

"Honey, you are my real-life hero. Thank you for saving me."

"I couldn't let that skunk spray you. I can't believe you was talking about your prayer cloth."

"I got to stay prayed up even when it looks like the end."

We rested for two hours until it was time for us to meet with Dr. Phillip for a joint counseling session. At first, I was hesitant about doing it, but I agreed because I really wanted to help Sincere with his journey to sobriety. I sat down on a chair next to my man and grabbed his hand. Then, Mr. Philip took a seat in front of us. I cleared my throat, feeling nervous. Sincere placed his hand on my shaking leg. I turned to look at him with a smile and he removed a piece of my fallen hair out my face.

“Mary, I want to thank you for joining us. Sincere speaks highly of you. You’re very important in his life,” Mr. Phillip said calmly.

“He means a lot to me and I want to support him in his recovery.” I squeezed Sincere’s hand.

“Great. Before you can do that, we have to understand you and how strong of a person you are, because dealing with a recovering addict isn’t an easy job. What if Sincere wants to use again? What are you going to do?” Mr. Phillip asked.

“I’m going to pray.” I smiled.

“What if praying doesn’t work for me? You know I got some issues, Lamb,” Sincere chimed in the conversation.

“I know you need support but all I know how to do is pray. Is that wrong? How do I help?” I looked Sincere in his eyes as he fiddled with his locks.

“Naw, but I need you to be hard on me. You don’t accept my lies and you have to create boundaries with me,” Sincere was blunt.

“Exactly,” Mr. Phillip nodded.

“I don’t want to hurt your feelings,” I was skeptical.

“It’s not about hurting his feelings. It’s about holding him accountable. You are going to be around him the most and will most likely be the first person to notice if he starts using again, but you can be there to help him stay on the road to sobriety.”

“I wanted to get high after I told you about what happened to my family, but I pushed through it,” Sincere admitted. “I don’t care if you have to kick me out the house. Do it and take my baby girl.”

I was so stressed out.

“Mary, I can tell from your face that you are conflicted. Why is it so hard for you to set boundaries and speak up? When do you feel this started for you? Who made you feel that your voice wasn’t important?” Mr. Phillip massaged his chin and probed.

A batch of tears immediately drenched my face. Through my sobs, I told him how my Grandma Mable was always making me feel insignificant for wanting to speak up if I said anything other than what she expected. She had a way of guilt tripping me. While I was speaking and expressing my feelings, Mr. Phillip was jotting notes on his pad with a neutral facial expression. I didn't know what he was thinking, but I think I had an idea of what. Maybe, he felt that I was too old to not stand up for myself as an adult. If so, what he didn't know was that I was getting a backbone standing up to people like Nevvia. But when it came to Grandma Mable, I was still fearful to speak up. She was still upset about me not coming home and treated me poorly even though I did everything else she asked of me without giving any push back.

"I think you need to call granny right now and tell her how she makes you feel," Dr. Phillip was making me a little uncomfortable.

I clutched hold of my chest and rapidly shook my head. "I can't, doctor. She is old and I don't want to mess with her health, stressing her out with my feelings."

"You have a right to speak up for yourself, Lamb. I believe you can do it," Sincere encouraged me.

"You think so, honey?" I sought his approval.

"Yeah. Why not?" Sincere smiled.

I took out my cellphone and called Grandma Mable. Instantly, I was sent straight to voicemail, so I didn't even bother to call back a second time. Nonetheless, Dr. Phillip kept on encouraging me to speak up. I sighed heavily and called her again. She finally picked up, but she had an attitude. I could hear it all in her voice. Then, I put her on speaker.

"Mary, the only reason you should be calling is if you're coming home. I'm assuming that is what this call is about, right?" Grandma Mable was being controlling.

I looked at Dr. Phillip and Sincere. They were looking at me like they wanted me to speak up and stand up to her. I took a hard swallow and started speaking my truth. I could no

longer allow Grandma Mable to keep putting my back against the corner.

“Why are you acting like me wanting to live my life is disrespectful? I have done everything you’ve asked and more, but you still don’t respect me. I love you granny, but that’s not right.” My voice cracked.

“You done lost your mind and forgot your common sense. Who do you think you’re talking to like that? If you were here, I would wash your mouth out with soap and slap your face,” she was getting hostile.

“No. YOU have lost YOUR damn mind. I’m sick of you treating me like a child,” I raised my voice at her.

“Well, if you stop acting like one, you fool. I don’t know what got into you, but you have been acting like a heathen lately. The world got you straying away from God!”

I slammed my eyes shut and took a deep breath. Grandma Mable started calling me *ungrateful* among other names until I lost my temper. That’s when I leaped up from my chair, pulled the phone away from my mouth, and got so nasty.

“I’M SO SICK OF YOUR JUDGMENTAL HYPOCRITICAL ASS! You think you’re better than everyone, but YOUR past IS filthy. Everyone knows you were a stripper and used to sell your ass. Doing so, you were NEVER with your kids! The entire family talks about how judgmental you are. Yet, you’ve had more dicks than a sex shop. You were a fresh heathen like you’re always telling me. And you talk about the world is making me stray away from God, aren’t we supposed to bring sinners to repentance like Jesus did?! Aren’t we supposed to spread the gospel, granny?! Or have you gotten so caught up in your own self-righteousness that you’ve blinded yourself to see that?!”

It was the first time I ever used profanity against anyone. I couldn’t believe it was against my elder. Honestly, I felt bad for using foul language, but I needed granny to know what I was feeling. As a woman, she had no respect for me, so I had to let her know that it was time to show me some. She had crossed the line too many times.

I was shaking after talking to her like that.

“After everything I’ve done for you, Mary, this is the way you talk to your poor granny ?” Her voice was crushed.

“ Don’t start that crying shit. I don’t have time for it!” I yelled.

I ended the call and rushed out the office in tears. Sincere followed behind me and gently grabbed my arm when he caught up to me. I collapsed into his chest, sobbing. The last thing I wanted to do was tell my granny off, but I was sick and tired of her judgmental ways. It was my time to live for me and stand up for myself without feeling guilty. Grandma Mable was the biggest hypocrite of all of us!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



I stepped outside with my duffel bag on my shoulder and newfound strength to be a better man. For once in my life, I had something to be proud of other than my music. I completed rehab and received my sobriety chip. It felt good to be clean and I wanted to stay on the right track. After talking with Dr. Phillip, I enrolled into the outpatient program in Houston that he recommended. It's not like temptation had a bedtime, I was gonna need a lot of support until I could walk the path of sobriety on my own. My life was important. I wanted to live the dream that my three beautiful sisters never got a chance to experience, and I had to be the great parent that my mother was to me, to love unconditionally. As long as I kept those things in perspective, I could battle my demons head on.

Everyone except Wolf was waiting outside the treatment facility to show their love and support. I was emotionally overwhelmed, and tears welled up in my eyes before I allowed them to roll down my face. No matter how many times I disappointed them with my antics and drug use, they didn't abandon me. Everyone was giving me hugs and when Mary came up to me, she had the biggest smile on her face. I admired her beauty from head to toe. Then, I pulled her close to my body, cupped the side of her face, and kissed her lips. As

I was tonguing her down, I firmly gripped hold of her ass and squeezed.

Surprisingly, she didn't stop me. I pinned her on the Lexus Sprinter shuttle, and she started moaning with her lips stuck to mine. My dick couldn't help but to start growing and rubbed against her stomach. From the way her eyes buckled, she felt how big that mothafucka was. I wanted her to feel the thickness but even more, inside her pussy. Of course, that wasn't going to happen until she officially became my wife.

Mary had finally pulled her lips away. "Sincere, we got to slow down. Everyone is looking at us." She fanned her face with her hand.

Sure enough, I looked around. Big Mama, Mr. Lee, Barbie, Nardo, Rhythm, Cameron, Faye, Savage, Avery, Cupid, Mr. Moore, and Phoebe were all grinning. I shook my head chuckling. They were nosy as hell, but I loved my family.

"What's wrong, Lamb? You don't want them to know you got a little heathen in ya?" I joked as Mary playfully smacked my arm.

"It only comes out when you're around. Don't make me get my oil." She smirked.

"You know there is some sex oil we can use too, baby." I winked.

She clutched her chest. "Really? I mean... stop being a heathen. You are always trying to get me out of character."

"That inner freak waiting to be unleashed, grrrr." I growled.

"Psssh. You're not getting any loving from me until you put a ring on my finger. You want my V? You better marry me." She pursed her lips.

"Aye Lamb. You funny as hell, but I got you though." I gently rubbed her cheek and kissed her once more.

"Nigga! Kiss your Lamb later. We hungry," Nardo blurted out while touching his stomach.

“Baby, why you got to be so loud? I told you about this.” Rhythm rolled her eyes.

“What I do, Cornfed?” Nardo looked confused.

“Bubby, don’t start that ghetto shit. You need to act like I raised you right,” Big Mama scowled.

“I’m a hood nigga all day. Money didn’t change me,” Nardo rapped.

“I’m a hood nigga too,” Cameron copied his brother -in-law.

“Don’t you say that,” Rhythm tried to correct her brother.

“Leave me alone, sister. I’m a grown ass man with a wife. You don’t tell me how to speak.”

My man Cameron had everyone laughing their asses off. He wasn’t taking anymore shit from anyone down syndrome or not. As we were all getting ready to climb in the Sprinter for a night out to celebrate, we heard a horn beep. A long white stretch limo with the letters, “WK” inscribed on the side, pulled up in front of us. I thought that nigga Wolf would never wanna see me again after I had put hands on him like a nigga off the street. When he opened the door and stepped out in a black Versace sweatsuit, I was shocked. That nigga was always wearing an executive suit. We mean-mugged each other for a few seconds. And just as easy, those mean-mugs turned to smiles. Wolf came up to me with opened arms and hugged me like I was his son. He cupped the back of my head and whispered something in my ear.

“I’m proud of you, son. You are really doing it. Keep at it, okay.” His voice ruptured.

“Yeah. I appreciate you coming, Wolf. I am sorry for how things went down between us the last time we were in each other’s faces. That was fucked up on my part.”

“No need to bring up the past. Let’s build on the future. I believe it’s time to do this music stuff without me. Our relationship is more like father and son. I think it’s best we stop the business before it ruins our personal one. You’re gifted, Sin. You’re one of the best entertainers and lyricists of

this generation. I want you to win in music and in life. My gift to you is freedom from your contract. Even though you quit, I could still tie you up, but I won't do that."

"You fired me first, remember?" I chuckled.

"I never had any plans to let you go, but I feel it's for the best. Step into your manhood and be about your business. Don't put this industry before your daughter. I did that for years and almost lost my family. I don't want you to do that with yours."

"I appreciate your wisdom, Wolf."

It was a bit disheartening to know that I wasn't going to be part of Wolf's label anymore. From the time I was seventeen years old, that studio was my safe haven. It was something special I belonged to; my sanctuary of peace and the equipment was like the congregation that I spoke to on a regular basis. We created history and made lots of money. However, I gained the father figure that I was always searching for in the process. He invested in my future, even when it looked like I wasn't worth it. He never turned his back on me, even when I turned on him. For as long as I was breathing, my respect for Wolf was never going to fade. We were always going to be family. He turned my dream to be an artist into a reality. Little did he know, he gave me back the voice that I once lost as a young boy.

All of us left from the rehab facility and went to Wolf's mansion. When we pulled up to the driveway, there was a huge banner hanging up over the top of the porch pillars that said, 'Congratulations.' Seeing that, had tears rolling down my face. Mary saw me and wiped them away with her palm and grabbed hold of my hand to climb out of the Sprinter. We made our way inside and went to the backyard where the smell of BBQ immediately tickled my nostrils. I licked my lips seeing the huge spread of food sitting on the table as wait staff walked around with trays full of appetizers. I found a comfortable spot next to the pool and Mary sat between my legs. I kissed the back of her neck, making her giggle.

“Are you okay? I know this can be a lot, but we wanted to celebrate your accomplishments.”

“Naw, I’m straight. This is great. Thank you guys for doing this.”

“I would love to take the credit, but Mr. Wolf contacted me and wanted to do something special. He really loves you.”

“Yeah, he does. I just don’t know what I am gonna do since I am not on his label anymore.” I sighed.

“What you’re not going to do is sit here and sulk, honey. You don’t need a label. Sincere, you’re talented. You can do your music independently. I am sure your fans will support you one hundred percent. You got to believe in yourself or your greatness will not happen.”

“Yeah, but I don’t have any producers. I burned too many bridges when I was fuckin’ up. Nobody is gonna want to work with me without Wolf’s approval.”

“Give them a reason to want to work with you. If they don’t, so what. It’s gonna be their loss. All the awards and accolades you received wasn’t just because of Mr. Wolf. You put in some work too.”

“I know, Lamb, but I haven’t released music in two years. It’s messing with my head. I don’t know if I still got what it takes to be the best.”

“What do you need from me? How can I help you with your music?”

Mary’s love meant the world to me. She wasn’t trying to just support me in my personal life but also in my career.

“Can you find me a producer? That’s what I need before I can make an album.”

“Sure can. Give me a second.”

I frowned my face confused as Mary stood up. She walked over to Nardo while he was crushing some BBQ ribs with sauce all over his mouth. I saw them talk for a couple minutes, then Nardo got up from his seat, wiped his mouth and hands, and walked over to me.

“What’s good, bro? Your Lamb said you need a producer for your next album. Why the fuck you didn’t think about me? You know how long I wanted to get you in the studio?”

“Yeah, but I figured you was busy. You’re one of the top hittaz now in the industry. I know Wolf doesn’t like his producers working with other artists if they are working on one of his. I heard you are producing that nigga Drez.”

“Fuck that. You’re family. I’m gonna work on your album too,” Nardo was adamant.

“What about, Wolf?”

“That nigga don’t own me. I’m gonna take care of the fam.”

“Alright bet. I’ll get with my lawyer to draw something up that works for both of us.”

From the corner of my eye, I saw Wolf staring at us as he smoked a cigar. He handed his cup to a waiter who was walking by and made his way over to us. We were in a good place personally, but business wise, I wasn’t too sure. I didn’t want to cause any friction between him and Nardo. They already had a complicated relationship due to the fact he married his only daughter while drunk in Vegas.

I knew what mode Wolf was in when he blew cigar smoke in our faces. “What’s going on, fellas?”

“Nothing,” Nardo shrugged his shoulders.

“Cut the bullshit. This looks like a business meeting in a very casual setting.”

“I need a producer and Nardo was saying he could do it,” I was honest.

Wolf took another puff of his cigar and blew more smoke in our faces. “You already know the deal, Sin, not when he is producing my artists. They come first and side deals come last. He is working on Drez’s album. I can’t be showing favoritism and letting him do yours, especially when you are no longer on the team. People already say I show you special treatment.”

“Yeah, you right. I respect that,” I agreed.

“C’mon Wolf, have a heart with your bald-headed ass,” Nardo said rudely.

“What you say, little nigga? I’m your boss. Have some respect.” He pointed his finger in Nardo’s face.

“I’m not talking to my boss. I’m talking to my father-in-law. You’re wrong, Wolf. I always wanted to work with Sin.”

“This isn’t good for business. I am all about my paper,” Wolf mugged us down.

I raked my hand down my face, feeling frustrated. Wolf was all about business and wasn’t going to let anybody mess with his. As he got ready to walk away, he turned to look at us with an unreadable expression.

“It ain’t never stop you two knuckle heads before, from listening to me. I can’t be everywhere when y’all record this album. Shit, I am a busy man. When the album drops, I won’t be able to stop it. But I am gonna have to go hard at my sneaky ass producer for breaking his contract while also working with my artists, but he ain’t gonna get in too much trouble. He is gonna have to meet with board members, but they won’t do shit because I got the final say who stays on my team. For my producer to risk his career for another artist he believes in, means that I should too. Go ahead and do that shit, Sin. You might not be on the team anymore, but I want you to win. This is your come back, so make it count,” Wolf walked off, smoking his cigar.

Wolf was basically telling me in his own way I had his blessing. He had no idea what that meant to me. We stayed at the party celebrating until it got dark. As we pulled up to the house, Mary was fast asleep on my chest and all I could think about was how bad I wanted her to be my wife. She was one of the reasons why I didn’t succumb to my addiction. I gently shook her body and she finally opened her eyes. A huge smirk tugged at her lips after seeing me staring at her.

“Damn, you’re so beautiful, Lamb.” I kissed her forehead.

“Thank you, baby. Are we home yet?”

“Yes. Let’s go inside. I want to lay in the bed with you all night.”

“I’m sorry, Sincere. We can’t do that unless we are married.”

“Well, let’s get married. Right now, we can do it.”

“What about the big wedding?”

“I don’t care about that. All I care about is marrying you.”

“That poor woman won’t get paid. She did so much planning.”

“Don’t worry, baby. I will still pay her. We can do something intimate. If that’s okay with you, baby.”

“A big wedding doesn’t matter to me either. I was only going along with it because you wanted it. All I need is my preacher to officiate the wedding and our closest people. We can do it at the house.”

“How about tonight?”

“Really? Let me see if I can get my preacher. It’s last minute but he might make an exception since he thinks so highly of me.”

I needed the preacher to agree to officiate the wedding because Mary was gonna have a hard time otherwise. She pulled out her phone and made the call. Once she got off, she leaped into my arms screaming with excitement. I quickly made a call to my jeweler, Santos, to bring the custom ring over to the crib. While I was in recovery, I had reached out to him to create something perfect for my Lamb. After hanging up, I called all the people we loved and told them to get over to the house because Lamb and I were getting hitched. Then, I went to find something to wear in my closet. Once I was dressed, I went to my dresser and pulled out a picture of my family. It was the only one I had with my mother and three sisters. A batch of tears rolled down my cheeks, but I wiped them away. It saddened me that they weren’t able to watch me get married, but I knew they were in my heart. I walked downstairs and Mary was wearing a wedding dress. My eyes

popped open seeing how beautiful she was. I twirled her, taking in every angle. She was smiling so proudly.

“I didn’t know you had a wedding dress.”

“Yeah, I picked it out while you were away. Do you like it?” She posed.

“Hell yeah. You are looking sexy, baby.”

“Thank you. I can’t wait to be Mrs. Lamb-Kennedy.”

An hour later, Mary and I stood up in front of everyone we considered important to take our vows. We had no idea what our union would bring. Yet, we vowed to love, protect, honor, and obey each other through sickness and health.

“This is so beautiful. At least one of my babies let me see them get married unlike some people.” Big Mama said loudly as she wiped her tears.

“All hell. You ain’t gonna let me live it down getting married to Rhythm without you,” Nardo fussed.

“Neither will I, little nigga,” Wolf said.

“Y’all better cut this out at my cousin’s wedding. She is finally getting a man,” Avery said.

“Who you talkin’ to Avein? Don’t let me put you across my knee,” Big Mama threatened.

Our support system was crazy as hell, but I loved them a lot. As I lifted up Mary’s veil to kiss her, tears glided down both of our cheeks. I couldn’t believe I found the woman who I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. She was truly my angel from above.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



MARY LAMB

I married the love of my life. We had opposite personalities but connected like a puzzle. There were no words to describe how happy I felt. I found my soulmate in Sincere and couldn't wait to embark on our journey. We went to Hawaii for our honeymoon and stayed at a luxury resort that was surrounded by crystal blue waters. The air quality was so pure, I felt like I was born again. I couldn't think of a better place to celebrate.

I was standing on the balcony of our suite listening to the waves crashing and washing up on the shore. Sincere crept behind me slowly kissing the crook of my neck. The softness of his lips had my lower core throbbing. I wanted him. Better yet, I *needed* him to explore my body. It was going on day two and my husband still hadn't made love to me. Honestly, that made me a little self-conscious. *Was he not attracted to me physically?* So many thoughts were swarming around in my head.

"How are you liking Hawaii, Lamb? It's so peaceful out here."

"It's beautiful," I sighed.

"You alright, baby?" he softly asked, after kissing my shoulder blade.

“Yes. I’m just thinking.”

“About what?”

“Why haven’t you touched me yet? Is it because you’re not attracted to me?”

“Lamb, you got my dick hard just looking at ya. But I didn’t want to rush you. Losing your virginity is a big deal and I was waiting for you to give me the word or at least, take off the panties to give me a hint,” he chuckled.

“You’re my husband. Of course, I want you to have me.”

