

B. LOVE

BOSS BABE NOVELLA SERIES

Tampering with
TEMPTATION

TAMPERING WITH TEMPTATION

B. LOVE

Prolific Pen Pusher

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PREFACE

Please note:

This 23,000-word novella shows the space in time where friends become lovers. If you are looking for a more in-depth plot with twists and turns and drama, please choose another read. *Tampering with Temptation* shows the growth of a woman after quarantine... and how that growth opened her up for the spoilage and bomb dick from her best friend. Nothing more, but definitely nothing less. 😊❤️

INTRODUCTION

Boss Babe: A confident woman in charge of her own life who doesn't apologize for being her authentic self.

Prologue

I knew my perception was flawed when my best friend of forever walked in the room, and as soon as she did... all I could visualize was sucking both of her nipples and running my dick between her big ass titties. They had always been big, but I had never really noticed. Not sexually. Until tonight. I wanted to say it was because I hadn't seen her in a year because of quarantine and that she'd put on a few pounds, but that was still no reason for me to be lusting after her...

One

Wesley

This was the first time in over a year that I'd gone out for Maintenance Monday. Before COVID-19 had us quarantined, Mondays were my pamper day. For the past year, I'd been doing everything myself except my brows. To me, they were a way too vital part of my face for me to be playing around with. Now fully vaccinated, I finally felt confident being in the company of others outside of my immediate family. Before now, I'd only been going out for groceries and brow threading.

My entire day today was spent treating my mind, body, and soul to all of the treatments I'd been in desperate need of. Not necessarily just physically, but for my spirit as well. Pampering myself had become a major part of my self-care practice, so this past year of not being able to indulge myself with the service of others was draining. Even with me being able to perform a great deal of my routine on myself, there was something about truly relaxing and unwinding and allowing someone else to get paid to do it for me.

I guess my love for pampering myself stemmed from me serving so many others. Before quarantine, I worked several jobs and wore different hats. Each role made me available to anyone in need, but there weren't too many people or things seeing to mine. The main person to always fill my cup had left Memphis to truly live his best life right after high school, but he would come and visit me and our friends at least once a month. During that time, he made sure that he always devoted at least three days to me. Even if we weren't together

physically that whole time, my best friend made sure he spoiled me.

Now, single and alone, it was my responsibility to do all the spoiling. It was probably best that way anyway. There was no man in my life holding the deed over my head or trying to use it to keep me when I no longer wanted to be kept.

I'd been out all day today, spending time with myself, so much so that when my mother called, I hesitated to answer. My stomach dropped and my intuition told me she wasn't calling with good news. Releasing a breath, I quickly pulled my AirPods out. As I accepted the FaceTime request, I told her to hold on while I put the earbuds in. There was no telling what she was about to say, and I didn't want my nail technician all in our business while she did my shellac pedicure.

"Hey, Ma," I greeted. "What's up?"

"You went to the hibachi place without me?"

I chuckled. "No. I'm getting a mani-pedi."

"Oh. Well, I have good news and bad news. Which one do you want first?"

With a sigh, I squeezed the back of my neck. I wasn't really in the mood for any bad news. My crew was linking up this weekend for a small set at my place, and I was trying to remain as positive as I could. It would be the first time in a year and a half that I would see some of them. I really didn't want anything lingering over me.

"Can you not give me the bad news altogether?"

"I wish I didn't have to, but no. The longer you wait to hear it, the worse it will be. I can wait until you get home, though."

"Might as well get it over with. What's the good news?"

My mother sighed as her mouth twisted. With a smile, she informed me, "Now that we are officially vaccinated, we can go and see Lucki."

Covering my partially opened mouth, I shook my head as my eyes watered. This was definitely great news, and I was nowhere near prepared for it or aware of how much I needed to hear it. One of the absolute worst parts of choosing to self-quarantine even after the mayor lifted the one for the city had been not being around my sister while she was pregnant. We couldn't go and see her or the baby after her delivery, and months passed before we were able to even go and see them when she made it home.

Even though my sister was okay with us getting tested and coming to see them, her husband was being overly cautious for the first few months of his life. They weren't really going anywhere or letting anyone in. I understood that, but at the same time, it was torture not seeing my sister and the newest addition to our family. Lucki was my first nephew, and there was no doubt in my mind that we all were going to spoil him rotten.

I'd been buying him things like crazy. Every time we would go over and see him through the large dining room window, I'd go crazy. This virus had not only taken from us physically through the death of our aunt but it had taken something we honestly hadn't been valuing as much as we should have – the ability to spend quality time with those that meant the most to us. We all had kind of fallen into the habit of losing ourselves in our own little lives, and it wasn't until we weren't able to spend time with each other that we realized how blessed we were when we were able to.

For my sister, Westin, and her first pregnancy with my niece, I was there with her every step of the way. I even moved in with her for the first year of Tatiana's life. Her husband came around faithfully but he didn't know what the hell he was doing. We would always joke and say I was Tati's daddy, but eventually, he got it together. So not being there for my sister while she was pregnant with Lucki had definitely been hard on us.

“You mean we can go inside the house now?” I confirmed, needing to know if I had to reel my excitement back in. “Because if I have to look at him through another window...”

My mother laughed with a nod. “I mean we can actually go inside. She’s vaccinated now and so is Chris. Lucki’s doctor finally convinced Chris that it was okay for us to visit now that we all are vaccinated.”

My eyes rolled involuntarily at the mention of Chris’ name. He’d been a germophobe before the pandemic, so this type of thing was like his worst fear. My sister had fucked around and gotten the virus right after giving birth, which her doctor explained was common because she went back to work so soon and her immune system was compromised, and he lost his shit. Westin made the mistake of calling me while she was crying over the things he’d said and done during their argument and I called our father on three-way. Needless to say, Chris had the whole family after him.

He left my sister and Tati alone with Lucki for about two weeks, so Tati was pretty much responsible for taking care of a newborn while my sister stayed in her room. Me and my parents dropped off food and necessities for Tati on a daily because she refused to leave her mother at home alone. Instead, she just kept Lucki in the room with her.

“Don’t do that,” my mother ordered. “You will mess around and do it around him.”

“Does it look like I care? I don’t like his ass no more.”

“So, that’s your sister’s husband, so he’s family. You don’t have to like him, but we will still show him love and respect.”

Squeezing the bridge of my nose briefly, I huffed and shook my head. “If you say so. So when can we go and see them? I can’t wait to hold my baby.”

“You know your sister is at home all day now so we can go whenever you’re free.” I couldn’t stop myself from rolling my eyes. Chris had made her quit her job after she got the virus. Now, she was stuck being a full-time housewife... something we both loathed after watching our mother live that lifestyle. We loved having her there all the time when we were kids, but when we got older and realized how much of her life, day, and time revolved around her family... it started to get sickening.

She didn't really start living for herself until we went to college. "West," she called through her laugh. "What I say?"

"I can't help it. You know how I feel about that whole situation."

Her expression softened. "I know, but she chose to stay with him, so how she lives her life is on her. All we can do is support her and be there for her."

Releasing a long exhale, I nodded. "Okay. Well, after this, I'll be done with my stuff for the day so we can go over there tonight if you're available. I can't wait to love all on my baby!"

She only nodded as her eyes began to water, and that's when I remembered she said she had bad news too.

"Ma, what's the bad news?"

"I don't know if I should tell you while you're out in public."

"That might be for the best. What is it?"

"It's your grandma." I held my breath, waiting for her to continue. "She took a turn for the worst." My eyes blinked and I clenched my jaw. "They have confirmed that she has COVID and pneumonia, so it's not looking good. They have her on a breathing machine, and we are taking it day by day. It's up to her to fight this or surrender, so all we're doing is praying and keeping her lifted."

I nodded as I licked my lips and swallowed. If I lost my father's mother to this shit, too, I didn't know *what* I would do. It was hard enough losing my aunt in Chicago and having to watch her funeral on fucking Zoom.

Fuck COVID.

Yes, the time to myself had enlightened me spiritually, mentally, and emotionally, but I'd lost so fucking much. From my jobs and most stable sources of income to family time and family members. Here I was preparing to celebrate still having my life while my grandmother was fighting for hers. Brushing away a tear quickly, I released a shaky breath.

“Okay. Just keep me posted. How is Dad doing?”

“He’s okay. He’s prepared either way. You know their family handles death well because of his parents preparing them for it. He’s praying that God and his mother’s will be done and that everyone has peace with whatever happens.”

“Okay. Well, are you at home?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll just come over after I leave here then.”

“Alright, boo. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

After disconnecting the call, I cut the massage chair back on and closed my eyes to pray and try to relax. I wasn’t even as excited about seeing Lucki as I was anymore. My grandmother was a fighter, no doubt, but we really had no clue how this thing would pick and choose who to take. All I could do was pray it wouldn’t be her.

Not like this.

