



LAST
CHANGE
To Love

B. LOVE

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INTRODUCTION

Please skip this read if you don't like novellas.

If explicit, vulgar language or the use of the N word offends you, please skip this read.



He'd just sent me into an orgasmic convulsion three times... now, he was telling me we couldn't do this anymore. Worst, Levi hadn't even had the decency to allow me to pull myself from my spent state. His cum was still wet, resting on top of my pussy as my chest heaved. Slowly, I turned my head in his direction, hoping he hadn't said what it sounded like he said. There was no need for me to ask him to repeat himself. His slumped shoulders and hung head confirmed that those words were true.

Truthfully, we weren't in a committed relationship anymore. So we weren't together for us to break up. We were, however, having amazing sex for going on fourteen months now. When we first met, we quickly devoted ourselves to a relationship. The ways we were incompatible didn't matter in the bedroom. It didn't matter that he was a stuffy, uptight politician whose mother couldn't stand me because she thought I was vain.

My business left me with little time to spare, and his career did too, so we worked. We didn't date per say, but we fucked – *good*. And we talked – *deeply*. For now, that had been enough. But as I considered the idea of no longer having my partner, a sense of emptiness began to fill me.

Spreading my legs wide and flat on top of his bed, I let my eyes settle on the pebbles on his ceiling. “What did you say?” I checked, pulling in a deep, steady breath.

“I said this has to be the last time, Morgan. We can't... do this anymore.”

I allowed a few silent seconds to pass. Morgan Carter was spoiled by herself and others. She, I, was used to *always* getting what I wanted. Consistent access to Porter had gone from a want to a need at this point, and as I crossed my arms over my sweaty chest, I couldn't help but feel offended that he would even *consider* taking himself away from me.

“Why not, Porter?”

“Because.”

I remained silent, waiting for him to continue. But Porter wouldn't. He wasn't the type of man who felt as if he had to explain himself to anyone. His position of power as Mayor of Memphis didn't make it any better.

“Because what?” I pried anyway, hoping he would have the decency to give me more.

“Re-election is next year, and my team and I think it would be best if I go on and commit to Amber this year. She's the mother of my child, and it'll look better if I made her my wife.”

I chuckled as I sat up and placed my feet on his beige carpeted floor. “So what? You think having a baby mama is going to be the reason you don't get re-elected?”

“It will if she paints me to be a bad guy who doesn't spend as much time with my son as I should. My schedule is already tight; it doesn't help that I spend what little free time I have splitting it with PJ

and you.”

With a huff, I stood and snatched my pieces of clothing from the floor. They were in a trail that started in the hallway. He couldn't wait to get me in his bed, so he started undressing me as soon as I walked inside of his home. Now, I was starting to think he was in such a rush just to get to this point.

A part of me wanted to ask Porter why he couldn't marry me. He may not have been the man I was in love with, but I did want the same things as him. Stability, consistent companionship, a family. Not once had he ever mentioned loving or even being attracted to the mother of his child, and I was supposed to now believe they'd be in a healthy marriage just for the sake of his Mayoral image?

“I should have cut you off when you got her pregnant,” I grumbled, hoping my ill feelings of the night he told me about Amber wouldn't resurface. Being triggered by him having a baby on me would further remind me of all the things I lacked in life. On the outside looking in, people thought I had it all. Great looks, wealth from my million-dollar hair and skincare company, and the ability to have anything and everything I wanted.

The money no longer made me happy, though. Not as much as it used to at least. Money wasn't keeping me warm at night nor was it making me feel as if I was fulfilled. Sure, I knew I'd found my calling and was living my purpose, but there was still a hole in my soul that needed tending to. I knew that Porter wasn't the glue I needed to mend that hole permanently, but he'd been filling me temporarily.

“It was a one-night stand, Morgan,” he gritted softly, making his way over to me. “We had just broken up. I didn't think we'd start back up again.”

Scoffing, I tried to slip into my jeans without falling onto my ass from moving too fast. I swatted his hand away as he reached for me, grinding my teeth and inhaling a deep breath as my nostrils flared.

“You're right. And we're done, so it doesn't matter anymore.”

He seemed so detached when he first said the words, but as he reached for me again and looked down at me with sad eyes, I wondered if this was as easy for him as he made it look.

“I apologize, Morgan. And I'd like to make this right. Tell me what I can do to make amends.”

My smile was soft as I gently pulled my wrist away from him. I couldn't allow any part of me to beg him to give me him, no matter how much I wanted him. I would suffer and release him before I forced him to have me. Settling for a sex only relationship was for convenience, not because that was all I deserved. And I'd be damned if I let Porter make me believe otherwise.

“Goodbye, Porter.”

Our eyes remained locked for three Mississippi's before I turned my back to him and slipped my shirt over my head. He didn't protest as I grabbed my shoes and headed out of his room. The further I got away from him, the heavier my feet felt. My heart felt. I couldn't help but wonder if this was my payback. For hurting all the boys and men that had ever loved me. The one time in my life where I felt a connection with someone... besides Amaru... I had to accept that connection being taken from me prematurely.

“FLUFFY CAKES,” I called, slamming the door behind me.

I didn't like for my fur baby to be alone while I took trips for work, so I dropped her off at my sister's house earlier this week. Cali's place should have been my first stop, but silly me for wanting

to get some dick instead. Now all I wanted to do was eat ice cream, get high, and let Fluffy Cakes cuddle with me until I felt better. Well, I'd need to shower first, but still. Nothing would make me feel better other than my Fluffy Cakes.

Before getting a dog, I would laugh and find it so hard to believe that people could actually compare their dogs to children. I could never understand how they could feel so attached to something that couldn't even talk. But my life changed when I got Fluffy Cakes. She was the cutest little puppy I'd ever seen. Like me, her love language was physical touch, so she was always under me wanting to get and give love.

Fluffy Cakes had been my companion for the past fourteen months. She was who I told my secrets to. Who I cried with. Who I loved on. Who I catered to. She made me feel needed... like a mother... since I didn't have any real children. I could honestly say that buying her after Porter and I first broke up had been one of the best decisions I'd made in my life.

"Fluffy," I called out again, wondering why she wasn't running to me like she normally did when she heard my voice.

Figuring she was maybe sleep or outside, I began to search the house for my sister. Her car was outside, and the door was unlocked, so she had to be here. They had to be here.

"Cali?"

I searched all over the house, landing at the backdoor last. The sight of Cali slumped over as she sat on the top step of the deck made my heart drop.

Something was wrong.

The door creaked as I pushed it open, and she didn't bother to look back at me.

"What's wrong, sis?"

Her head tilted, but she remained silent. I made my way closer, scratching my forehead at the sight of Fluffy Cake's noise collar in her hand. Since I hadn't gotten around to getting her a chip, I always put the sound collar on her when she went outside. Fluffy Cakes was a wanderer, never liking to stay in one place for too long. If I didn't keep an eye on her, she'd escape and lose her way. I never feared her actually running away, but I always had a fear of her little nosey self wanting to explore and getting so far that she couldn't find her way home. So I would use the sound collar to keep tabs on her and make sure she didn't get too far.

"Cali... where's Fluffy?"

With her mouth partially open, Cali hung her head and released a low sigh. "I'm so sorry, sissy."

Smiling nervously, I jogged down the stairs and looked around the yard for Fluffy Cakes. "Fluffy Cakes," I called, ignoring the sight of Cali standing out of the corner of my eye. "Come here, boo boo."

"Morgy..."

"Where's my baby?"

"She got out of the gate, Morgan."

My head tilted as I turned to face Cali. Crossing my arms over my chest, I shifted my weight to my left side and ran my tongue over my teeth. "And?"

"I forgot to put the collar on her, so I didn't know. I—it was only three minutes, I swear. But by the time I'd come out and realized she was gone... it was too late."

Shaking my head, I took a step away from her. "What are you saying?"

"My neighbor saw someone in a blue car pick her up before they drove away. I'm sorry."

My chuckle was low as I ran my hand down the back of my neck. "You're joking, right? Where is she? For real."

“She’s gone, Morgy. I’m so sorry, sissy.”

Those words... weren’t registering in my head. Leaving her where she stood, I began to search the back and front yard for Fluffy Cakes. When I couldn’t find her there, I went back in the house, constantly calling for her. Both her bed and cage were empty, and the food that Cali had poured before taking her out was still in her bowl.

Unable to reject the truth any longer, tears immediately began to pour from my eyes.

My Fluffy Cakes was gone.

Leaning against the wall, I sobbed.

Sobbed for her, for Porter, for the empty home I was about to go to.

And the sound of Cali saying, “I can get you another dog,” didn’t make it any better. Honestly, it made me feel worse.

“It won’t be the same,” I yelled, looking up at her as my pulse began to race. “That’s like saying you’ll have another child if you lose one. They won’t be the same. You can’t compare or replace one with another. They won’t be the same!”

“Okay,” she almost whispered, sitting next to me and taking my hand. “Okay. I’m sorry for suggesting... I’m sorry, sis. My neighborhood watch is on the lookout for the car. I promise we’re going to do everything we can to get her back.”

All I could do was rest my head against the wall as tears steadily poured. I came here seeking solace. Seeking comfort. Seeking a reason to smile and feel less empty. And now, I’d be leaving even emptier than I came.

A WEEK HAD PASSED since I’d lost both Porter and Fluffy Cakes, and I’d spent the bulk of that time sulking in my home. Thankfully, my team was able to run my business without me because I hadn’t been any good for anyone. If it wasn’t my thirty-fourth birthday, I wouldn’t have bothered to go out tonight, especially with Cali of all people, but she was basically forcing me to have a good time. Because of my hectic schedule I didn’t have any friends, so she was the only person I really went out with. Though I knew I couldn’t one hundred percent blame her for Fluffy Cakes being a wanderer, a part of me couldn’t help but blame her for not making sure her gate was locked and putting the collar on her.

But that was the past and holding on to it was only making me feel worse. Instead of focusing on no longer having Fluffy Cakes or Porter, I tried to be thankful for the time I shared with both and the good memories. That was the only thing that allowed me to agree to going out with Cali tonight. My parents had brought me brunch earlier today and a couple of gifts, including a new Terrier pup that I gave back. Though she was a cutie pie, I didn’t want to get attached to another dog just to have to grieve for it all over again.

I knew that I’d gotten so attached to Fluffy Cakes because I didn’t have a real relationship or baby, and nothing would fill the void of either of those things. While I couldn’t say that I wanted to try to be in a committed relationship again, I did want to start my family. With a real baby. Then maybe another fur baby. But I’d made up in my mind to use a sperm donor. Men had become a hassle that I wanted to avoid at this point.

I wasn’t such an independent woman that I felt like all a man had to offer me was dick, but I was definitely independent enough to feel as if trying to develop a relationship right now wasn’t worth the

hassle. My business had been my main priority for the past ten years, and I didn't see that changing any time soon. Was there a man capable of tolerating the lack of my free time? Would I be capable of getting to know someone new? Just thinking about it had my head throbbing.

As my head shook, I sighed and picked up my drink. Since I wanted to get tipsy quickly, I had the bartender bringing a mix of Hennessy and Red Bull back to back. I was on my third one when I'd started grumbling under my breath about my fucked up plight.

"What did you say?" Cali asked.

Releasing a sigh, I looked towards the ceiling and contemplated whether or not I wanted to tell her. Zunda's, though it was an amazing, upscale steakhouse and bar, was certainly not the place for an emotional breakdown. Every time I thought about Fluffy Cakes I wanted to cry. Porter didn't have the same effect on me, but if I thought about the fact that he was the first man to hurt me in years after failed relationships that were my fault I'd get in my feelings. Not necessarily over him but what he represented.

"Nothing," I lied, looking up at the muted TV.

"You sure? You seem like something's on your mind."

Looking over at her, all I could do was not cry. Eleven years my junior, she'd been my biggest supporter when I first started my business. Back then, she was in middle school getting all of her friends to convince their mothers to buy my products. I ended up paying her way through college. Now, she was over my marketing and advertising team. Cali was almost as dedicated to my business as I was, and while I appreciated her help, I hated what her devotion was doing to her life.

Like me, she hadn't been in any real, committed relationships for years. No children. No time for dating and friends. We literally only had each other, and I wanted so much damn more for her.

"I'm lonely," I whispered before clearing my throat and looking around. As if someone was watching us and had read my lips. When I was sure there were no eyes on us, I returned my eyes to hers. "And I don't want you to be lonely, too."

Her hand covered mine atop the bar as she did that same nervous chuckle that I normally do.

"What do you mean you're lonely? You have me, mom and dad, our family, your team, your followers..."

My head shook as I flipped my hand over to entangle her fingers with mine.

"I'm lonely here," I clarified, pointing to the center of my chest. At my heart. "I love my family, don't get me wrong, but I want my *own* family." Turning back in my chair, I pulled my hand from under hers and grabbed my drink. "I want a baby, and I want you to be able to live a normal life. Have time to find love and start your own family. You'll never be able to do that working sixteen-hour days with and for me."