When Sincere turned me around to face him, I could see the lust building up in his eyes. Without warning, he dropped to his knees and pulled my lace panties to the side before stroking my clit with his thumb, then began licking it with his long tongue. My body jolted as I slammed my eyes shut from the unfamiliar sensation of lust. He slightly chuckled from my reaction and pulled my panties completely down my legs. After I quickly stepped out of them, he started eating between my legs as I leaned against the balcony railing. The way he was gliding his tongue down my clit had me gripping hold of his locks. Suddenly, my stomach muscles clenched, and a blaze of heat ripped through my body. I came hard with my juices racing down my inner thighs. Never in my life had I experienced anything so liberating. He didn’t even penetrate me, and I was already on a cloud. My legs were so wobbly from my first orgasm that I could barely stand and Sincere had to hold me closely to his strong chest.

“You like that, baby?” he softly caressed my right cheek.

“Ummmmhummm,” I moaned and barely could keep my eyes open.

“Fuck, Lamb! You’re so wet. I can’t wait to make your pussy squirt again. Do you want me to do that, baby?”

“Please, do,” I begged.

“Are you gonna open your legs for me and put that pussy on my face?” he spoke dirty.

“Yes.” I nodded.

I could feel my breathing getting heavier while waiting for Sincere to take another taste of my sweet nectar. He teasingly looked at me with a smirk tugging at his lips, scooped me into his arms bridal style, and took me back into our room, away from the balcony. Slowly, he laid me across the king-sized bed and removed my silk gown, tossing it to the floor. Once I was fully naked, he simply just stared at me. He looked at me like I was art. Yet, I still felt a little self-conscious because it was the first time that I showed my body to any man, so I tried to shield my body with a blanket.

He snatched it off. “Don’t do that, Mary. I want to see every part of you. You look like a masterpiece, baby. Sexy, elegant, vibrant. You got my dick striving to get lost up in you like an island... straight pile driving. Now open up those legs and let a nigga taste you.”

I slowly spread my legs apart to give him a better view of my lower core and he glided his tongue against my clit, causing my back to arch and my toes crack. The louder I moaned, the nastier he got. He pulled my clit into his mouth, sucking it. Once again, I came hard with my legs shaking in the air. The wetness from my juices drenched the cover underneath me. As I was sprawled out with my chest slowly rising up and down, Sincere dipped his tongue into my mouth for a kiss. His lips were still covered in my juices, so I got to taste my sweetness. When he stripped out of his clothes and I saw that big elephant trunk hitting his thigh, I swallowed hard. I didn’t know how I was gonna get that huge thing inside my virgin walls.

He climbed on top of my body and covered his mouth with mine as he slowly eased inside my wetness. The girth of his shaft had my face squinting in discomfort. He managed to get the tip in, but I felt so much pain. Tears slowly rolled down the side of my face and he kissed them away.

“Do you want me to stop?” he asked, caringly.

“No, baby. Just go slow.”

“I got you, baby,” he nibbled on my ear.

There was no way I wanted him to stop. I did my best to relax as he continued to slide inside me, taking ownership of my virginity. The deeper he went, more tears flowed down my cheeks. Eventually, the pain turned into pleasure as he pumped and thrust with a steady rhythm. As he trailed my neck with kisses, I hooked my leg over his pelvis, and he sped up his strokes. My pussy muscles clenched around his shaft and his eyes shut. I expressed my appreciation for how good his dick felt by decorating his back with scratches.

“Fuck, Lamb! You’re so damn tight. I love being deep inside your pussy,” he murmured.

“Awwwwwwwww baby,” I moaned.

Suddenly, my body and legs uncontrollably jerked as juices squirted on his shaft. Next, his body started shaking before collapsing on top of me with a smile. We were both in a state of euphoria, cuddling our naked bodies together after making love.

After giving me a long kiss, he climbed out the bed, leaving me with a throbbing still between my legs. With a smile on my face, I scanned every inch of his naked body as he strolled towards the bathroom with his back muscles flexing. He was so fine and all mine. When he came back to lift me up in his arms, his dick was still hard like he was ready for another round.

“Where are we going, baby?” I asked softly.

“I am gonna clean you up. Relax and let daddy take care of you. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“You’re my rib, Lamb.

“And you’re my heart,” I beamed.

The bathroom tub was filled to the top with bubbles and Sincere gently placed my naked body into the warm water before climbing in with me. As I laid back comfortably, he thoroughly washed me up. I loved the way he pampered me like a queen. Once I was nice and clean, he lifted me up and took me back to lay on the bed. He then dried my body off

with a towel before grabbing the coco butter. His firm hands felt so great rubbing against my skin. After he made sure I was smooth, he laid on the side of me with his nose nuzzled under my neck. I couldn't believe I had lost my virginity to the love of my life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



The biggest reward I ever received in life was finding Mary. She was looking beautiful relaxing by the pool under the sunrays of Hawaii while sipping coconut water from a real coconut. Of course, no alcohol was in it, not even lime. She was having a good ass time being carefree. I stood up from a lounge chair with a smirk and kissed her lips before taking a dive into the pool. The water felt good enough to work out my muscles. When I saw my Lamb staring at me with a lopsided smile, I waved for her to jump in the pool with me. She was quick to shake her head no, at first, but after I pleaded a couple times, she slipped out of her black cover up that looked like a dress and revealed that one-piece Dior swimsuit she had on.

My dick got hard as a mothafucka in my Burberry trunks. My eyes roamed her body, thinking about the different ways I wanted to make love to her again. Mary slowly walked down the steps to get into the water, and I loudly whistled. Some people who were lounging by the pool curiously turned in our direction while sipping on their drinks, then Lamb became embarrassed because too much attention was on us. I chuckled at her reaction and pulled her close to my bare chest, giving her a kiss. She then tightly wrapped her arms around my shoulders as I held her body up in the water.

“People are looking at us. Stop making all that noise,” she whispered in my ear.

“I don’t give a shit! Fuck them! You look good in your bathing suit and I want you to know, Lamb.”

“Aww, you’re so sweet. I look okay but not like the models in your videos.”

I placed my index finger up to Mary’s mouth to stop her from talking. She was being insecure. I don’t know why she bothered comparing herself to those industry hoes. They weren’t on Mary’s level. My heart and my dick belonged to her already. I may have fucked a few tricks, but I never tried to get to know them personally. All I wanted from them bitches was for them to suck my dick like a vacuum cleaner and gag on my balls.

“Don’t you do that, Lamb. You are fine as wine. No other woman can compare. I love you and only have eyes for you. Do you understand?”

“I guess. But I don’t understand why you chose me. With your status, you could’ve had any woman in the world.”

“Naw. I could’ve *fucked* any woman, but I couldn’t *love* just any woman. The fact that you gave me your time is an honor. We didn’t start off in a good place, but you were always in my corner and didn’t give into my persona that had everyone fooled. You took a chance on me without knowing if I was gonna fuck it up. I love you for that. What I love most about you is, you aren’t trying to fix me. You are praying for me and giving me the support and love for me to want to heal myself. You are the epitome of a strong, powerful, black and sexy woman.”

Tears rolled down Mary’s cheeks and I kissed them away. I didn’t want to spend our time talking about anybody but us. We explored the pool and stayed closely together as we swam. When a group of rowdy teenagers came down to get into the water, we decided to get out, especially when they started splashing water all out of control and being loud as hell. While I was sitting on the lounge chair drying my body off with my towel, a teenager who had to be about six feet tall

approached me. He was tightly holding onto two little girls' hands while another little boy who looked like he was four years old stood next to them holding a beach ball.

“Sinful K, I hate to bother you when you're with your beautiful lady, but I wanted to know if I can get a picture? You're one of my favorite artists. I can't wait for you to drop another album,” he was hyped.

“You waiting for my album, huh? What's your name?”

“My name is Elijah Augustin-McBride. These are my siblings: Nasir, Eden, and Noa.”

“What's your favorite song?”

“Everything you drop is a classic, but, *A Real Nigga* and *Life Ain't Perfect For A G* is my top two. My favorite one out of all of them is, *Don't Want To Be A Sinner*. That joint helped me during a dark time in my life. Your lyrics made me realize I am supposed to be here.”

“Those songs weren't even singles. Thanks for being a loyal fan.” I smirked and was humbled.

Hearing that my music touched little man had me hyped about going back into the studio to record my double album. I knew my words were powerful but to see the impact on the youth really was an eye opener for me as an artist.

“Heck yeah. Me and my step-dad, Easton, love your music.”

“Respect. Let's take a picture man.”

“Do you mind if I go get my pops? He is right over there,” he pointed. “It's his birthday.”

“Go head. I'll stand right here for a true fan,” I said politely, and Mary smiled at me as she put back on her cover up.

Elijah quickly walked off, still holding his two little sisters' hands as his baby brother rushed behind him to get their pops. Two minutes later, a dude with a bunch of tattoos came back with them and approached me, smiling hard as fuck. I gave him a dap after he introduced himself before

Elijah pulled out his cellphone. Mary gladly took some pictures for us. I even saw little Elijah staring at my woman licking his lips. I chuckled when his stepdad playfully nudged him on the arm to stop him from looking at my lady. Little man even knew my Lamb was a prize. I dapped them up and they strolled off together as a family towards a woman who I assumed was their mother. Then, I grabbed Mary's hand and we left the pool area. As we walked around the resort holding hands, the sun was beating down on us.

"Did you have fun chilling at the pool?" I probed.

"I really did, baby. I am gonna try to take some swim lessons so I can make sure I can take my little Rose to the pool. I miss her so much."

"I do too, but we still gotta bring her home."

"We are because God is gonna help us through the storm."

"Yeah." I nodded. "Seeing that little dude Elijah with his siblings made me think of mine. I wonder how their lives would've turned out. Damn."

"How does this make you feel? Do you feel like masking the pain?"

"Lamb, you don't have to worry. I don't want to get high. I just miss them and my mama."

"How about you take flowers to their graves when you think you're emotionally able to handle it? I think that would be a great idea," Mary suggested.

"They don't even have headstones." I raked my face.

"Really? Why?"

"Nobody didn't have any money to get them any. By the time I was making millions, I was too messed up to do it."

She squeezed my hand for support. "I will help you get them some nice ones when you are ready. It's okay to be sad. But it's not okay to get high to deal with your pain."

"You're right. When we get home, I am going to do my first outpatient treatment meeting."

“I am proud of you.”

“Shit, I am proud of myself, Lamb.”

Once we got back to our suite, we stripped out our clothes before climbing in the shower. Mary stepped in first, and I was right behind her, closing the sliding door with my dick already hard. I watched her under the shower head, rubbing her fingers through her thick hair. She stared at me and then I pulled her by the waist for a long kiss. When she cupped the side of my face, I deepened our kiss before I lifted her up to slide her on my big dick. Her pretty face scrunched up in discomfort but eventually her eyes rolled from pleasure. Since she wasn't used to the dick, I didn't want to go too hard and slowly thrust as I pinned her against the wall. She loved it. Her pussy walls were tight.

“Goooooo deeper, baby,” she moaned.

“Are you ready to feel this mothafucka in your stomach?” I spoke dirty.

“Yesssss!” she shouted.

Her giving me permission to have control unleashed my inner freak. I slipped her right breast into my mouth and sped up my strokes. They were long and deep. She dug her fingernails roughly into my shoulders, making me grunt barbarically. I loved that wild shit. She came several times, drenching my dick with her juices before I released my seeds in her pussy. I didn't give a fuck about getting her pregnant. She wasn't going anywhere. We panted heavy, and I kept her in my arms. My Lamb had some good ass pussy, and I was already addicted.

I placed Mary down on her feet and her knees buckled. She remained standing, looking drunk off my dick. I quickly lathered up her washcloth and cleaned her body up. When she was fresh, I helped her out the shower. Then, I oiled her skin up and put her in the bed for a nap. She passed out the moment her head hit the pillow. Chuckling, I pulled the covers over her body and kissed her forehead before softly shutting the bedroom door. I plopped down on the couch and took out my

phone. There were a few text messages from everyone checking in on us.

Avery: I hope you all are having fun. Please....
Keep my girl safe or it's your ass. Don't forget to bring some watermelon home for your mother-in-law.

Cupid: I know y'all are doing your newlywed shit, but I wanted to give you an update on the custody stuff. We finally got a date for mediation. If this doesn't work, you know we are gonna have to take it the judge. I hope everything goes smooth so we don't have to go that route. I'll let you know if anything changes. Keep enjoying y'all time away, bro.

Rhythm: I'm so proud of you and I can't wait for you to bring my niece home so the family can be complete. Mary is a sweetie. She is great for you. I love you big bro.

Nardo: What's up my nigga? Hit me up when you are back in the city ready to work. I already started working on three beats and with your rhymes on them, I know they gonna be some hits. I hope you are enjoying your time with your wife. Remember, she is your peace when you are facing that storm.

I responded to everyone's messages and then put my feet up to watch some television. Flipping through the channels, I couldn't find anything that caught my attention, so I decided to turn it off. Since I didn't have anything else to do, I started rhyming in my head. Suddenly my cellphone started ringing. It was from an unfamiliar number. At first, I wasn't gonna pick up, but it could have been something important. The moment I picked up and heard a groggy voice, I had regret. It was that nigga, Bug. I hadn't seen him since I almost OD'd in the hotel room after getting drugs from him.

"Sin. What's good, man? I'm happy to hear your voice."

"Nigga, what the fuck you want?" I spoke through my locked jaws.

“What’s with all the hostility, nigga? You should be thanking me for saving your life. I was the one who called the ambulance and got the drugs out so they wouldn’t charge your ass.”

“You should’ve called, nigga. It was your bad as drugs in the first place.”

“I know, man. The dude must’ve sold me a bad batch. I will make it up to you though, with some new shit. It keeps you high for days.”

“Naw, I’m good. I’m not doing that shit anymore. I got to go, Bug. Don’t call me again.”

“Please, don’t hang up, man. You’re the only person I got, and I need some help. Let me stay at your pool house like I used to.”

“Fuck that. I’m trying to do right with my life and stay clean. Hanging out with you ain’t gonna help me. I’ll send you some money today and you can find your own way.”

“For real? You doin’ me like that? Let me come to the crib and we can chat.”

“Naw, I am not there. I am away with my wife.”

“Nigga when you get married?” he was shocked.

“None of your business mothafucka. I am sending you this money and don’t contact me again,” I hung up the phone.

Even though I felt bad for Bug, I couldn’t have him in my life. We attended the same church as kids, and we got abused by the same nigga. He knew my pain and I knew his too. We bonded from that trauma, but I no longer wanted to feed my addiction. I wanted to save my soul.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



MARY LAMB

The stars were twinkling in the sky as Sincere and I walked on the beach holding hands. It was our last night in Hawaii, so we planned to have a romantic candlelight dinner next to the water. We made our way to the setup, and I noticed people sitting on white chairs. When I got a little closer, I saw one of them was Avery. When she leaped up to give me a hug, I was still in shock. I glanced around with my eyes widened and saw everyone who was important in our lives right there. Tears sprung from my eyes when Sincere dropped on one knee holding another massive diamond ring. It was sparkling bright and looked so beautiful. I couldn't wait to put it on my finger.

“Baby, what is all this?” I placed my hand over my mouth in disbelief.

“I want to give you a wedding you deserve.”

“What? I was happy either way as long as I had your last name,” I choked up with more tears rolling down my cheeks.

“Naw, my heart couldn't allow you to settle. You deserve nothing but the best. I want to make sure I give you that, always. You're my rib and I love you, Lamb.”

“And you already know I love you. The best thing I ever did in my life was toss that oil on you.”

“You are my sunshine, my peace, my motivation, and I never want to imagine my life without ya. Will you do me the honor of marrying me again?”

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” I jumped up and down with excitement, causing everyone to laugh.

I was handed a bouquet and then stood under a flower arch with Sincere. The preacher stepped up in front of us, holding her Bible to start our ceremony. As she read the word, she spoke to my soul. I truly believed God sent me my husband. Our love was first built upon a friendship before we ever became lovers. The intimacy we first experienced was spiritual and then physical. Sincere cupped the side of my face before saying his vows. His words of affirmation and love had more tears flowing down my face. By the time it was my turn to speak, I collapsed into his arms to give him a hug. Through my sobs, I did my best to tell him how I felt. He just stared at me with so much appreciation and respect. When it was time to kiss me, he placed his hand on my lower back and pushed my body against his and slipped his tongue deep into my mouth. After our wedding, we had an intimate reception right on the beach. The food looked delicious, but I wasn't eating off any woman's body as she laid across the table. I didn't care about that being a tradition. Sincere tried to grab some food and I smacked his hand.

“Didn't you put those heathen's ways behind you? The only body you should be eating off of is mine,” I spoke feisty and shook my finger at him.

“I'm hungry, Lamb. A nigga can't eat?”

“Not from a woman's body.”

“Shit, let me eat off you,” he chuckled.

“Leave that man alone, Mary. Come take a picture with us,” Avery said, approaching us.

Sincere was saved by the bell when Avery called me. He quickly kissed my lips and grabbed some food from the

woman's body, stuffing it into his mouth before running away towards his buddies. He was a trip, but I loved him deeply. I approached Avery, Rhythm, and Brooklyn to take photos. After that, we went to a table and relaxed our feet. I was so happy being in the presence of phenomenal strong black women.

"We are so happy for you, cousin. Now tell us. How was the dick?" Avery was blunt.

"You know a lady never tells," I placed my hand on my chest, feeling shy.

"Good. I don't want to think about my brother breaking your back," Rhythm pursed her lips.

"Y'all are a mess," Brooklyn cackled.

"Thank you, Brooklyn, for coming."

"You know I wouldn't miss this for the world," Brooklyn beamed.

"Where are the girls?" I asked.

"My granny is watching them. That's where we have been staying."

"Is your kids' father still looking for you?" I was worried.

"Nope. He got arrested on drug possession and is facing some serious time."

"Great. Have you found a job?" I probed.

"No, but I am looking."

I turned towards Avery and showed all my pearly white teeth. She already knew what I was gonna ask from the scowl on her face. She needed a new receptionist since she beat up Nevia and fired her from the job. I wrapped my arms around my big cousin, pulling her close to me.

"What, Mary?" Avery smacked her lips.

"Do you think you can give Brooklyn a job? It can be my wedding gift."

Brooklyn shook her head with her eyes widened. “Mary, it’s okay. I will find one.”

“Do you have any experience with working at a front desk?” Avery seemed interested.

“No, but I worked as a cashier at a hospital,” Brooklyn stated.

“Send your resume and we can talk when we get back to Houston. Right now, I want to party,” Avery danced in her seat.

I leaped up from my chair, giving Avery a big hug. She had no idea what it meant to me and my friend. Brooklyn was the sweetest and I just loved how she was with her daughters. When Rose grew up, I prayed we had that bond. I wasn’t her biological mother, but I would raise her like she was my own. We talked for a little bit more before the ladies went on the dance floor while I went to check on my mother. She was sitting at the table with Faye and Cameron eating watermelon. They were having a good time talking from the smile on their faces. I approached my mother and gave her a big hug from behind.

“Hi, Mary. You look so pretty. I can’t believe you got married two times,” she said after taking another bite out of the juicy watermelon.

“I know right. Are you having fun?”

“Yes, I am eating watermelon with my friends.”

“Aww, I’m glad you are making friends. I am gonna try to get you in a program so you can make more.”

“Okay, daughter. I love you.”

“I love you too, Phoebe.”

“Don’t call me that. I don’t like it. You can call me mom now. When you don’t, it hurts my feelings,” my mother lowered her head and spoke in a somber tone.

All my life, I figured she was okay with me not calling her mom, but I was wrong. Once again, Granny Mable had made a decision for me that I never wanted to happen. I choked up,

pulling my mother into my arms. Then, I promised to never call her by her name again. It was simply gonna be *mama*. Seeing everyone on the dance floor having a good time, I started moving my hips. Sincere emerged from behind me and within seconds, his hard dick was pressing against my booty. He slowly kissed my neck and slowly grinded on me. He had me ready to go back to our suite so he could get between my legs. My panties were starting to soak. We spent the rest of the night dancing away. Then, we headed back to our room to make love.

The next morning, we woke up bright and early to catch the jet home. For the entire flight, I just slept next to Sincere. When we landed, Mr. Moore was waiting for us. He collected our luggage and we climbed into the truck. Mama turned on her ipad to watch it with Sincere who was just happy that she was comfortable. As I gazed out the window, my thoughts drifted to granny. I missed her deeply. Even though she was stubborn and judgmental, she raised me. I prayed one day that we could fix our relationship. All I wanted her to do was treat me like an adult. I didn't want to have any animosity between us. She just needed to change her old school way of thinking and stop trying to control me.