Two

Ali

As anxious as I was to get inside Heather's home, I had to call Westley before I went inside. Her sad ass status on Facebook had been eating at me ever since I left the house. I commented on it and told her to call me, but she hadn't done so yet, and I saw that she was online, so I could only assume that meant she wasn't going to. With the average person, that would have meant they didn't want to talk. With West, that meant I was going to have to baby her and pull it out of her.

It was my fault that she was so fucking spoiled when it came to my time and attention. It was because of me that she had me wrapped around her finger in such a way. Westley wasn't just my best friend; she was my whole heart. Had been since we met at twelve. My childhood was rough, to put it mildly. We struggled a lot. I'm talking... no tub so we warmed water on the stove and bathed in a metal tub struggled.

Me and my two brothers shared one tiny ass bedroom and my parents slept in the living room for as long as I could remember. It wasn't until I was about sixteen that we were able to move into a bigger house. But the moment I met West, she brought me into her family, and they treated me like I was one of them. I went from eating spaghetti, rice, or peanut butter sandwiches every night to having full balanced meals with her and her folks.

Back in the day, all I could do to show my appreciation was protect her. When I went pro, you better fucking believe I gave her anything she could possibly want. She took the gifts,

never cash, though. Because I played in the NBA for eight years straight, my time was what became a true luxury and the thing she craved most. So when I wasn't sending her gifts and paying her bills, I tried to come home as much as often. She and her folks would never let me say it, but I owed my life and freedom to them.

They kept me from taking my lack and frustration to the streets and getting into some shit that would have consumed me like it did my brothers. One was murdered at twenty-one and the other was currently serving a twenty-five-year sentence. So I guess spoiling West felt like the only proper way to show my thanks. Because there's no doubt in my mind that my life, if I still had it, would have turned out completely different had it not been for her friendship.

After texting Heather and telling her to open the door, I called West. She answered after the second ring with, "Hey."

"Why didn't you call me?"

She sighed. "Because."

"Because what?"

She sighed again. "Because I didn't want to."

"Why not?"

"Because I didn't want to call you with any bad news."

"You can call me for anything." I paused before adding, "You know that," even though she didn't need the reminder.

"I know, Ali. Maybe I just... wasn't ready to actually say the words. I knew you were going to call if I didn't, and I was hoping that would give me enough time to get my mind right."

A soft smile lifted the left corner of my mouth. "Okay. So what is it?"

"She's on life support."

My heart dropped and I sat up in my seat. "What? GG Pam?"

"Yes." Westley sniffled. "They have her on a breathing machine. There's a lot of fluid around her lungs or something,

I don't know. She has COVID and pneumonia.”

Head shaking in disbelief, I massaged my temple. “I'm so sorry, West. What can I do?”

She chuckled quietly, and I could see her wiping her eyes in my mind. “Just pray. We're preparing for things to go either way. You know how my dad is. He won't want any sadness and tears, so I'm just trying to mentally prepare.”

“I got you. We can pray right the fuck now.”

Her laugh was a little louder this time, like I wasn't serious. “You're the only person I know who curses before referencing prayer and anything to do with God.”

“What's the point in me trying to hide it? He be knowing it's on my mind and in my heart anyway.”

She chuckled. “I needed that laugh. Thank you, Ali. For it and for calling.”

“Always. You know I got you. Now bow your head and close your eyes so we can pray.”

“Okay,” she agreed quietly.

I did the same, and when I was done praying for her and her family, I disconnected the call and pushed my flight up. She told me she didn't need me to because they weren't able to see her grandmother, but I decided to head back a few days early anyway. GG Pam was like my grandmother, too. Both of mine died before I turned ten, and she was another one of Westley's family members that welcomed me in with open arms. I'd be sick as hell if she left any time soon, so I needed to start trying to get my mind right, too. More than anything, though, I had to make sure I was strong enough to be there for West, because her emotional wellbeing was my main concern.

Three

Westley

The old me would not have been swayed by the catcalls I garnered going into the gas station, but after being stuck inside for a year, I welcomed the appreciation of my appearance—especially since I'd put on a little weight. Let's just say my freshman fifteen in college happened again this past year... and added on an additional seven pounds.

I couldn't believe my ass gained a whole damn twenty-two pounds in a year, but when I thought about it, it made sense. I'd gone from being active on a daily basis to sitting around the house all day. After I lost my jobs, I got so depressed, I wasn't really doing anything. About six weeks passed before I started to feel like myself again, and I got a work-from-home job. Maybe it was God's grace, but I was able to start freelancing in what I'd originally gone to school for – graphic design. So, that was a good thing that came out of it.

I'm not going to lie, it took me some time to get used to my new body. I spent the past three months contouring it and making my shape curvier and more feminine. The day I saw two-twenty-five on the scale, I stopped looking, and hadn't checked it since. It was crazy because, for the first time in my life, I was able to look in the mirror and smile. Be proud. Actually love what I saw. Out of all of my slim and slim thick days... that had never been the case.

Not because I didn't like being smaller, but because this was the first time in my life I'd been forced to be happy with myself and myself alone. There was no man around telling me

how beautiful I was and all that shit. I had to look at myself in the mirror and tell me that—and actually believe it.

But even with all of the confidence I had built up, I was a little concerned about how my friends would react when they saw me. Even though I was fit, I was a thick fit, and I didn't want them thinking I'd been emotionally eating because I was depressed again. Especially Ali. I could honestly say I didn't care what anyone thought about me... except him. He wasn't just my best friend; Ali was my *every-fucking-thing*.

He protected me and looked out for me in a way that no one else ever had. I always want to please him and make him happy because he's done the very same thing for me. It didn't matter how much I told myself he wouldn't trip and make a big deal out of it, I could only hold my breath and wait to see if that would really be the case.

An annoyed breath escaped me as I looked at the length of the line inside the gas station. I hated even having to come inside but my card wasn't working at the pump. I started to drive around to another one, but I also didn't mind snagging some juice and hot chips, so I just came on in. It took me no time to grab my items and head to the front of the gas station to checkout.

When I noticed that the man standing behind me was one of the men staring at me outside, I expected to feel a little uncomfortable, but I didn't. There was nothing about his vibe that screamed creep or threat. Just in case, though, I held on to my keys a little tighter since the chain also held my pepper spray.

“Hey, stranger,” Omar greeted. “I feel like I haven't seen you in here forever.”

“I know, right? I had to come in today because my card wasn't working at the pump.”

“You on seven?” I nodded, and so did he. “That's the second time that has happened today. I'm gonna have to go out and check on it when I get this line down. How much you want on it?”

“Thirty.”

“Put hers with mine,” the man behind me said.

His arm snaked around me, handing Omar a hundred-dollar bill in the process. Looking back, I smiled.

“Thank you.”

“It’s all good, beautiful. Can I pump that for you?”

With a shrug, I turned to grab my juice and chips. “If you want to.”

“I want you,” he confessed, making both me and Omar chuckle.

I looked around him, impressed by how unbothered he was by the fact that we were holding up the line. Seeing three people behind him waiting made me anxious, though.

“You can only see my eyes. How do you know my grill isn’t jacked up underneath this mask?”

His head shook softly as he scanned my face. My mask. I may have been vaccinated, but I was still wearing it faithfully.

“I know the rest of your face is just as beautiful. I can tell by your eyes and your hair. How you keep up the rest of your body. Plus, you smell good as fuck. But if your grill is fucked up, I’ll take that L with grace.”

I chuckled and headed for the door. He followed behind with a slow pace and slight bounce that admittedly had me intrigued.

“So what’s your name?” he asked once we’d made it to my car.

“Westley,” I answered, quickly tossing my belongings into my front seat and locking my car back. I still wasn’t 100 percent sure he was worthy of my trust. I could see Omar watching us out of the window, but I didn’t want him trying to grab my key and toss me inside the car to take us both. “You?”

“Derrick.” He hesitated for a brief second. “Is it okay if I shake your hand?”

I appreciated him asking. “Yeah, that’s cool. I’m vaccinated and I have sanitizer in the car.”

“Me too.” Derrick pulled his mask down, and I couldn’t lie, he was very handsome. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Lowering my mask with one hand, I placed the other inside of his. “You as well.”

His brows raised and he released a breath as he stared at me. Smiling wide, he whistled softly and shook his head.

“You are beautiful as hell, Westley. What a pleasant surprise. I knew you would look good but *damn*.”

I just smiled as I pulled my hand out of his. Truth was, I had so much unused love in my heart and cum in my pussy that I desperately wanted to give away. A year and a half wasn’t the longest I’d gone without sex, but it was the longest I’d gone without any type of male physical companionship and interaction. The time wouldn’t make me desperate enough to have sex with just anyone, but I knew I was more open than usual.

“Thank you. You were a handsome, pleasant surprise, too,” I admitted, heading to the driver’s side of my car so he could pump my gas in peace.

When he was done, Derrick came to my window. I lowered it with a smile.

“Thanks again,” I offered.

“You’re welcome. Can I take you out now that the world is opening back up?”

Releasing a sigh, I looked down at the screen in the center of my dashboard to see that Ali was calling me.