"I don't want that. Not right now at least. Mor Better Hair and Skincare is my life..."

"But it shouldn't be!"

"Well it is!"

"I don't want you to end up like me."

"What? A bad ass boss ass beautiful ass made ass millionaire? Hell yea I want to be just like you."

Our buzzer began to vibrate and light up, signaling that our table was ready. Grabbing it and my drink, I waited for the bartender to look our way and see that we were heading for our table before going back over to the hostess station. I waited until she led us to our table to reply to Cali.

"Money isn't everything. Trust me, it's great. It's an invaluable resource that allows you to get the material things you want and need. But it can't buy love, peace, and fulfillment. That's what I want

and need right now. And I don't want you to see your life pass you by in a blur like I did. Then you'll wake up on your thirty-fourth birthday accepting the fact that you'll have to start your family with a trip to the damn sperm bank."

Her mouth dropped open; eyes widened. Cali looked so much like me it was scary. We looked like mirrored reflections of our mother, though, so it shouldn't surprise me how much we looked alike. We had the same pecan brown skin and slanted coffee brown eyes. My hair was cut into a jet-black blunt bob with bangs and hers was shaped in a pretty brown pixie cut. We had the same pointy nose, but our lips were different. She had our mothers' thin lips and I had our father's plump, bowtie shaped ones.

Even though I was the older sister, her body was bigger. My frame was slim, and I had a small waist, wide hips, with a round ass while Cali wasn't as curvy but thicker. Her breasts were bigger than my B cup, too.

Cali couldn't reply because our waitress arrived. We gave her our drink and appetizer order, and as soon as we were alone Cali squeezed the edges of the table as she said, "Morgy! You *cannot* go through with that!"

"I told you if I didn't marry Porter that I would. I want to have a baby before my next birthday, and I have no desire to get with a man to do so."

"That makes no sense, Morgan. If you want love, why don't you make that your priority first?"

"Because, I can't hurry or even control love. My heart. Who knows when I will find a good man? Hell, I might not even want one after I have a baby. I might be content enough with just having friends with benefits. But a baby is something I can control. I can do this on my own and not have to risk shit going left because the relationship attached to the baby wasn't what I need it to be."

Her hands covered her face as she sighed and shook her head. "I know there's no talking you out of this if you've made up your mind."

Her hands dropped. "Might I suggest you consider one last option before making such a drastic move?" I remained silent and she continued. "I know when we met Giselle and Jillian a year ago, you said you would only reach out to them if you wanted a sperm donor, but why don't you use Giselle as your matchmaker?" My head began to shake as I sat back in my seat. "If anyone can help you find love, Giselle can. Plus, she can match you with someone on your level. Someone who will understand your business and schedule and work with you, not against you."

She made it sound like it was easy, but it never worked out that way.

Giselle was a matchmaker that had gone into business with Jillian, the first black woman in Memphis to open and run a successful, multi-million-dollar sperm bank. They pretty much had the entire Mid-South on lock. If you wanted a man you went to Giselle. If you wanted a baby you went to Jillian. When I first met them, things were rocky as hell between me and Porter. I was sure in that moment that I'd never try to be in a relationship again, so I ended up getting Jillian's card just to be safe. If you would have told me in my early twenties that I'd be considering a sperm bank I would have called you crazy, but in this moment, that seemed like the quickest and easiest solution to my problem.

"What difference will it make? It won't matter if I meet with Giselle or not, she won't be able to help me find love, and I'll end up having to work with Jillian anyway. Might as well save time and go to her now."

Cali paused for a few seconds before saying, "If you don't think it's going to work, there's nothing for you to lose. Why don't you just meet with Giselle and see what she can do? And if she can't match you with the man of your dreams, I'll take you to meet with Jillian myself."

Though I didn't really need her support with my decision, I wanted it anyway. It was going to be nice having her in my corner because I knew for sure that my parents wouldn't understand or accept it. I agreed with a nod, smiling and shaking my head when she squealed and danced in her seat. It was crazy how something so silly could make her so happy. There was no doubt in my mind that Giselle would be unsuccessful in finding a match for me.

But if she could... he would for sure be my last chance to love a man. If it didn't work, my heart would be closed for good, and I'd be having a baby on my own before my thirty-fifth birthday.



This was a waste of my time, but I promised Cali that I would try. No part of me felt like Giselle was capable of finding someone for me to love, let alone someone I could love within a year's time. Giselle was known for matching people so perfectly that they were able to commit to loving each other within three to seven days, but that shit sounded unrealistic as hell to me. They may have been in lust or infatuation with each other, but love? Nah.

Well, then again, anything was possible. I used to think the success I'd achieved was impossible, but I was literally living my dreams. The only thing missing in my life was my family. If Giselle was able to help me with that, I would have to be open to receive it. Because it wouldn't matter what I was offered, if my door was closed to it, it wouldn't do me any good. My head and heart would have to be hopeful and on the same page, so as silly as I thought this was, I smiled and listened intently as Giselle went over the different packages she offered.

Giselle was proof of what matchmakers could do. Two years ago, she found the love of her life by mere coincidence. She was in the process of allowing her competition to match her with love and she stumbled upon Chaquille, her husband. They were a match made in heaven... a Christmas miracle... a beacon of hope.

"Did I explain the packages and process clearly enough for you to make a sound decision tomorrow? I always allow my clients twenty-four to seventy-two hours to think things over."

I nodded as I inhaled a deep breath. Swallowing hard, I tilted my head a little higher. If I left this office without committing, I would say no. "Yes, I want to go on and sign up now. The three-month package will work."

That way, if I needed to go to Jillian, I could still have a chance of having a baby by my birthday. Or at least being pregnant by then depending on her process.

Giselle stood with a wide smile. Absently, her hand rubbed her protruding belly before resting on her hip. She was expecting their first baby, and she definitely had a deeper glow than she did the last time I saw her.

"That makes me so happy. You will not regret this, Morgan. I got you, girl." She extended her hand across the table for me to shake. Standing, I put my hand inside of hers. "Let's go back out front. My receptionist will give you the contract to look over and accept your payment. After that, my assistant will take you back to our computer room where you will be able to fill out your paperwork and questionnaires. Because my matches are based on compatibility, complementation, and connection, it will be very important that you are one hundred percent honest with your answers. The more honest you are, the easier it will be for me to match you. Once we have your top three matches, I will call you back in and we will go over the next step."

“Sounds good, thanks.”

“Thank me after I match you with the man of your dreams.”

There was nothing left for me to say to that, so we both shared a smile before heading out of her office. When we made it back to the front, my feet stopped working a few feet shy of the receptionist’s desk. At the sight of him, I stood frozen in place. My heart instantly skipped a beat, and I wanted to smile, but the scowl that covered his face caused me to frown instead.

While I understood why Amaru may have been unhappy to see me years ago, enough time had passed for him to be over how things ended between us by now. Obviously that wasn’t the case. He turned more in my direction, puffing his chest out as his eyes squinted. Giselle called out to me, reminding me of what I’d come out here for in the first place. Slowly, I made my way to the receptionist’s desk... right next to Amaru.

His tall frame hovered over mine, but that didn’t keep me from not being able to feel his hard stare at the side of my face. And he smelled just as good as he looked. I had to keep myself from visibly inhaling a deep breath for the sake of taking in more of his scent.

“You gon’ stand there and act like you don’t know me,” were the first words out of his mouth. His voice, thick with hate, was just as deep as I remember it being. “You probably don’t, huh? Your stuck up ass treated me like I wasn’t shit, so why should I be a memory to you?”

Closing my eyes, I gritted my teeth and inhaled a calming breath. “I could never forget you, Amaru Mitchell.” Opening my eyes, I looked up into his. Briefly, I thought I saw a fleck of light pass through his eyes as they smiled, but the darkness that originally filled them at the sight of me quickly returned. “And I’m not stuck up, nor did I treat you like shit.”

He scoffed with a nod. “Whatever you say, Morgan. I see cutting niggas off like a light switch hasn’t worked in your favor since you’re here.”

I knew he was trying to get a rise out of me, and I was trying not to give him one, but that irritated me. Tilting my head, I snatched the clipboard that the receptionist offered me before turning to face him.

“I could say the same for you since you’re here.”

“I’m here because of you.” His pointer finger nudged me in the center of my chest as his nostrils flared. “You broke my heart and made it impossible for another woman to get up in there.”

“Oh, please. Do not blame me for that, Amaru. Even if I did break your heart, that was years ago. Grow up and get the hell over it.”

Briskly, I walked away from him and plopped down in a chair to look over the contract. Just that quickly my mood had turned to shit. I hated even offering him that power over my emotions and allowing my interaction with him to lower my vibration. Now I would have to force myself to get into a better mood instead of naturally flowing in the one I was already in.

I couldn’t believe I was happy to see his ass. He was just as bitter as he’d always been, which was one of the reasons we didn’t work out. When we first met, it was during our last year of college. Amaru was getting ready to head to the NBA and I was absolutely smitten with him. Unfortunately, he ended up suffering from an injury that sent him out of the ranking of being a first draft pick for the Memphis Grizzlies. Not being able to play professional basketball had turned Amaru into a monster.

He smoked and drank his life away for quite some time. A part of me wanted to help him heal his demons... and I allowed him to become my own. I tried to help him as much as I could, but eventually, I had to cut him off. His lifestyle had become way too toxic for me. Eventually, he ended up going to rehab and getting clean, and we linked back up maybe seven years ago.

I wasn’t open to a relationship at that point because Mor Better was doing so well. It was taking

up so much of my time that I simply didn't have any to spare. Especially not to a man in Amaru's position. While I knew he had potential, he had literally hit rock bottom. I was so blinded by success and brainwashed by people who are not even in my life anymore that I thought being with Amaru would be a bad look. That he'd somehow taint my image and leech off of me. I didn't think I could be with a man who wasn't on the same level as me, and I made that clear to him.

It wasn't until I talked to my mother that I realized I could have helped influence him to become better that I understood how detrimental the words I said to him were. Especially knowing that he'd had an addictive spirit that he was battling with. The fact that he'd gone to rehab to get better for me didn't make matters any better. Learning that from his mother made me feel even more like shit. But... that was the turning point he needed in his life. The second time Amaru went to rehab, it was because he wanted to be better for himself, not for a woman.

And it stuck.

I'd been keeping up with him over the years from a distance, and I knew that he'd created a street basketball league – for niggas who couldn't make it to the pros – was how he described it to the press. Just thinking about that made me smile, even though I wanted to be mad at him for being mad at me. But that was Amaru. He didn't sugarcoat anything for anyone. Except me. I'm sure he wanted to call me a bitch and get real disrespectful. What he'd said was the nice version I bet, which was another reason why I left. The last thing I wanted was to argue with him in front of a crowd after all these years.

When I was done filling out the last page of the contract, I took it up to the receptionist. She paged Giselle's assistant to take me back to the computer room. Before I left, I walked over to where Amaru was seated and stood over him. He didn't bother looking up, but he did stop writing.

"I understand if you don't want to forgive me, but you would be doing yourself a disservice. That forgiveness would be for you, not for me. You deserve to release the ill feelings my actions caused within you. Maybe if you would have done it sooner, you wouldn't have to be here." That last part caused him to look up at me. "I'm sorry for hurting you, Amaru, even though I'm sure me saying that does nothing to or for you. So please, forgive me, so you can release me."

He stood, forcing me to step back. Looking up at him, I searched his under turned whiskey brown eyes for something that would assure me that I was getting through to him. I saw nothing.

Amaru's voice was strained when he said, "That's the point, Morgan." He released a hard exhale as he looked over my head. "You were never someone for me to release. Let go of. I tied myself to you in a way that I'd never connected with another woman. That's why it hurt so bad when you pulled away from me. Felt like you literally ripped out my heart. Forgiving you ain't gon' do shit to fix that."

"Amaru..."

Not bothering to hear me out, Amaru gently pushed me to the side and walked to the receptionist's desk. My shoulders slumped as defeat filled me. God. I was so blinded by ambition back then that I didn't see how heartless I was being to him and other men in my life. Letting Amaru go was one of the few things I regretted in my life. I was sure the hurt I inflicted on him was the reason I was in the position I was in now. Since there didn't seem to be anything I could do to change his mind, I followed Giselle's assistant back to the computer room and prayed that she'd be able to find a woman who could make him love her more than he hated me.

MY EYES ROLLED when I turned onto my street and saw Porter's car parked in front of my mailbox. We hadn't talked since he'd called things off. I was hoping he wasn't here thinking I'd still have sex with him while he was engaged to another woman. Yes, I was cool with having friends with benefits, but only if I was the only woman receiving those benefits. After my run in with Amaru, I honestly didn't feel like I had the energy to engage Porter, but my curiosity was piqued.

What was he doing here?

I let up the garage to my home but didn't pull the car in. If I did, he would have followed me inside, and I wanted to have whatever conversation he wanted to have outside. Even though my business was profitable, I didn't use material things to showcase my success. Not anymore at least. When I first started making money I did, but once I got used to it, I started being smarter with what I purchased.