We pulled up to the gate and Mr. Moore pressed the code to gain access. As we were cruising up the driveway to get to our home, there were different cars lined up outside. From the look on Sincere's face, he was just as confused. He opened up the door and climbed out. When I tried to follow him, he stopped me.

"You and Phoebe stay here. I don't know what the hell is going on."

"Do you need my prayer cloth?"

"Naw, I'm straight. Don't step foot in this house until I give you the okay."

Sincere made huge strides towards our houses and walked through the front door that was already opened. My mama was too busy looking at her ipad to notice anything was going on. I sunk into my seat and waited for him to return with my arms

crossed. After five minutes, I climbed out the backseat and told my mama to stay put. Mr. Moore leaped out behind me to grab my arm. I looked at him strangely and he released me.

“I didn’t mean any disrespect, but I don’t think you should go in there,” Mr. Moore seemed worried.

“Why? What’s happening?”

“When it looks like this, it’s a party. Not just your average one, ma’am.”

I grabbed my purse and pulled out my prayer cloth before marching past Mr. Moore who looked stressed. The moment I stepped through the door, I heard music blasting and the smell of weed smacked me dead in the face. I made way through the house seeing chaos. Women were walking around naked, men were playing dice, and liquor bottles were scattered on the floor. When I got to the kitchen, white power was on the counter next to some pills. I frowned my face watching a woman sniffing it as a man sexed her from the back. I almost gagged in my mouth because they stunk. They needed to take baths.

“Stop that, you heathen. Get out my house now!” I yelled and stomped my feet.

They wouldn’t listen and kept on doing the nasty. I continued to make my way around, looking for Sincere. People were everywhere and they all looked like zombies in a haze. I stepped in the backyard, seeing people in the pool and laying on the lounge chairs. Glancing round, I couldn’t believe the foolishness. Something told me to go to the pool and when I did, I got the shock of my life. Sincere was punching some dude in the face as two naked women watched. They went to grab their phones, but I snatched them from their hands.

“You better back up heathens and get on out of here,” I spoke through my gritted teeth.

“If we don’t, what are you gonna do?” one of the girls rolled her eyes.

“I’m gonna forget I am a woman of God and beat your tail. You better get on. I got a prayer cloth and I know how to use

it. Now get on, heathens!” I pointed towards the door.

I placed my hands on my hips and gave them a look. They could've tried me, but I wasn't going to play any games. Those heathens took off running out the door. Sincere kept punching a man out in the corner. If I didn't stop him, he would've gone to jail for murder. With all my strength, I tried my best to pull him off his body. Yet, he kept hitting him in the face. All I could do was pray. I loudly spoke the word until Sincere stopped and sighed heavily. I could see the pain in his eyes. He turned to the man who was sprawled out with blood covering his face and stood over him glaring.

“I told you not to come to this place. You lucky I don't kill you, mothafucka. You aren't welcome in my life. You and these mothafuckas got five minutes to get out or I am coming back with the mac,” Sincere threatened everyone.

My eyes got big when Sincere snatched me by the hand and we left out the house. We climbed back into the truck before driving to stay at a hotel. After I got mama settled, I went to check on Sincere. He was sitting on the bed with his hands on his head while staring at the floor. I placed my hand on his shoulder and he looked at me with a faint smile.

“Who was that guy?”

“Someone I used to get high with. He called when we were in Hawaii asking to stay in my house, but I told him no. He had the code to the gate and let himself in anyway.”

“How long have you known him? He had to be important to have access to your place.”

“Naw, he wasn't. He just liked to get high and so did I at one time. I don't want to live that life anymore.”

“I'm sorry.”

“For what, baby?”

“That he broke your trust. He put your sobriety at risk.”

“For the rest of my life, I am gonna be a recovering addict. It's up to me to stay clean. Nobody can't make me do anything I don't want to. I have control over who I allow access to my

life. I don't want those type of people in it. I want to start fresh and I think it's for the best that we get a new place to start our journey together."

"That's a great idea." I kissed his lips.

While I got settled, Sincere took a phone call in the bathroom. The door was cracked halfway, so I could hear him talking. When he called Mr. Phillips' name, I knew he was talking to his therapist. I figured seeing all that back at the house was a trigger, so he needed to talk through his feelings. I was super proud of him for taking the steps to stay clean. Little did Sincere know that was the best wedding gift he could've given me, the fact that he was continuing to walk on the path to sobriety.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



I slammed my phone on the nightstand and took a deep breath. The media invading my privacy and talking shit on my name came with the territory of being in the entertainment industry. Throughout the years, I had developed tough skin and didn't allow people's opinions to bother me. However, I did take issue when they tried to attack my Lamb. After photos from our Hawaii vacation were posted online by the paparazzi and radio personalities, Big Dollars decided to share the photos on his Instagram and captioned it, "Sinful K with his nappy headed whale," trying to be funny. I knew we still had beef from me beating his ass after my interview, but he didn't have to bring my innocent wife into the situation. She didn't bother anyone and stayed in her own holy bubble.

For that nigga to trash her online to his millions of followers so they could jump on the bandwagon to talk about her too, had me pissed and I was ready to break his jaw. I might've been focused on my sobriety, but I wasn't going to let nobody disrespect me, especially some double chin ass nigga who had to use insulin as an energy drink. With my nostrils flaring, I picked my phone back up and got ready to dig into that nigga's shit online when Mary strutted in our bedroom holding a hamper while humming. She quickly gave me a kiss and started neatly putting the clothes into the

dressers. Once she was done, she plopped down next to me on our bed and laid her head on my shoulder. She cleared her throat but didn't speak right away. Anytime she wanted to bring up something, she did that.

“What's going on, honey? Your energy is off.”

“I'm straight, Lamb. Just a little pissed this morning over some bullshit, but I'm gonna be alright.”

“About what? I know it's not regarding you making your album. We already talked about this, Sincere. You are talented. You need to get in the studio.”

“Preciate your words, baby. But that ain't the reason why I'm pissed.”

“Oh, so what's the reason? Did you hear anything else regarding the mediation?”

“Naw.”

She pursed her lips. “Okay. So why are you upset? You can vent to me.”

“That bitch ass nigga, Big Dollars, made a comment about you online. I am ready to beat his ass,” I spoke through my gritted teeth.

“What did he say? Can you show me?” she was curious.

“I don't want to hurt your feelings. Just know, it was offensive and disrespectful.”

“Nobody can hurt me as much as my granny did, Sincere. Show me,” she was adamant.

I sighed heavily and showed Mary the post that he made. She grabbed my phone to take a better look before shaking her head with her lips pursed. I didn't want her to see the bullshit and start worrying about her looks. She was perfect to me and I didn't want her to feel like she had to change her appearance to fit into the superficial industry. Most of the women who had those face filters and got work on their bodies still hated themselves.

“Messy Dollars is only doing this to get a reaction out of you. Don’t even pay this heathen any mind. I’m nobody’s whale and my natural hair is beautiful. I feel sorry for him that he has to attack me just to feel better about getting knocked out. He still hasn’t learned to keep his mouth closed.”

I slammed my fist into my palm. “Yeah, but I’m gonna give him another lesson.”

A perplexed expression emerged on her face. “For what? You need to focus on staying clean, getting custody of our daughter, and working on your music. I don’t care about what that man said, and neither should you.”

“But you’re my wife and I love you. I want to defend your honor.”

“Nope. You can’t take everyone down who says something negative or rude about your little Lamb. There are a lot of people who show love and I appreciate that. For the heathens who don’t, I could care less. They are just miserable. I’m happy and living my life.” She kissed my lips.

I raised my eyebrow and analyzed her body language. “Lamb, you sure you ain’t upset? I don’t mind handling that nigga for ya.”

She pulled her lips into a smile. “I’m positive, baby. Thank you for having my back and being supportive.”

“I got you, Lamb.” I rubbed her chin. “What time are you going to help out at the church?”

“I wanted to take care of a few things around the house first. Why?”

“Can I make you breakfast?”

She placed her hand on her chest. “Aww, honey. You are so sweet, but you can’t cook. I’m not trying to meet my Jesus early because you gave me food poisoning.”

“Damn woman. I am trying to take care of you,” I chuckled.

She folded her arms across her chest. “Fine, but you better not take me out.”

“I won’t woman.” I kissed Mary’s lips and she smiled wide.

Lamb really had my heart, and I would do anything to keep her happy. Even though my cooking skills weren’t the best, I headed to the kitchen. I grabbed a carton of milk, eggs, and pancake batter from the refrigerator. Mary came to join me and sat at the granite countertop with her elbows lying flat, curiously looking at me like she was the food inspector. Chuckling, I disregarded her stares and poured the pancake mix and milk into a gigantic red bowl before cracking some eggs. As I picked up the wooden spoon to stir, I noticed the mix had eggshells in it, so I had to dump it out in the trash and start again. Mary just put her head down. I finally managed to crack the eggs right. After stirring up the ingredients, I raised my head up to see Mary biting the edge of her lip and squirming on the stool. It killed my little Lamb that she couldn’t help. When I started pulling out different sized frying pans from the cabinet to cook, she gasped. Mary hated things to be taken out of place. By the time I found the right pan, the rest of them were scattered on the counter.

“Honey, you sure you don’t want my help? I am here to do my wifely duties.”

“Nope. I want to cater to you.”

“Humm, I hope your catering doesn’t send me to the emergency room,” she grumbled.

“What you say, Lamb?”

“Oh, nothing honey.” She put on a fake smile.

I stood over the stove and got to cooking the pancakes. They were breaking apart. Some even had uncooked batter inside them. From the corner of my eyes, I saw Mary biting her nails. She finally walked up behind me. When she saw me making a mess, she bumped me out of the way with her hips and took the spatula from my hand.

“For the love of God, you’re making a mess, Sincere. I don’t want you ever cooking again. Go on somewhere so I can

cook us breakfast. I'm a fool for even letting you go this far. Look what you did to my kitchen."

"Damn Lamb. You really gonna do me like that?"

"Nope, you did it to yourself. You really in here burning up my pan," she fussed.

I chuckled. "But I brought it."

She snaked her neck and showed me her diamond that was sparkling on her finger. "No, they are ours now."

"Yeah, you right, baby." I rubbed my fingers through my locks.

Mary kissed my lips and then made her way around the kitchen to clean up before she started cooking. She stood in front of the stove flipping pancakes like she was a chef. It smelled good as fuck and had my stomach growling. I sat at the table ready to crush. The moment she put the square plate in front of me, I picked up my fork and she smacked my hand before cutting her eyes at me.

"We say grace in this house, baby, and I don't want to hear your mouth about it."

"What if I don't want to?" I smirked.

I loved to still get under Mary's skin. When she got sassy, that shit turned me on. She placed her hands on her hips and then glared at me with her top lip curved.

"Then your plate is going in the trash."

"You serious?"

"As a heart attack." She smacked her lips.

"Aight, but can you do me a favor first?"

"What is it?"

"Can you call me Sinful Man for old time sake?"

"You better get to praying Sinful Man or your food is gone," she got sassy.

"Thanks, babe." I winked.

Mary joined me at the table, and we lowered our heads to say grace. We were in the middle of eating our food when my cellphone started vibrating in my pants pocket. I took it out and saw Cupid's number flashing across the screen. I quickly picked it up, assuming it was pertaining to my custody case.

"What's good?" I asked.

"The Martians want to meet today for the mediation at my firm with their lawyer to see if we could talk before going to court."

"Do you think that's a good idea?"

"Hell yeah. Cuz they are trying to catch you off guard by trying to move the meeting up, but we are ready," Cupid said.

"I am down," I said confidently to Cupid.

"Meet me at my office in an hour."

The line went dead, and I sat my phone on the table while gathering my thoughts. Mary placed her hand on mine with concern on her face before asking me what was wrong. After explaining what the call was about, we got up from the table and rushed out to get in the car. While we were driving to Cupid's office, my heart was in my stomach. Getting Rose back was very important to me and I preferred to do it in a civil manner, without getting the courts involved. We pulled up to the building and I followed the sign that said parking. There was a side for workers and for clients. I killed the engine and climbed out my ride to open Mary's door. She grabbed my hand and we walked around to the front of the entrance.

We stepped into the lobby and got greeted by the receptionist who was running the front desk. She was already familiar with Mary, who she called by her name. After telling her that Cupid was expecting us, she told us to take a seat and then she picked up the phone.

I was too nervous to sit and decided to stand with my arms folded against my chest. Mary stayed close to me and rubbed my back. While we waited, I glanced around, taking in the area. It was a pretty dope spot. There were gigantic windows,

two receptionist desks, all black furniture, a water station, and black art on different parts of walls. My man Cupid even had pictures of the attorneys who worked for his law firm displayed with their names engraved under their pictures.

“Mr. Saint-Claire is ready to see you,” the receptionist called us.

She escorted us to Cupid’s office, and he was sitting at his desk flipping through paperwork. There was another dude sitting on the couch and he gave me a head nod. When Cupid saw us, he gave me a dap and then gave Mary a hug. He then motioned for us to take a seat. I raked my hand down my face and plopped in the chair. My Lamb sat next to me and encircled her hand into mine for comfort.

“The Martians will be here with their attorney shortly but before they come, I want to chat with you first, so we are on the same page,” Cupid explained.

“Alright cool. What’s up?” I rubbed my chin.

“Since you have a history of substance abuse, I think it’s best to take a drug test to show you are not indulging. This way, you will be one step ahead if they want to try to bring that up. That’s why you see Jacob here. He can test your urine. I know I am catching you off guard with this, but I am all about tackling anything that may occur.”

“No problem. When can I take it?” I asked.

“You can handle that now,” Cupid said.

The dude Jacob took out a cup from his briefcase and handed it to me. Since Cupid had a bathroom in his office, I went inside to take a pee and to show I didn’t have anything to hide. I asked Mary to watch me. Once I was done, I washed my hands and gave my urine. After that was handled, we went in the conference room where we would be having our meeting. I sat down at the long table next to Mary and could feel the sweat beads emerging on my forehead. Mary noticed I was stressed and wiped my head with her prayer cloth that she pulled out her purse before putting some oil on me. She then started praying. Her faith in the Lord was amazing. After I

relaxed, I took a deep breath. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door and the attorney strolled in wearing a stuffy tight ass suit carrying his briefcase. Behind him were Rose's grandparents and they already had their noses hiked in the air. Since they were my baby girl's relatives, I wanted to be respectful. I raised up from my seat and extended my hand to give them both handshakes. Those mothafuckas looked at me like I was trash before taking a seat without giving me any eye contact. The lawyer didn't leave me hanging though and gave me a firm shake before introducing himself as Mr. Hamilton. He then opened his briefcase and pulled out some documents. He was gonna be on some bullshit.

He cleared his throat. "We won't be here long. My clients think it's in the best interest of the child that Rose stays in their custody. They are pillars of the community and are retired from law enforcement. They have all the means and resources to give her a great life. With your substance abuse history and always being on the go because of your music career, we don't think it's wise for you to raise her. If you agree for them to keep her, they will let you have visits and one holiday a year."

I swallowed hard and looked at Cupid to respond. He adjusted his tie before sliding a folder towards the attorney.

"My client is well in his right to be a father to his child. He is financially secure, sober, and has an amazing church going wife who has never been in trouble with the law. She has never even gotten a parking ticket."

"Mr. Kennedy may be clean but for how long? From what I heard, he has done many stints in rehab. He always goes back to getting high and getting in trouble," Mr. Hamilton said rudely.

"You're correct. But this time, it's different. He went on his own and has enrolled in outpatient treatment. I have several letters from people who know Mr. Kennedy personally and professionally. They believe he is capable of raising his child."

"I can see we aren't going to agree so it's best for the courts to decide."

“I think that’s a great idea but before you leave, I am requesting that you leave Baby Rose in the custody of her father and his wife until we have a court date.”

“My clients have temporary custody of the child because her mother wasn’t able to take care of her, so we won’t be giving her up.”

“No, your client has temporary custody from the mother who is now deceased, but you never took my client, Mr. Kennedy, to court. From what you can see, he established paternity and is the father. While he was suffering from an infection that left him in a coma, you took his child without his permission.”

“What? He OD’d on drugs,” Mr. Hamilton yelled.

“What proof you got? I got medical records saying otherwise,” Cupid smirked.

Cupid must’ve paid someone in the hospital off to change the record. That nigga was smart and calculated.

“My clients and I are leaving. We will see you in court and we are coming with everything.”

They wanted to play dirty.

“I think it’s best that you hand the baby over or I will be taking my client to the police station to file a report that someone kidnapped his baby when he was incapacitated. I bet the press will have a field day when they learn two prominent members in the community are trying to keep a black man out of his child’s life because they are racist. You can have it your way, but I think you know what’s best,” Cupid cocked his head to the side.

The lawyer turned to his clients and softly whispered. Suddenly, Mr. Martians leaped up from the chair with a scowl. He was so damn angry his skin turned red. That mothafucka was looking at me like he wanted to kill my black ass. I remained calm, trying not to react as he called me all types of junkies and black mothafuckas. He was a straight racist, so I knew I didn’t want him with my child. To keep me calm, Mary rubbed my leg under the table. It got even wilder when Mrs.

Martians jumped over the table, trying to attack me. She was immediately snatched back by the lawyer and her husband. Of course, the wife's frail skinny ass started playing victim and sobbed like she wasn't trying to fight me. Security rushed inside to remove them, and I balled up my fists. Mary put her hands on top of mine to relax me. Mr. Hamilton didn't say anything and packed up his briefcase to follow them out the door, but Cupid was right on his ass. I dropped my head down and Mary clutched my cheeks to give me a kiss. I wanted my baby girl home with us and not with those racist people. As I got ready to drop my head in defeat, Cupid came back carrying my baby girl. Both Mary and I leapt up to take her from his arms. She had gotten so big. Even though she hadn't seen us in a while, she wasn't even afraid. In fact, she was smiling.

“You can't fuck up, man. This little girl needs you. So, when we get to court, they are gonna come hard, so be ready. But I am not taking any prisoners. I got you. Now get your wife and baby girl home,” Cupid patted me on my shoulder and left.

I nodded my head and held my baby girl close before bringing my wife next to me too. For once in my life, I had something to fight for and I wasn't gonna fuck it up.

CHAPTER THIRTY



MARY LAMB

I prayed daily for our baby girl to come back to us and never gave up hope. Seeing Rose's beautiful face was a dream come true. My heart swelled with pride and joy cradling her in my arms as we walked out the law firm building. We were taking her home where she rightfully belonged. As we were getting inside our car, I started praising my heavenly father from the top of my lungs while Sincere pulled me into a hug. We were both overwhelmed with emotions and broke down crying. There was no better feeling than God bringing a person through their darkest times. I didn't care who didn't believe, but I knew my faith meant everything to me. It had made me a strong woman ready to face adversity.

"We got our baby's back." My voice croaked.

"Yes, we did, Lamb. I need you to know I am thankful for you being by my side and loving her like your own."

"You never have to thank me. I am your wife, and she is my child. No matter what, I am gonna always make sure you both are taken care of and prayed for."

"With you Lamb, I found my peace. I didn't even know that was possible. For the majority of my life, I was filled with misery."

I cupped the side of his face. “You just needed prayer, nurturing, and love. Nobody has the last say on your life except God. I told you from the beginning you were here for a purpose. You are the voice of the people.”

“I love you, Lamb. You don’t know how much I needed you and Rose. Before you two came in my life, I wanted to die. The pain of my past was too great.”

“All you needed was something to live for. Now, God has given you a more precious reason, Rose.” She smiled.

“She is very precious, and I don’t want to mess up.”

“You have to be the father that yours wasn’t. It’s not gonna be easy. You will sometimes make mistakes because no parent is perfect, but you are gonna do amazing. Just roll with all the everyday changes and enjoy parenthood. Remember, we are a team. If you need me, I am gonna be here every step of the way.”

“I never want to be like my pop. My daughter will never feel what he put me through. When I looked at him, I saw hate. I want her to see me as her hero, as her protector.”

“You are her hero and protector,” I assured him.

“Remember I told you I wanted to start fresh and get a place?”

I nodded my head. “Yeah, but I thought you decided to stay in the same house since you didn’t bring up moving.”

“Naw, I was just waiting for Rose to come back and surprise you. I had my realtor find us a new home already. Do you want to see it?”

“Yes,” I said with excitement.