“Um... sure.”

“What’s your number?”

I rattled it off quickly, needing to answer Ali’s call. I had told him that I was out and about running errands in preparation for his arrival, so if I didn’t answer, he would

worry. Quickly letting up my window, I resisted the urge to watch Derrick walk away as I called Ali back.

“What you doing?” he answered.

“Leaving the gas station. What’s up?”

“My flight just landed.”

“You need me to pick you up?”

“Nah. I’m already headed to your place. I was just calling to see if you were there.”

I smiled as my shoulders hiked in anticipation. A year was much too long to go without seeing my Ace. The distance definitely didn’t cause us to drift away. If anything, it brought us closer together because we had to find creative ways to bond. I couldn’t wait to hug him and have him in my presence.

“I need to go to the grocery store, but you know where my spare key in the backyard is. I’ll be there in about an hour.”

“Okay, cool. I’m going to send something to your cash app since I’ll be staying with you all month, too.”

My eyes rolled as I pulled out of the gas station. “How many times do I have to tell you that you don’t have to give me money when you stay with me? You bought me the damn house!”

Ali chuckled softly. “And? If I was staying at a hotel, I would pay them, so I’m always going to send something your way, too.”

“Whatever. You just do that because you expect me to wait on you hand and foot like you’re at the hotel.”

“No I don’t,” he lied, with a smile honeying his voice. “But I appreciate how you take care of me when I do stay with you. These Miami women ain’t no joke, West. I ain’t found one yet that’s got that vibe I’m used to back home. They don’t be cooking for a nigga, cleaning, none of that shit unless I’m throwing down stacks.”

I chuckled. “What about the millionaire you linked up with from Memphis? You still talking to her?”

“Nah. She was on some bullshit, too.”

“Y’all Memphis niggas don’t be looking for a spouse; y’all be looking for a chef, housekeeper, babysitter, and on-call sex worker.”

“Damn, West, it’s like that? You supposed to be on my side.”

I chuckled. “I am, that’s why I’m telling you the truth.”

He sucked his teeth. “Whatever. Just bring ya ass.” His voice lowered when he confessed, “I’m ready to see you.”

Biting down on my lip, I smiled so hard, I couldn’t even reply right away. “I’m ready to see you, too.”

“Aight. I’ll see you.”

“Okay.”

Not long after I disconnected the call, I was getting the notification of his cash app payment. All I could do was laugh and shake my head at the five thousand dollars he’d sent. It didn’t matter how much I told him he didn’t have to do it, he always did. And that was why I was heading to the grocery store to get some of his favorite things. Even though he didn’t expect me to, I enjoyed cooking for him whenever he was in town. I don’t know if it was the praise he gave or how much fun we’d have while I cooked and we ate together... but it was one of my favorite ways to wind down with him.

The more I accepted that Ali was in Memphis, at my house, the more excited I got. I was finally about to see my best friend!

Four

Ali

I knew my perception was flawed when my best friend of forever walked in the house, and as soon as she did... all I could visualize was sucking both of her nipples and running my dick between her big ass titties. They had always been big, but I had never really noticed. Not sexually. Until tonight. I wanted to say it was because I hadn't seen her in a year because of quarantine and that she'd put on a few pounds, but that was still no reason for me to be lusting after her.

I was so caught off guard by my dick growing at the sight of her that I hadn't even bothered to help her with the bags in her hands like I normally would. She placed them on the ground and quickly walked over to me. As soon as she was within reach, I pulled her into my arms and held her tightly. A sigh of relief left me the moment she melted into my arms. After so fucking long, it felt like the part of me that was missing had finally been returned.

Unable to resist, I picked her up and wrapped her legs around me.

"Put me down, Ali. I've gotten bigger."

"Ain't shit big about you but your heart." She squealed as I lifted her higher and tossed her over my shoulder. "Don't let me hear you say that again," I ordered with a smack to her ass.

"Ali!" she yelled before giggling and tightening her grip around me. "Put me down!"

"No," I declined, carrying her to her room.

Shit, to be honest, I felt like I would continue to stare at her and make things weird. She had gained weight, but it wasn't a detriment by any means. Westley was already beautiful, but the extra weight made her sexy. Well, she was already sexy, I guess... I don't fucking know. Up until now, I hadn't been looking at her like that. In my eyes, she had always been just my best friend. Like a sister. There was never a moment where I wondered if we could be in a romantic relationship, and I damn sure didn't want to have sex with her. But right now, as I carried her to her bedroom, all I could think about was tossing her onto her bed, spreading her legs, and letting my dick slide into the wet warmth that I knew was waiting between her thighs.

“Where are you taking me?”

“To your room. I got you a surprise.”

“A surprise?” she repeated softly.

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

I placed her on her feet in front of her closed door, forcing my eyes not to roam her body. Her face was more distracting than usual, too. Big, thick, wavy curls came a little past her shoulders, framing her cute, chubby, oval face. I had to keep myself from lowering and kissing her triangular nose. Because then I'd want to kiss her heart-shaped, plump lips, too. They were juicy as fuck. All I could picture was them wrapping around the head of my dick.

Shit.

“Uh...” Clearing my throat, I looked away from her briefly to try and focus on anything but how her honey brown thighs would look and feel wrapped around me as I dug deep into her pussy.

“Ali?” she called sweetly, grabbing my arm.

Her touch... I had never cared about the softness of her touch. Or her skin. How she always kept it so soft and hydrated that it glowed.

“Hmm?” I almost moaned, looking down into her slanted dark eyes. “Have you always been this fucking beautiful, West?”

Her head dropped bashfully as she released a quiet chuckle. “Yes, but I guess you’re just now noticing since it’s been so long.”

She shot me a wink before turning and opening her bedroom door. With a gasp, she looked back at me with widened eyes. Before I could open my arms fully, she was entering them again, resting her head on my chest... by my heart. I could only hope she didn’t feel how fast it was beating or how hard my dick was.

“What is all of this?”

“I just... wanted to show you how proud I am of you. You didn’t just survive over the past year, you thrived.”

Westley looked up at me with watery eyes. She had been working as an art teacher by day and in an art gallery by night before the pandemic hit. Even though she wasn’t paying rent for the house, she insisted on paying the insurance and the rest of her bills. On top of that, she lived an expensive ass life of luxury, and I loved that about her. Hell, she deserved it. I respected how she cared for and prioritized her wants and needs, making sure her life was filled with everything she desired. Because when she was satisfied, Westley was at her best and full enough to care for everyone else.

Not only did she work a lot, but she helped her family and everyone else in need too.

When she lost both of her jobs, she had a brief spell of depression, but she eventually began to see it as God’s blessing because it forced her to get out of her own way and use her degree to do what she was most passionate about. She ended up landing a freelance graphic design job, switching out the website monthly for an online hair and makeup company for a stylist. That turned into her handling their social media too. At first, she was going to tell them she didn’t know as much about branding and marketing and being a social media

manager, but I told her ass to accept the job then do her research because of the doors it could open in the future.

Thank God she listened, because she was finally doing what she loved and making just as much as she was working both of her jobs. Now, she had more time and freedom to really live her life.

She brushed a tear away again before squeezing me tightly.

“If you keep spoiling me like this, my future man will have to apply twice the pressure.”

“As he should. You deserve the world. If he can’t go as hard for you as I do... he doesn’t deserve you.”

Our eyes remained locked for a few seconds before she turned and released a shaky breath. She walked over to the bed, opening the Chanel bags that almost covered it. I’d gotten her three purses, some tennis shoes, and a pair of earrings. It was light work, but I knew if I did too much, she would make me take some of it back.

“Now I feel bad about just fixing you a welcome home dinner.”

We both laughed as she walked over to me. Her pout made my heart skip a beat.

“You don’t have to do shit for me but exist, Westley. You know that.” Her mouth opened and closed before she smiled. “What you cooking, though? I feel like I haven’t had a homecooked meal all year.”

With a giggle, she took me by the hand and led me out of her room.

“Have you been following the recipes I’ve been sending you?”

“Yeah, but they don’t taste like they do when you cook them.”

“Are you cooking with love? That makes all the difference.” My head shook as I resisted the urge to close the space between us and press my chest against her back... get a good feel of all that ass she was toting around now. “Ali?”

“Huh?”

“Did you hear me?” When she looked back at me and noticed me staring at her ass, she smiled and shook her head. “You act like you’ve never seen ass before.”

“Not on you!” She laughed but I was dead serious. Even when she started getting a little thicker in college, she didn’t really have a lot of ass. It was just her thighs, titties, and hips. Now, that shit had spread and evened out all over. “You couldn’t warn me about this so I could prepare? Send a nigga a picture or something so I wouldn’t be staring like a fucking weirdo?”

“Well... I didn’t know how you were going to react.”

“What you mean?” I asked, grabbing the bulk of the bags that we’d left behind.

“I’m big—healthier than I’ve ever been. I didn’t want you or anyone else thinking it was because I was depressed and eating my emotions again. It was actually the opposite. This is happy weight because I made it through. So that would have made me self-conscious. And I’ve worked too damn hard to perfect my shape and rebuild my confidence to let that happen.”