My seven-bedroom home was paid off, and so were my three cars. I had a beach house in Panama and San Diego as well, but that was it. Investing and stocks were how I preferred to splurge, mainly because of the return investment. I used to always say I would spend my money traveling and making memories, but I'd been so busy that I hardly traveled outside of events for work. Once or twice a month I went to different cities to showcase my products and do popup shops. Other than that, I hadn't been on a real vacation in about three years.

That was going to change, though. I was committed to using the next year of my life to truly live. The whole point of me having a team in place was to be able to have help with my business. So no matter how hard it was, I was committed to spending only one to three hours a day handling business. The rest of my time was to be spent figuring out things I loved to do outside of make money.

Porter made his way over to my car with a big box in his arms. Now I was really curious. Leaning against the trunk, I crossed my arms over my chest.

"What are you doing here, Porter?"

"I wanted to come and tell you in person that I will be proposing to Amber Sunday. Just... wanted you to hear it from me first so you wouldn't be surprised."

Smiling with one side of my mouth, I nodded. I couldn't believe he was actually going through with this, but I shouldn't have been surprised. Porter's family was hardcore dedicated to politics. They were willing to do whatever it took to maintain their positions of power within the community... even if that meant marrying someone they didn't love.

"Thanks for the warning." My eyes lowered as I asked, "What's in the box?"

"Your sister told me about Fluffy Cakes. I'm sorry."

My body immediately weakened at the mention of my Fluffy Cakes. I'd gotten to the point where I wasn't crying every day, but I still had those sad moments. More than anything, it drove me crazy wondering where she was and if she was okay. If there was a way for me to know that she was being well taken care of I would be okay, but I couldn't have peace not knowing who had my baby.

Porter placed the box on the ground and opened the top. As soon as I saw the black puppy inside my eyes watered. Covering my mouth, my head shook adamantly. I understood what he was trying to do, but I couldn't even consider getting a puppy right now. Honestly, it made me feel bad as hell. Like I was being disloyal to Fluffy Cakes. She'd been so good to me and made me so happy... I couldn't possibly replace her.

Before I could stop them, tears were pouring from my eyes. Porter stood and took me into his arms, allowing me to cleanse my soul on his chest.

"Morgan... I'm so sorry. I wasn't trying to make you sad. I assumed another dog would make you happy."

“I’m not ready,” I confessed in a whisper, clinging to his body. “I feel like I’m cheating on her.”

He chuckled, though I was dead serious. “Do you think Fluffy Cakes would want you sad and depressed over no longer having her?” My head shook. “She’d want you happy and at peace, just like you were with her. Whether you do that with another dog or not. But, I think you should let another one love you just the way she did. And I think you have a lot of love stored up inside of you to give, too.”

That was true.

But I was tired of giving it to an animal.

I wanted to love a baby.

A man.

I couldn’t tell him that, though.

The last thing I needed was for him or anyone else to have pity for me.

“I think I just... need a little more time. I really appreciate this gesture, but I’m not ready. Maybe you can keep him or her for a little while, and if my heart changes, I’ll get it.”

Porter pulled away from me, but his arms remained wrapped around me. He looked softly into my eyes with a small smile.

“I’ll keep him for a month, and if you don’t want him after that, I’ll give him to one of my little cousins.”

Nodding, I looked down at the puppy who was looking up at us. He was cute... but not as cute as Fluffy Cakes. In that moment, Amaru’s words struck me even deeper. Here I was trying to convince him that another woman was the answer to not having me, but the truth of the matter was, when you experienced a one of a kind love... you could *never* replace it. All you could do was appreciate it and cherish the memories while trying to establish a connection with someone new. No dog would ever be for me what Fluffy Cakes was, and I’m sure no woman would ever be for him what I was to him.

I owed him that hurt and anger, but my God I wanted his love now, too.

Releasing Porter, I offered him a smile. “That sounds good. Thank you, Porter. And congratulations in advance on your engagement.”

Porter stuffed his hands in his pockets and stared at me. There was something on his mind. I sensed it. But if he wouldn’t mention it, I wouldn’t either. That was probably for the best anyway.

“Thank you. I guess I’ll talk to you later.”

I nodded, though I was sure we wouldn’t speak again. About the dog or anything else for that matter. I couldn’t say that I loved Porter, but I did love how we were together. How well we were able to communicate with our mouths and our bodies. If he had any chance of making things work with Amber, we would have to cut all ties.

Looking down at the puppy, I watched as Porter picked up the box and carried him away. His gesture was sweet, and kind, just like Porter. And it was a better way to remember him by instead of rushing out of his home with the remnants of our sex still sticking to my body.



When Giselle's receptionist called to schedule my next appointment, I was starting to finally get a little excited. The thought of possibly finding a partner had me going to sleep every night filled with anticipation. I kept telling myself not to let my hopes get too high or my guards too low, but the more I read success stories the more trusting I felt of Giselle's process.

Since we had a mid-morning appointment, I did my usual morning routine of Pilates and breakfast that was already prepped by my personal chef before heading to her office. On the way there, Cali called to make sure I went through with it and didn't change my mind at the last minute. At this point, even if I didn't want to go through with it, I at least wanted to see who she would have picked for me.

After signing in at the receptionists' desk, I got comfortable for but a brief second before she was calling me back. My smile was wide as I made my way to Giselle's office, but it instantly fell when I saw Amaru already seated. His eyes rolled and he looked up at the ceiling with a shake of his head. Scooting down further in his seat, Amaru spread his long legs under her desk.

"The fuck is she doing here?" he grumbled, to which Giselle looked from him to me.

"You two know each other?"

"Yea, and I'm trying to forget I ever did."

Now I was the one rolling my eyes as I stepped fully into her office. "Good morning, Giselle." Looking down at him, I muttered, "Amaru."

He looked at me but didn't bother to speak back.

"Good morning, Morgan. Please, have a seat."

"If you're not done with him, I can wait outside."

"No. I wanted to speak with you both at the same time." My eyebrows wrinkled as I sat in the chair that was next to Amaru. Giselle waited until I was seated to smile and turn her computer monitor in our direction. The screen had *compatibility* in bold, blue letters flashing across the screen. With her hands cupped on top of her desk, she looked from me to Amaru in a way that made my stomach turn. "I wanted you both here to explain the next steps of the program and how it works. As I mentioned when we first talked, my matches are based on compatibility, complementation, and connection. It shouldn't have surprised me that you two knew each other based on the results of your tests, but I wanted to bring this to your attention."

Christ.

Crossing my arms over my chest, I smiled nervously, hoping she wasn't about to say what I thought she was about to say.

"We used the software that I created to come up with your three best matches. You will have

exactly one week to connect with each of your possible partners. At the end of those three weeks, you will choose who you want to court for the remainder of your time with me. If you want to commit to your best match, which will be your first match, you won't have to spend time with the others. It's imperative that you all do exactly as I say for the first three days for this to work..."

"Wait," Amaru interrupted, sitting up in his seat. "Are you trying to say *she's* the best you've got for me?"

Giselle looked from him to me. "... Yes."

His head shook as I laughed.

"Hell no," he declined, and I was too in agreement to be offended.

"I'm sorry, Giselle, but no," I added. "He wants nothing to do with me, and..."

"You want nothing to do with me. You made that shit clear seven years ago."

"Is this what you're going to do every time we see each other? Because I'm already sick of you bringing that shit up."

"Are you fuckin' serious right now?" The veins in his neck and forehead began to protrude, and I knew if we kept this up his anger would fully surface. "Your ass made me fall in love with you, and when I needed you most you left me. You made me feel like you only wanted me for the fame and money. Then when you came back in my life, you basically spit in my face and made me feel like I was beneath you."

"It wasn't like that, Amaru," I lied, not liking how horrible that made me sound.

"Then what was it like, Morgan?"

My eyes softened and shoulders slumped the longer I stared into his eyes. I couldn't deny that that's how my actions made him feel, though that was never what I wanted to project and portray. Even if it was how I felt, I'd never want to hurt him in that way.

"I'm sor—"

"Save the apologies. They mean nothing to me."

Giselle cleared her throat, and we pried our eyes from one another to look at her. She clicked the *Enter* button on her keyboard. Both our names and pictures popped up with 99% flashing in the middle.

"As you can see, you both have a ninety-nine percent compatibility ranking. That means out of the thousands of people in my database, you two can have the most harmonious, fitting, less conflict riddled, likeminded match."

She clicked *Enter* again. "For complementation, you scored ninety-seven percent. That means out of the thousands of people in my database, you two will best balance each other out. Because of the places you are in your lives, you both have an amount of completion and wholeness individually that makes you prime candidates for marriage. The right partner will complement and make your lives better. Increase and expand the love and joy and fulfillment you already have."

She clicked *Enter* a third time. "For connection, you scored one hundred percent. That means out of the thousands of people in my database, you both are literally... the perfect match. You should be able to vibe, connect, and enjoy one another's company effortlessly. Well... if you can get past what ever happened in your past. Only seventy percent of my clients score this high, and that seventy percent married within six months. They are all still happily married today."

Giselle turned the computer screen back around. She grabbed two folders that were on her desk and handed them both to us. "If you want to discuss what happened, I'm all ears. I also have a relationship therapist available if necessary. But I need to know if you two would be willing to give this a shot, or if I need to match you with your second options."

I remained silent. Partly because I was taking in the fact that Amaru, on paper, was the perfect match for me. The other half of me wanted to see what he had to say first. Not even bothering to open the folder she had given him, Amaru stood.

“I’m not doing this with her, so set up a meeting with the second best choice.”

My head hung as he began to walk away, and I felt horrible for the damage I’d inflicted upon him.

“Amaru,” I called softly. He stopped walking but didn’t bother turning around. Looking in the opposite direction, I willed myself not to get emotional. When it came to business, I was always fierce and able to use my masculine energy to get shit done. But as a woman, an emotional being, it didn’t take much to soften my heart and put me in my feelings.

“I know I broke your heart, and I know you don’t want to hear me say I’m sorry...” Blinking rapidly, I licked the corner of my mouth. “So I just... hope that you use those cracks to let love shine through for whoever you choose. If you’re going to be broken, be broken open. Let it give you the capacity to hold more love in because you really, truly deserve it. And I know I don’t deserve the chance to give it to you...” I licked my lips and swallowed before releasing a shaky breath. “But I want you to have it. Okay?”

With one bob of his head, Amaru left. I couldn’t face Giselle, so I continued to stare out of her window as I twisted my mouth to the side.

“Do you want to talk about it?” I shook my head, fighting back tears. “Okay. Well... if you want to see your second choice, you can schedule an appointment up front, but I pray that you and Amaru can work through this because he truly is the best man for you.”

Chuckling quietly, I stood and brushed a tear away quickly. “I don’t deny that, but I’ve proven to him that I’m not the best woman for him.”

I WANTED to feel closer to Amaru. The way things ended at Giselle’s office was not sitting well with my spirit. It was unfortunate that he had to experience such an ugly version of me, but I wished he could have seen the mature, stable, open version of the woman I was today. Since it would have been selfish of me to try and talk to him on social media or via email, I decided to go to the basketball court he frequented while we were dating just to see if I could feel his presence. It caught me totally by surprise to find him there playing basketball.

For a while, I stayed in my car and watched as he ran from one side of the court to the other... sweat dripping down his walnut brown colored muscular, tattooed frame. Some of them were new. Like the one that had GOD written boldly down his chest and stomach and Lifted written in cursive across the center of his neck. Seven years ago, his hair was cut into a low curly afro. Now, he had a tapered cut with a cross design. Both of his ears were pierced, and a low, scruffy beard lined his jaw.

After making his tenth shot in a row, Amaru allowed the ball to bounce away from him. His hands were on his hips as his head hung. The droplets of sweat that splattered against the concrete called out to me as if they were life water for me to drink. He must have felt as if he was being watched because he looked around until his eyes landed on my car. My windows were tinted, so he couldn’t see inside, but he stared at my car in an attempt to figure out who I was.

I didn’t want him to think I was here to bring him harm, so I rolled the passenger window down so he could see me. Expecting him to flip me off or walk away, I was caught off guard by the smile that fought to form across his face. We stared at each other for seconds on end before he finally

yelled, "Getcho ass out the car, Morgan."

Biting back my smile, I cut the car off and slowly made my way over to him. If I would have known he'd be here, I would have kept my clothes on from earlier. Now, I was dressed in loose fitting joggers, an oversized white t-shirt, and matching sneakers. I still looked good as hell, though. Amaru made that clear by the way he eyed me as I walked towards him. He had always preferred when I dressed down when we dated – I don't know why I thought now would be any different.

"What you doin' here?" he asked when I finally made it in front of him.

Unsure of if I wanted to be completely honest with him or not, I waited a few seconds before I answered. "I felt bad about how things happened earlier and was thinking about you. I didn't expect to actually see you here, though."