I leaned over with my chest wildly beating and kissed Sincere deeply. Our love was one entity. Forever he would hold my heart. He was all the man I needed. When he started up the engine, I laid my head back on the headrest with a smile. While he drove, I placed my hand comfortable on his thigh just to be close to him. We pulled up to the driveway of our new Mediterranean inspired home and my mouth dropped

open. The sight of the house was breathtaking. It was surrounded by so much fine cut grassland. I eagerly climbed out before taking Rose from her car seat. Then, I kissed her cheeks, making her laugh. Her spirit was so pure, and I wanted her to stay innocent forever. We made our way inside and I had to admit to Sincere that he did a wonderful job. Each room had a different style. I could tell the interior decorator was very experienced. My mama was gonna love her new bedroom, especially since it had a bigger television and all her electronic needs at her fingertips.

“Wow, this place is beautiful. I’m afraid to ask how much it cost.”

“The money was worth it,” he chuckled.

“Can we move in right away? I love this place.”

“Yeah, it’s ours, Lamb.”

I handed Rose off to Sincere and made my way to my new kitchen. Cooking had always been a passion of mine. Knowing that I could make people happy with my food was the most satisfying part. The only reason why I had got an accounting degree instead of a culinary one was because granny told me I could make a lot of money with a calculator rather than with a pan. After rubbing my fingers along the countertop, I opened the refrigerator to see how much I had to work with, but it was fully stocked. I pulled some meat out the freezer to defrost it before taking out some sweet potatoes. Then, Sincere came up behind me and started grinding his big dick on my butt.

“What are you doing silly?” I chuckled.

“I want you to back that ass up on a nigga.”

“You can get some loving later but not now. Where is Rose?”

“She is on the swing.” He kissed my neck. “Now give daddy a feel of that ass. Come on, Lamb,” he pleaded.

With my hands up in the air, I shook my butt against his hard shaft while he slowly kissed on my neck. My kitty purred and began to leak. Ever since I had lost my virginity, I wanted to have sex more than ever. Sincere was so patient as well as

an amazing lover. Even though I felt like giving him my wetness, I couldn't, with Rose not being fast asleep in her bed. I made him go grab my baby out that swing and bring her back in the kitchen. Rose was sitting in her MamaRoo chair, looking content. After rubbing her cheek, I made my way around the kitchen and Sincere just stared at me with his hooded eyes. When he took out his phone and went live showing off Rose, I looked at him like he was crazy. He never once showed her on social media. Of course, there were pictures floating around, but we never confirmed anything with anyone because we didn't want anyone in our business.

“It’s been a minute since I went live but I wanted my true fans to know I’m doing great. Here is my reason why. Everyone I know y’all have seen the pictures on the internet, but I wanted to confirm it first. This is my baby girl, Rose. She is my daughter. Isn’t she pretty?”

Pride and joy appeared on Sincere’s face as he put the camera up to our butterfly. She reached her little arm to grab his phone. She was so cute. Then, he came up to me, grabbing me by my waist and had us on camera. I was still very self-conscious about my figure based on judgments from other people online. I was still trying to pull away from that mentality. Sincere wasn’t having it, though. He wouldn’t allow my negative self-esteem to stray me away from showing the love I had for him and the love he had for me. He didn’t hesitate to kiss my lips on his live. People were so happy in the comments. They were glad to get a glimpse into our love life. Sincere began talking to his fans and answering their questions. For a brief moment, he even filmed me baking, but I was so in the zone, I didn’t realize he did that. After my pies were done, he showed them and then turned the phone back to him while licking his lips.

*“Listen, it was good talking to my people, but I got to eat my pie. **My wife** just finished baking.”*

My mouth flew open when he revealed to the world that we were married. I knew in the next minute he would be trending. We sat at the table and blessed the pies.

BRRRNNGG!!

BRRRNNGG!!

Before I could take my first bite, my cellphone rang. It was Avery calling me. From the sound of her voice, she was angry and needed me to stop by her office. I raked my hand through my hair, sighing. Sincere momentarily stopped stuffing his mouth with pie and gave me his attention.

“You good?” He placed his hand on top of mine.

“Avery just called me upset and needs me at her office.”

“Alright. Do you want me to drive you?”

“Yes, please.”

We put our pies away inside the refrigerator and rushed to Avery’s office. She wasn’t one to get stressed so easily. Whatever was on her mind had her in a bad mood. I stepped out the car while Sincere stayed inside with Rose, who was fast asleep in her car seat. I made my way inside the building and the scent of fresh lemon hit my nostrils, like it had just been cleaned. There was a new receptionist at the desk, and she smiled. After I told her I was there to see my cousin, she called and allowed me to go. I caught the elevator. The moment I stepped off, I saw a few of my colleagues working and I waved. Since I had been with Rose, I hadn’t been back at the office. Walking a few more feet towards the boss’s suite, I smiled seeing Brooke sitting at a desk. Avery was allowing her to work temp to test out her skills before giving her a job. We embraced with a big hug before I walked into Avery’s office where she was sitting at her desk frowning and squeezing a stress ball.

“What’s going on cousin? You called me in a panic.”

“Do you know that bitch Nevia is trying to sue me? I knew I should’ve never given her ghetto ass a job.” Avery grinned, showing her perfectly whitened teeth.

“For what?” I was confused.

“Because I beat her ass that day for bothering you. Now she is coming up here to talk about getting a pay out or she will sue me. I can’t stand that apple headed bitch. You better

not say anything about her being our cousin. This is what you get for always trying to help family,” Avery ranted.

When Avery wasn't in the mood, I knew not to open my mouth. She could get off and I didn't need to hear all that cursing. Seeing that she was stressed and her body was tense, I took out my oil and rubbed the center of her forehead before rubbing her back. My way of supporting her was giving her a massage and words of encouragement. The moment she became calm, Nevia strutted in with her purse hiked on her shoulder. I frowned looking at her wearing some tight shorts showing her butt cheeks. She looked nasty and I thought I smelled a stench of fish as she walked past me. I could have been careless if she didn't like me. Heathens like her weren't on my level. Avery stood up from her seat and planted her knuckles on the table. I looked back and forth between both of my cousins. At that moment, being family didn't mean anything because they were about to go at it like two lionesses in a den.

“Do you think threatening me is a good idea?” Avery was direct.

“You should've thought about that after you snatched my hair for trying to protect that prude,” Nevia turned to cut her eyes at me.

As kids, Nevia and I never got along. When we became adults, the two of us became even more distant. She felt like I wasn't hip enough to hang around. Honestly, I didn't understand why she had an issue with me all because I loved the Lord.

“A prude with a man you want, heathen,” I got sassy.

“Girl, the only reason why that man is dealing with you is because he needs a therapist who can listen to his problems. You fit that bill, Mother Theresa!”

“Whatever, you are just mad because I don't have to lower my standards to find a man while you're out there tossing your coochie around like a frisbee to all those dogs,” I grunted.

“Your man is for the streets. Remember that. He was down to fuck me before he knew my name, so I know he ain't

change. When he wants a real one, he knows who to call. He got my number anyway and I got his.” Nevia winked.

“Girl, you don’t have that man’s number. You’re a groupie,” Avery had my back.

I folded my arms across my chest, not paying that heathen any mind. Nevia was calling my bluff because she didn’t have my man’s phone number. I knew she would do or say anything just to get under my skin. Nevia pulled out her phone and called. The moment I heard Sincere’s voice, tears welded up in my eyes. He really had me fooled. From the look on that heathen’s face, she knew my feelings were crushed. I didn’t get a chance to ask her anything because Avery connected her fist against her jaw and pulled out her braids like weeds from a garden. All I could do was stand there and watch with tears in my eyes. I just couldn’t hold them in any longer. That’s when it hit me, I should not have been crying.

I was going to confront that lying fool. I marched out of that office with the meanest scowl and made my way back to the car. My adrenaline was pumping so fast as I approached the car. I loudly banged on the window, forgetting that Rose was sleeping in the backseat. The moment Sincere climbed out, I started hitting him on his chest with my fists, sobbing in pain. My heart felt like it had been ripped from my chest.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Mary was throwing some serious blows at my chest and I didn't know why. Nonetheless, I didn't stop her. All I needed was for someone to record us, so they could put it on social media and make it look like I was beating on her for trying to get her off me. My already tainted image would be completely ruined. The best thing I could do was walk away to give her some space. We were perfectly fine before she went inside Avery's office. As I made long strides out the parking lot, I saw my Lexus zooming past me with the tires loudly screeching. She took Rose and left me stranded. Shaking my head, I had to figure out what the hell made her so angry at me.

I went into Avery's building. There was a receptionist at the front desk, but I walked past that bitch without stopping or saying or a word. When I got to the elevators, I pressed the up button. When it arrived on the lobby floor, I stepped inside quickly and shut the doors. All eyes were on me as I walked through the hallway to get to Avery's office. I attempted to barge in, but that chick, Brooklyn, quickly got up from her seat and blocked my way with her arms folded. Her face was all scrunched up like I did something to her. The only reason why I didn't go off was because her and Mary were good friends.

My nostrils flared. “I need to see Avery, please.”

“She is busy. What can I help you with?”

“Shit. Please go get Avery so we can talk.”

“Talk about what? You are cheating on Mary! How could you do that to her? She is an amazing person. You’re a fool for stepping out on her and with a family member at that. You are a dirty ass dog. I swear after I get off work, I am gonna stab all your tires and bust the windows out your car for hurting my friend,” Brooklyn threatened.

“What the hell are you talkin’ about cheating? I ain’t never step out on my wife!”

“That’s not what Nevia said. She made it seem like you two were messing around and called you on the phone.”

I scowled my face and looked at Brooklyn like she had lost her mind. Never once did I step out on my Lamb to sleep with another a woman, especially not with her hoe ass cousin. My playa days were behind me.

“Look Brooklyn. You got it all wrong. I never cheated. Can you please let me go talk to Avery so I can get to the bottom of this? My wife just took our daughter and left. Please,” I pleaded.

I must’ve looked like a sick puppy because Brooklyn stepped to the side and allowed me to walk into the office. Soon as I walked in, Avery grabbed a picture frame that was sitting on her desk and lobbed it at my head. I barely managed to get out of the way, but that didn’t stop her crazy ass from leaping on top of me and going upside my mothafuckin’ head with her fists. Brooklyn heard all the commotion and came in to get Avery off of my black ass. She was too strong and flung Brooklyn on the couch and kept trying to get at me. With my chest pounding, I rushed away from her and she chased me around her desk, tossing more shit at my head. Eventually, Avery needed to catch her breath and plopped down on her leather rolling chair.

“You are gonna pay for hurting my Mary,” Avery said furiously.

“Avery, I need you to please hear me out. I never cheated on Mary. I don’t know what Nevia is talking about.”

“If you don’t know what I am talking about, how you know it’s about Nevia?” Avery accused.

“Brooklyn told me,” I explained.

Avery turned to look at Brooklyn who was looking up at the ceiling.

“How do you know the business?” Avery asked.

“I was ear hustling at the door. I wanted to make sure Mary was okay because her energy was off,” Brooklyn admitted.

“Thank you for being honest,” Avery said before turning to face me with her teeth barring. “Nigga, you need to explain why your number was in Nevia’s phone?”

“I gave it to that hoe,” I shrugged nonchalantly.

“Excuse me? We are about to beat your ass up in here?” Avery and Brooklyn said in unison.

“Calm down, project twins. This was *before* Mary and I got cool. I wanted some pussy and the way Nevia was tossing it at me when I came to your office the first time, I knew she was gonna be down to fuck. I gave her my info but when she hit me up once, I didn’t take the bait. I forgot she even had it. I know you don’t believe me, ladies, but it’s true. If I was cheating with her, don’t you think Nevia would’ve been said something by now,” I was trying to make sense of things.

“He does have a point, boss lady,” Brooklyn was starting to believe me.

Avery was still not convinced, and I had to put my heart on the line. “Look Avery. I love your cousin. She is the *best* thing in my life, and I would never ruin that for temporary satisfaction. You might not believe me, but I haven’t been unfaithful. Yeah, I was a dog in my past but since Mary put a leash on my neck and some oil on my head, I have been on my best behavior. I wouldn’t risk what we have for anyone.”

“Aww, you really are telling the truth, Sin. I’m sorry for beating your ass. I just didn’t want you to hurt Mary. She loves

you so much,” Avery said.

“Can you please help a nigga out and help me out the doghouse? Mary just beat my ass right in the parking lot and took the baby.” I rubbed my head, stressed out.

“Lord. She really got to be hurt if she is hitting you,” Avery admitted.

BRRRNNGG!!

BRRRNNGG!!

Before I could say anything else, my cellphone rang, and it was Cupid, calling to tell me that my wife was at his office with Rose, demanding for him to draw up divorce papers. I felt like my world was slowly caving in on me. Avery snatched my phone, telling Cupid to stall, so we could make it to his building. The three of us rushed to get into Avery’s car. While we were driving, I felt stressed. I could feel tightness around my chest like I was getting ready to have a heart attack.

“Sin, you good?” Brooklyn asked from the backseat.

“Naw, I think I am dying.” I placed my hand on my chest, trying to catch my breath.

“No, you’re not fool. You are just stressed because your Lamb left the barn,” Avery laughed.

“You ain’t right, but that’s a good one,” Brooklyn cackled even louder.

I just shook my head. We made a quick stop at a flower shop so I could grab some roses before we went over the plan to get my lady back. When we got to the office building, my shirt was drenched in sweat. We made our way inside the front lobby. The security didn’t even stop us since Avery was Cupid’s wife. We got to the floor where Cupid’s office was located, and I could hear my heart beating in my ears. The moment Mary saw us, she shot Cupid a dirty look. I knew she wouldn’t attack me with our baby in her arms.

“Mary, can you please calm down and talk to me? I know what you’re thinking, but I am not cheating.”

“Stop lying. You men are all the same, just a bunch of cheating fools. I bet you think because I never had a man that I would allow you to just walk all over me. Nope, I won’t be *nobody’s* push over. Yes, I love you in my heart, but I will make it through.”

“Stop talking crazy. I am *never* going to let you leave me. We are in this marriage until we take our last breaths. I love you. Don’t you see that?”

“Yes, but you’re cheating on me.”

“I’m not cheating. Yes, Nevia had my number because I was trying to fuck her before we ever got cool, Mary. My past ain’t the best but I never lied to you. I have been with a lot of women. More women that I am proud to admit but I wouldn’t lie if you asked me. I never respected, cherished, valued, or loved them hoes. But when I am with you, you’re my future. I saw that the first time I looked into your eyes. Everything about you is breathtaking from your face, body, mind, spirit, and soul. It’s an honor to have you as my partner. You’ve done so much for me. I would never do anything to betray that. You got to believe me, Lamb.”

“I do, baby, but I don’t want to be a fool. It’s not a secret that women want all of you.”

“Yeah, but they won’t because **you** have me, and **I** have you. I love you.”

I wanted to show my love and started serenading Lamb with a song, “My Girl” by the Temptations. Cupid, Avery, and Brooklyn backed me up and started doing the rocking motion behind me while harmonizing like we were a group. At first, Mary acted like she wasn’t impressed but then started moving her body while listening to my voice. A big grin tugged at Mary’s lips and I knew she was gonna forgive me. I pulled her closely while she cradled our daughter.... Mary and Rose were my girls, I was always going to prove my love no matter what.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



MARY LAMB

Sunlight beamed through our bedroom window as I got dressed for church. I had an hour before service started. I loved making sure my husband was taken care of, especially after he worked so hard at the studio. He was exhausted, laid out on the bed softly snoring with the back of his hand covering his face. I kissed his lips and left out the door holding onto the baby monitor. From what I could see, Rose was awake inside her crib. Stepping into her bedroom, I scooped her up as she gave me a smile. After quickly changing her diaper, I tossed it into a silver bin and then put on her little ruffled pink dress. My butterfly was going with me to church because I wanted to expose her to the word of God as early as possible.

We headed downstairs and I made Rose a bottle. I knew she was hungry from how she started sucking on her tiny fist. As I curdled her into my arm, I slipped the nipple into her mouth. She had me smiling when she laid her hand on her bottle. Time was flying and she was getting so big. Once she was finished drinking, I gently patted her back and she burped. Then I laid her in her bouncing chair while I cooked breakfast. It didn't take me long to make a delicious cheesy omelet. While I was putting Sincere's food on a plate, he came behind me and kissed my neck. I couldn't contain my glowing smile.

There were no words to describe how much I loved my man. I was truly blessed.

“Good morning, my little Lamb.”

“Hey, honey. Did you sleep well?”

“Yeah, but I’m still tired though,” he yawned.

“How was your first session? Were you nervous about being back in the studio?”

“It was dope. Nardo and I work great together. We already finished eight tracks.”

“Wow, that’s amazing. Will you be going back tonight?”

Sincere nodded his head and rubbed his chin. “Yeah. Nardo wants to bring in another producer to work on the project, so I am gonna meet them tonight.”

“That’s great. I am proud of you.” I pinched his cheeks.

“Where my mama at?” he said, referring to my mama.

“She stayed over with Cameron and Faye at their house. They are becoming great friends.”

I placed the plate in front of Sincere and he licked his lips. While he stuffed his mouth with eggs, I turned around to wash the dishes. After everything was clean, I grabbed my little butterfly from her bouncing seat. Then I kissed those chunky cheeks of hers, making her giggle. Rose was my baby, and she was so precious.

“I’m going to church. Do you need anything else before I leave?”

“Naw,” he answered, giving me a weird look.

“Love you. We will be back soon,” I sang.

“You aren’t taking Rose!” he raised his voice.

With a frown on my face, I turned around to make sure I heard him correctly and he stared at me with his jaws tightly locked. Sincere must’ve got up on the wrong side of the bed because he was tripping.

I cocked my head to the side with my top lip in a sneer. “Excuse me? What do you mean I am not taking my child?”

“Just like I said, Lamb. I don’t want her going to a church.”

My eyes flew open in shock. “Are you serious?”

“Damn serious,” he grunted.

“I love church and you know I want the same for our daughter.”

“She doesn’t need it,” he spoke through his gritted teeth.

I placed my hand on both of my hips and cut my eyes at Sincere who just nonchalantly shrugged his shoulders before stuffing more of the omelet I made him into his mouth. He had really lost his mind not wanting me to take our daughter to church. I understood he wasn’t as faithful as me, but he needed to be reasonable. At the end of the day, he married a woman who believed, and I wasn’t gonna stop for anyone. I didn’t pay his foolishness any mind and walked out with Rose anyway. As I made my way out the front door towards one of the cars, Sincere chased after me barefoot.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going, Lamb?”

“I told you to church,” I got sassy and rolled my eyes.

“You can go, but Rose isn’t, Mary. I’m not gonna say it again,” he said firmly.

“Who do you think you’re talking to? I already told you once not to play with me when it came to my Jesus. If you don’t want to see another side of your Lamb, I think you better get on.”

“I’m not playing, Lamb. You are welcome to go but not with Rose.”

I didn’t have the energy or time to go back and forth with Sincere. After handing off my little butterfly, I climbed into the car and sped down the driveway. To calm my nerves, I turned on my gospel music. I rocked my head back and forth with a smile. As I was cleansing my soul, my cellphone started ringing. It was connected to the Bluetooth in my car, so I

answered. The voice I heard was Sincere and I hung up right in his ear. He called right back but I just allowed it to go to straight voicemail.

When I pulled up to the church parking lot, there wasn't that many places to park, but I found a spot. With my purse hiked on my shoulder, I made my way to the front where Hanley was standing. He glared at me, but I didn't care anything about his dirty looks. I didn't want him because he wasn't my type. The choir was already rocking, and I could hear them as I walked through the doors. I quickly made it inside the sanctuary and found a nice spot at the pews. Their beautiful voices got me up on my feet. I clapped my hands and shook my head rocking to the choir. Once they were done singing, I plopped down, and Pastor Frank made his way up to the podium to preach. I stayed the entire service basking in the word. After the service was over, I made my rounds to speak to everyone and then headed out to my car. Before starting up the engine, I checked my cellphone and saw a text from Sincere.

Hubby: Lamb, I didn't mean to make you upset. I'm sorry. Can we please talk about this when you get home? I love you.

Me: We can talk it but I'm not coming straight home.

Hubby: Why? Where are you going?

Me: Out. I will be home before you go to the studio.

Hubby: Shit! You really trying to punish a nigga. I am sorry.

Me: We will talk later. Love you.

Hubby: Yeah aight. You really mad at me?

Me: Yup!