My head shook. “If you could even think that I would come at you sideways because of some shit like that, you must have forgotten about my character since we’ve been apart.” Her head lowered briefly, but I lifted it when I told her, “You were beautiful then, and you’re beautiful now. We all have gone through tough spells mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. You were allowed that time to feel what you felt and disconnect. No one judged you for how you chose to nurture yourself. But you didn’t stay down; you reconnected with your Source, and by His grace, you turned your life around completely. You have every right to be confident about every good thing in your life—not just your beautiful body but the boss moves you’ve been making too. I’m your best friend, so I will always stand by you and honor that shit just like they were my successes. You hear me?”

Westley nodded with a smile. She gave me another hug before brushing her tears away and heading for the kitchen. As she cooked, I helped where I could here and there as we caught up. I was too happy when she told me GG Pam was off life support. She was still in the hospital, of course, but that was a good sign. Her doctors told them not to get their hopes up too quickly, but I couldn't imagine God bringing her this far just to take her away from them permanently. Either way, I was here now, and like always... I would be here for West no matter what.

Five

Westley

Ali was so damn cute. He was staring at me like he'd never seen me before. At first, I wanted to be offended because he'd never shown me this much attention, but I couldn't blame him. Things had always been platonic between us and we had never considered taking things to the next level. Now, I was definitely more his type as far as my body was concerned, so it made sense for it to be so hard for him to take his eyes off me.

I can't lie, it was a little weird at first. For both of us. He kept fighting it and I was glad he did. But eventually, he just stopped trying. Now, every time I noticed him staring, it would make me blush. His approval of the outward change was definitely building my confidence up even more. I didn't want him to think I was insecure about my body and looks because that wasn't the case. It was hard to explain, but as always, he got it... because he got me.

My phone vibrated, causing me to look down to see a text from Derrick saying he was outside. Even though we agreed to go out tomorrow, since all of my friends had come over tonight, I told him he could come through, too. I wasn't really worried about him knowing where I lived prematurely because there was no doubt in my mind that the men in my life would handle him if things got crazy. But, I still wasn't getting any bad vibes from him. From the few conversations we'd had, he seemed like a really good guy.

I was hoping my pussy wasn't making me ignore all the red flags and warning signs. That was another reason I'd

invited him to come through before our date. If something was off with him, my homies would be able to tell.

“He’s here,” I told my best female friend, Uriah, as I stood.

“He better be as fine as you said he is, or I’m clowning your ass,” she warned, making me smile.

Heading out of the living room where everyone was gathered, I went to the front door to let him in. I smiled at the sight of him and the brown bag he was cradling. Even though I told him we were good and he didn’t have to bring anything, he refused to show up empty-handed.

“Hey, beautiful. Thanks again for the invite.”

“Hey. You’re welcome.”

After we hugged briefly, he handed me the bag and asked, “I got a bottle of clear and brown. Is that cool?”

“Of course. Come on in. I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

Before I even could, Ali was making his way over to us as I set the bottles of alcohol down on the round brown table.

“Who the fuck is this?” Ali checked, looking Derrick’s frame over.

Derrick’s head tilted. “You’re Ali Morgan from the Grizzlies, right?”

I thought Derrick’s recollection of him would soften Ali like it normally did, but his expression remained hard as he nodded. A lot of people couldn’t believe Ali retired after playing for eight years. That was a long time to have a successful NBA career, but he was still so young and had his health. Being a twenty-eight-year-old starting lineup living legend in our city did nothing to sway Ali’s decision to retire two years ago, and I was proud that he did. Not because he was no longer playing basketball, but because he stood firm on the decision that was best for him.

He didn’t give a damn about what the team, his fans, or his family wanted. He didn’t care about the extra money he could make. Ali had one goal when he went pro, and that was to make good money doing what he liked so he would have the

financial freedom to live the life he loved—and he'd done just that.

“Yeah. Now, who are you?”

Derrick laughed quietly as he extended his hand. “I’m Derrick.”

Ali looked down at his hand for a few seconds before shaking it.

“Where you know West from?”

“Don’t start that shit,” I ordered, taking Derrick’s hand and leading him away from the table... and Ali.

I didn’t want him grilled; I just wanted them to get a feel for his vibe. Things weren’t serious enough for them to be wanting to find out his life story. Hell, a few dates and hopefully some good sex was all I was after.

“Everyone,” I called, getting their attention. “This is Derrick. Derrick, this is everyone.”

“He *is* fine.” Uriah approved with a smile, making me and my other two home girls laugh.

He definitely was that, but for some reason, I wasn’t as excited about his looks as I was anymore. I don’t know. Ali arriving yesterday changed things. It was hard being impressed with Derrick when Ali was around.

Ali was the perfect height, had the perfect muscular, tattooed build, and don’t get me started on his handsome face. He was obsessively fine for no good reason. There wasn’t one thing in particular about his beautifully dark brown face that stood out—everything about him was good. From his naturally arched brows and dark, intense eyes to his wide nose and the goatee that surrounded his plump lips.

As they all spoke and welcomed Derrick in, I tried to avoid Ali’s eyes. This time, they were angry. I tried to ignore it, but that was kind of hard to do when he started walking toward me. Instead of keeping the space next to me empty for Derrick while he chatted it up with Saint and Houston, Ali sat next to

me and asked, “Where you know this nigga from? What does he do? Who his folks? He got his own?”

“Ali,” I interrupted, squeezing his thigh. “It’s not that deep yet, friend. I don’t know all of that.”

“Then what is he doing here?”

“We’re going out tomorrow and I wanted y’all to get a feel for him.”

“How you expect me to do that if you won’t let me talk to him?”

“I don’t want you to talk to him because you’re being overprotective, and I don’t want you to be unnecessarily hard on him.”

He frowned as he sat back in his seat. “If he can’t handle your best friend asking him a few questions, he ain’t the one for you.”

“You sure have a lot of ways to determine who is and isn’t for me all of a sudden.”

His head shook as he accepted the cigar Lance offered him. Normally, we all would share blunts and cigars; now, everyone had their own.

“It’s not all of a sudden. I’ve always looked out for you. That’s my job.”

With a huff, I stood when I noticed Derrick looking around the room for me.

“Well, consider yourself off duty tonight. Just relax and enjoy yourself. You can talk to him, but please, don’t grill him, Ali.”

“Ain’t no off duty with you. You know what’s up.”

All I could do was shake my head as I walked over to Derrick. My intuition was telling me this was about to be a long freaking night.

Six

Ali Westley had been ignoring me all day pretty much and I really couldn't blame her. She said I embarrassed her in front of her friend last night, but I really didn't give a fuck. If he couldn't handle a conversation with me, he for damn sure wouldn't be able to handle one with her brother and uncles. What I asked and did was light work compared to what her father would have wanted me to do. Even with that, I hated that she was upset with me.

She was still sweet enough to make and have breakfast with me before locking herself in her home office. When she did come out, she wouldn't say anything to me unless I talked to her first. And her responses had been the bare minimum. At first, it was cute and funny, but as dinner time approached, I was over the shit. I hadn't come back home for there to be tension between us over a nigga that I was sure wouldn't last more than a few dates.

When she came out of her office this time, she was wearing a #BossBabe crop top and her titties were damn near popping out. All I could do was lower my eyes down her frame. The longer I looked, the more I wanted to get back in her good graces – whatever it would take.

“Are you done working for the day?” I checked, putting my phone down.

The TV was on, but I wasn't really paying it any attention.

“I am.”

“You wanna grab dinner somewhere?”

Her head tilted as she paused. Instead of going into her brightly lit kitchen, she came and sat next to me. Things were definitely still weird between us. For me, at least. I thought once I got used to her new body that my attraction would die down—it hadn't. It wasn't just the curves that were drawing me to her.

Everything about Westley was alluring now.

From her floral scent to the softness and glow of her skin. The way she looked at me. How she stood her ground and maintained her silence, not giving in to me.

“That depends.”

“On?”

“If you're ready to apologize.”

I chuckled and looked from her to the seventy-inch TV mounted above the fireplace. She seemed so... feminine to me now. Her plants and flowers and soft color scheme... all the shit I'd never noticed that made her a woman were putting me into sensory overload right now. It was like I was seeing every facet of her for the first time. Rubbing my temples, I turned slightly and put some space between us on her peach velvet sofa.

“I will apologize if I feel I did something worthy of it.”

Her nostrils flared. “So you don't think you were unnecessarily cruel last night?”

I frowned with a shake of my head. “Not at all, but obviously you do.”

“Yes, I do. I think you were really disrespectful toward Derrick last night, and as one of the leaders of our crew, Houston nem followed suit. They were open to him until they realized how closed off you were.”

“They are grown ass men, Westley. I don't control who they gravitate to. You asked that they feel him out. If they started treating him differently, maybe it's from something he said or did or they caught a vibe, but not because of me.”