His eyes looked around as he said, "This my hood." They returned to mine. "I'll never leave." I nodded, not sure of what to say. He picked up on it, giving me a full smile. "For you to have been thinkin' about a nigga, you ain't sayin' shit. I need you to make some noise like a robber in a bubble wrapped factory."

Chuckling, I shook my head and pulled my hands behind my back. "I don't know what to say."

"Why not?" His eyes scanned every inch of my face as he licked his lips. "You ain't ever had no problem talking to me before."

"That was before I hurt you. And I know I probably sound like a broken record, but I really am sorry, Amaru. That girl was... too caught up in a destination that she thought was impossible to reach. Now that I have, I realize how much time I've wasted and how much more there is to life. Don't get me wrong, I don't regret my success at all. I just... regret letting it be my main focus for the past ten years. But that's why I'm working with Giselle now. I want to change that. So I'm sorry for the pain I caused you. I don't know what else to say besides that."

"You look so damn good." His voice was low and husky. So low, it was as if he wasn't talking to me. As if it wasn't meant for me to hear. Cutting my eyes away from his, I blushed and prayed my nipples didn't betray me by hardening. "You are so beautiful." Smiling wider, I put space between us as I continued to avoid his eyes.

"Thank you," I almost whispered, looking at him for only a second before looking away again.

"I been thinkin' too," he confessed, running his hand over his head as he watched the car that drove by. He obviously still maintained full awareness of his surroundings at all times. I guess growing up in the hood and being victim to and the cause of violence did that to you.

"About?" I pondered, pulling his attention back to me.

"I met with Giselle because of a bet with my brother, but I realize now, this is God's way of giving me the chance to prove to myself that I'm worth you."

"Amaru..."

His lifted hand silenced me. "Say what you want, but that night scarred me. You were my everything, Morgan, so to hear the woman I would have done anything for say she wanted nothing to do with me... that shit fucked with my ego. I haven't taken any woman seriously since, and I probably never will until I feel like I'm worth you. So if you wanna do this shit, I'll agree, because I gotta prove to myself that you wasn't right about me."

That certainly wasn't the reason I would have wanted to reconnect with Amaru, but if that was what he needed, I would give it to him with no problem. His fucked up perspective was my fault, so I had to offer the solution to the problem.

"So what does that mean? You want us to date just for the sake of being able to say you had me?"

He smiled with one side of his mouth as his head tilted. Amaru's hand went to my cheek, and he

used it to pull me into his chest. My eyes fluttered as I bit down on my lip. So much for not showing my arousal. Not only did my nipples harden but chills covered my arms, too.

“I want to make you fall in love with me. Show you what you missed out on. If we end up together, cool. If not, I want to give you the best week of your life. And when it’s over, I want to be able to walk away knowing I proved myself and gave my all to you.”

Shit.

This was dangerous.

But I owed him this.

I couldn’t possibly say no.

But... I could use this time to make him fall in love with me all over again. That way, he wouldn’t want us to part ways after our week together.

“Okay, I’m down.”

“Cool. I’ll call and set something up with Giselle in the morning.”

Amaru released me, and I immediately hated the lack of his presence. Not wanting to let on to that, I took a step back and hoped the distance would lessen his effect on me.

“I’ll see you later, Morgan.”

Having been practically dismissed, I nodded and took a step backwards before turning and heading to my car. I couldn’t wait to get home to tell Cali about this. She was going to swear I was crazy as hell for agreeing, and she would be right, but there was something about Amaru that I couldn’t let go of so soon.



I was nervous as fuck. Not only was I about to go on my first real date in over a year, but that date was with Amaru of all people. Giselle had given us a list of things to ask each other and do during the first three days of the week, then we were on our own. It would have been difficult enough embarking upon this journey with someone I didn't know; it was twice as awkward knowing I'd be taking it with someone who could barely stand me.

Though at the basketball court he wasn't so bad. I didn't know how long that was going to last.

I'd ended up changing my outfit three times before settling on a classic little black dress with matching pumps and clutch. We were scheduled to meet for dinner tonight to get to know one another again, and the week would officially start tomorrow. As I waited at the bar for Amaru, I twiddled my thumbs as my left leg bounced. One glass of wine was already flowing in my system, but I was tempted to take a shot of something stronger.

After scratching my nose, I pulled my phone out of my clutch to call Cali. She'd be able to calm me down and convince me to stay. To not run. To not let my pride cause me to avoid Amaru because I didn't want to see the hurt I'd inflicted within him.

"You didn't leave, did you?"

With a smile, I lowered my head as it shook. "Not yet. I..." Though I couldn't see him, I knew his touch the moment his hand went to the small of my back. Inhaling his scent, I closed my eyes and exhaled deeply. "I have to go, Cali. Call you when I get home."

As I disconnected the call, I looked to the right. Amaru looked as good as ever. We were matching since he was in all black as well. The cross that started at the right of his hairline was freshly done, and his beard had been trimmed down some.

"I thought you wouldn't show up," he confessed, sitting next to me at the bar.

Smiling, I decided to keep the moment light instead of revealing my fearful truth. There would be enough time for that when we got to the questions.

"Had to stay so you could use me for your ego."

He smiled back and rested his elbows on top of the bar. "Amongst other things." Amaru's eyes scanned my face, then my body. "You look beautiful."

"Thank you. You're looking quite handsome yourself."

"Why are you here, Morgan? And why are you here with me?"

The bartender came over, asking if Amaru wanted anything to drink. Before ordering, he asked if I was hungry and I told him I didn't have an appetite. I was too nervous. Maybe after we had our conversation that would change, but for now, all I could think about was how things were going to go as we talked. Since I wasn't quite ready to eat yet, Amaru ordered himself a Jack and Coke, then we

went to a small two chair table on the side of the bar.

“Are you going to answer my questions or act like I never asked?”

That made me smile because I was hoping he would forget. Running my hand down the back of my neck, I nodded. Surrendered.

“I’m here with you because I want to right my wrong. Honestly, you don’t have to prove you’re worth me – I already know you are. But if you need to do this to believe that, that’s cool.”

“And my first question?”

I licked the corner of my mouth. “My dog’s gone.” Smiling bitterly, I resisted the urge to cry. With a shrug, I shook my head and bit my bottom lip. “I know that sounds silly, but she was all I had.” My voice broke, so I paused. “And my sister lost her the same day the man I thought I would spend at least a few more years of my life with decided to marry someone else.” Tilting my head, I avoided his sad eyes. “So I decided I wanted to have a baby. Not to put that pressure on him or her to love me and be loved by me while giving me purpose, but losing the both of them on the same day reminded me of just how little time I invested in my personal life. Originally I planned to meet with Jillian for a sperm donor, but my sister convinced me to meet with Giselle first. She thinks I would regret not knowing who the father of my child is. So...” I smiled, and he mirrored it. “You’re legit like my last chance to love.”

Amaru took my hand into his and licked his lips. Then, he placed a tender kiss to my palm. One that had me tugging my bottom lip between my teeth again.

“Do you think you could handle not knowing who the father of your child is?”

“In that moment I did. But I’m not sure anymore.”

“I don’t think you could, not if you’re like you used to be.”

“Why not?”

“You’re too curious of a person. You’d want to know why your baby has anything or does anything unlike you and your side of the family. You’re a problem fixer. If your child ever came to you wanting to know who their father is, it would kill you to not be able to answer them. To not know who you went half on such a beautiful blessing with. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it, and it works for some people, but I couldn’t see that working for you.”

He was right. I didn’t want him to be, but he was right.

“What’s your why?” I deflected.

“Tell me about your dog. Did it die or is it lost?”

I rolled my eyes and chuckled. “She got out of my sisters’ backyard and was stolen. What’s your why?”

“Have you been looking for her?”

“They put the car information on their neighborhood watch app but of course no one is saying anything. The car didn’t have tags, but my sister said she’s seen it in the neighborhood before. We don’t think they live there, but they know someone who does.” Chuckling, I looked away from him. “I don’t want to cry, so can we talk about something... anything... else?”

He swirled around the small amount of liquor that was still in his glass. “My brother set me up.” His head shook as he sat up in his seat. “He felt like I hadn’t been giving women a real chance. Suffering and punishing them because of you. Not you, how I felt about you. So he thought going to a professional would help me find someone better so I could get over you.”

“You’re not over me?” I paused, but didn’t give him much time to answer before asking, “You still... love me?”

Amaru remained silent, giving me time to think back to the last time we split. The last time I

called things off. He'd come to me and poured out his heart to me. I was in the middle of filling what had been my biggest order to date, vlogging and going live on my Instagram to hype my followers up for my next restock. If he would have told me what he was coming over to discuss, I think I would have told him to come at another time. Maybe that night would have ended differently.

But I was so caught up in sales and getting orders and engaging customers and making money that I snapped on him before putting him out. My mother saw it and immediately came over to get on my head. I deserved it, too. When I tried to reach out to him, I learned that he'd blocked my number and profiles on all social media. I tried to go and talk to him in person, but he was missing, and his mother was who I ran into at his place. She made me feel even worse, and I figured it was best for him if I left him alone. The only thing I was good for in that moment was my business. He didn't deserve to be talked to or treated like that.

"Amaru..."

"I do," he rushed, as if he didn't want to admit. That was made even clearer by the scowl that covered his face and the way his body stiffened.

"I lo—"

"No," he gritted. "You don't get to say it back." I watched as he gulped down the last of his drink. "Let's just ask these questions and get this shit over with."

I nodded, figuring there wasn't anything I could do but agree. This was what I feared... the happiness and peace quickly fading away.

Maybe it was best this way.

THE NIGHT TOOK A SURPRISING TURN. Giselle suggested we try the love challenge. It was a series of questions, three minutes of staring into each other's eyes, then holding each other for a full minute. At first, I was really skeptical about it, but it definitely lightened the mood between us. After that, we were able to converse and connect like there had never been any bad blood between us. Instead of ending our night right after dinner, Amaru trailed me to my place so I could drop off my car, then we took a ride around the city.

I never knew something so simple and chill could be so fun. For three hours straight we just... drove and talked. And when we weren't talking, we were singing and rapping. And when we weren't singing and rapping even our silence was golden. When we finally made it back to my place, I wasn't ready for him to leave. I wasn't all the way comfortable saying that because I didn't want him to reject me. But as we stood at my door, I had to literally keep the request from spilling from my lips.

"I guess I'll see you tomorrow," he mumbled, stepping closer to me.

Nodding, I turned and opened the door. Instead of stepping inside of my home, I turned back around to face him.

"Would you like to come in?"

Amaru smiled with one side of his mouth as he shook his head. "Not unless we fuckin'."

I shouldn't have been surprised by his frank way of speaking because I used to be the same way with him. It still caught me off guard, though.

"You don't think it's a bit too soon for that?"

Shaking his head, Amaru took one final step towards me and closed the space between us. "If I only have a week to make you fall for me all over again, I'm doing everything in my power to make

this work. That includes giving you this dick, and I know you ain't forgot how good this shit is."

I probably shouldn't have agreed... maybe I should have taken a bit more time to respond. But not even three seconds had passed before I said, "You should come in."

Our eyes remained locked for a few seconds before his stepping forward had me stepping back and into my home. As he waited patiently, I locked the door with trembling hands and sweaty palms. Amaru was the man who had broken my orgasm cherry, though I was no virgin when we first met. He showed me how a man could please me and led to my curiosity on how I could please myself. After him, I wasn't afraid to take control in the bedroom to make sure I got mine. But with him, that never had to be the case.

Whether I was in control or submitting to him, he used to always take care of me and put me first.

Thinking about that had me regretting how things ended between us all over again. If we had any chance of making magic tonight, I would need to get my mind right.

I'd given him a tour earlier, so I told him to make himself comfortable in the living room while I changed, to which he offered, "Need some help?"

My hand slid down the back of my neck as I smiled. "Um... I would love some help actually."

I waited where I stood for him to make his way behind me. The heat of his body shot through mine. Radiated and warmed every empty crevice of my heart. My bones. Taking his hand into mine, I led him up the stairs to my master bedroom. He stuck close, wasting no time.

His lips were on my neck, kissing as I tilted to give him more room. The moment his tongue grazed me my nipples began to harden. Chills began to cover my arms. I wanted to squirm, to push him away, but I also wanted to enjoy every moment of the good that I knew he was about to make me feel.

Pulling me into him, Amaru kept his arms wrapped around me as his lips kissed up my neck and ear. As soon as his tongue slipped inside, I bit down on my lip and giggled.

"Amaru," I whispered, voice laced with lust.

"That still turn you on?"

"Like crazy."

He groaned quietly within his throat. As his fingers began to sweep across my waist, my heart began to palpitate. Hard – and fast.

Shit.

My nerves were about to get the best of me.

Tugging my lip between my teeth, I squeezed my eyes together tightly and inhaled a deep breath. His hands traveled up my stomach. Squeezed my breasts. I took his jeans into the palms of my hands and gripped them tightly for support.

"Get in your bed."

Doing as I was told, I climbed into the center of my bed. Amaru waited until I was laying comfortably to slowly undress. I watched intently as each piece of his clothing began to fall. By the time he was standing before me in only his gray boxers, I was swallowing hard and closing my legs just to open them and close them all over again.