Since I wanted to teach Sincere a lesson for getting nasty, I called Avery to see if she was free. We agreed to meet up at one of her favorite restaurants. There was valet parking, so I drove up and handed my keys to the elderly man who gave me a return ticket. I walked through the doors with my purse hiked on my shoulders while approaching the male host. He escorted me to a table on the patio and it had a nice view. After letting him know I was expecting a guest, he handed me a menu and put another one in front of an empty seat. I didn't even get a chance to see what I wanted to order before a male waiter stood by me. From what I could already see, they had phenomenal customer service.

“Do you need any more time to check out the menu?” the waiter asked.

“Yes.” I nodded.

“No worries. Take your time,” he spoke politely and walked off.

I flipped through my menu trying to decide between chicken samosas and tacos when Avery strutted up with a smile looking fabulous. She gave me a hug and took a seat. We found out what we wanted to order and then told the waiter when he came back. He memorized it and left. Avery and I settled into a comfortable conversation about what had been taking place at her office. Since baby Rose was home, I gave my resignation letter. It was a hard decision, but I wanted to be at home with my ladybug. With Sincere's wealth, I was given that privilege and was going to utilize it. The great part about me leaving my job was that it left an opening for Brooklyn to get that personal assistant position instead of working the front desk. I was super excited for her.

“How is it going with Brook? Do you like her as your assistant?”

“Aww, she is amazing. You were right, cousin, but you know I miss you too. It's not the same around the office without positive energy.”

“I was thinking about finally putting my account degree to use and wanted to see if I could work from home for your

company?”

Her eyes got bigger. “Really? Omg, yes.”

“It’s not gonna be right now though. I’m thinking in the next six months to give us some time to adjust to having Rose.”

“You give me the word and you know I’m gonna hire ya. I’m so proud of you, boo.”

We were having a good time bonding and catching up until from the corner of my eye, I saw that man Messy Dollars strutting in with some woman with big blond curls. Her face looked like it was created in a factory with all that plastic, but he wanted to talk about me on the internet. I dropped my fork onto my plate and immediately lost my appetite. That gossiping heathen being in the same place as me didn’t sit right with my spirit. I decided it was best for us to leave. Avery, on the other hand, didn’t care and kept on eating. I figured if she wasn’t bothered, I needed to relax. Big Dollars finally noticed us and a devious smirk spread across his lips. When he stood up and approached us, I sighed because I wasn’t with the drama. With a dude like him, it surely followed.

“Hello ladies? I come in peace,” he said, opening his arms with a smirk.

“What do you want, fool? Nobody got time for you or your messy games,” Avery angrily barred her teeth.

“I want to apologize for posting that picture on my page. My beef with Sinful has nothing to do with you.” He looked me into my eyes and seemed sincere.

“Damn right. You better.” Avery rolled her eyes.

“I accept your apology. Now, please leave,” I said politely.

“Aight cool but tell your man that I will be the first person to drop the story when his ass goes back to rehab. We all know it’s a matter of time before he relapses,” he chuckled.

“How dare you judge someone when *you* are one burger away from a heart attack? Listen here, you heathen, you and

the world don't know nothin'. Sincere will make a comeback and put you all to shame. Now get on somewhere. Your presence is messing with my spirit.”

“Yeah right. Sinful K is a *has been* . He ain't making another album. My sources say he ain't even a part of Wolf Knight's label anymore. He ain't shit without his label. He won't even sell ten thousand units,” he continued to hurl insults about my husband.

“You can get the exclusive from me. He is gonna break the charts and don't need a big label,” I spoke through my gritted teeth.

“That nigga is *done* . He is a failure and won't ever reach the top again.”

I grabbed my lemon water and tossed it into his face before storming off with Avery behind me cackling. No, I didn't want to act up, especially in public, but I wasn't gonna let nobody disrespect Sincere. Even when he wasn't in the room to defend himself, I would always have his back especially when the world was banking on his downfall. Deep in my heart, I knew he was gonna make a comeback to reclaim his career and tear up those charts.

I parted ways with Avery and climbed into my car after getting my keys from the valet guy. The entire drive home I stayed in silence. When I pulled up to the house, I grabbed my purse and climbed out, making my way to the front door. There were a few boxes, so I picked them up. Upon entering, I kicked off my shoes in the foyer before going to look for everyone. My mama was in the backyard laying on the hammock with Rose on her chest while Sincere was standing over the grill. They looked to be having a mini cookout. When Sincere saw me, he leaned in for a kiss and then took the hotdogs off the grill.

“What's all this, honey?”

“I wanted to make us some food.”

“Aww, I just ate with Avery but will love it for dinner.”

“No problem. Did you have any fun?”

“I really did. It’s always great when me and my cousin get together. Our time was interrupted when we ran into Messy Dollars,” I said angrily with my skin crawling.

“What did that nigga say?” Sincere cracked his neck.

“He was talking stuff about how you don’t have what it takes to drop music without Wolf. I don’t even know how he knows that you aren’t with the company. But anyway, I got him together after tossing a drink in his face.”

“What? *You* out of all people getting wild in the streets. Damn. You really love a nigga,” he was flattered.

“I sure do, baby.” I kissed his lips.

“Can we talk about what happened between us earlier? I hate when we are at odds. It doesn’t make me feel good.”

“Finish cooking and we can talk.”

Sincere finished grilling and sat the food on the table. Of course, he had watermelon for my mama too. We sat down at the table to enjoy each other’s company. After they ate, Sincere and I laid on the other hammock together and cuddled up. I could tell he was stressed about something. I could feel his heart pounding.

“Look Mary. I know when you got with me that you loved God. My relationship with him is complicated. When I started getting molested by the assistant pastor at my father’s church, it broke me. I didn’t understand how that could happen in a place where I should’ve been protected. I prayed every day for God to make it stop. That shit went on for three long years until I went to foster care because my family got killed. Even with that, I blamed God. I didn’t understand how he could put me through all this in my young life.”

“**God** didn’t put you through that. Those were evil men in your life who didn’t live right. When my granny’s brother touched me, I felt the same way. I was scared and afraid to go into church. But it also made me sad because I loved God and being in his sanctuary felt amazing. Even when I spoke up about him rubbing on me, I got in trouble. No, he didn’t take

my clothes off, but he still hurt me. Everyone turned an eye to it. After I prayed, I had to ask God to help me forgive.”

“People are sick.”

“Yeah, you right. But sick people who liked to hurt people aren’t just in the church. They are everywhere in the world. I get you want to protect Rose, but you also have to allow me to protect and raise her too. We are a team.”

“Yeah, you right. Just give me some time to work out my feelings about this church stuff. Then we go from there. Is that okay, Lamb?”

“Yes, baby. Thank you for trusting me enough to talk.”

“I appreciate you listening.”

The man who hurt Sincere was a coward, but he didn’t break him. Even though I knew it was difficult to talk about his pain, indeed, he survived it. I couldn’t be prouder that he wanted to share his feelings with me. All I could do was allow him space to process his feelings towards church before taking Rose. While he figured things out, I would continue to pray for his strength, sobriety, and sanity.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



There was a lot at stake. My double album had to be successful. With me no longer being under Wolf's label, I knew all eyes were gonna be on me. I was his prodigy who finally decided to do it on my own. From the beginning of my career, he had been my biggest supporter and gave me the platform to share my talent with the world. We made millions and history together. I would always be indebted to my mentor for schooling me to the game. However, it was time for me to become my own boss and make decisions for my career without having to answer to anyone. The Sinful K persona was a brand, and I wanted my family to be able to eat off my hard work and legacy for the rest of their lives.

I slipped the headphones on my ear and adjusted the mic inside the booth before giving my homie Nardo the signal to drop the beat. Then, I started rhyming from the top of my head. It came naturally to me. I couldn't recall a time when I ever wrote anything on paper. My most successful top charting songs were created in one session. After I was done rapping, I took a deep breath. Another song was done, and it felt good. I stepped out of the live room to see Nardo smiling like a quokka. He had made my transition back into music smooth and I appreciated that shit.

“This album is gonna be dope. I smell some number ones, nigga,” Nardo was hyped.

“I’m going for it all, man. It’s been a minute since I dropped any music, but I’m coming back with that fire.”

“Fuck yeah! The only reason why some of these rappers got any type of success is because you couldn’t release. Their music is some straight trash.” He frowned.

“I appreciate you making these beats for me, man. You’re killing it.”

“I got to look out for my fam. Plus, that check you wrote me had a nigga hyped, so I had to come with it.” He rubbed his hands together.

“Nigga, you act like you ain’t getting money with Wolf,” I chuckled.

“That bald headed nigga pays good as fuck. But I’m always looking to fatten my pockets. I got to make sure my kids and wife are taken care of.”

“If I know anything about my lil sister, she is gonna get her bag. As her man, I understand that you want to make sure she doesn’t have to use her money for shit. I feel the same way about Mary.”

“I can’t believe your ass got married. Hell must be frozen.”

“When you find the right woman you know, I got that in my Lamb. She is the right one for me. I love her to death.”

“Your wife is your peace especially when the world is against ya. Now get your ass back on that mic, nigga... we got to finish recording our hits.”

I got back into the booth to record three more songs before it was time for a lunch break. We were sitting on the couch eating our Chinese food when Nardo received a video from another producer. He turned it on and that bitch ass nigga, Drez, was on Instagram live. Of course, I was the topic of the conversation. My jaws locked, listening to him call me a *has been* and saying the only reason why I got so much success was because of ghost writers. That nigga was way out of line.

Nobody wrote my fuckin' lyrics. All my success was based off of my hard work, sweat, and dedication. When Drez ended the video telling everyone to check him out on Jenny and Big Dollars show in thirty minutes, I decided to make myself a surprise guest.

It was time to put that lil' nigga in his place. I stood up clutching my fists and Nardo quickly rose to his feet. He could tell from the look in my eyes, I wanted to break that nigga's jaw.

Nardo placed his hand on my shoulder and shook his head, no. "Sin, whatever you're thinking about man, I need you to chill. This nigga ain't worth it. He keeps calling you out because he is trying to eat off your hard work. I have worked with him. He is a *gimmick* rapper. He can't mess with you lyrically."

"Yeah, you're right. But I'm not gonna keep letting this lil' nigga call me out without a response from me!"

"Naw, you got it all wrong, bro. I'm not telling you to act like a bitch. You need to beat him at his own game without using your fists."

"Let's go to the radio station unannounced and I will out rhyme that nigga on the air," I was adamant.

"I'm with that shit. But you can't let this nigga set you off because we know he is gonna try to get you heated so you can act crazy. Right now, you got *more* to lose. Your black ass can't afford to mess up keeping custody of your baby girl for a temporary satisfaction for beating his face."

"I got chu. No fists will be thrown," I agreed.

We left Nardo's home studio and headed over to the radio station. My adrenaline was pumping as I stared out the truck window. My cellphone rang, interrupting my thoughts, and it was Avery calling. She must've gotten word about Drez's live and was calling to make sure I didn't react off emotions. Little did she know, my black ass was gonna make headlines. I sent her straight to voicemail. That's when I got a FaceTime call from Mary and answered it.

“Hey, Lamb. What’s up?”

“I am calling to check in to make sure you’re okay. Avery said something about some rapper dude coming for your neck. Whatever that means.” She frowned.

“Don’t worry your pretty little head Lamb, I heard about it, but I am not even tripping.”

“You sure? I can get my prayer cloth and get that energy away.”

“If you want to, Lamb. Is that what you called me for?”

“Yes, I wanted to make sure you didn’t get into any trouble. I know how that temper can get you. Did you remember to put the oil on your head before leaving the house?”

“Naw, baby.”

“Nope. You know said you would, honey. I need you to stay prayed up and protected.”

“Alright, I will do it next time. I’ll be home soon. Love you.”

“Love you too. I miss you and want some sex. Come home *now* . My kitty is craving.”

“I got you, baby. Daddy will be home. I got to make a run. And I will bring dinner for you, Lamb.”

I hung up my phone and Nardo laughed about me being pussy whipped. I didn’t pay that nigga any mind. He was the same way with his wife. We drove up to the building and found somewhere to park before getting out. All eyes were on us as we stepped into the lobby and made long strides towards the front desk. The chick who was running it smiled when she saw us approaching. From the way she seductively licked her lips, I knew she was down to fuck. Before I could even open my mouth to tell her my reason for the visit, two security guards stood in front of us and I chuckled.

I figured they would ban my black ass for coming back in the building for beating Dollars for disrespecting me. Nardo didn’t pay those rent-a-cops any attention and took out his

phone, making a call to one of the producers of the show who he became cool with after doing some work for him. He immediately came down wearing his fancy suit to get us and shook our hands before he took us upstairs. They were always looking for high ratings. We got off the elevator, ready to make my presence known. The moment I stepped in during Drez's interview, his eyes got big and he started nervously clearing his throat. I had that nigga already shook. With a smirk on my face, I pulled up a chair in front of the mic. Big Dollars' fat ass was already sweating bullets while Jenny gave me a welcoming smile. I could feel the heat in the room.

“Guess who just popped up in the building? It's Sinful mothafuckin' K! Everyone knows I love him. What's been up, boo?” Jenny was hyped talking into the mic like we were good friends.

“Life is good. I just wanted to pop up since I am *always* the topic of conversation for Drez. It seems like nobody wants to talk to him unless my name is mentioned,” I was blunt.

“Nigga please. You're a *has been* . *I* am making *you* relevant. When was your last hit?” Drez tried to play me like he was the big name.

“I'm still getting paid for all my hits and getting money every spin. What about you, nigga? You *still ain't* drop a hit yet but stay with my name in your mouth.” I scowled.

“Naw, I'm just letting the people know you ain't the face of Wolf's records no more. You busy in and out of rehab,” Drez hurled an insult my way.

Big Dollars cackled loudly like a bitch from what that nigga Drez said regarding my struggles with addiction. They wanted to get under my skin so I could snap on live radio, but I refused to give them the satisfaction. **CLAP! CLAP! CLAP!** I clapped my hands and they both looked at me confused while Nardo nodded his head approvingly for keeping my cool. I had more to lose.

“Yeah, it's no secret that I struggled in the past but I'm **clean** now. It feels *good* . I know it's tough for **your family**

since your mama is still struggling. I think she was with me in the program.” I smirked.

My low blow against Drez’s mama had him clenching his teeth. Even though he was pissed, he stayed his bitch ass in his seat. He wanted to attack my character, so I did the same about his mama.

Jenny wanted to break the tension. “I’m so happy to hear you’re doing great with your recovery. That means we are getting some music.”

“Yeah, I’m already in the lab working. I am hoping to have my single drop soon,” I explained.

“Let me guess, you got Rhythm Knight on it? You need her to help you get back in the game,” Big Dollars threw shade.

My jaws twitched and I felt like beating that nigga’s ass.... again. I remained calm and kept it professional.

“Naw, my little sis ain’t on the track, but we might do something special in the future. The last song we did together got us her first Grammy. And you already know how many I got, so I was just happy for her,” I boasted.

“Listen, is this interview about me or this nigga?” Drez said angrily.

“Since Sinful is here interrupting and claiming to be the best, he should at least give us a sample of what he is working on. What y’all say to that?” Big Dollars chimed in.

“I’m ready,” I was hyped, rubbing my hands together.

“You already know I’m never scared, and I can go first,” Drez appointed himself while mugging me up and down.

“I’m so happy y’all. We are about to get two new exclusive songs,” Jenny Martinez announced.

Since it was Drez’s interview, I allowed him to go first on the mic. He started with his weak ass flow and nobody was impressed, not even his partner who was behind the scenes waiting. When it was my turn, I cracked my neck and started bobbing my head. It was rhyme time.

*“Realizing the street livin’,
My community’s immunities at risk,
Hangin’ on tha corner sippin’ a fifth,
Brown bottles, filled with sorrows,
Up on my block, they shoot hollows,
Such as life,
You here today, but not tomorrow,
Wassup bro,
I woke up this morning early,
And I had this dream so vivid that I found it
 very concerning,
Souls burning with pain and rage,
But they go beyond the page that I stain,
Cuz I saw bloody rain, and it came down like a
 cur-tain,
Covering the whole plain,
Dark meadows, shadows blend in like nettle,
Vegetation, thick like coagulation,
Evaporation from the sedimentation,
Condensation, without the scientific equations,
Do they exist? Sure
Nonetheless, don’t need to solve them to occur,
And endure the test of time,
Nature can be divine, and at the same time, it
 can punish us for our crimes,
Clean the grime off the face of the earth and
 rebirth a new work and build it from the
 bottom of the dirt,
Erect it to the top, just enough to observe,*

*On the bottom, we growing crops, trees that
reach the top for the birds,
Teas made out of herbs, to reduce the
inflammation,
Heal a whole nation without debating, the
naturalization of medication,
There is so much we would like to understand,
But we live in a world that is under hand,
Many walk on the same path,
We used to live, love, and laugh,
Now we live, hate, and grasp whatever we can
take with our hands,
Black gloves, black mac, automatic gun claps,
Red dots on the map,
Not easy to avoid that,
Your best bet,
Pray to God, and be smart,
Set yourself apart from the ones who only
wanna the see the dark in ya,
Certainly, there's light within,
And careful who you tell things to and let in,
They'll be the same ones who tell all your
business like CNN.”*

I finished my verse and the radio phones immediately started ringing off the hook with callers. My fans wanted to know when I was gonna drop my album. The look on Drez's and Dollars' faces were priceless. I left the radio station and felt even more hyped to finish my album. It was time to take back the charts and reclaim my career.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



MARY LAMB

Music meant the world to Sincere. It was his safe haven and therapy. The way his words flowed so beautifully brought tears to my eyes as I watched him record inside the studio booth. He truly had a gift. There wasn't any doubt in my mind that his first independent album would do amazing. It didn't matter if it wasn't under Wolf Knight's label. All of his fans were waiting for him to come back to reclaim his title as the king of *Hip-Hop*. Once he was done recording, he stepped out of the booth with a smirk and took Rose from my arms to give her a kiss on her chunky cheeks before dipping his tongue deeply in my mouth. When he separated his lips from mine, he plopped down next to me and I laid my head on his shoulder, waiting for him to speak. Nardo stepped away from the control board to give us some privacy while my mother's face was glued to the iPad screen, not paying us any attention.

"How do you like it? I know it's not the music you're used to listening to, but I want your opinion."

"You're a poet with your words. I can listen to you all day. I am so proud of you," I said softly, pinching his cheek.

"Is it really that good or are you just saying that to get the dick?"

“Honey, you can’t talk that way in front of Rose.”

“My bad. I forgot we got little ears around,” he chuckled and playfully pinched Rose’s cheeks.

“It’s okay. You didn’t mean it,” I smiled. “I love the song and can’t wait for everyone else to hear it.”

“It’s been a minute since I released, so I am kind of nervous.”

“Nobody can rock the mic like you, baby. You are *the truth* .”

“Lamb, you really know how to make a G feel special.” He winked. “I want to take you to lunch before I go to my outpatient meeting.”

“Where do you want to eat?”

“Big Mama’s place. She invited us over to eat for lunch.”

“I would love that. She seems very sweet. Do we need to bring anything?”

“Naw, she is old school. She handles the cooking. All we have to do is bring our empty stomachs.”

“Sounds great.”

“Aight. We are gonna leave in about an hour.” He kissed my cheek.

They recorded some more songs before we left the studio. We got Rose settled into her car seat and my mama strapped in the back as she stared at her iPad. While we were driving, my stomach started to feel sour. I had been feeling like that since returning back from Hawaii but felt it was a stomach bug. Suddenly, vomit spewed from my mouth, landing on my clothes and at the bottom of the floor. After I was done emptying out my stomach, I laid my head on the headrest feeling exhausted. Sincere was worried about my well-being and parked on the side of the road. He then leaped out, rushing around to open up the passenger door, and I heard my mama calling my name. She was worried and I felt bad.

“What’s going on, Lamb? Are you okay? Please talk to me.” He looked worried as he cupped the side of my face.

I could hear Sincere’s voice trembling and that made me worried. Hearing him in distress had my heart tight. I lifted up my head to look at him and cupped the side of my cheek with the look of relief on his face.

“I’m sorry, baby, for messing up your car.” I pouted.

“Fuck this car, Lamb! Let’s get you to the hospital.”

“No, baby. I’m fine. My stomach just felt nauseous.”

“Are you sure? You might be sick and don’t even know. I think we should go get you checked out, Lamb. A nigga will go crazy if something happens to you.”