Westley's eyes rolled as she crossed her arms over her chest. "Why were you being so mean, Ali?" Before I could let words fall from my opened mouth, she added, "And don't say it's because you were trying to protect me. You've never acted like that with anyone else. Tell me the truth."

I considered her request for a few seconds. Lying had never been our thing... even when it would hurt less than the truth. Was I ready to really accept what I was feeling to even express those feelings to her? It didn't matter at this point. Obviously, I was acting different last night, and that I wouldn't deny. West deserved to know why.

"You inviting him here fucked with me," I started, hoping she wouldn't probe any deeper.

"Why? Because I spent more time with him than you?" She smiled softly, already breaking away some of the concrete around her heart that had been keeping me out of it all day. "You're going to be here for a whole month, Ali, so you know you'll have more of my attention. I just wanted to prepare for my date tonight with Derrick."

"It's not that."

"Then what is it?"

"I was struggling with the thoughts and feelings I was having for you since I got here, and seeing you with another man... just the thought of you being with another man... it confused me."

I could tell by her wrinkled brows, soft blink, and slightly parted lips that she was getting confused too.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying..." With a huff, I looked down briefly and shook my head. Had she been any other woman, I would have not only told her about the nasty ass thoughts I'd been having but made them happen too. But this was Westley. My girl. My *best* fucking friend. "When I first saw you, I wanted to do some nasty shit to you."

She chuckled before quickly covering her mouth with one hand and taking my hand into the other.

“Nasty shit?” she repeated just above a whisper, like we weren’t the only two people here. “Like what?”

Licking my lips, my eyes lowered down her frame. “I wanted to suck your nipples and run my dick between your titties.” I saw the moment her chest inflated when she gasped, but I didn’t really give a fuck at this point. She asked, so I would tell her everything and just deal with the consequences. “I wanted to fuck you from behind and watch all that ass you got now bounce while you twerked on my dick.”

“Ali,” she whispered, but I couldn’t stop now.

The images were replaying in my head again.

“I wanted to lift you up and flip you so that your pussy was right in my face while you sucked my dick until you got lightheaded, then I would lay you down and fuck you until you felt yourself come down. Give you the hardest orgasm you ever had in your life before pulling out and shooting my cum all over you.”

“Ali,” she called, louder this time, forcing my eyes to lift to hers.

“You don’t have to say anything. I know you’ve never looked at me sexually. Honestly, I don’t know what the hell is going on, West.” She stood. “I don’t know if it’s the weight you put on that’s driving me crazy or how much you’ve changed this past year and really evolved as a woman. Your peace and happiness that you’re radiating like crazy now, or just the fact that I haven’t seen you in so fucking long and I just... missed you.”

When she left the living room, I knew this was probably the one time in our friendship that I should have lied until she called out from the hallway, “Come here.”

Following behind her, I remained silent as we headed to her room. I didn’t know what she was thinking or feeling, and I understood that maybe she needed time to process what I’d just said. Sitting on her pale green chaise, I asked, “You ’bout to put me out?”

She chuckled from the bathroom. “Nah. I’m about to let you in.”

Westley returned from the bathroom wearing nothing but a smile. My dick instantly began to harden as I took her naked body in. She stood directly in front of me, holding a small bottle of lube.

“What you doin’?” I asked quietly, refusing to believe she was surrendering her body to me.

“Making your thoughts our reality.”

I chuckled as she handed me the lube. “I don’t want to ask you if you’re sure because I don’t want you to change your mind.”

Wrapping her arms around my neck, Westley smiled. “I don’t want you to ask me either, because then I’ll start overthinking. Right now... I just want to feel you. So do whatever you want to do to me.”

I had to keep myself from asking her if she was sure again. Because, quite frankly, I was starting to get unsure. Westley was my best friend. Would we be able to maintain that friendship after this? Would I want more? She still hadn’t expressed how she was feeling. All I knew was that she wanted me physically, too, but would that be enough?

Needing to get out of my head, I ran my hands up the back of her thighs. Because the truth was, until I had her, I would never be satisfied. I would continue to lust and yearn for her, probably ending up doing more harm than good. And the last thing I wanted was for our friendship to suffer because I started acting crazy.

Westley released a soft sigh when I squeezed her ass. I leaned forward, kissing her chest a few times as my hands came forward. They rubbed her breasts gently before tweaking her nipples. When I couldn’t hold back anymore, I began to lick, suck, and nibble both. The sound of her ragged breathing as she squirmed confirmed how good it felt. I lowered my hand between her thighs, groaning at her wetness.

Alternating between one nipple and the other, I circled her clit slowly and slid my fingers up and down her slit until she came.

Pulling my head back, she looked into my eyes with hunger in hers.

“Are you sure?” I checked, one last time.

“Yes,” she whispered with a nod of her head.

Pleased with her answer, I took a small amount of the lube and put it on and between her breasts. She giggled when I began to massage her nipples but that quickly turned into a moan. I stood to undress, but she did it for me. Dropping to her knees, Westley coated my shaft with lube before walking over to her bed. My eyes were trained on her as she climbed on top of the cream comforter while I slowly stroked my throbbing dick.

I walked over to her and covered her body with mine. Her eyes closed and she smiled briefly as she pressed her titties together. Sliding my dick between them, I bit down on my bottom lip. A part of me wouldn't want to look in her eyes because I was sure that would make this weird. I mean, I was fucking my best friend. But the more I looked into her eyes, the more this felt like the most natural progression.

And then she started showing me that she was nasty too—dipping her head to lick mine and stroking my shaft with her hand. My emotions made the physical act so overwhelming, I was cumming in no time. But that was cool because I was ready to put on a condom and slide my way inside.

While I sheathed myself, Westley flipped over and got on her knees. The sight of her puddled-up cream had me wanting to feast more than anything. Pulling her to the edge of the bed, I got on my knees and slid my tongue between her folds. I spread her ass cheeks and alternated between slurping on her clit, dipping my tongue in her opening, and running it against her tight asshole.

As much of a rush as I was in to get inside of her, I found just as much pleasure in pleasing her. Every moan and breath

she released... every time she rocked against me or tried to scoot away from me... that shit just turned me on more and more. So much so that I had no desire to stop eating her dripping pussy even after she came. Had she not fell into the bed before I could catch her, I wouldn't have.

Propping Westley back up, I cursed under my breath when she spread her ass cheeks again—giving me the perfect view of her drenched pussy. Slowly, I made my way inside, knowing through previous conversation that it had been a while for her. She inhaled a sharp breath as she gripped the comforter.

My strokes started out slow and soft as I held her down by her waist, arching her back the way I liked. As her juices went from clear and slippery to creamy white and thick, I began to stroke her harder. Between her moans and the feel of her pussy, I had to fight to continue my steady pace. Her shit was so fucking hot and tight... hugging me and clutching me like my dick was finally in the one place it had always belonged.

Westley was home.

Had always been, and now, I was sure she would always be.

When she began to fuck me back and twerk on my dick, I was no longer able to keep my moans in. Between me smacking her ass, pulling her hair, and wrapping my hand around the front of her neck, Westley was cumming hard. And long. And back to back. I wanted to make this last for as long as I could, but by her third orgasm, mine was creeping up on me.

As soon as I felt those tingles and my body began to tense up, my strokes sped up and grew more sporadic. She looked back at me, taunting me. Daring me to cum.

I did.

Hard as hell, too.

We both fell over onto the bed and struggled to regulate our breathing. She was up first, bringing a warm towel to clean

me off. When she was done, I got up, and we showered together before crawling into the middle of her bed.

I knew she had a date, but I didn't want to think about that.

I didn't want to think about anything but how good she felt in my arms.

I didn't want anything else to matter but this moment... no matter how briefly it would last.

Seven

Westley

I was going to be late for my date with Derrick because I kept getting distracted by thoughts of sex with Ali. Okay, so I had never thought about how sex would be with him, but that was cool because it was better than anything I would have ever been able to imagine.

His dick was hard.

And long.

And curved.

And thick.

His strokes were steady.

So fucking steady.

And precise.

I felt every one all over me.

No man had ever fucked me so slowly and deeply.

So methodically.

Jesus H. Crice.

Just thinking about it now had me grinning in the mirror when I was supposed to be applying my blush.

Shaking the thought from my head, I bit down on my bottom lip, trying to lower my smile. It took less than five minutes for me to complete my makeup, then I removed the flexi rods from my hair and fluffed the big, wavy curls out. Since it was early June and super humid out, even with the sun

setting, I decided on a form-fitting linen midi dress. I didn't know what Derrick was planning but he did say it was casual since we were still getting to know each other.

Once I settled on my dress, I applied my perfume oil and headed out. Derrick was waiting for me to meet him at Automatic Slim's for a few drinks to see where the night would take us, but I couldn't leave without talking to Ali. We hadn't really talked about what happened between us. He'd been chilling in my woman cave, which housed a few arcade games, a pool table, and a couple of recliners in front of my flat screen. It was often where he spent his free time when he was here.