The bulge in his boxers reminded me of just how thick and long his dick was. Not that I could forget it. Or its curve. And if time and experience made him an even better lover, there was no way in hell this weekend would end and I not be sprung. Amaru casually retrieved a condom from his wallet – as if he wasn't nervous about this at all. Maybe he wasn't. Maybe it was just me overreacting. I didn't have a need to, though.

I dominated everything in my life, so I could dominate sex with an ex too.

Closing my eyes, I tried to inhale a deep breath, but it came out short and choppy instead. I covered my face when I felt his body dent the bed. With his weight hovering over me, Amaru chuckled quietly. It made me smile before I felt myself want to cry. This shit was probably a hilarious joke to him while I, on the other hand, was going fucking crazy on the inside!

“Carter,” he called, and that only made it worse. Because he had always been the only person to call me by my last name. No baby or boo or sweetheart... just Carter. The *way* he said it always made it sound like the sweetest, most endearing pet name in the world.

“Hmm?”

“Are you okay?”

“Uh – yes. Are you okay?”

He lowered my left hand and wrapped it around his hardened shaft. Dammit. I’d missed him taking his boxers off.

“Does it feel like I’m okay?”

Opening my eyes, I looked into his. “Yes.”

“Are you okay? Is this moving too fast?”

“Yes and no. I’m good. I promise.”

Amaru stared at me for a few seconds before releasing a heavy sigh. His hand cupped my cheek, and he lowered his lips to mine. But he didn’t kiss me... and that’s what I really, really wanted. Maybe even needed. That intimate connection and exchange of his breath tangling with mine.

Slowly, his hand lowered to my chest, taking in the rapid beating of my heart.

“Breathe,” he ordered gently. “Relax, Morgan.” Closing my eyes, I inhaled a deep breath. “Talk to me. What’s wrong?”

Shaking my head, I opened and closed my mouth. “I want this. You. I’m just... scared. Because of our history...”

“Don’t worry about that shit, bae.” My eyes opened immediately. “Stay in this moment with me.” His thumb caressed my cheek. “Don’t think about our past, or even our eight day. Just stay in this moment, right here, right now.”

Nodding, I unraveled my tightly wound legs from around him and placed my feet on the bed. “Okay.”

This time when he stared into my eyes, he must have been pleased with what he saw because he placed a tender kiss to the center of my forehead. Hooking his fingers between my panties and my hips, Amaru slowly pulled them down. His eyes softened as he licked his lips and took in my already wet pussy. Body weakening, he spread my legs wider.

“Damn, Morgan,” he moaned, running his finger between my folds.

I watched as he put his finger into his mouth and sucked off my cream. My walls clenched, yearning for him even more. Amaru flipped me over, putting me on my hands and knees. As he kissed up my spine, he removed my bra. The moment he spread my cheeks and swirled his tongue around my asshole my eyes closed, and I relaxed against him.

He took his time devouring me – licking every hole, fucking me with his tongue, sucking my clit and lips until I began to tremble. Amaru’s arm wrapped around me, holding me in place as I damn near smothered him. But he didn’t stop. He continued to lick and suck my clit until my orgasm subsided.

The more I tried to scoot away the more he held me in place, moaning and licking with such fervency I would have sworn pleasing me was just as satisfying to him. His left hand went to the back of my neck, holding me in place as his right middle finger entered me. I pressed back into him, in need

of more. And when his ring finger slipped inside of me, he gave me more. As his fingers massaged the walls of my pussy, Amaru used his mouth to lick and suck my clit until my body froze and I came again.

Pulling his fingers out of me, Amaru positioned himself at my opening.

“You still down, Carter?”

“Hell yea,” I moaned, struggling to catch my breath.

Before I could catch it, I lost it at the feel of him stretching me as he entered me. My hands gripped my comforter, gripping them just as tightly as he gripped my hips. Amaru removed himself from me, then slowly pushed his way back inside. He continued to do that – entering me deeply and pulling out entirely – until my room was filled with the sound of my cream coating him, his body slowly slapping against mine, and my heavy breathing and moans.

My walls began to close, signaling my orgasm. Amaru continued to stroke me just as slowly, holding onto me and keeping me from falling into the bed as I came. Once my orgasm subsided, his strokes began to speed up. My moans began to grow louder. And I was finally able to fuck him back. But that didn’t last long because he wrapped his hand around the front of my neck and lifted me up from the bed. Holding me in place against him, Amaru’s strokes filled me deeper. Became more potent because of the permanent arch of my back.

I could feel the sweat from his chest coating my back... his heavy breathing blowing the hair over my ear. And when he moaned and whispered, “Morgan,” I just about lost it. My body convulsed against him, but he held me steady. He was... always... holding me steady. Not just while we had sex, but in life. And when he needed me most... I left him to unravel.

Pushing those thoughts back, I enjoyed the high he sent me to until he pulled out to cum himself.

Unable to resist, I fell into bed as tears threatened to pour from my eyes. I thought I was capable of forgiving myself for what I’d done to him, but obviously I hadn’t. So how did I expect him to? Even if I was able to be shrewd and uncaring when handling business, I was never that way in my personal life. Looking back on that moment, I couldn’t even recognize myself – who I was on the verge of becoming.

Thank God for my mother and his for pulling me through.

Laying next to me, Amaru pulled me onto his chest. My tears, thankfully, hadn’t fallen. But my voice did tremble when I told him, “Saying I’m sorry doesn’t justify what I did to you, but I don’t know what else to say or do.”

“I’m giving you the best dick of your life and *that’s* what you worried about?”

I giggled, needing that relief as I continued to renew my strength.

“Oh no. I was all in for that. It wasn’t until I came that last time that I thought about it. Thought about how good you were back then and how bad I treated you.”

Amaru sucked his teeth and scratched my scalp, instantly soothing me.

“You didn’t treat me bad, Carter. If you did, I wouldn’t have fallen in love with you. Wanted to go to rehab and better myself for you. You were... the best woman, best thing, I’d ever experienced in my life.” He paused. “You didn’t hurt me until you cut me off. And as much as that fucked with me, I needed it.” Looking up at him, I waited for him to continue. “You had become another drug to me that numbed me and kept me from feeling angry over my dream being shattered. You kept me high, but we were toxic as hell. So no, I didn’t want you to leave, and how you cut me off was harsh and fucked up, but I needed that tough love. I needed to be free of you and get sober and on my feet for myself. Not for you or anyone else.”

“And now?”

Amaru shrugged. “Now... I don't know. I guess we will cross that bridge when we get to it.”

I was cool with that. Didn't have much of a choice either way. This was supposed to last for seven days. When that seven days were over, I didn't know if he'd want to keep going or go our separate ways. I agreed under the assumption that he needed only a week to believe he was worth me. But as he held me and kissed my head, I wasn't sure if that would be enough for either of us.



My attitude had been real rude all day today. When I woke up, Amaru was gone. I figured he'd changed his mind about us giving this a real chance and cut me off. Which was a scary sign of how I'd react if he cut me off for good. Because if I felt some type of way after spending just one day with him, I couldn't imagine how I'd feel at the end of the week.

On top of that I was bored out of my damn mind. Work used to keep me so consumed that I didn't even realize I wasn't having fun. Work was my fun. I didn't need a social life. Work was my life. Now that I was limiting the amount of time I worked, I found myself cleaning things that were already clean and spending unnecessary money to pass the time.

It was three in the afternoon, and I was calling Cali for the fourth time. I could tell by how many times she let it ring that she didn't really want to answer, but she did eventually.

"Yes, Morgan?"

"What you doing?"

She paused, and I pictured her looking at the phone and rolling her eyes. "I'm working. You know... what you pay me to do."

"I'm bored."

Cali sighed. "You need to get a life, sis. A friend. A dog. A man. Get out the house."

"I don't have anyone to go out with until you stop working. If I go out by myself, I'll buy something."

"You're rich, you can do that."

Groaning, I hopped out of my bed and began to pace around my room. "Not every time I leave the house just because I'm bored."

"Well, where's Amaru?"

"I don't know. I still haven't heard from him."

"Have you tried to call him?"

My feet stopped pacing. Eyebrows wrinkled. Confusion took over me. Call him? First? Why hadn't I thought about that?

"No. Should I?"

She chuckled, making me smile. "I think you should do a lot of things, sissy. I think you should get some hobbies and find things you love outside of work, and actually do those things. Don't just add them to your list. I think you should find common minded men and women to be friends with. I think you should spend time with our parents and not let them stress you out about your life plans as if you haven't already done amazing things. And yes, I think you should call Amaru."

Thinking over her words, I walked over to the small writing desk that was in my room. I didn't

like to work in here since I had a home office, but I used that for random ideas that came to mind and journaling. On top of it was a list of things that I enjoyed and wanted to do more of. So far, I had reading nonfiction books, movies, shopping, traveling, and self-pleasure.

“Okay, I’ll talk to you later.”

“Okay, Morgy. Bye.”

“Aight.”

I didn’t like ending any conversation with bye or goodbye and she knew that, but it didn’t stop her from doing so. As I looked the list over, I decided to read a book and watch a movie to get my mind off Amaru. I wrote down join a class to learn something along with a yoga or exercise class to see if that could potentially be a way to make a new friend. If not, I’ll join meetup and look for groups of women with the same interests as me. The last thing I did was make a note to buy a plane ticket to whatever place crossed my mind first in the morning if I didn’t hear from Amaru.

The last thing I’d do was spend the next week wondering when or if I’d see him again when I could be traveling the world and making memories. I went into the room I’d turned into a mini library to find something to read. My phone was still in my hand, startling me when it began to vibrate. As anxious as I was to hear from him, my eyes rolled at the sight of Amaru’s name.

“Hello?” I answered, trying to sound as unbothered as possible.

“Come outside.”

Amaru disconnected the call before I could ask why. Excitement began to course through me. With a smile and a squeal, I skipped out of my room. I was dressed in a spaghetti strapped shirt and shorts, so all I needed to do was slip into these cute gray fuzzy slippers I’d been obsessed with since I got them. The entire time I walked downstairs and through the hall I wondered what he could be up to. He didn’t say open the door, he said come outside. What was outside?

Standing at the door, I waited to see if he would get out the car. His door opened, and as soon as he stepped out with Fluffy Cakes in his arm my knees went weak. Covering my mouth as my eyes watered, I squatted down in disbelief. At the sight of me, she began to wiggle and bend trying her hardest to get out of his arm. The sight made me laugh as tears began to roll down my cheeks.

“Fluffy Cakes,” I yelled, and she almost leaped out of his arm. With a smile, Amaru put her on the ground. As soon as he did, she charged towards me. Since I was already squatting, she jumped into my arms and began to lick everywhere that she could. I held her low, trying to keep her from licking my face. She was so excited and antsy I couldn’t contain her, so I put her back on the ground where she ran circles around me and twirled on two paws against my leg.

Amaru stood there, keeping his distance, as if he hadn’t just given me my boo boo back. It took a few minutes to get her calm, but when I did, I took her into my arms and walked over to him.

“How did you find her?”

I listened intently as he told me how he reached out to my sister on Facebook yesterday to find out where she lived and what happened to Fluffy Cakes. This morning, he went to her neighborhood with two of his friends and began to knock on every door until he got some answers. The man whose brother was coming over to visit tried to lie at first, but they could tell by his facial expression and body language that he knew more than he was letting on.

Eventually he confessed that his brother took Fluffy Cakes and gave her to his girlfriend. But here she was... back with me.

As I stared at him, my mouth hung open partially in disbelief. Even though I was hopeful, I was sure I would never see her again. No one ever returned dogs that were stolen, and I knew if someone ever took Fluffy Cakes it would be a lost cause because she was a mix breed little beauty. There were

only six puppies in her litter, and only two were left in Memphis after her mother gave birth. I spent ten thousand dollar on her and tried my very hardest to keep her safe.

Not taking the time to schedule an appointment for her to get a chip was such a silly thing to do. But it was yet another thing I'd put off because of work.

"All this time I thought I hadn't heard from you because you'd changed your mind about us... and you were out trying to find my Fluffy. Why?"

He shrugged as his hand lowered to her head. "I saw the pain in your eyes. I know how that feels. Figured I could at least try to get her back for you. No big deal."

Chuckling, I shook my head as I hugged Fluffy closer to my heart. "It's a big deal, Amaru. A very big deal. Thank you so much."

"No problem. I'm about to head home and shower and shit and get my house ready for our date tonight. Is that cool?"

Smiling harder than I ever had before, I nodded. I put Fluffy Cakes down so that I could stand on the tips of my toes and give him a kiss on the cheek. He didn't kiss me during sex, so I figured that was something he wasn't into anymore. Or at least with me.

"You got time for me to take you in the house and thank you properly?"

He gave me that signature one sided smile. "Tonight, bae. I promise."

As I watched him walk away... I made up in my mind that I would hold him to that.