“I don’t feel comfortable going to the emergency room. How about I make an appointment with my primary doctor?”

“Alright you can, but I want to be at the appointment.”

“No worries, baby. I will make sure you are with me. You’re my husband and I know you want to take care of me.”

After rubbing my cheek, Sincere took out his phone and made a call, then he got back into the car driving us home. The stench of my vomit had my face frowning. I couldn’t wait to get out of my clothes. Once we were home, I kicked off my shoes and took a quick shower. Once I settled in bed, he came back with Rose strapped against his chest in the carrier. He looked cute being on his daddy duties. I just loved how he cared for us.

“Baby, where are you taking Rose?” I scrunched up my face.

“I’m going to my treatment and taking her with me.”

“Absolutely not. You need to focus. I will be fine to be with her until you are back home. My mama is here too.”

Sincere hesitantly looked at me but unhooked our baby girl from the carrier. He handed her off and kissed my lips before leaving for his treatment meeting. I grabbed a blanket to put on floor to give her some tummy time. Rose was fed up,

screaming from the top of her lungs. At first, I felt bad, but I had to stay strong because she needed to strengthen her core muscles to start crawling. I read it about in a baby book I purchased. She did tummy time for a few minutes before I scooped her into my arms. The tears on her little cheeks had me feeling horrible, so I wiped them away and hugged her close to my chest. She was just so precious. Her eyes were starting to hang low, so I put her inside her crib for a nap. Since I was a little tired, I decided to relax on the futon that was in her bedroom to ensure I heard her when she woke up. Motherhood was a nonstop job and I had to be alert. I slept for about an hour until the sound of Rose's crying abruptly woke me up. When I stood up to grab her, I felt dizzy and soon afterwards, my phone started ringing, so I answered it. The moment I heard Sincere's voice, I tried to speak but was no longer able to stand. I heard Sincere calling my name but I was unable to answer him. **THUMP!** Feeling lightheaded again, I fell backwards to the floor, hitting my head as everything faded into darkness.

An hour later, I woke up in the hospital room with mama and Sincere standing over top of me, looking so stressed. I sat up on the bed with a slight headache. All I remembered was getting dizzy and passing out. When the doctor came in the room, he shook my hand. He explained that I fainted, and it was often caused by a drop in blood pressure. However, they wanted to rule out anything else and said it would be best to run some tests to rule out anything serious. After the doctor explained what he was going to do, he gave us a few minutes to talk.

"My Mary. You scared me." My mama's voice sounded shattered.

"I'm sorry, mama. I got a little dizzy and lost my balance."

"When I saw you on the floor, I called the ambulance and then got baby Rose. Then, I called Sincere to tell him you fell down. He told me to stay by your side, but I already knew that because you taught me all the things I needed to do if I ever had to call for anyone."

"You're a hero," Sincere called Mama and she blushed.

“I had to make sure my Mary was safe,” my mama asserted.

“I am going to buy you so much watermelon.”

“Yummy. I love watermelon and holding little Rose.” She smiled.

My mama kissed my cheek and continued to hold Rose, who was sitting on her lap so content. Sincere cupped the side of my chin before kissing my forehead. He was worried and most likely in his head about leaving me after I got sick earlier in the day.

“Baby, I know you are blaming yourself, but you shouldn’t. You had to go to your treatment.”

“I know, Lamb, but I still feel bad. What if you would’ve hit your head and got a concussion?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t, honey. I’m still here and everything is great. Please, relax.”

“Naw, I won’t be calm until we get these test results.”

“God will lead us through,” I assured him and squeezed his hand.

I took several tests, and everything came back normal. After getting pricked with needles and being hooked up to different machines, I was exhausted. The last test I had to take was for pregnancy. I went to the bathroom and peed into a tiny cup before handing it to the nurse. Within an hour, I was given a clean bill of health and some life changing news. I had a little bun growing in the oven.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Power and money were things that could influence people to do some fucked up shit, even if it meant destroying their lives. I was standing at the front door of my house, listening to some social worker named Rebecca with a big ass beak nose, telling me that a report was made about me neglecting my daughter. I was about to go all out. I already knew the Martians were behind the pop-up visit. They had different connections to play in their favor because of their years of working in the law field. They were trying to get a nigga caught up. With Mary being pregnant, I didn't want her to have to deal with any stress. Yet, nothing stopped her when she saw that woman standing at the doorway. Mary rushed towards us and damn near pushed me down. With her eyes expanded, she looked at the woman and then back at me for some clarification.

“Who is this woman?” Mary asked.

The social worker extended her hand towards Mary to introduce herself. “Hi. My name is Rebecca Lauren. I am with Child Protective Services. We have a report of child neglect at this address.”

“Why are you here? You are not taking my baby. Leave us alone. We are good people.” Mary started sobbing.

I felt like it was my fault that she was breaking down.

I pulled her closely to my chest and whispered in her ear. “Nobody is taking our baby. I know Rose’s grandparents got something to do with this shit. This is stressful, having someone popping up unannounced, but we don’t have anything to hide.”

“You can’t let them take Rose. She is my baby.” More tears rolled down Mary’s cheeks.

“I promise you, Lamb. We are gonna be straight. Do you trust me?”

“Yes, baby, but I am worried.” Her voice cracked as she sniffled.

“Put all your worries and fears on me, baby. I got you.”

I kissed Mary on her forehead to bring her some comfort before turning to face the petite social worker who was fidgety. After stepping to the side, I allowed Rebecca to walk in and she kicked off her heels. We had a basket filled with Gucci slippers, so I had her put them on her feet. I didn’t want anybody messing up my expensive carpets. We made our way to the living room and got comfortable on the couch while Mary went to grab Rose from her mother. Five minutes later, Mary strolled back in holding our butterfly. Phoebe even came and looked at the social worker strangely. Then, she turned to look at me with her hands perched on her hips, not giving a damn that we had company.

“What’s going on, mom?” I probed.

“I want some watermelon while I watch my show,” Phoebe pursed her lips.

“Mama, I already told you no watermelon until after dinner,” Mary chimed in firmly.

“It’s not for me, Mary. The pretty baby wants some good watermelon.” Phoebe said.

“What? Rose doesn’t even have any teeth?” I laughed.

“Babies can suck on watermelon.” Phoebe frowned.

“Ma, if you want some watermelon you don’t have to lie on the baby,” I chuckled.

“Mary won’t let me have any because she said it will spoil my dinner and I don’t like it. *I* am the mom so I can get more watermelon.” Phoebe got sassy.

“Fine, you go ahead,” Mary gave in.

A gigantic smile spread across Phoebe’s face, happy that she was able to get more watermelon. When she galloped out the room giggling, I chuckled. Even though she was a grown woman, she had kid qualities. That made me want to keep her close so no one could hurt her again. Mary told me how she was conceived from some guy taking advantage of her mother. It messed my head up that someone would do that shit.

“I’m sorry about that. My mom is finally learning how to express herself. She has special needs,” Mary explained.

“No worries. My sister has Autism, and we love for her to speak her mind,” the social worker admitted.

“Yes. I love my mama and my daughter. Now why are you here?” Mary got straight to the point.

“I am here because someone made a complaint about Mr. Kennedy neglecting his daughter, Rose Martians.”

“Who was it? Who made the report?” I was blunt.

She swallowed hard. “I’m not at liberty to discuss who filed the report.”

That bitch knew exactly who it was.

“Yeah aight. You know it’s the Martians. I know it’s them. What do you need from us?”

“I have to look around your house to make sure everything pertaining to Rose is up to code and she is living in good conditions.”

My anger was boiling hotter than lava. The fact that my privacy was being invaded on the count of what some bitch made mothafucka said. All of us stood up and I showed the social worker around our house. Everything she saw, she was

documenting notes on her iPad. When we showed her Rose's bedroom, her eyes grew and a smile appeared on her face, especially when she saw that the theme of her room was Dumbo.

"I don't need to see anything else. You both are doing great with Rose. I can tell she is very loved. Sorry that I bothered you with this foolishness."

"Naw, you are straight. Just make sure your report reflects what you saw. Now you can leave," I was annoyed.

I could tell Rebecca wanted to say more but instead, she shook our hands and tucked her iPad under her arm before walking away. I followed her to the foyer as she slipped on her heels and left the house. Just for precaution, I sent Cupid a text, letting him know about the social worker's pop-up visit.

Cupid: Thanks for the heads up. I am gonna look into it to see if the visit was authorized.

Me: Preciate ya.

After reaching out to Cupid, I went to look for Mary to check-in to if she was in better spirits. She was anointing all the doors and windows in the house while praying. Once she was done, she turned around to put a cross on my head using her oil. Then, she did the same to Rose while she was playing on a little gym mat trying to reach for her dangling soft toys while she was laying on her back. All I could do was smirk. Mary stayed prayed up. I needed some fresh air and stepped outside for a moment. When I came back inside, I was in a better mood. I strolled in the living room while Mary was sitting on the couch knitting some clothes. Rose was laying on her blanket playing with her little plastic keys. I picked my baby girl up and kissed on her chubby cheeks, prompting her to start laughing. I could see one of her teeth trying to push through her gums. I had read a book about that shit. When babies started teething, it was supposed to hurt like hell, so we had to give her lots of love. I kept holding on to Rose and leaned down to kiss Mary who gladly accepted it.

“Honey, you need to put her back for her tummy time. She just got settled on the floor. Now, if you put her back, she might start screaming.”

“She doesn’t like that. I don’t want my baby girl to be sad.”

“I don’t even think she is, but she needs to get her muscles stronger. Now, put her down and you can give her kisses later.”

“Aww, damn Lamb. Why do you got to make me the bad guy? I don’t want to do it.”

“She got you wrapped her fingers. Give her to me,” Mary pursed her lips.

Mary took Rose from my arms and put her back on the blanket. I sighed heavily. My little butterfly was pissed off too. She started crying her ass off while trying to stretch her tiny body. Seeing her so emotional, I couldn’t take it anymore and picked her back up, giving her a hug. I chuckled when Mary gave me a dirty ass look. She already knew I was weak.

“Sincere, this is the reason why I don’t do tummy time around you. You’re always making it difficult.”

“This my baby. I ain’t gonna see her cry.”

“Yeah. She is getting spoiled.”

“There is no such thing as being spoiled,” I chuckled.

We switched subjects.

“I saw that you’re trending?”

“For what?”

“You know for what? Why would you go up to Dollars and Jenny’s show to confront some rapper? That could’ve gone wrong.”

I figured since that happened over the course of a week that she wouldn’t find out. I was wrong.

“That ni- I mean man, kept calling me out, so I had to show him who I was. I just wanted him to know that I still got

it.”

“Yeah, you do. I’m so proud of you. But I don’t want you to be put in a position where you get yourself in trouble. Remember, we are still fighting to keep our baby and I don’t want you to give her grandparents anything to use against us.”

Mary reminded me of the bigger picture. It meant more to keep my nose clean and stay out of the media. At any moment, they could call to the courts. I was ready to prove to the courts that I was a good father. The last thing I wanted to do was ruin my chances of getting custody.

“You’re right. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, baby. All is forgiven.”

“Do you want to go out tonight?”

“Not today. How about I cook?”

“Naw, I don’t want you slaving over the stove. You’re pregnant. Want you to relax and let me get my private chef on. We can eat by the pool and have a candlelight dinner,” I suggested.

“Yes, that sounds so romantic. Can I dress up?”

“Hell yeah. It’s a date.”

“After our date, I want sex. You know I love that.”

My dick jumped. I couldn’t wait to make love to Mary. She was getting more comfortable and allowing me different ways to explore her body. I kissed her forehead before grabbing my phone to hit up my private chef. Sergio didn’t come by my house as often to cook since I had Mary, but I kept him on the payroll. He was a cool dude and a family man. No matter the bullshit he heard about me in the media, he always showed me love. After I was done with the call, I headed in our room and climbed in the bed. The moment I dropped my head to the pillow, I was out cold. An hour later, I felt a wetness around my dick and looked down to see Mary giving me head. She *never, ever*, went down on a nigga! I was mind blown! She had spit rolling down the sides of my dick. After she got it nice and wet, she climbed on top. Her face

scrunched up because she was still getting used to how thick my dick was. Mary moved her ass and matched my thrust. The way she was riding my dick had me grunting and smacking her ass. Her pussy was leaking, feeling so good. I couldn't hold my nut and released my seeds inside her wetness. She passed out on my chest and I snuggled her closely to my chest.

We slept for a little bit until I had to get up. That nigga chef Sergio was blowing up my phone. Mary's pussy had me knocked out. I called his ass back and he told me he was at the door. I rushed down the steps and let him in. He dapped me up before making his way to the kitchen to get things prepared. I went back upstairs to take a shower. Mary was still sleeping after I dicked her down real good. My shower didn't take long, so then I woke up Lamb to get fresh. She climbed out of the bed butt naked. I went to check on Rose who was with mama Phoebe. She was reading my baby girl books.

“Mama, do you mind feeding Rose her bottle? I want to spend some time with Mary.”

“Yeah. I can take care of the pretty baby.”

I closed the door and headed downstairs to wait for our date. The chef was cooking some bomb ass steaks. My stomach got to rumbling looking at them searing on a skillet. To past my time by, I took out my phone and started searching online. I saw that I was trending because my new song had been leaked. I sent Nardo a text and he admitted to doing it. From the positive response I was getting online, I couldn't wait to drop my album. Life was fuckin' good and I didn't give a fuck who tried to come for me. My life *belonged to me*.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX



MARY LAMB

My eyes were heavy as I took a seat on the couch next to Sincere with my feet tucked underneath a pillow. Sincere had been at the studio putting in overtime hours while I was with the baby. That same routine had lasted two weeks, but we were finally able to spend some quality time after putting Rose to sleep. Sincere was watching old western movies and I was so exhausted. Our little butterfly had a double ear infection and teething badly. For a few days, she constantly wanted to be picked up for comfort. God knew I couldn't see my baby girl miserable. Rose had me wrapped around her little finger and her daddy too. As her parents, we made sure she felt our unconditional love so that she didn't have to crave for attention, especially since I was pregnant. She wasn't going to be treated any differently than the baby I was carrying inside my belly.

“Lamb, you look sleepy. Go upstairs and get some rest.”

“Nope. We finally have time to spend together and I will not miss this opportunity.” I was yawning.

“It's alright. We can go to breakfast in the morning,” he was going to make it up to me.

I shook my head no, and Sincere chuckled.

“I miss you.” I pouted.

“I know we’ve both had a busy two weeks and that’s why I want you to get some rest. It’s good for the baby,” he said with excitement as he placed his hand on my belly.

A smile spread across my lips looking at Sincere’s reaction. At first, I thought he wouldn’t be happy because he already had Rose, but that wasn’t the case. He was thrilled about our new baby and had already picked out some names. With him by my side, I knew my pregnancy was going to be smooth. I wanted to share the exciting news with Granny Mable, but she was still in her feelings after I decided to stay in Houston with Avery. She knew she was wrong for holding a grudge but was too prideful to admit it. For a woman who loved the Lord, she wasn’t as forgiving and very judgmental. Maybe Granny Mable thought that I wanted to be rebellious. No. And even though we had our differences, I prayed that we would be able to fix our strained relationship.

“What are you thinking about Lamb?” Sincere looked at my zoned-out face.

“Nothing, honey. Do you want to play some board games?”

“Whatever you want, Lamb. You know I am down, but I don’t want to hear your mouth when you lose,” he seemed so confident.

“Please, I am gonna win.”

“What if you don’t win? What are you gonna give a nigga?” he licked his lips.

“I am gonna wrap my mouth around your dick. Would you like that?”

“Of course, baby!” he gripped hold of his dick.

I cocked my head to the side with a smirk. “But if I win, you have to taste my sweet honey.”

“That ain’t a punishment, baby. I might lose on purpose now.”

“You are a mess,” I chuckled.

“Yeah, but I am your mess. I ain’t going anywhere.”

I grabbed the *Trouble* box and started getting set up on the floor sitting Indian style. Sincere was already trying to cheat by knocking pieces over. I playfully smacked his arms. Then, we intently played several rounds. I ended up winning three out of four to Sincere’s one. He knew what was about to happen after that. I couldn’t wait to feel Sincere’s long tongue against my clit. My butt hung off the couch and Sincere wrapped my legs around his shoulders before dipping his tongue into my sweet hole. He knew how to make me feel good. I gripped hold of his long locks and slammed my eyes shut in ecstasy. When he sucked on my swollen diamond, sending shocks up my spine, I climaxed in his mouth. As I laid back panting heavily, Sincere raised up his head with my juices running down his chin. I had him looking like he just drank a glass of milk. When he kissed me, I tasted so sweet.

My pussy was still throbbing when Sincere took me upstairs and laid me on the bed to clean between my legs with a warm rag. Once I was all cleaned up, he strolled out the bedroom door. The feeling of bliss took over my body as I stared at the ceiling.

BRRRNNGG!!

BRRRNNGG!!

In the distant, my cellphone rang, disturbing my blissful state. It was from an unknown number and had no clue who the hell it was, especially not at that time of night.

“Hello,” I picked up.

“Is this Mary?”

“Yes. Who is this?” I sat up on the bed.

“ A friend of your granny’s.”

“Is everything okay?”

“Your granny suffered a stroke.”

“ Not my granny! Tell me she is okay. What hospital is she in ?” I became very frantic.

“Uhhh. I don’t know. I have to get that information ,” the man mumbled over his words.

“What? I’m on my way now ,” I ended the call.

That was the last thing I expected. No matter what we went through, I was always going to be by her side and in her time of need. I stood up from my bed with tears gliding down my face. It took that one moment for my world to start crumbling. I rushed towards the walk-in closet for something to put on. There was no way I was going to be able to forgive myself if she didn’t make it. I dropped to my knees and started hurling uncontrollably from the pit of my stomach. Sincere rushed to my aid and caught me whimpering loudly on the floor. He embraced me in his arms with urgency and saw the look of panic on his face. When he grabbed my cheeks and placed his head against mine, I sobbed even more. I was just glad he was there.

“Baby, what’s wrong?”

“Some man just called and told me my granny had a stroke. I need to get home. Please help me,” I begged.

“I got you, baby. Don’t worry. Let me call for the jet.”

“Thank you,” I croaked.

Sincere was always stepping up to the plate. As I sat on the edge of the bed crying my eyes out, he started packing our bags, then got my mother’s and Rose’s stuff too, leaving the house not to longer after. Not once did he complain. All of us got into the truck to be driven to the private jet. As we were in route, I was emotionally drained while looking out the window. I heard my mother asking questions about where we were going. I didn’t even have the energy to even answer. At least Sincere was able to tend to her. We pulled up to the jet at the landing strip and climbed out to board while Mr. Moore helped us with our luggage.

“Do you want me to get mama and Rose to put them on the jet?” I asked.

“I’m gonna take care of them, Lamb. You go head and board.”

“Thank you, honey.” My voice was stopped-up.

“You don’t have to thank me for taking care of my family, Lamb.”

I collapsed into my husband’s arms as he tightly held my body close and allowed me to cry. He wiped away my tears before I boarded the jet. The leather chairs were so comfortable. Soon as I took a seat, I didn’t realize I passed out asleep until we landed. There was a stretch limo waiting for us at the airstrip. As we were driving to my granny’s house, I fed Rose a bottle. She was cranky and refused to latch onto the nipple. It was probably because she wasn’t feeling well, but I was patient. I softly sang to Rose and she finally decided to drink some of her formula. I needed to find out what hospital granny was at. I handed our butterfly to Sincere so he could keep her busy. I called the man’s number back and it kept going straight to voicemail. Squeezing my phone in frustration, I grunted. There was no way someone would call with that type of news and not answer the phone. I was getting overwhelmed and started calling hospitals in the area. I called at least three, but no records of my Granny Mable being admitted to any of them.

I found it very strange, so I had the driver take me to my granny’s house. We pulled up and I quickly swung the limo door open, rushing towards her porch. One of the steps was loose so I had to be careful not to fall. I grabbed the spare key from under the rock, unlocked the door, and stepped inside the house. The first thing I noticed was that it smelled like moth balls. The living room sure still looked the same. I saw that the couches still had plastic covers on them and piled with things she liked to hoard. I made my way up the steps towards the bedrooms and heard music coming from granny’s room. When I pushed the door open slowly, I saw her sitting against the backboard of her bed smoking a cigarette next to a man. They looked like they had just finished having sex. *What a hypocrite*, I thought. At first, I didn’t recognize the man but then I realized it was the next-door neighbor. As soon as she saw me in the doorway, her eyes widened like she saw a ghost and tossed the cigarette towards her curtains. She obviously wasn’t trying to look suspect but was too late. I caught her

creeping. I couldn't believe she wasn't in the hospital. On top of that, she was sleeping with a *married* man.