Even though it was my home, I still knocked before entering. As he normally did, he put his phone down and gave me his undivided attention.

"You wanna talk about it?" I asked, slowly making my way to the recliner next to the one he was sitting in.

"Unless you want to act like it didn't happen, yeah."

My smile was small. "Well..."

I paused and swallowed hard, gathering my nerve. One of the main things I worked on while quarantined was finding my voice and learning how to better communicate and take charge of what I wanted and needed. A lot of my past relationships made me feel silenced. Not intentionally. I just... was more focused on being a submissive, respectful partner instead of speaking up for what I wanted.

I had never really had that issue with Ali, though. He had been my safe space since we were kids. With him, I always felt emotionally safe and like I could speak up.

But this was different.

This was delicate.

"You definitely have the best dick I've ever had in my life," I admitted, making him smile a small, confident smile. "Like... it was really good." My pussy started to pulse just thinking about a second taste. "And I feel like I should thank you."

His face covered with confusion. “Thank me?”

“Yes.” I cleared my throat. “You know it’s been a really long time for me, and I wanted the man I broke my sex fast with to be someone I could trust. Who better than you? I felt really safe with you, and I really appreciate that.”

“You’re welcome,” he said, but it sounded more like a question, making me laugh softly.

“I just mean being with you kept me from moving too fast with Derrick or anyone else.”

Understanding covered his face as he smiled and nodded. His body relaxed.

“Okay, I understand now. That’s why you wanted us to meet him? Not just because y’all are going out tonight but because you were considering sex?”

“Yes, and I didn’t want to actually say that to any of you. That’s why I wanted y’all to just feel him out a bit. I didn’t want my desire for sex to have me blind to his true character. Now, I can take my time and truly get to know him without sex clouding my judgement.”

His expression was blank as he stared at me for a few seconds.

“Well, I’m glad I could help.”

I didn’t want things to go left, so I tried to reel the conversation back in.

“It wasn’t just because I didn’t want to have sex with Derrick,” I clarified. “I really wanted to experience that with you.”

“But it was just sex for you, right?”

I nodded. “Yeah. That’s all it was for you, too, right?” He didn’t reply. “We’re best friends, Ali...”

“You think I don’t know that,” he seethed, teeth gritting. “You think I wanted to start looking at you differently?”

I scoffed. “You’re only looking at me differently because you finally like what you see. But you don’t have any new or

romantic feelings for me, Ali. It was just lust.”

Ali chuckled and sat further in his seat. He rubbed his goatee.

“How can you tell me what I don’t have?”

“Well, tell me. Are you saying you have feelings for me?”

“It doesn’t matter what I’m saying because you’ve made it clear it was just sex to you.”

He stood and I did too.

“It does matter! What you want matters.”

“Not when it comes to you, Westley,” he rejected, voice strained, running his hand down the back of his head and neck. “You know I always put you first. So if you want us to remain friends, that’s what it’s going to be.”

I took his hand into mine, pulling him close instead of allowing him to leave. “But are you saying that’s not what you want?”

A few seconds passed before he answered me with, “I’m saying I would have liked for this conversation to have been us processing our next move together instead of you coming in with your mind already made up.”

Ali released his hand from my grip. I watched him walk away, knowing this wasn’t an issue I could deal with right now. I needed to get to Derrick for our date.



A BREATH of relief escaped me when I heard the front door open and close. I was trying not to act super worried about Ali not coming home last night, but I was. Not because I felt like something had happened to him... but because something had happened between us. Normally when he planned to stay out super late or even all night, he would call or text to let me know, but that hadn’t been the case. I had to call him, and he didn’t even answer. He did text me about an hour later and tell me he would see me in the morning, though.

I was moving kind of slow, hoping he would arrive before I left. My grandmother was back home, so I was going to meet my parents and sister over there to spend some time with her. Really, I had gotten an amazing opportunity and wanted to share the great news with my best friend. Ali had always been the first person I wanted to share things with, and I didn't want us having sex to change that. Well, I didn't want my reaction to us having sex to change that.

A part of me felt like he would be okay with us fucking around for the month until he left. It wasn't like we would be able to do the long-distance relationship thing anyway. We both were too affectionate and valued quality time too much for that. Hell, that's why he came back home as much as he did. We talked at least every other day and he came back once a month while we were friends, so I could only imagine how it would be if there was more between us.

I don't know why I expected him to immediately make his way to me, but when he didn't, I went to the guest room to find him removing his clothes from the dresser and putting them back into his suitcase.

"What you doing?" I asked quietly, leaning against the doorframe.

He didn't bother to look up at me as he said, "I think I need to go."

"You don't have to." *I don't want you to.*

"It's for the best. If I stay, we'll be tampering with temptation and I'm not trying to have that."

"I'm okay with us having sex until you leave if that's what you're worried about."

Ali laughed softly, finally looking up at me. He licked his lips as he stared at me, giving me time to accept just how much I missed him already.

"C'mere," he requested, sitting on the edge of the bed.

I walked further into the room and sat next to him. Instantly, his hand covered mine on top of my thigh, and the gesture filled me with such relief.

“Sex would be cool, but I feel like I would want more.”

“Since when? I’m sorry if it seems like I’m having a hard time accepting this, it just seems so out of the blue.”

“Trust me, it’s that exact same way for me, too,” he confessed with a small smile. “At first, I kept telling myself it was because of your appearance and that so much time had passed since we’ve been in each other’s presence, but I started thinking about other things that made me feel like that’s not the case.”

“Like what?”

“Like how hard this past year has been without you. How you’re not just my best friend but you’re my whole heart and I really do love everything about you. About us. How good and at peace I feel when I’m with you. How much I want to know what your top set of lips taste like.”

I blushed and looked away briefly. “I didn’t know.”

“You didn’t really give me a chance to tell you, and that’s okay, because I haven’t really processed everything. All I know is, I came home to spend time with my best friend... but when I saw you...” He paused, and I held on, anxiously waiting. “I started thinking about how much I wouldn’t want to leave my lover. And then we had sex and that just further complicated things for me. So I think I need some time to just... get this shit out of my system. I don’t want to do anything to fuck up our friendship.”

“And you think it’s going to be that easy for you to get over your feelings for me?”

“It has to be because I’m not losing you.”

His confession had me wondering if I was taking the easy way out by not allowing myself to consider how things could be between us, but it was just too risky. Ali was too vital of a part of my life for us to fuck up what we had over something as inconsistent as feelings. Feelings changed, but our friendship had always remained the same. I didn’t want us to think our love was romantic because of temporary feelings and we ruin our friendship when that phase passed. No sex would

ever be worth that. But... I would also be lying if I didn't say Ali had literally everything I wanted in a man.

But surely... there had to be another man out there with all of his qualities. One whose friendship wasn't as sacred to me.

“Well, if you think leaving is the only way for you to process this, of course, I'm not going to stand in your way.”

I tried not to pout and make him feel bad, but I was really getting sad. His return home was all I had been looking forward to, and now he was leaving me again. Yes, I knew we would link up still, but it would probably be with the rest of our friends.

“I think leaving is the only way I won't make you mine,” Ali corrected. He placed a kiss to the center of my forehead before adding, “Thank you for understanding.”

I wasn't expecting his words to send a surge of excitement through me, but it did. I literally shivered. My hand cupped his cheek, and as my thumb gently caressed it, our heads moved in each other's direction like magnets. Even though I knew it was coming, feeling his lips on mine still caught me by surprise. My body tensed, but the softness of his lips instantly made me relax.

Each tender peck of Ali's lips made me weaken more and more. He spread my lips with his tongue, and the second it connected with mine, I moaned quietly. His tongue swirled around mine slowly before he sucked my top lip and nibbled the bottom one. As he held me close by my cheeks, like he couldn't risk me pulling away, Ali made love to my mouth.

He kissed me so passionately I whimpered.

My nipples hardened and pussy throbbed in anticipation of more, but I didn't want to make this harder for either of us. Even though he had been the one vocal about his changing desires, mine were merely stifled—tucked away neatly to keep me from overthinking what could be.

Maybe it was best for him to leave.

Maybe I couldn't handle sex with him for another twenty-seven days.

We slowly pulled away from each other, and I released a shaky breath.

“Ali,” I whispered, and his eyes sealed shut as his head shook.

“Don’t say my name like that, West. Not right now.”

It was risky, but I couldn’t stop myself from kissing him again. This time, he lowered me down onto the bed and made his way between my legs. I wasted no time lifting my hips so he could pull my cotton shorts and panties down. This was the opposite of what the hell was supposed to be happening, but I’d be a lie if I said this wasn’t what I wanted. What I wanted so much, it bordered a need.

I needed Ali.

Desperately.

And I needed to figure out in what capacity.

The moment he spread my legs as wide as they could go, I inhaled a deep breath. Ali’s dick game wasn’t the only thing that was exceptional; his head was too. He’d managed to perfect the perfect amount of suction on my clit. It was hard enough to immediately have me clenching but not so hard that it was painful. All it took was a few seconds of his sucking to have me cumming. And he was a tease too... he’d pull away at just the right time to draw my orgasm out.