WHEN AMARU SAID he hadn't left the hood, I thought he'd be living in a small house in his old neighborhood. Instead, he'd taken acres of land that used to house a small shopping center and used it to build his home. From my research, I was aware of the fact that Amaru had created a million-dollar street basketball league, so I was surprised that he still lived in his old hood. Granted he lived a few streets up from his old street but still.

His big ass house was the only one on the street, making him a huge target. It was clear he was respected and protected... safe... but it still didn't sit well with me that the public had so much access to him. All it took was one jealous ass nigga that was hypnotized by hate to decide he wanted to take what didn't belong to him and Amaru's life would be on the line.

I didn't realize how long I'd been sitting in his driveway staring at his big ass house until he came out and walked to my car. Smiling, I cut my car off and opened the door.

"You wanna put this hoe in the garage? It's clean as hell."

Amaru eyed my lime green Aston Martin Vulcan in appreciation while rubbing his hands together. It was my pride and joy. The most expensive thing I'd ever purchased outside of my home. Had I known he wanted me to actually come inside, I would have driven one of my day to day cars.

"If you don't mind."

With a nod, Amaru turned and headed back inside of his home. It was when I watched him leave that I noticed the security cameras on every corner of his home. That was good to see and know. Not for my sake, but for his. I wasn't worried about anything happening to me or my car while I was with him. He had always made it a habit to protect me. Not just physically but mentally and emotionally as well. And I guess I would have to trust that he would keep himself safe as well. If he couldn't, he wouldn't be here.

The garage began to let up, so I started my car again. After driving it inside, I marveled at his mini

fleet of cars. There were four and two motorcycles.

“Impressive collection,” I complimented, running my fingers along the hood of his black Bugatti Chiron.

“Thank you. Cars are my guilty pleasure.”

“I see. You obviously can afford it, though.”

He nodded as he stepped to the side so I could step inside of his home. “Yea. Between the sponsorships and advertisements along with tickets to games and bets, my league allows me and everyone included to be straight.”

“Straight?” I chuckled. “Amaru, you’re clearly a multi-millionaire. You’re *beyond* straight.”

Leaning against the door in his kitchen, Amaru eyed my face then my entire frame.

“I am, but it was never about the money for me. You know that.”

Nodding, I inhaled a deep breath and lowered my eyes. All he’d ever wanted to do was play ball and be recognized for his greatness.

“Well, the dream you had for yourself has allowed you to help thousands of other people live their dreams. From the players to the coaches and medical teams you put in place. You even offer your players the option to have physical therapists and personal chefs to ensure they remain healthy. Counselors for their mental health. What you’re doing is amazing, Amaru, and I’m so very proud of you.” He gave me a full smile before hanging his head bashfully. “When does the next season start?”

“June. So I got a little over one month to enjoy the summer freely before I have to get back to work.”

“I know all about that. I had to force myself to take a year off so work wouldn’t continue to consume every aspect of my life.”

“I always knew you’d make it big. And this ain’t even the end for you. There’s still so much for you to do. You just gotta loosen up a little and make the most of your time. You’ve always been a perfectionist, so it didn’t surprise me when you said you were still a workaholic. But I assume the team you’ve got in place helped you get to where you are today. They can handle that shit, Morgan. You gotta let them so you can be free to do and experience other things.”

Wrapping my hand around my elbow, I pulled it further into my side as I nodded. That was true, all of it, but that was easier said than done. I was going crazy already and it hadn’t been a full month. I honestly didn’t think I could go a whole year. Not unless I started traveling more, was really invested in a relationship, or got pregnant.

Last night, I shared with him how important this was to me. That he was my last chance to love and if he and the other two options didn’t work I’d be going to Jillian. I also shared with him how I wanted to find an identity outside of my job, which was how I ended up creating a list of things I liked instead of just keeping them in my mind. He suggested I write them down and put it somewhere visible so I could actively put them into my daily plans. I’d forgotten until Cali reminded me of it.

“You’re right. I’m working on it.” Our eyes remained locked for a few seconds until I looked away. “Do you think you’ll want this, us, after our week is up? Or will you want to explore your other options?”

“What do you think you’ll want?”

I returned my eyes to his. “You.”

Pushing himself off the door, Amaru slowly sauntered over to me. “Why?”

Looking up at him, I licked my lips and smiled nervously. He had me feeling like a little schoolgirl with how infatuated I was growing over him. Honestly, I felt like I’d love him deeper this time around. Because he was healthy. And whole. In his purpose. Not needing me... but choosing me.

Wanting me. The pressure was released and what we were creating and experiencing felt... free. And love and freedom were one hell of a combination.

“Because I’ve always loved you and wanted to be with you, Amaru, the timing just wasn’t right. Between me trying to run my business and your substance abuse and toxic behavior... it just wasn’t the right time. It feels different now since we’re both grounded and steady. I—I would like to try. But only if you’re willing.”

He took my hand into his. Kissed my palm. “You know I’ve always loved you.” Amaru’s voice lowered when he added, “I am willing.”

The longer he stared into my eyes the wider my grin grew. I never thought he’d be able to speak to me without getting upset let alone give us a second chance. Unable to resist, I wrapped my arms around him. The top of my head fit perfectly underneath his chin. As if the space was made for me. As if I was made for him.

Amaru wrapped his arms around me, held me closer. “Let’s go in the living room before the date I put together is ruined.”

“Ruined? How could it be ruined?”

“Come on in here and see.”

Taking me by the hand, Amaru led me through his kitchen, down the hallway, and into the living room. The sight of the makeshift ice cream buffet he’d created made me giggle and sway.

“Amaruuuu,” I sang, squeezing his hand. “An ice cream buffet?”

“You said you loved ice cream and movies, right?” I nodded as I grinned and looked up at him. “So... ice cream and movies tonight. Is that cool?”

“It’s perfect. Absolutely perfect.”

Because the truth of the matter was... I’d prefer this over a fancy date any day. The fact that I was sharing it with Amaru Mitchell only made it better. I followed him over to the buffet and took several pictures before putting my phone on do not disturb. I wanted no distractions tonight.

“Hey.” Taking his arm, I gently tugged him in my direction. “I know I thanked you for Fluffy earlier, but I’m truly grateful. Without her, I felt so empty, and because of you I have a piece of myself back.”

“How do you think you’re going to handle it when she dies?”

Shrugging, I released his arm and grabbed a bowl and ice cream scooper. “I don’t want to think about that right now.”

“You don’t think your attachment to her is a bit unhealthy? Understandable but unhealthy?”

I wasn’t offended by his question because it wasn’t the first time I’d been asked that. My parents told me it was all the time. Didn’t matter, though. Their lives were fuller than mine and they’d never had pets, so of course they wouldn’t understand.

“Maybe a little. I know that I can’t put such a huge weight on her or anyone for that matter. That’s why I’m working on my hobbies and planning to travel more. Gain friends. A baby. Love. I’m working on fulfilling other areas of my life. So when she does die hopefully twelve or thirteen years from now, it won’t be so bad.”

“I’m proud of you for realizing how important those things are.”

I met his eyes briefly before putting a scoop of French Vanilla ice cream in my bowl next to the Strawberry. We were two days in officially and I still couldn’t believe I was here with him. That this was happening. A part of me felt like I was dreaming, especially since he’d brought my Fluffy Cakes back. If this was a dream... Lord knows I didn’t want to wake up.



It was our fourth day together, and it was my turn to put together a date I thought he'd like. What I enjoyed most about Giselle's weeklong plan was that she guided us for the first three days, then gave us freedom for the last four. She did, however, suggest things for us to do and talk about. We didn't really need help with conversation topics, but when we realized we avoided a lot of things that needed to be discussed, we spent our third day together talking about them.

So far, I'd learned how he wanted to spend the rest of his thirties, that he wanted to retire at forty-five, he did want to get married one day, and his desired number of children was four. I wanted three, and he agreed we'd talk about the fourth one after the third if we ever made it to that point. We discussed the ways we were different and how we were still the same. Our views on different life and relationship roles. What we wanted and needed from our partners.

I think day three has been my favorite so far. It showed me our maturity and that we were finally on the same page.

But tonight... tonight was all about us having fun.

I chose to take him to a car show and race that was happening downtown. He hadn't mentioned it so far, so I assumed he didn't know anything about it. When we pulled up, his eyes lit up like a kid in a candy store.

"So this is why you wanted me to drive the Hellcat?"

With a smirk, I nodded and unbuckled my seatbelt. Since the show was hosted by a Dodge car club, I figured he could join the race if he wanted to.

"Yep. Are you surprised, or did you know this was happening?"

"One of my homies mentioned it but I didn't ask no questions 'cause I knew I was spending the day with you."

"Well... now you'll get to spend the day with me doing something you really love. I was going to try and ge—"

Gasping, I held my breath as Amaru took ahold of my shirt and used it to pull me across the center console. Smashing his lips against mine, he quickly reminded me of why kissing him was very much worth the wait. From the way he nibbled on my lips and sucked them into his mouth to the way he circled his tongue around mine and tenderly kissed my lips.

Amaru Mitchell had to be the most passionate man I'd ever encountered. No matter the emotion — whether it was positive or negative — anger or joy... Amaru felt it ten-fold and boldly expressed it.

"Getcho ass over here," he ordered, using my arm to pull me onto his lap.

My giggle made him laugh quietly as I straddled him. "What did I do to deserve kisses?"

"You want the truth?"

I nodded, wrapping my arms around his neck. “Always, Ru.”

Gritting his teeth, Amaru inhaled a deep breath and rested his head on the headrest. “I’m tired of trying to keep pieces of myself from you. Yea, I wanted to make you want me, but I honestly didn’t want to want you more than I already did. Do. But when you do shit to remind me of how familiar you are with me... I can’t help but want to reconnect with you in the deepest of ways.”

Cupping his cheek, I caressed it with my thumb. “So you’d probably lose your shit when you find out what I reserved for you this fall.” Lowering my head to hide my smile, I took his hands into mine. “Whether we’re together or not, I got you a weekend at Iris’ cabin in September. Everything is already paid for and in your name. I’ll email you the details, and you can go no matter what happens between us.”

“How did you manage to get that? Last time I checked that cabin was booked for the next three years.”

Smiling proudly, I shrugged, not wanting to let him know that my uncle was dating Iris and helped me out. Iris Greenly had the most sought-after cabin in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. She spent fifteen years fixing it up, and for the past five, she made waves renting it out for three-day blocks at a time. It wasn’t the typical cabin by any means, and since I knew Amaru loved nature, fishing, and camping, I figured he’d enjoy having the cabin for a few days too.

“I got a few connections,” was all I was willing to offer.

I changed the subject, returning to his why. We talked about if he believed his feelings for me were one sided back in the day or if he really believed I loved him. He said he did, so I couldn’t understand why he didn’t want to grow closer to me. A part of me understood that was his way of self-preservation, but if he wanted us to be together, there was no reason for him to deny his feelings or take things slow. The other part of me wondered if he was really ready for us to try again or if I should mentally prepare for things to be over after our seven days.

Not wanting to get too in my head, I decided to assure him of my reason for being in his life. Though I was trying to show him with my actions, it didn’t hurt to actually say it sometimes too.

“I know we’ve made it clear that you deem it necessary to make me want you, but I told you I always have and always will. Even though I never thought we’d have a second chance, I’m grateful for it no matter how long it lasts. But I want you to know that you’re safe with me, Amaru. So if you want to fall in love with me all over again... I promise I won’t break your heart.”

“You can’t...” he interrupted me quickly just to stop speaking and shake his head. “You can’t promise something like that, Morgan. Especially if you don’t know that kind of hurt.”

“But I’ve been hurt. I’ve hurt a lot of men, but I’ve been hurt too. Not in the same capacity as you but...” Releasing a heavy sigh, I shook my head. “Just because I haven’t been hurt on that level doesn’t mean you can’t trust that I won’t inflict that pain on you again.” My pride had my defenses rising. “If you don’t trust me, there’s really no point in us doing this.”

He chuckled quietly. “Now you ‘bout to run?”

I shook my head, though I was honestly considering calling this off. Not because I didn’t want him, but because I was afraid of the day he decided he no longer wanted me.

“No,” I muttered, chin almost touching my chest it hung so low. “I just don’t want to be invested in this if you’re not.”

“I am.”

“I know you’re invested in making me want you, I just... need to know that you’re invested in actually building a relationship with me too. Yes, the fun and romance is... exciting and amazing, and don’t get me started on the sex... but I... I want more. And I know I didn’t give you that when you

asked...”

“Carter.” I stopped rambling and looked into his eyes. “Shut up and kiss me.”

I smiled, leaning forward to connect my lips with his. My hand wrapped around his neck, getting a quiet groan out of him.

“Don’t do that unless you tryna ride this dick.”

“When do I ever turn that down?”

His tongue slid down my neck before he bit down on it causing me to shiver. As I unbuckled his pants, Amaru pulled my jeggings down and pushed my panties to the side. The feel of his hands squeezing my breasts and thumbing my nipples as I pulled his dick out of his boxers had my pussy leaking before we even connected. Lifting myself slightly, I positioned him at my opening. He sucked my bottom lip into his mouth, inhaling my moan as I took every one of his ten inches in.