“Granny, I thought you had a stroke? You up in here with a man who isn't *your* husband?”

Granny waved her hand dismissively at me. “Humm. I am surprised you're even here, Ms. Thang. No, I didn't have a stroke. I told my friend to lie just to see if your ungrateful ass was going to check on me.”

I snapped my head back giving her a dirty frown. “Excuse me? I am here worried sick about you and that's all you have to say to me. Playing sick isn't a game, granny. I don't think that's funny. I thought you may have been dead.” My voice broke.

“Don't play victim with me, Mary. You wouldn't think I died if you never left me like I didn't mean anything. After everything I've done for you child, and this is how you repay me. Then, you talk to me crazy without having the decency to tell me that you got married. Out of all the men you could've picked, you chose someone who is full of sin. And subsequently, his damn name is Sinful K!” she tossed insults.

“That's his artist name, granny. His real name is Sincere. You would have known that if you stopped judging books by their covers.” I squeezed my fists together and exploded. “And who left you? I just want to live my life and you acted like that was a problem. Don't you *dare* talk about my husband when you are laying up with someone else's. You are trifling and low down. I can't believe I looked up to a sinner like you. All that preaching the word when you are a **fraud** .”

“Keep living because I don't care. You don't ever have to bring your ass back to my house. If I had it my way, I would've made my daughter get an abortion, but she was too far along. You're nothing but a disappointment.”

“How dare you talk to me like that, you old ass whore? Now I see why Avery couldn't stand your mean ass. You are *miserable*. For years, I clinged on to your every word, never spoke up for myself, and allowed you to control me. *But not*

anymore , Mable Lamb! I am **done** listening to you and living for you.”

Granny Mable got up off her bed, put on her slippers, and raised her hand like she was gonna smack me across the face. She tried, but I blocked her hand. Then, I pinned her up against the wall. She looked at me with fear in her eyes. Even though I was angry, I would never hurt the woman who raised me, but I surely wasn't gonna take anymore of her manipulation. Letting her go, I marched out of her room as she called my name. As I made my way downstairs, I knocked all the family photos off the walls, vowing to never treat or control my children's lives as long as I lived. The next phase in my life was living for me and enjoying my family.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Being with my wife had brought me closer with the man above. I was reading the Bible and praying every day. It felt good to connect with something beyond me. I don't know if that would've even been possible without Mary. She was an amazing woman, my biggest supporter through my darkest times. No matter what I faced, she was in my corner. With tears in my eyes, I stood over my mama's and big sisters' new headstones holding flowers. Mary was standing next to me gently rubbing my back to help console me because I was overwhelmed with emotion. Then, I dropped to my knees weeping like a child. The way my family was tragically taken away from me wasn't fair. I had to finally grieve if I wanted peace because no matter how much I mourned them, they weren't going to ever come back.

"I miss them you know. For a long time, I've had this feeling that I wanted to go with them, but it wasn't my time."

"Even though they are not here physically, they are in your heart. I'm sure they would be proud of the wonderful things you have accomplished."

"Thank you for being my lifeline." I sobbed with tears running down my face.

“And you are mine.... I am gonna give you some time to talk with them, okay.”

I lowered my head and started telling my mother and sisters about the struggles in my life and how I turned out after I overcame them. Tear after tear, I promised them that I would keep doing the right things and made my way back to the truck. Mary, Phoebe, and Rose were patiently waiting for me. I climbed in the front seat and took a deep breath, feeling a sense of peace. Mary was right. Even though my family wasn't with me physically, they would always be in my heart. At least I was able to still cherish the memories. I started up the engine and pulled out of the cemetery.

“Are you okay, baby?” Mary asked caringly as she rubbed my locks.

“Yeah, I'll be alright. I got to talk to them. Thank you so much for making sure they got nice headstones.”

“I told you I would take care of it. But I have to tell you something.”

“What is it, Lamb?”

“I had them move your father's to another location. There was no way I wanted him next to their innocent souls, not after the evil things he did to them.”

“You're a real one, Lamb,” he grabbed my hand and kissed it.

We made our way to Wolf and Barbie's mansion. They were having a party celebrating their anniversary. Their driveway was flooded with cars but had valet parking cars for them. I gave the dude my keys and walked inside with an empty stomach ready to be filled. A lot of familiar faces were there. I spoke and kept things moving towards the backyard. Wait staff were walking around serving food along with champagne on silver trays. Mrs. Barbie rushed over towards us for a hug and then pulled Rose from my arms. She really treated her like one of her grand babies. I appreciated that.

“I want you all to make yourself at home. Eat and relax. I have this pretty girl. Phoebe, come with me. Cameron and

Faye are looking for you.”

My stomach was growling so I went straight to the table to get something to eat. Mary went to speak to Rhythm since they were becoming good friends. After making my plate, I went to holla at Nardo and Wolf who were sitting around. Those mothafuckas were high as a kite. I could smell weed on their clothes, but it didn't tempt me. They dapped me up and I plopped down on the couch. Wolf got called away to take pictures with Mrs. Barbie. He jumped up running like his ass was on fire and I shook my head chucklingly.

“Nigga, when you gonna be ready to drop that album? I know that shit going straight to the top,” Nardo was hyped.

“It's almost done but I got one more song that I want to write and add before it is finished.”

“What is the song about?”

“My childhood and my struggles. It's called *Broken But Now Free* .”

“Aight. I can't wait to hear that joint.”

We started talking about how I planned on marketing my album when that nigga Drez came to sit down next to us. He wasn't even a friend of mine. I was trying to figure out why the fuck he was in my space. As I got up to leave, he said something slick out his mouth and I got in his face. In the mist of trying to be a better man, he had to play devil's advocate and burned in the end. Before I could do anything to jeopardize my custody hearing, Nardo grabbed me by my shirt before pulling me out the backyard and took me into a room as I paced the floor.

“That nigga ain't worth the spit on the ground so I don't know why you even entertaining him,” Nardo kept it real.

“You and I both are from the streets. You know disrespect ain't tolerated.”

“True, but when you got more to lose, you got to keep that chin up and keep moving. I'm still affiliated with the gang shit, but I can't let that shit cost me my family or my career.

Someone is always trying me, and I want to put that heat in them, but I got more to lose, and you do too, Sin.”

“I guess you right when you say it like that,” I agreed.

Wolf strolled in with that bitch ass nigga Drez and I was ready to explode, again. My jaws locked as I stared that mothafucka down, but he wasn’t looking back. He was a straight bitch but wanted to act tough in front of a crowd.

“We need to settle this shit once and for all. How about you two get into the ring and get this frustration over with?” Wolf suggested.

“Naw. He ain’t worth breaking a sweat for.” I mugged Drez.

“I knew you was a scared nigga,” Drez spoke up, upping the ante.

“Bring your ass on, but you better be ready,” I spoke through my gritted teeth.

We went into Wolf’s gym and got gloved up before stepping into the ring. I was ready for that nigga. He called himself trying to rush me, but I hit him straight on his jaw. Then, I came back with a hook to the side of his temple, causing him to stumble, and I let loose on his face with a combination of punches. Eventually, he dropped to the canvas. As I stood over him with a smirk, Mary strolled in with her hands on her hips. She wasn’t pleased, climbing into the ring to get me out. Wolf and Nardo were outside the ropes laughing. When she grabbed my ear and fussed, all I could do was smile. My Lamb didn’t play no games, especially when I wasn’t acting like a gentleman.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT



MARY LAMB

A few months later...

I was wearing a gold strapless dress that showcased my round baby bump. Sincere was licking his lips when he saw me walking down the case of marbled spiral steps. When I reached the bottom, he grabbed hold of my hand and twirled me around to get a better view. He never missed a moment to appreciate my beauty, but that night it was all about him. We were going to the Grammy's ceremony and Sincere had five top nominations for his double album, "A Sinful Mind," which had already gone diamond. Music critics called it *a masterpiece*. I stood on my tippy toes and wrapped my arms around his shoulders for a long kiss. Even if he didn't win anything, he was still a winner based on the fact of how much adversity he had overcome. I couldn't be prouder of the man he had become.

"Honey, you look so handsome in your suit," he looked so debonair.

"Preciate you, Lamb. I wanted to try something different. This is my first time attending the Grammy's." He held his suit jacket open with a b-boy stance pose.

"Why haven't you been before? You have won so many times."

“I was more focused on getting turned up at the after parties than being at the award show.”

There was never a dull moment with Sincere.

“You are something else, Mr. Kennedy.” I pursed my lips.

“Yeah, but you were the only one who could hold me down.”

“Ummm hum. You know I don’t play. Don’t make me get my oil. Before we leave, let me go check on Rose and to see if Ms. Nancy needs anything else.”

Ms. Nancy was our nanny, and she was phenomenal. We hired her after I went back to school to get my culinarily degree. I had finally decided to pursue something that I enjoyed. My plan was to open my own pastry shops.

“Don’t worry, I can check. If you go, Rose is gonna start crying because she doesn’t want you to leave, and we’ll be late for another event.”

“Don’t do me like that. I’m not that bad, Sincere.”

“Shidd. You got her spoiled rotten.”

“What about you? You are always giving in to her mess when she sticks out that tiny lip.”

“Yeah, but not today. I’m gonna see if they are straight and then we are getting in the limo.”

Sincere made me laugh acting and walking off like he had some control. Rose had him wrapped around her finger. If she started crying, he would crumble like a cookie. I waited a few minutes before going upstairs to Rose’s bedroom. When I peeked my head inside, Sincere was sitting on the floor reading books to Rose. He was so full of it. Rose was a daddy’s girl for sure. She always knew how to tug at his heart strings.

“Ah, ha! What do you think you’re doing?”

Sincere’s eyes got big because I caught him.

“She started crying and I gave in like a sucker,” he shrugged nonchalantly.

“You new age parents be letting these children run y’all crazy. Rose doesn’t do all that with me. She acts really good.” Ms. Nancy pursed her lips.

Without uttering another word, she grabbed Rose up before shooing us out of the room. We knew not to give her any lip about it. One time, I brought up a recommendation I read from a baby book. Immediately, she established her dominance and showed me she had control of the situation.

“How is she gonna toss me out the crib I paid for?” Sincere rubbed the top of my head.

“You should ask and see what she says?” I chuckled.

“Hell naw. I’m not trying to get a foot up in my ass. That woman is a trip just like Big Mama.”

We headed outside and climbed into our limo. After getting comfortable in the back seat, Sincere pulled me closer to lay my head on his chest. When we arrived at the Grammy’s, we were instructed to go. I swallowed hard and butterflies swarmed my belly as I got ready to walk the red carpet. Sincere encircled his hand into mine and it was time.

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

Cameras were flashing from every direction. Boom mics were being shoved in our faces. I was nervous, but Sincere handled it like a pro. He pulled me close and leaned into my body with a smile. Reporters were happy to see him and for once, they weren’t trying to make him out to be a crazy man. They only asked him about his music and how he felt about his success. I preferred to be behind the scenes but being married to a mega star brought me into the spotlight whether I liked it or not. We posed for a few cameras as we continued making our way down. My cheeks were hurting so much from smiling. When we saw Rhythm and Nardo, we took pictures together before walking into the building. All of us were sitting together in the same aisle with Wolf and his beautiful wife, Barbie. She was so sweet.

After greeting everyone, Sincere helped me to my seat and I sat down cradling my belly. There were a lot of people in

attendance. Music artist after music artist, they kept coming to give Sincere his props. Once the award show started, everyone got silent. Suddenly, Sage Walker came down while singing a song as her dancers were on stage. She had people on their feet rocking, including me. While rubbing my belly, I moved my hips. We all cheered for her after her song was done. From that performance, I could tell it was gonna be a fantastic event.

“You better not drop my baby earlier with all that shaking you’ve done,” Sincere joked.

“What? I love that song.”

“Let me find out *you* a *heathen* now, listening to this ungodly music.”

“Leave me alone, honey. I can love the Lord and still be hip.”

“Is that right?” He smirked.

“Yup. I rocked my Jesus all day. Now leave me alone, Sinful Man,” I joked.

“I love you, Lamb.” He kissed my lips.

We focused our attention back on the stage for the first award. I wasn’t familiar with the person who won, but I was happy for her. When it was time for Sincere’s first nomination for Song of The Year, I tugged at his arms and he smiled. Time stood still as the presenters collectively called Sincere’s persona, “Sinful K,” as the winner. While everyone clapped and cheered, he leaned over to kiss my lips. Tears rolled down my cheeks watching him walk on stage. He gave the two lady presenters hugs before standing at the podium. Pushing his locks out his face, he finally spoke into the mic.

“What’s up y’all? Honestly, I didn’t even think I would win so I am not prepared. I want to thank everyone who believed in me and stayed down for ya boy, especially my fans. Without you all, this wouldn’t be possible. Shout out to my beautiful wife, Mary, who is expecting my first son, and to my daughter, Rose. Daddy loves you, baby. This is for us!” Sincere raised his Grammy in the air like a drink.

I was so happy for Sincere. I couldn't stop crying. Even when everyone doubted him, after he was no longer on Wolf Knight's label, he worked tirelessly to make his comeback album a success. Once Sincere walked off stage, we all settled down and continued watching the show. A lot of talented artists took the gold home. It was great witnessing them win and thanking the people who helped them get to the top. Sincere and Nardo were up for Record of The Year. We waited on our seats anticipating if their names would be called. I was squirming in my seat and so was Rhythm. We wanted our husbands to win. Sure enough, our prayers were answered.

"The Grammys are going to Sinful K and Nardo The Don," the woman announced.

Everyone was hyped as they made their way to the stage. Sincere played it cool but I knew he was ecstatic. When Nardo went up to the podium, he had everyone laughing. He didn't have a filter, so the audience loved him.

"I grew up on led water with pork and beans, so a man like me ain't supposed to be up here. I want to thank everyone who loves *true* hip hop. My boy Sin gave me an opportunity to work on his project and I'm blessed. You know I got to shout out my wife, Ms. Rhythm Knight, a.k.a Cornfed, and our black Brady Bunch. I can't forget my Big Mama, Mr. Lee, Savage, and Pops. Oh yeah, and my beautiful mother-in-law, Barbie. Last, but not least, my milk dud headed father-in-law, Wolf," he joked, making everyone laugh again.

Sinful placed his hands on Nardo's shoulder. "I appreciate the love and thanks to my homie Nardo for killing this beat."

As the Grammy's time was dwindling down, we got ready to give an icon Award to Mr. Wolf Knight. He was responsible for making so many people successful in the music industry. Once they played the video tribute about all the things he had accomplished, the big man broke down. He put on a tough persona, but I knew he was a bald-headed teddy bear. After the video ended, the rapper Drez strolled out with a mic and started thanking Wolf and told everyone he was gonna perform. From the look on everyone's faces in the crowd, they didn't think it was the right time for him to do it. Sincere was

his prodigy. From the corner of my eye, I saw Sincere frowning. He then stood up from his chair and my heart started beating.

“Baby, sit down. What are you doing? Don’t you cause any trouble. Lord, I need my prayer cloth,” I whispered.

My pupils dilated watching Sincere make his way on the stage. Instantly, he snatched the microphone from Drez, causing the audience to gasp. I couldn’t believe he was about to act a fool in front of all those people and the millions on national television. Security rushed from the sides of the stage and my knees got wobbly like I wanted to pass out. I turned to look over at Wolf who had his hands on top of his bald head with a stressed-out expression. When the beat dropped and the security guards started dancing, I started looking crazy. Then, Sincere started rapping as the guy Drez hyped him up. The crowd went wild. Without warning, Rhythm got up and walked to the stage and someone handed her a microphone and she started singing once Sincere’s verse ended. Next, pop star, Gia, came out in a see-through outfit looking like a heathen, but she had the crowd pumped too. Even Sage came back out to serenade her boss. The whole audience was on their feet, including me, shaking it. I had no idea all of his top artists would perform. It was amazing. Wolf was so emotional. I could tell it meant a lot for them to do that. Once the flashing lights and music stopped, Sincere stood in the middle of the stage sweating with the mic raised in the air with everyone else on stage posing next to him. The applause and screams were so loud that it hurt my eardrums.

“Listen, enough. I know that I am not part of Wolf’s label anymore because he had to let me go to be better, but I want to thank this man for everything he did for me. Not just with music, but in my personal life. Today, we want to honor you for your contributions in the music industry and giving us the platform to be *us* . We love you, Wolf. Now, bring your ass up here and accept this award, old man,” Sinful shouted.

CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! WOOO! WOOO!

Wolf slowly stood up and kissed Barbie, then he made his way to the stage while everyone cheered. He embraced all of

his artists before turning to Sincere. I could tell it was mutual love and respect. When they hugged, it was a beautiful sight to see. Forgiveness and making up were the key to healing. We ended the night feeling great, especially when Nardo won Best Producer of The Year. To top it off, Sincere also won Album of the Year, Best Rap Song, and Best Rap Album. I had no idea he was gonna pull me on stage to thank me for helping him become a better man and for saving his life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

SINCERE "SINFUL" KENNEDY



Court buildings were nothing new to me since I had a history of getting in trouble, but for the first time, I was nervous as hell. The judicial system wasn't designed to favor a black man and I already had multiple strikes. I needed the law to be on my side in order for me to get full custody of my baby girl. Even after completing rehab, I still felt like I had a red bullseye on my back. My past was either going to make me or break me. I just wanted the judge to be fair and not crucify me before hearing my case. One thing that Rose's grandparents had over me was their squeaky-clean image. They were pillars in their community, whereas I was portrayed in the media as a fuck up. All the odds were stacked against me. Before going in the court room, everyone who was there for moral support grabbed hands and we prayed. No matter the outcome, I wasn't gonna get high. My sobriety was important.

After we were done praying, I walked through the double doors with my hand encircled into Mary's as we followed behind Cupid. There were already some people sitting on the two front rows, so I took my opportunity to glance at them before taking my seat at the long wooden table. There were a bunch of white people dressed in their fancy clothes with their noses hiked up in the air. I figured they were Rose's family

and got my confirmation after seeing Mrs. Martians wearing a pink dress with ruffles. When the old heffa saw me staring, she cut her eyes at me. There wasn't any point in making a scene. I just turned around shaking my head. That bitch was racist.

When the bailiff called for us to all rise, we stood up as the judge strolled out wearing her black robe and approached the bench. She glanced around before taking a seat and I swallowed hard seeing that her ass was white. There was no telling if she was open minded opened towards my situation or with the Martians because they looked the same. That alone had me feeling sick. From the corner of my eye, I saw Mary looking at me before she leaned over to give me words of comfort. She was always the sunshine when things looked gray.

“Honey, you already look worried and we haven't even started the trial. Try to relax. We are not gonna lose,” Mary was optimistic.

“How do you know that, Lamb? You got some type of psychic powers I don't know about?”

“No, but God told me that everything will work out in our favor.”

“I'm gonna try but I can't make any promises.”

“I have faith that everything will be in our favor.”

We immediately started the trial. Cupid stood up adjusting his tie and opened with all the reasons why I deserved custody of Rose. Next, the Martians' lawyer rose from his seat and gave all the reasons why I didn't deserve to have Rose. Of course, they brought up my addiction and how much trouble I had got into over the years. I just pushed back my dreads and looked at the floor.

For a whole hour, different witnesses came forth from both sides. The judge's face remained neutral. You couldn't tell whose side she was leaning towards more. Then, Cupid got desperate and asked me to testify. He was on some improv shit. We didn't talk about what I would say if I had to testify on the stand! All I knew was that sweat was beating off my

head as I took a seat on the witness bench. Mary looked nervous as hell. I didn't want to say anything that would jeopardize our chances of getting Rose. The arrogant smirks on the Martians' faces said that they had won. Cupid approached the stand and gave me a serious stare. I stopped moving my hands, placed them on top of my lap, and took a deep breath. If I wanted to win, I had to trust Cupid. He was a beast in the court room. That's what he told me.

“Mr. Kennedy. We know you have had trouble in your past, but we can see that you're doing better. This court has heard from several witnesses who believe that you are more than capable of raising your daughter. I want you to tell everyone in this court room and Judge Rowe why your child benefits from being raised by you?”

I felt like Cupid was setting my ass up, but what other choice did I have but to answer as honestly as I could.