Now was no different.

As soon as his lips latched onto my clit, I was gripping the edge of the bed and biting down on my lip. Deep, shaky breaths kept me from climbing over the edge too soon, but it wasn’t long before his slurping had moans and whimpers pouring from my mouth.

Just as my back began to arch and those spirals of pleasure began to shoot up my spine, he released his hold, licking between my lips and opening. Gripping his head, I tried to prepare myself for each move he made. He began to suck again, this time not letting up until warmth spread through me and my body locked as I came.

His middle and ring fingers entered me as he licked my clit, fucking me with the same slow pace. He didn't stop until I was crying out to God, joking that he was the one putting in this work. I couldn't help but laugh at his silly ass, and it was in that moment, as I looked into his eyes, that I saw my best friend.

Still.

He was still there.

We were still here.

And the fear that I had of this changing that wasn't as heavy on my heart anymore.

It was still there, though, and I would protect and honor our friendship above all. But for a brief moment, it didn't feel so damn scary taking this leap.

We moved to the center of the bed, and I was so anxious to have his lips back on mine that I was pulling him back down before he could enter me. As he did, Ali nibbled on my bottom lip. The fullness of his stroke had me gasping.

“Kiss me back,” he ordered, circling his lips.

I moaned as I wrapped my legs around him. Cupping his neck, I kissed him back as he filled me with medium-paced deep strokes. It was something about the steadiness of his strokes that was quickly becoming my weakness. I didn't have to tell him how to pleasure me—it was like he already knew...



“I DON'T UNDERSTAND why you aren't happier,” my mother replied.

Westin had just left with Lucki, and now, it was just me and my mother. My father and Tati had fallen asleep about three hours ago and GG Pam had done the same not long after. I started to leave then, but I didn't want to go back to an empty home. Not while Ali's scent would still be lingering.

I could understand why my mother said what she said. I'd just told her about the amazing opportunity I'd received, and I wasn't even smiling. I was happy about it, but I was also sad thinking about how I felt like a hypocrite because of it.

The company that I worked for was opening the first black-owned beauty supply store in their small neighborhood in Malibu. The owner had been so impressed with my work virtually that she offered me a position that would require me to also work as their full-time photographer. Since I would be over their monthly website changes, social media, and promotional graphics, Mya extended the invitation for me to fly out. It made sense because Mya relied heavily on following social media trends to drive clientele for her hair and makeup business as a stylist, and now that she would have a storefront, she was going to have to be even more involved.

Now the old me would have immediately turned down the promotion if it meant catching a flight because I was scared of heights, but I was expressing to my mother how quarantine reminded me to live in the present moment, face my fears, and do what makes me truly happy within my life.

And the reason I was feeling like a hypocrite was because I wasn't taking my own advice and doing the same thing with Ali. Hell, I hadn't even sat down and gone on a date with him, yet I was completely shutting down the idea of us taking things to the next level. I kept telling myself it was because that was the best way for me to exercise boundaries and maintain control to make sure our friendship remained solid, but truthfully, it was just fear of the unknown.

"I'm happy, Ma," I assured softly. "It just... made me realize something that I need to do with Ali."

"What's that?"

I didn't answer right away, wanting to make sure I wanted to let her in on how things had progressed between us.

"He suggested possibly seeing if we could take things to the next level."

She squealed and took my hands into hers as she danced in her seat. “Girl, you better be glad they are upstairs sleeping, or I would shout!”

The wideness of her joy-filled eyes made me laugh.

“What are you so happy about?”

“Do you know how long I’ve been waiting for you two to get together?”

My head shook as my laugh turned into a comfortable smile. “I don’t know why you’ve been waiting for that. There hasn’t even been anything romantic going on between us.”

“Maybe not, but I always wanted you with him because I trusted you with him. I knew no matter what, he would always do right by you. Honor you. Love you and respect you. You’ve never considered that, too?”

I shrugged. “Not intentionally, no. I mean... I’ve mirrored men against Ali, for sure. A lot of what I want in a man is because of his characteristics, but I never thought it would actually be him.”

“Why not?”

“He’s always been just a friend.”

“So what’s changed now?”

Not wanting to tell her that we had sex, I left it at, “Seeing each other after so long. Like I said, we haven’t really talked about it because I’ve been shutting down the idea. Which is why I feel like a hypocrite because I’m all for trying new things with everyone and everything except this.”

“That doesn’t make you a hypocrite; it makes you careful... and you have that right.”

“Yeah, and Ali is honoring it.”

“So what’s the problem, Westley? Really?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I don’t want him to. I did at first, but now... I think I shut things down too quickly. And I may have done some slight damage in the process. With how things are

now, I don't know if he's still even interested in talking about it and trying to date."

"Well..." She shrugged as she released my hands. "You won't know until you ask. I didn't raise no coward, so you need to have that conversation."

I nodded and released a sigh. That was true. I wouldn't know until we really talked about it. We were supposed to be meeting up with the crew tonight, so I didn't want to mess up the vibe. But tomorrow, for sure, we would have to talk. I would have to be brave and tell him that no matter the outcome, I believe our friendship is strong enough to withstand us at least dating and seeing where it will lead.

Because the truth of the matter is, Ali is the perfect man for me. He's handsome, financially secure, and solid spiritually. He accepts and loves me unconditionally. He's seen all of my weird and awkward phases and handled me with grace. I can trust him with every part of me. Ali always makes me feel safe and secure. At peace. He's my best friend and closest confidant.

He communicates well and is respectful. We have some of the same values and beliefs. And we enjoy a lot of the same things.

Why wouldn't that be the perfect foundation for a relationship?

And now that I know how proper his dick game is...

Whew.

I see why his exes have been so damn sprung!

More than just good sex, he's way more passionate and tender than I thought he would be, and I cannot deny how good being with him has made me feel.

God.

I hope I haven't made a mess of things.

So much has changed. The world will never be the same again. Was I a fool to not expect our friendship to change too?

Eight

A li

When I told Westley that I was on my way, I didn't tell her I was coming back to stay, so when she saw me carrying my bags, she smiled.

"Yay," she cheered quietly, doing a little jig that made me chuckle. "Does this mean you're over what could be between us?" she asked, following me back to the guest room.

"Pretty much," I confessed.

It had taken me three days, but I was finally at peace with the fact that we didn't want to explore a new level of our relationship. It wasn't what I wanted, but I was okay with that. I knew that with time, we would eventually settle back into how we used to be. Most importantly, I didn't want to jeopardize our friendship. So if that meant us never really dating or even having sex again, I would be okay with that.

"You mean you don't want me anymore?"

"I do, but not at the expense of us. I'm cool with us being just friends. More than cool with it, actually." After putting my bags down, I turned to face her. "So you don't have to worry about that anymore. Things are going to be back to normal."

I watched her expression, waiting for the moment relief covered it. When it never came, I began to wonder if this was what she really wanted. She said it was, so I could only assume she was just surprised that I'd caved so easily. All I could do was hope if she was changing her mind about giving us a chance, she would let me know.

“That easily?” She chuckled softly and shrugged. “You seemed so adamant about us trying, or at least talking about it. And you’re over it that fast?”

“Three days isn’t fast when you spend them obsessing over your best friend and praying to God that he would remove the soul tie you know becoming one with her created.” I took a step in her direction, eyes lowering to her chest when she inhaled and held her breath. “What’s this about?”

“Nothing. Just... wondering. Um...” She scratched her scalp and took a step back. “I’m glad you’re home! I have some really great news that I wanted to share with you.”

“Are you working today? If not, you can tell me, and we can hang out.”

“Ooh. Can we go to Urban Air? And then get Ramen?”

“Whatever you want.”

Her smile fell slightly as she stepped back in front of me. Wrapping her arms around me, Westley buried her head in my chest. She released a soft sigh before saying, “I missed you so much.”

I kissed the top of her head. “I missed you too. And I promise, I’m never going to let anything threaten our friendship. You mean too much to me.”

I felt her body stiffen before she pulled away. Even though her head was lowered slightly, I saw that she was smiling softly as she nodded and walked away.



“So...” I pressed, leaning forward.

We’d gone to Robata Ramen and were seated on the patio. Thankfully, the sun had set, so it wasn’t too hot or humid outside.

“What’s the good news that you had to tell me?”

“Oh, yes.” Westley smiled as she rested her chopsticks against her bowl. “The woman that I design for is opening a storefront in Cali and she’s invited me to join her. I’ll be doing what I do now, plus taking pictures of her and her beauty supply store staff plus their salon clients on a daily basis for the website and their social media.”

“What?” I stretched in disbelief. “You must be taking that long ass drive because I *know* you’re not getting on a plane.”

Her giggle was light and sweet. “I’m going to be flying out that way. Even though it’ll be full-time, I’ll only be working four straight days a week. I feel like starting out, I will want to come home quite often until I get used to being out there alone.”