Amaru was so fucking big. His dick. His body. His presence. His energy. His expectations. His love.

I wanted all of it.

All of him.

All of that love.

All of it.

And I wouldn’t ruin this moment by wondering if he would give it to me.

I would *make* him give it to me.

Because I deserved it.

And he deserved to give it to me – wholeheartedly.

My entire body heated as he filled every inch of my pussy. The untouched crevices that no man had ever been able to touch, too. He’d never been a very vocal lover... only moaning my name when he was reaching his peak. But his hands... they were how he talked... and they were always all over me. Those hands, his mouth, his eyes... always all over me.

I whimpered, body bending as he alternated between licking my nipples, neck, and ears. His thumb circled my clit, intensifying my building orgasm.

“Morgan,” he moaned, tightening his grip on my hips.

He pushed me down harder. Just as slow, but harder. I hugged his dick tighter, sucking him in with each stroke. The sound of my cream coating him began to grow louder than my choppy breaths and his heavy breathing. As I began to convulse on top of him, Amaru fought like hell to push his orgasm back. He squeezed and slapped my ass, allowing me to use him as my walls pulsed.

He waited until I’d come down from my high to tell me, “Get up unless you want me to nut in this pussy.”

I wanted that, actually, but not until I knew for sure that he was sure about us. So I got up, mesmerized by the sight of his dick throbbing and leaking as he came. Placing my feet on his seat, I waited until he was done to slide back down onto his still hardened shaft. His hand went to my hair, pulling as he licked my neck. That tongue was always my undoing. Speeding up my ride, I bit down on my bottom lip as he wrapped his hands around my ankles to keep me planted securely.

Our eyes locked, but mine fluttered as I fought to keep them open. Biting down on my bottom lip, I allowed my eyes to close as my brows wrinkled.

“You wet as fuck, Morgan. I’m a have to go home and change clothes.”

My laugh turned into a moan when he pressed my back into the steering wheel and began to lift his hips and fuck me back. It was hard enough handling his curve as I rode him, but now that he’d angled me and sent paralyzingly pleasurable strokes up and into me I knew I’d be cumming again in seconds.

His shaft buried itself inside of me, going from wet, slick, and clear to milky white as I began to cum. I tried to hold it back but there was no use.

Shortly after... he came too.

His boxers were soaked with our cum. Dealing with him, I'd started carrying wipes in my purse for moments like this. We cleaned up, and he decided to just take his boxers off since we wouldn't be staying for that long. The whole time we walked over to a group of people I couldn't help but giggle as he held my hand. He was so uncomfortable without any boxers on and you could see it written all over his face.

"Do you want to just go back home, crazy?"

He shook his head then nodded at a man who'd begun to look our way. "Nah. We won't be here long."

"You sure? The race won't start until ten and they won't announce the winner of the car show until nine. If you want, I can just run to the store and get you some more."

"My nigga, my nigga." I looked in the direction of the voice and the smiling man. He met us halfway, embracing Amaru in a brotherly hug. "What's up?"

"Can't call it."

"I thought you weren't coming through?"

"I wasn't until my baby brought me." Amaru looked down at me and wrapped his arm around my shoulders. "Bae, this is Alex. He's one of the homies from the hood. Alex, this is Morgan."

"It's nice to meet you," I greeted, extending my hand for him to shake.

"We family. We hug out here."

I laughed as he pulled me in for a hug. Shortly after, we were surrounded by a group of Amaru's friends, which led to their women embracing me. One in particular, Malaysia, was very friendly. She pretty much pulled me away from Amaru to get to know me. At first, it was a little uncomfortable. I'd never been friendly. Into small talk. Nice.

Kind, yes. Sweet, for sure. Good hearted, all the way. But friendly? Not so much. Which was probably the real reason I didn't have friends. I used business as an excuse so I could drown myself in it. But the real reason I didn't have friends was because I'd always been too to myself to put forth the effort to make any. With Malaysia, that didn't seem like it was going to be an issue.

She did all the question asking until I got comfortable enough to really engage and talk back. By the end of the night, we exchanged numbers and made plans to hang out once my week with Amaru was over. All in all... today was a pretty good damn day.



Day seven. We were on day seven. Night seven, actually. The day started with me making Amaru breakfast in bed. We binge watched a few episodes of the last season of *How To Get Away With Murder* before he left. When he returned, it was with a well-known fashion designer who'd flown in from Miami along with her assistant. They set up a rack that had about twenty-three different dresses and jumpsuits for me to choose from.

I'd realized a lot of my shopping was because I liked dressing up and trying on clothes more than I really enjoyed buying them. Once they were in my closet, I hardly ever put them on. That could have been because I didn't have much of a social life too, but whatever. I would literally spend hours trying on clothes at stores and only walk out with the pieces I felt like I could not live without. After expressing that to Amaru, he brought Adia in with some signature pieces for me to try on.

Her style was so unique and eclectic that I couldn't choose just one. When I told him that, Amaru told her to leave everything at my place and charge his card. It didn't matter how much I said he didn't have to do that, Amaru made it clear that he wanted to, to please me. After that, I got ready for our date, and we had an amazing night together. We went over the list of questions Giselle had given us to use as a recap and ate some good food. Then, we went to a kickback where we smoked a little, but neither of us drank.

I'd learned that Amaru was the kind of man who had the most fun when he was in a group of people, so I didn't mind when he wanted to include group outings into our time together. Plus, Malaysia and I had been texting every day, and she'd introduced me to his other best friend's wife as well.

Once we made it back to my place, we made love. Earth shattering, legs quaking, speaking in tongues kind of love. He was about to leave. No part of me wanted him to leave. But I also didn't want to stop him. Because we'd been spending the bulk of the past seven days together. The number of completion. In the morning, we'd have to meet with Giselle, and I was honestly anxious to see how that would go. Though we were on the same page about staying together, I was still nervous because I knew she would probably make us dig deep and talk about things that could potentially be uncomfortable.

"What you getting into for the rest of the night?" Amaru checked, as if it wasn't already midnight.

Shrugging, I sat on the edge of my bed and twinkled my toes in the carpet.

"Probably just eat the last of my pie and ice cream."

"And you ain't think enough about me to offer me some?"

Smiling, I rolled my eyes and shook my head. "It's butter pecan, Amaru."

"So?"

“You’re allergic to pecans.”

“I’m healed by grace.”

“A lie, sir. You cannot eat pecans anymore.”

He remained quiet for a while, determination hardening his expression as he put on his jeans. When he was a child, he didn’t have an allergy to nuts. As he got older, he developed it, which meant no more of his favorite pecan pie or anything else with nuts for that matter.

“I can just eat a little bit of the pie. It’s been here for two whole days and I haven’t been tempted yet.”

Chuckling, I stood and walked over to him. “No, you can’t. I don’t have any Benadryl.”

“So? If I die, I’ll die happy.”

That only made me laugh harder because he was so damn serious. Wrapping my arms around him, I looked into his eyes as my laugh died down.

“How about I make you a sweet potato pie tomorrow?”

With a sigh and a pout, his shoulders caved. “It’s not the same.”

“Whatever. What you about to get into?”

Amaru shrugged as he finally wrapped his arms around me as well. “Probably stop by the pool hall on my way home for an hour or two then call it a night.”

“Are you ready for tomorrow? What do you think she’s going to ask us?”

“Shit I don’t know. But I’m sure it won’t be nothing we can’t handle.”

Releasing him, I wrapped my arms around myself, suddenly feeling empty. Honestly, I’d been giving him so many husband privileges that we were moving as if we were living together. It felt as if I was about to have a chunk of me leave when he should have been ending his night in my home. Our home. But that was my problem, not his. If I didn’t want to get attached to him so quickly, I shouldn’t have agreed to do this. Giselle warned us that if we followed her rules, especially for the first three days, that we would fall in love again and be attached to each other.

And my silly ass just *had* to test fate and try it anyway.

WE WERE SITTING THERE, staring at each other with big smiles awkwardly. I couldn’t wait to talk to Giselle about the progress Amaru and I had made, but she wanted to wait until he arrived first. After checking the time on my phone for the fifth time in three minutes, I sat back in my seat with a sigh and crossed one leg over the other. At the sound of the door opening, I sat up and turned to see if it was him. My smile widened as I took him in.

He was so damn beautiful.

So big.

So captivating.

And finally... so mine.

He spoke to her as he walked over, shaking her hand before lowering himself to me and kissing my nose. Amaru sat next to me as he asked, “How you doin’?”

“I’m good, how are you?”

“Good.”

We both turned slightly to look at Giselle at the same time. She jumped right in thankfully, asking for a recap of how we spent our week. Then we talked about our expectations versus the reality of

our time together. When she asked us if we wanted to continue on for the next two weeks together or meet our second and third choices, I bit my bottom lip to avoid speaking first. Though I knew Amaru and I were still on the same page, I wanted him to lead.

“I want to meet my second match.”

Head tilting, my smile dropped. I didn't reply because it took me a while to allow his words to register.

“You want to meet your second match?” Giselle repeated. He nodded. “Okay, but may I ask why?”

Amaru turned in my direction. “Did you think I would be foolish enough to give you a third chance to break my heart?” My mouth opened and closed as my brows wrinkled and pulled together. “I only wanted the chance to make you fall for me just as much as I'd fallen for you and drop your ass like you dropped me. How does it feel to love someone with your everything and they want nothing to do with you?”

All I could do was stare at him and blink rapidly. I was so surprised that he'd agreed to do this that the thought of him setting me up had never crossed my mind. But I should have known he'd do this. Should have known he wasn't giving us a chance because he loved me so much. That would have been too much like right. Like love. And love hadn't been for me since him. So was this the full circle of my karma? Now that he'd essentially stepped on my heart after I'd trampled his... would I finally be able to move on after I healed?

I watched as he left, unsure of what I could say, if anything. It wasn't until he closed the door that I was able to look at Giselle. She was looking at me with the same bewildered look I gave Amaru, but she quickly shook her head and sat up in her seat.

“Morgan, I'm so sorry. If I would have known he had reservations I would have met with you individually.”

I chuckled quietly as my eyes watered, but I felt like I wouldn't cry.

“I guess it's my turn to wear the braces.”

“What... what does that mean?”

Licking my lips, I grabbed my purse off the floor and stood. “This was me and Amaru's third time trying. The second time we did, I talked to him horribly and tried to find him when I realized just how fucked up what I'd said was because of my mother.

When I went to his place to talk to him, he was already gone. His mother was there, and she told me the story about Amaru and his braces. He had...” I smiled, thinking back to the pictures of him I'd seen as a child. “Crooked teeth at the bottom and a gap at the top. It didn't take away from his handsomeness by any means, but he used to get picked on and teased because of it. I think it was because it was his only flaw, so the kids at school drilled in on it as much as they could.

Which led to Amaru getting into a lot of fights. When he was finally expelled in the sixth grade, his parents decided to get him braces. He hated the entire process. He said they were painful, inconvenient, and a nuisance... but they made his mouth beautiful. Gave him courage. Confidence. So it was worth it.

Before he left... he told her I was his braces. That us breaking up hurt...” Shaking my head, I huffed and ran my hand down the back of my neck. “But I was his braces and he'd turn out even more beautiful when his healing was over. Now I guess it's my turn to wear them.”

Twisting my mouth to the side, I turned and headed for the door. “Can you set up a meeting with me and Jillian? There's no need for me to meet with my other matches. This was it for me.”

Giselle released a sad sigh as she picked up her phone. “I can call her receptionist and let her

know that you're coming up. Third floor. She can get you set up. Again, I'm really sorry, Morgan, and if you change your mind, I will gladly set you up with my second choice."

Nodding, I forced a smile before opening the door and heading out. As I headed towards the elevator, I tried my hardest not to think about Amaru. And the fact that I'd prematurely planned out our entire lives because of the time we spent together over the past seven days. I didn't want to think about the fact that he'd taken my love and tossed it to the side like it was nothing. Couldn't face the fact that he hated me just as much as he did nine days ago. He'd have to hate me even more to have been able to play me and string me along like that.

I could, at least, say that the hurt I inflicted upon him wasn't intentional. But to know that he'd plotted and made it his mission to have me smitten over him just to rip my heart to shreds...

"No," I denied, pushing my tears back. Because I refused to shed another tear over him. He didn't deserve them. Closing my eyes, I inhaled a deep breath and stood there until I was composed. When I was, I pushed the *up* button on the elevator. A part of me wanted to call Cali or even Malaysia, but I felt so foolish, I didn't even want to tell anyone about what had just happened. Instead, I'd just curl up with Fluffy Cakes when I got home and force myself to try and forget about how magical the past week had been.

Stepping onto the elevator, I pushed my bangs back and exhaled a hard breath. All I could do was laugh. Punch the wall of the elevator and laugh.

"He really played me," I mumbled with a shake of my head.