“I love Rose and of course she deserves to live the best life possible. I'm not gonna sit up here and say we are not scared to fail, because we are. We are in charge of someone's life and that in itself is scary because we are human. That means we may make mistakes but not intentionally. When I look into my daughter's eyes, I can already see her greatness and what she can be when she grows up. That's why my sobriety is so important. By me taking all the necessary steps to make sure I stay on track, not just for Rose but for me too, I can be a father she looks up to and always feel protected with. And with a wife like Mary, who also loves my daughter like her own, will be a great mother figure. We are a team, a family. My daughter will be in the best hands with us.”

“Thank you, Mr. Kennedy. No further questions.” Cupid nodded.

The Martians' lawyer stood up to approach the witness stand. I could tell that mothafucka was gonna be on some bullshit. All I could do was clench my hands. Otherwise, I would have knocked that mothafucka out up against the judge's podium.

“Mr. Kennedy, I mean no disrespect, but it’s been shown many times before that you have went to several rehabs in attempts to get clean. The other problem is, after a few months, you relapse and end up getting back into trouble. It seems like a potential risk for the minor child to be raised in your custody. She doesn’t need to see another parent of hers get destroyed by drug addiction. She has already lost her mother to the same thing. Are we to sit here today and risk more trauma to the minor child’s young growing mind? I don’t think we can let that happen.”

“I have a right to be a father to my child. Everyone has a past, including you, sir.”

“What if you get stressed? Don’t you think that might want to make you get high again?” the Martians’ lawyer tried to antagonize me.

“No,” I was adamant.

“You sure? Raising a child isn’t easy. I would know because I have four children of my own.”

“My daughter will be in good hands.”

“You seem to have a bad temper from what I’ve seen in the media, fighting and attacking people when you’re upset. Drug use adds to that behavior. Can we trust you enough to not get rough with your daughter?”

“I would never abuse my daughter in any way!” I slightly raised my voice and got defensive.

Cupid gave me a look to relax.

“Are you sure? You really don’t seem to be convincing, and I can already see your temper elevating by the way you are grinding your teeth. Babies can make you do that too you know. We don’t want anything to happen because you’re overwhelmed.”

“Your Honor. He is badgering my client,” Cupid tried to restore order.

“Enough, Counselor. Stick to relevant questions,” the judge said firmly.

“My apologies. I have one more question. Do you think you’re capable of being a great father when you can’t even take care of yourself? I mean the drugs, fighting, and anger can’t be good. Who knows how you were raised? That all comes into play how you do as a father.”

“I’m *nothing* like my damn father!” I started getting emotional. “I wouldn’t *kill* my own family. I wouldn’t *molest* my children. I wouldn’t *beat* my daughter like my father did me every day. I love that little girl! I am determined to give her the fighting chance my father took away from me and my sisters! I ain’t the best role model, Your Honor, but I’m *better* than him. All the love I have is for my child. She won’t have to worry about using drugs to forget about painful memories that scar her for life, because I’m gonna give her memories that that will shape her future into a bright one. My wife and I will raise her with morals, love, and respect.”

My tears could not stop falling from my face, but I kept my head up high on that stand. My past had been haunting me my whole life to the point drugs and alcohol became my new family members. I didn’t want to face the fact that my family was killed by my own father. I didn’t want to remind myself that he knew the assistant pastor was sexually abusing me because I told him, and he turned a blind eye.

The judge called for an hour recess. I rushed out of the courtroom feeling like I had lost the case. Mary followed behind me calling out my name. She caught up with me and pulled me into a hug. I just cried. I didn’t care about all the people looking at me. Mary grabbed my hand and took me outside for some fresh air.

“I think I messed up the case with my outbursts,” I was paranoid.

“No, you didn’t, baby. You did amazing. I feel like everyone felt your pain and got a better understanding of who you are and why you make the mistakes you did in life.”

“I’m scared, Mary. I don’t want to lose our daughter. I’ve already lost so much.”

“Don’t forget you have also gained things along the way. I’m here with you, right?” She kissed my lips.

“You’re right. If it hadn’t been for you coming into my life the way you did, I probably wouldn’t even have gotten a chance to get custody of Rose.”

I needed to recharge. We walked across the street to a deli for some food. As I sat at the table with my head down, all I could do was think about how I might’ve lost the case. Mary kept assuring me that I did good. We stayed for a bit until it was time to go back to the court building. I stepped off the elevator and ran into Mrs. Martians. She was looking all teary eyed with wet rims under her eyes. At first, I thought maybe she was gonna have something slick to say, but to my surprise, she gave me a hug and started sobbing on my chest. I really didn’t know what was happening. She had to be setting me up in some way. Then, she tilted her head up, looking me dead in my eyes.

“I am sorry for trying to take Rose away from you. That’s not what my baby girl would’ve wanted. Kirsten’s problems stemmed from the pain my husband caused and what I foolishly ignored. She begged me not to take the baby because she didn’t want Rose to be raised by her father, but I didn’t listen. Even in death, I didn’t respect my daughter’s wishes. I will tell the judge you know what’s best for Rose and have what it takes to give her the quality of life she deserves. I will not stand in the way any longer. Please, just let me have a relationship with my only grandchild.”

Mrs. Martians grabbed my hand, and we strolled back in the court room side by side together. All eyes were on us, and everyone looked confused, especially when she took a seat next to me at our table. Mr. Martians wasn’t pleased at all. His face was twisted up in a frown. The judge came back out with the same neutral facial expression. She sat down and slammed the gavel for the trial to start back up.

“I have heard both of your testimonies today. Thank you, to all the parties involved who has Rose’s best interest at heart. After listening to everyone, I have my ruling. My decision came down to Mr. Kennedy’s testimony.”

I was convinced that I fucked up. My emotions had once again, got the best of me. I showed that judge I was driven by emotion and portrayed myself a threat to Rose. I was gonna have Cupid file petitions to the court until I got her back because quitting wasn't an option for me.

“Mr. Kennedy. The fact that you are one of the most successful artists in the world and still here living after everything you've been through in your life, is a testament of your strength. Your testimony was true and genuine. I can see that you truly love your daughter and will be a great role model to her. Even with the setbacks you've faced, you admitted your problems and got help. I am proud of you. I truly believe that you and your wife will raise Rose with unconditional love. In the best interest of the courts, I believe that the minor child in question will stay in your custody.”

The moment the judge banged down her gavel, I leapt up and kissed Mary with tears of joy in my eyes. I had accomplished something more than music. I finally had my family.

CHAPTER FORTY



MARY LAMB

The stage control Sincere had was unbelievable. Fans were hanging on to his every word as he rapped his lyrics alongside Rhythm, who he had brought out as a surprise guest to perform with him. He was back to headlining his own tour after dropping his double album, “A Sinful Mind.” I knew he would reclaim his career. When he walked off the stage sweating and pulled me into a kiss, they kept shouting his name. I could tell by the sparkling look in his eyes that made him feel good. Suddenly, he grabbed my hand and pulled me towards the stage. With my eyes widened, I shook my head rapidly, telling him no, but he didn’t listen. The moment I saw the thousands of fans going off, I swallowed hard. Sincere pulled my body against his and started rapping to me. I was so shy, but he made me feel comfortable. The fans loved it.

*“I’m a let you see what’s going on inside of my
head,*

Lots of trauma, lots of drama,

None of it ain’t for your mama,

All of it, it’s just for karma,

*Piercing through my armor,
Pinching to my flesh,
Can you see the droplet of blood dripping down
my vest?
Yes, you can,
I'm on the battlefield of temptation,
Increasing like inflation,
Thoughts delegating,
Foolishness and maturation,
Procrastination lays flat like a foundation,
But I'm patient,
Checking my arrangements,
I'm face to face with all the challenges they
came with,
I'm tainted, looking at the pain my scars
painted,
No erasing,
This is permanent,
It stays there,
Tattooed into my heart,
That's where my tats are at,
Take me to another dimension, just like the
tesseract,
I'm prone to what reality throws,
And every catch I make is what reality holds,
Like two pistols, with bullets ready to unload,
Pop, Pop,
Body shots, they rock ya hard, like some
guitars,
Bars I spit, and after that I get twisted,*

*Too drunk cuz my cup ran over from being
gifted,
A witness, to the swiftness of God's love
I prayed one day, when I was under the stairs,
Didn't know if I was gonna see the next day,
So, what I did, was put my hands together and
pray."*

During his final song, he tossed the mic and gave me the biggest kiss as the crowd rumbled with cheers. We then headed back to the dressing room after the show ended. As we made it through the hallway, people patted him on the back telling him congratulations. Sincere had the biggest grin, especially when he saw Rose sitting next to her favorite stuffed kitty and building a puzzle with my mama and his personal assistant. Rose quickly climbed off the couch and ran to her father's arms. She was eighteen months and had a big personality. He scooped her up before attacking her face with kisses while she giggled uncontrollably. When he put her back on the floor, she wrapped her arms around my leg and smiled. Then Sincere grabbed our son, Ezra, from the carrier. We all got comfortable on the couch. No matter how exhausted Sincere was after a show, he wanted to make sure he gave us some attention. His personal assistant left and was told not to let anyone in.

"Your show was amazing. They loved you but I can't believe you brought me on stage."

"Why not? You're my lady and I wanted to show you off. If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be standing here."

"Nope. You are here because it was meant. I can't take any credit for your change. All I did was pray for you."

"Your prayers worked because I am a different man. Thank you."

"Anything for you, baby." I kissed his lips.

“I’m proud of you too, Lamb. You got your culinary degree and found something that you love to do.”

“Aww, thank you. It’s nothing compared to you having the highest grossing tour of a rapper.”

“Naw, we are not doing that, Lamb. You won’t diminish your accomplishments like they’re not enough. I’m proud of you.”

“Thank you. I can’t wait to find a vacant spot so I can open my bakery business. I might have to take out a loan.”

Sincere had a big frown on his face. He was generous with his money, but I wanted to do it on my own.

“What you need a loan for? You got access to all the money. You’re able to buy anything you want, Mary.”

“I know, but this is something I want to do. I don’t want people to support me just because your name is attached to it,” I sighed.

“Even if my name wasn’t attached to it, your crack pies will sell and your sweets. You almost caused a war at Sunday dinner when Nardo said your pies were better than Big Mama’s,” he chuckled.

“Right. She almost went upside his head. I thought I was gonna have to get my prayer cloth so she wouldn’t hurt him.” I laughed. “Thank you for believing in me.”

“It’s my job. I got you.”

We focused our attention on Rose and saw her kissing her stuffed kitty as she snuggled it closely to her body. Ever since we visited Avery and Cupid’s house, and she saw that her cousins had a real cat, she fell in love with cats. I wanted to get her a real one but Sincere didn’t want to because he felt that she would be sad if the animal passed away. While Rose ran off to play, I scooped my baby boy from Sincere’s arms, and he gave me a toothless smile. He was already two months old and just the cutest baby.

“I went through that tough labor for Ezra to come out looking just like you. Life isn’t fair.”

My pregnancy was rough, and I even had to be put on bedrest. It was very scary for our family, but we made it. Sincere never left my side to ensure that I got the best care.

“Don’t even worry about it. When I get you pregnant again, the baby might look like you, Lamb.”

“Again? Who said I was having another baby anytime soon? We already got two.”

“The way you keep jumping on this dick, you’re bound to get pregnant.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” I agreed.

“I’m about to get dressed so we can go out for dinner.”

“It’s late, baby. We got to get the kids to bed. You know I don’t let them stay up. I just didn’t want them to miss your last show.”

“Calm down, Lamb. We keep them on routine all the time. It’s okay to break it occasionally.”

“Alright, but only because it’s your big night.”

“Preciate it.”

After kissing my lips, Sincere went to change his clothes in the other dressing room. I pulled out my boob and got my baby boy comfortable to breast feed. As I covered him with a blanket, there was a knock on the door. Rhythm strolled in with her two beautiful kids. We were great friends and spent a lot of time together. She told me she was going to meet us at the restaurant with Nardo before she walked out the door. An hour later, we left out the arena and climbed into our limo. I just relaxed looking out the window.

“Lamb, I got to make a quick stop before we get to the restaurant.”

“Okay. Is everything alright?”

“Yeah. Remember that place I wanted to buy to create a studio?”

I frowned. “The one I told you would look out of place because all those restaurants were around it.”

“Yeah. Stop hating,” he chuckled. “The owner, Walter, is looking to sell the property, but I have to go sign the papers tonight because he is going out of town for a minute.”

“What kind of mess is that? He can’t fax or email them?”

“I don’t know, but this property is dope. I have to get it.”

“Okay, honey. Do what you think is best, but I don’t feel that studio will thrive in that location.”

I didn’t utter another word and allowed Sincere to handle his business. He was adamant about getting that property. We pulled up to the property and climbed out to walk towards it. Walking through the doors, my mouth flew open. It had been turned into a bakery. There were several clear desserts displays, beautiful colored walls that had different sweets designed on them, a register to take orders, and a waiting station. I couldn’t stop the tears from falling down my face. When Sincere pulled me into a hug, all I kept saying was *thank you*. I flicked my tears away before going to check out the kitchen. It had state of the art appliances and new baking equipment.

“Wow. You did this for me?” I placed my hand over my mouth.

“Yeah, but it wasn’t easy, Lamb. You were about to ruin it being nosy for the last few months.”

“Is that why Brooklyn, Avery, and Rhythm wanted me to show them my designs for the store?”

“Yup. I got some people here who wanted to tell you congratulations.”

We left the kitchen and went back into the front of the bakery. All the people who we loved were there to share their support, holding balloons. It felt great to finally do things on my own terms.

EPILOGUE



Sincere “Sinful” Kennedy

I had hit rock bottom several times, but the Lord helped me find my way back. For five years, I had been clean from any alcohol or drugs and being a family man had become more important than my career. I retired from music after dropping three more independent albums that reached diamond status. And even though I wasn't doing music anymore, I was working as an A&R rep for Wolf Knight records. He wanted me to help develop new talent and song writers. It was a dope job. Shit, I even had a big ass office with a nice view. The best part was I able to spend time with my four kids and my Lamb without having to be on the road touring. I looked at the clock on the wall and saw that it was going on five at night. I needed to hurry home for dinner.

Closing my laptop, I stood up from my desk and grabbed my suit jacket to put on. Never in a million years did I think I would be rocking some fancy ass suit. I stepped out my office and got on the elevator to take me down to the parking lot. I unlocked my convertible with my key fob and climbed into the driver seat. My engine loudly roared as I peeled out my designated parking space. As I was on my way home, Mary called me, but when I picked up, I heard a tiny squeaky voice on the phone.

“Daddy, when are you coming home? I miss you.”

“I miss you too, Rose Kennedy.”

Rose was six years old and the sweetest kid.

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing. I was playing with my baby dolls with Granny Phoebe, but she is gone with her friends to the movies.”

“Are you being good to mama?”

“Yes, I am but the boys aren’t listening. Mama had to get her prayer cloth and oil.”

“What are they doing, butterfly?”

“They keep playing with the ball and broke one of the vases. And Ezra took one of your Grandma’s trophies to play in the sand. Mama said that you worked hard for that.”

“You mean my Grammy?”

“Yeah, that’s what mama said I think,” she chuckled.

“Alright. I’ll be home soon butterfly .”

Twenty minutes later, I pulled up to our mansion and parked before stepping out to walk to the door. The moment I stepped in the foyer, my sons, Ezra, Noah, and Sincere were caught kicking a ball. They were five, four, and three years old. Once they saw me, they stopped and looked sheepish. They knew I didn’t like them playing with balls inside. They handed it to me before giving me a hug.

“Uh dad. We’re sorry,” Ezra apologized.

“Yeah. We are sorry, dad,” Sincere dropped his head to the floor.

“We won’t do it anymore, dad,” Noah smiled.

“Please, or you won’t be able to have any of mama’s pie, and I will take away your toys. Now go,” I was firm.

I shook my head chuckling as they sped off and almost ran into each other to get away. I never even gave them a whooping, but I was firmer than Mary. After I kicked off my shoes, I went to the kitchen where Mary was setting the table

up with the plates for dinner. I kissed the nape of her neck and she moaned. When she turned around, I gripped hold of her ass and slipped my tongue into her mouth. She kept her eye shut until we separated our lips. I cupped the side of her face to look into her eyes. Every day I fell more in love with my Lamb and I always wanted to show her how much I valued her as my wife.

“Welcome home. I missed you. Did you have a great day at work?”

“Yeah, I did, beautiful. I think we are going to sign these two artists to the label.”

“That’s great. You have been finding so much talent.”

“Yeah, it’s a good feeling to help develop someone else’s career. Enough about me. How was your day? Did you get the flowers I sent to you?”

“I sure did. They came right on time. We were busy today at the bakery. I don’t know if the grand opening for the third one will happen on time.”

“You’re gonna crush it. Keep your faith and everything will fall into place.”

“Look at you, talking me off the ledge.”

“I got too, Lamb. You’re my other half.”

“Guess who called me today?”

“Who?”

“Granny Mable. She is still stuck in her ways. It’s been five years since we last spoke, but she still feels like she didn’t do anything wrong for acting like she suffered a stroke. I don’t have time for her. I will continue to love her from a distance.”

“How about you love her from a distance and stop using the money to pay her bills? I can’t stand that old ass woman,” I grunted.

“I know, but she still my granny. She has a fixed income. I don’t want to see her in the streets. She did raise me you know.”

“Yeah aight. Let me change out my work clothes.”

“When you are done, I need to talk to you.”

“I got time. What is it?”

“We will talk when you get settled. I love you.”

Mary seemed a little anxious and I didn't understand why. Maybe she was pregnant again. I headed upstairs and took a shower. After slipping on a tank top with some basketball shorts, I stepped into the hallway and ran into Rose who was holding a kitten with her little brothers following behind her. Once they saw me, they all took off running down the steps like they had committed a crime. I chased after them, needing some answers. When I got back in the kitchen, my kids were behind Mary peeking out.

“Mary, we talked about this. We said no pets.”

“No, Sincere. You said no pets, but my children wanted one, so I got them a cat.”

“You really gonna make me look like a bad guy?”

“Yup. I understand you are worried that they will get attached to the cat and something will happen, but they have a right to love something other than us.”

I sighed heavily looking at Rose, Ezra, Sincere, and Noah's pouting faces. Honestly, I felt my back was against the wall. I was kind of upset with Mary, but I also admired that she wanted our kids to be happy. After agreeing for them to keep the kitten, they gave me the biggest hug and started doing a dance. We all sat at the table and ate dinner. While the kids went to play with their kitten before bed, I helped Mary clean and we both talked about why she felt she needed to go behind my back to give them a pet. At the end of the day, I was just trying to keep them from any heartache if something happened to it, but I had to be reasonable. I kissed Mary and went to check on the kids. My eyes popped out my head seeing those rugrats feeding that damn kitten milk out of my Grammys. At first, I was pissed but then found it funny. I picked up the kitten and smiled.

“I forgot to ask you what's his name?” I asked.

“We named him BJ. We love him already, daddy. He loves us too,” Rose said with excitement.

I sat on the floor with my kids and we gently patted BJ’s head while Mary joined us too with a smile. I finally had the natural high of life. That wouldn’t be possible if I had never met my Lamb. She stayed by my side and eased my Sinful Mind.

The End.

NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR

Wow, Sinful K and Mary Lamb were so fun to write about. I had so many laughs and couldn't believe the things these two did in some scenes. They were so different in personality but connected like a puzzle. I truly loved watching them evolve as characters and fighting for their happiness. They will be missed but never forgotten. If you have been rocking with me since my first series, I thank you. If you just learned about Kendra Necole, I hope you enjoyed the ride.

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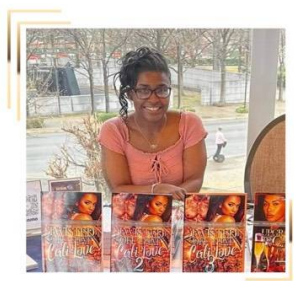
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Shout out to **DUBBLE AA** for bringing Sinful's lyrics to life.
I love you my bae.

KENDRA NECOLE'S CATALOG



TWISTED OFF THAT CALI LOVE 1-3
UPGRADED TO A CALI BOSS
NO LOOKING BACK 1-2
A COZY CHRISTMAS WITH A G
WHEN LOVE HITS 1 3
CAUGHT UP IN THE RHYTHM
FOR THE LOVE OF CHRISTMAS
A WINTERCREST VALENTINE'S: AVERY & CUPID
A SINFUL MIND

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