The more I thought about it, the more my sadness turned into anger. The doors of the elevator opened, and I felt as if I'd seen a ghost when my eyes landed on Amaru. He was casually leaning against the wall with his ankles and arms crossed... as if he was waiting for me. Well, he had to have been waiting for me. But how did he know this was where I'd come? Inhaling deeply, I stepped off and tried to walk past him, but Amaru grabbed my wrist and pulled me in front of him.

"This your first move after I tell you I don't want to be with you? You come to get another man's sperm?"

"What exactly did you expect me to do, Amaru? Chase after you?"

"Yes! I wanted you to show me that this was what you wanted."

"Why should I after you made it clear that it wasn't what you wanted?"

He released a tormented laugh as his body weakened and rested against the wall. "It's all I've ever wanted, Morgan. *You're* all I've ever wanted."

I wasn't expecting that, so it took me a second to reply. My eyes left his as I cupped my hands in the center of myself. "Then why did you say those things?"

"I wanted you to hurt, to make sure you would never say or do anything to make me feel that pain again. Because I can promise you that if we do this, for real for real, I'll be all in, Morgan. Marriage, kids, all that shit. But I ain't tryna wake up one day when you have a new business goal and you decide you can't be committed to us anymore. The way I did it may have been harsh, but I just... wanted you to feel that pain to make sure you won't ever try to inflict it on me again." He chuckled and looked away as I looked towards him. "I couldn't go a day with you thinking I didn't want you, though. I knew your stubborn ass would come here first, so I came to wait on you."

"I told you that I wouldn't hurt you," I gritted quietly before licking my lips and swallowing. "All that did was... make me feel like I had to prepare to live my life without you."

He nodded, finally looking back into my eyes. "Is that what you wanna do?"

"Of course not, but I told you this was my last chance to love. So I was going to do what I have to do."

Amaru grabbed the front of my shirt and pulled me into his chest. “What if I don’t want to be your last chance to love?” He paused, but since I didn’t see where he was going with this, I remained silent. “I wanna be your first chance to love. In different ways. On different levels. New people. Our babies. Your new friends. New passions and interests... businesses... but only if you’re willing.”

I smiled, regretting the fact that I was unable to give him a poker face. Unable to make him hold his breath much longer. Unable to make him sweat for even the briefest of moments. But we’d spent enough time apart. And if I wanted him to really forgive me, I’d have to forgive him too.

“You know that I’ve always loved you. I am willing. Always... willing... when it comes to you.”

Amaru nodded, and I saw the moment his heart began to beat again.

“Cool. Then let’s go back downstairs and let Giselle know she has another match made in heaven and let this be the last time your ass even *think* about getting another nigga’s sperm.”

With a chuckle, I allowed him to entangle his fingers with mine. “I won’t need it now that I have you. You know I want a baby by my birthday, right? Or at least to be pregnant by my birthday.”

“I know, Carter. I gotta propose first.”

“Just make sure you warn me before you do so I can have my hair and nails done for the pictures.”

His face covered with confusion as he pressed the *down* button on the elevator.

“Warn you? Why would I warn you before I propose?”

“So I can be prepared!”

“Nah. You just make sure you have the shit done at all times.”

“Oh, so you gon’ be paying for it then?”

“Shit, I ain’t got no problem with that. It ain’t like I can’t.”

With a roll of my eyes and a grin, I stepped onto the elevator, smiling harder when he pulled me into his arms. “Fine. Let’s just get this over with so we can go home.”

“Yours, right? I wanna get some of that pie.”

“Amaru!”

EPILOGUE

Life had a funny way of changing you. Your thoughts. Your desires. Your goals. On my thirty-fourth birthday, I had one goal and one goal only... to have a baby. In that moment, I was so discontent with what I had that I was sure nothing else would fulfill me the way being a mother would. Security had been so important when it came down to my career that I'd spent little time focusing on anything else.

That changed when Amaru came back into my life.

When I finally decided to actually live my life.

Six months later, I was still working part time, and my money was still rolling in. In fact, I'd seen an increase in sells. I guess with me not hustling so much and flowing more... my vibration was on a level of power and creativity. The less hands on I was, the more ideas I had to market and promote my business. I'd even started a second line of all-natural hair and skincare products for Mor Better.

My social life was more active these days. Malaysia, Karisma, and I had become a trio of sorts. We'd gotten close over the past six months, and I was genuinely proud to call them my friends. Amaru ended up proposing three months in, which made us yet another success story for Giselle. I don't know how she does it and what she has in that software of hers, but the bulk of her clients always fall in love in one week and end up engaged within three months. True enough, I was skeptical yet hopeful when this first started... but when you're in that moment... there's never a doubt in your mind.

There's no room for it.

There's only room for love.

"You wanna make a toast, bae?" Amaru asked, looking down at me with smiling eyes.

It was the first time he'd had a drink all month, and it was only because we were celebrating with family and friends who wouldn't be able to come with us to Hawaii for the wedding. I admired his willpower and strength. Though addictive spirits ran in his family, Amaru realized during his rehab and therapy that he used liquor and drugs to numb the pain of not having the things he wanted most. They were coping mechanisms that came from not knowing of healthy ways to deal with and express his lack and pain.

With that realization, he was able to have wine to celebrate if it had a low alcoholic content. The first time I saw him drinking I almost peed myself I was so worried. But he assured me that he had it under control, and that it was moments like that that proved his discipline and control were in place. Besides, he'd finally had literally everything he wanted in his life, and Amaru was committed, just like me, to making sure we didn't do anything to jeopardize the life we were building. And it was because of that that I told him...

"I can make a toast, but I can't drink."

Licking his lips, he leaned in closer to me and put his ear more towards my mouth. “You said what?”

Chuckling, I grabbed his arm and said directly into his ear, “I said I can make a toast, but I can’t drink.”

Our eyes linked as he nodded, allowing what I’d said to register. We agreed that even though I wanted to have a baby by my birthday we wouldn’t force or rush it. I’d been enjoying life and traveling so much that I didn’t want to have a baby yet because I felt it would slow me down. As fate would have it, I got pregnant when I was least expecting it. And even though it was unexpected, I couldn’t be happier.

Amaru smiled with one side of his mouth as he put his still full glass of wine down.

“What you tryna say?”

He took my hands into his and caressed them with his thumbs. Looking around at everyone laughing, talking, dancing, and enjoying themselves, I smiled as I put my eyes back on Amaru.

“I’m saying I’m pregnant. Seven weeks.”

His hand went to the top of his head as he stared at me. Scratching it, Amaru allowed his smirk to form a full grin. It fell quickly, his eyes watered, and I wondered if he’d changed his mind.

“Morgan...” he moaned quietly, pushing me into the wall and taking my lips into his.

For a while, it was hard for me to kiss him back because I was smiling so hard. But I quickly regrouped and wrapped my arms around his neck, melting against him as he kissed me deeply.

“Amaru... we’re not alone. This is inappropriate,” I managed to get out between pecks.

“Mane fuck them. You about to be my wife *and* the mother of my child. They lucky I’m not putting you on this table and spreading them legs to feast.”

“Amaru!” I yelped when he picked me up bridal style.

“Chill out.” He chuckled. “I’m not about to put you on this table. I am about to take you home, though. We gotta be alone so I can show you how grateful I am for you taking this chance on me and giving me the greatest gift a woman could ever give a man.”

The longer I stared into his eyes, the less those around us mattered. As he carried me out of the ballroom, the voices around us grew quieter and quieter. All I could hear, cared about, were the words coming out of his mouth.

“I know I gave you hell over hurting me, but the truth is, I really didn’t deserve you in that moment. I was at my worst hoping to have you at your best.”

“Ru...”

“That wasn’t right. We wouldn’t have been equal. And I would have ended up resenting you or feeling like I had to be with someone else that made me feel like I had more to offer.”

“And now?”

He remained silent and thought over my question as he continued to carry me out to his car. When we were settled inside, he finally answered me.

“Now... I feel like we’re finally equal and able to give each other what we want and need. I know you said I was your last chance to love, but you’ve been my only love... and besides our children... you’ll be the only one I need for the rest of my life.”

My bottom lip poked out as I leaned across the center console to give him a kiss. When he cupped my cheek, I deepened the kiss as I wrapped my hand around his neck.

“Aight now. Don’t do that unless you trying to be thanked in this car as you ride this dick.”

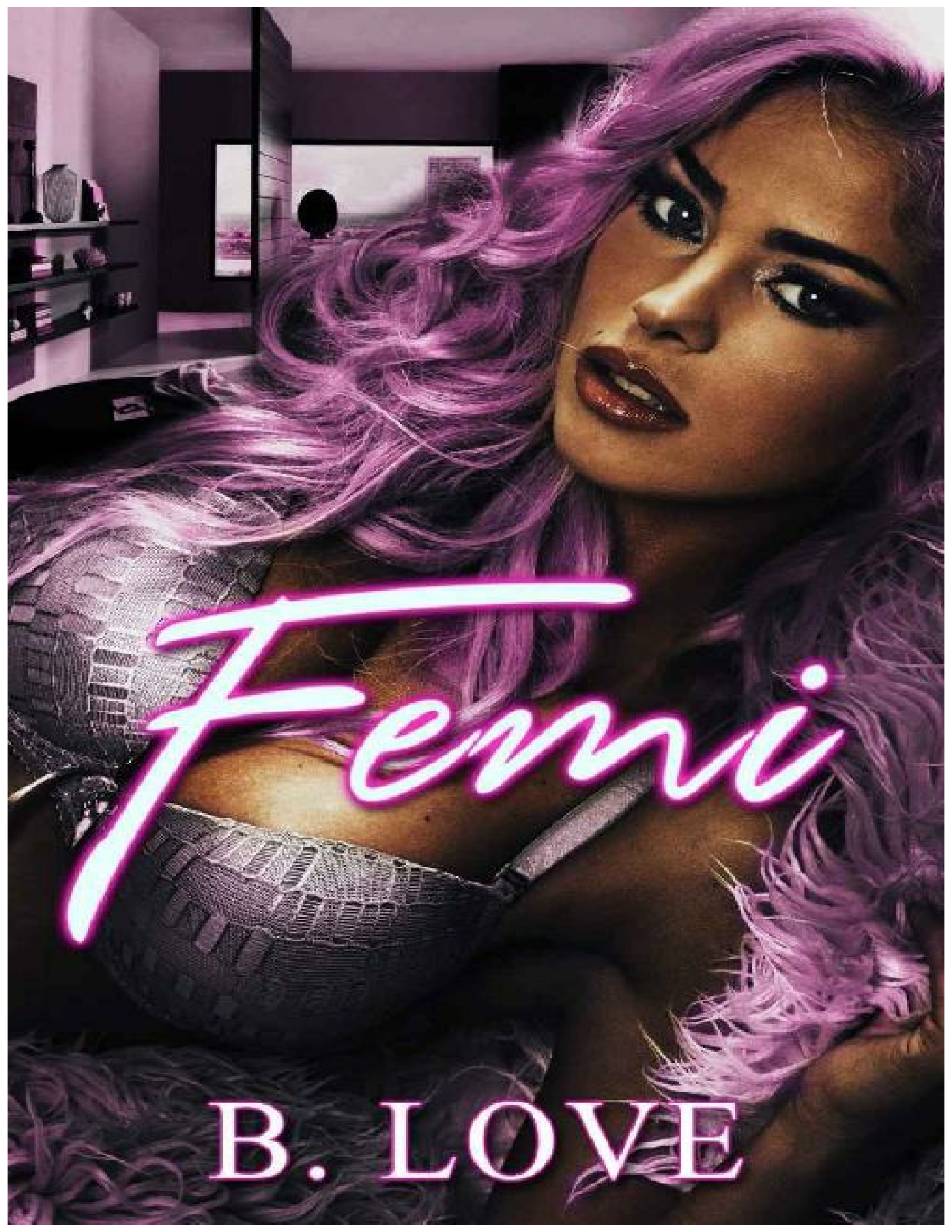
Smiling, I rested my forehead on his and asked, “When do I turn that down?”

The End

If you'd like to read Giselle's story, here's the link -- [Love Me For Christmas](#)

AFTERWORD

Also, I've technically closed my paperback store because so many orders came in, but I had to take into consideration the fact that a lot of my readers aren't on my mailing list or following me on social media, so they weren't aware of the news. Because of that, I'm opening the store back up until June 15th, but I will not be promoting it anywhere outside of this book.



Ferrari

B. LOVE

If you've been waiting for Femi's story... it's finally here and available for preorder! (Paperback only, only from my site. Please note: Femi was first introduced in book 4 of Rule and Camryn, but you do not have to read it first to read her story.)

Synopsis:

When Camryn Owens causes all hell to break loose in Peru, it's up to Femi to fix the damage done. Set out to avenge her Godfather's death, Femi breaks the cardinal rule set by The Bosses. Because of her disobedience, Femi must flee to the United States before she is forced to pay with her life. But she learns quickly that returning to the States shifts her from one hell to another.

Click [here](#) to visit my paperback site and order!

As always, thank you for the continued support. Until next time... Love, B.