I nodded my understanding. “Congratulations, West. I’m so fucking proud of you. Not just for the job but for finally stepping into your passion and overcoming your fear of flying. This is only the beginning for you. Soon, you’ll have your own graphic design firm. There’s no doubt about that.”

Her shoulders hiked as she smiled wider. “Thank you, friend. That means so much to me.” She paused. “Um... would you mind taking that first flight with me? It’s two weeks away and it’s to look at a few apartments. I’ve started to get my list together. I’m hoping to have a maximum of five to look at when I get there.”

“Of course I’ll go with you. What else do I have to do?”

She smiled. Even though I had money saved from my NBA career, I had invested quite a bit of it in other businesses to bring in a residual income. My life was literally spent doing whatever I wanted to do whenever I wanted to do it. Once every two weeks or so, I’d speak with the owners of the businesses I was investing in just to make sure they were straight, but as long as their deposits hit my account, we would be okay. I did spend time speaking to high school students and college athletes here and there, but other than that, my schedule was pretty much free.

Before this COVID bullshit, I was doing a lot of traveling on a monthly basis, but I didn’t see myself getting back on that

wave any time soon. I had gotten vaccinated, but I still wanted to take some time before trying to get back into the swing of things just to be safe.

“You’re the best, Ali,” she complimented with a warm smile. “What would I do without you?”

Westley’s arm stretched across the table. I took her hand into mine, caressing it with my thumb.

“Thrive. Just like you’re doing now. I don’t add anything to your life that can’t be taken away.”

“Then what do you think you do?”

“Increase what you already have.”

Westley sighed and looked away as her eyes watered. I hated to admit it, but our friendship was definitely too important to the both of us for us to risk it on sex and love. I could find that shit within any woman. Westley’s pussy was good as fuck. Honestly, the best I’d ever had. But pussy was pussy. Her heart, her love, her support, her friendship? Those were things I’d never be able to replace.

Nine

Westley

“Did you not consider me at all when you made that decision?”

Derrick’s question caught me so off guard, I didn’t respond right away. With a chuckle, I sat up in my seat. We were on our third date and I had shared my news with him. I wasn’t expecting him to be upset over it at all. We were still very early in the dating stage and things hadn’t even gotten physical yet. When I told him, it was more so to prepare him because I would be going out of town next week.

It caught me a little by surprise that he expected me to consider him when it came down to anything so soon. There was only one man I’d taken into consideration when making my decision and that was Ali. Unfortunately, that consideration was too little too late. Before I could even tell him that I wanted us to talk about taking things to the next level and seeing what could happen, he was shutting the thought down.

I was happy as hell when Ali came back home, but had I known it was because he wanted us to remain friends, I would have tried to make him stay away a little longer. The only reason I didn’t say anything was because I didn’t want him to think I was crazy and conflicted, unsure of what the hell I wanted. I had been so adamant about us not taking things to the next level... it wouldn’t have made sense for me to go against it in that moment.

The good thing was, I didn’t feel any regret over not telling him that I’d changed my mind. I figured if things were

to progress between us that it would happen naturally. The old saying was that a man knew the woman he wanted to commit to before she did, so maybe that's what had happened between us. Maybe that was the awakening Ali needed to prepare for what would happen between us in the future.

Scratching my head, I nibbled on my bottom lip to keep from speaking too quickly. Even though I wanted to be direct, I wanted to do so with respect.

“Derrick,” I called softly. “We aren’t deep enough into this for me to consider you with my decisions. I do, however, apologize if my choice to leave Memphis causes you discomfort.”

Derrick sighed. “I know we aren’t that deep, and we haven’t committed to each other, but I thought that would soon be on the way. Things have been really good between us, and I was actually planning to ask you to commit tonight.”

“Well, I guess it’s good that I told you about my move in advance then because I’m definitely not the long-distance type.”

His head tilted as he stared at me. “So, this is it?”

I shrugged. “That’s probably for the best.”

Honestly, it hadn’t been my plan to end things tonight because we had been having a good time, but based on his reaction, we probably needed to end this soon.

“Okay. Well, it’s been nice, Westley.”

I smiled and stood. My food hadn’t been delivered yet, thankfully, and I didn’t feel like sitting through what was bound to be an awkward meal. Pulling two twenty dollar bills out of my purse, I placed them on the table before kissing his temple.

“You’ll see me again. Is it okay if I call you when I’m in town?”

He smiled, finally, softly. “Yeah, I would like that.”

Derrick took my hand into his and kissed it, and I couldn’t lie... I would miss him. He was so sweet and charming, and

probably the only man I'd ever give my number to at a gas station. Though our time together was brief, he'd definitely made it worth it in more ways than he'd ever know. Not just with his companionship but by forcing Ali to come clean about what had been bothering him.

After we said our goodbyes, I headed out. I started to call Uriah and see if she was up to anything, but I FaceTimed my sister to see Lucki instead. Tati's overgrown ass wasn't at home and I couldn't blame her. She and her best friend had been taking full advantage of being vaccinated. They weren't going anywhere, but they were spending every weekend at each other's homes.

By the time I made it home, I texted Uriah to see if she wanted to do something just in case Ali had plans. It wasn't weird between us since he'd come back, which I was glad about. He came jogging down the stairs, shirtless, wearing a smile.

"What you doing back so early?" he checked, walking over to me.

"I told Derrick I was leaving, and things got a little weird, so we decided to just end things now."

"Oh." His smile fell and he tried to feign concern before his grin returned. "I'm sorry to hear that."

I chuckled. "No, you are not," I accused, swatting his arm. "You're glad I'm not talking to him anymore."

Ali shrugged as he took my hand and led me to the kitchen. "I got you something."

"Ali..."

"Just to congratulate you about the move. I wanted to do it right after you told me, but Shari's calendar was booked until today."

With a gasp, I released his hand and scurried past him toward the kitchen. "No you did not get me my favorite!"

But he did. I absolutely loved fruit pizzas and cupcakes and Shari made my favorite kind. She used fresh fruit in all of

her cupcakes and muffins. I think her lemon cupcakes were my favorite, but Ali's was chocolate.

Placing my hands on top of the table, I smiled. The sight of the balloon, teddy bear, and half a dozen cupcakes reminded me of when we were in high school and Ali had first made the basketball team. I became a cheerleader and we had gotten even closer. Sports had never been my thing, but I learned all about basketball to be able to talk to and support Ali. He was so passionate about it, his eyes would just light up when he spoke.

That's what our friendship had always been about—support and unwavering loyalty, no matter what.

“The fruit pizza is in the fridge,” he announced from behind me.

Standing less than an inch away from me, the heat from Ali's body began to transfer to mine. If I turned, our bodies would touch. That much was true. And maybe that truth was the reason I slowly turned, savoring the feel of his body being pressed against mine.

Ali's expression was soft yet serious as he stared at me with those dark, intense eyes. I loved how thick he was. Well, he hated when I called him that and made me say muscular instead. But he was the perfect build. I loved how his smooth, dark brown, tattoo-covered skin wrapped around his muscles. He could pick me up effortlessly. Like I was weightless. And straight manhandle me.

Just the thought had my lips parting slightly as my breathing slowed down.

“Thank you. You're always doing the sweetest things for me.”

“You deserve it.”

I had to keep myself from saying I deserved *him*. If he was genuinely trying to get me out of his system, it wouldn't be fair for me to work my way back inside. Yes, I believed fate would make a way if we were meant to be, but I couldn't guarantee that that would be any time soon. In about two

weeks, he'd be going back to Miami and I would be in Cali. That would still be too much distance between us for a relationship to work. In fact, we would be even further apart. Just the thought had my chin trembling and eyes watering. Dropping my head, I inhaled a shaky breath as I dried my eyes.

“What’s wrong, West?”

“Nothing. Just...” I chuckled as I lifted my head. “Sad over how much I’m going to miss you. We’re going to be even further apart when I get to Cali.”

His smile was soft as he wrapped his arms around me, and I didn’t realize how much I wanted, needed, to be this close to him until I was filled with relief.

“When has distance ever kept me from getting to you when we needed me to?”

Mirroring his smile, I pressed my body even more into his. “Well, on the bright side, I’ll be able to take a flight and come see you now.”

Ali chuckled. “You know how long I’ve been waiting to hear that? I’m really proud of you for finally releasing that fear. Now you will really be limitless.”

He was always saying shit like that, making me love him even more. He always spoke life into me. Even when we disagreed on something, it was with respect.

My hands slid up his arms. Arms wrapped around his neck. I confessed, “You make it so hard.”

He licked his lips, drawing my focus to them. “Make what hard? ’Cause you can feel what you make hard for me.”

I giggled, but it almost became a moan when he pressed his dick into me.

“Being just your friend now.”

“Was I supposed to make it easy?”

I shrugged. “I thought it would be as easy as it has always been. I can’t help but see you differently now.”

“How do you see me now?”

My smile was bitter before I licked my lips, forcing it to fall. “Someone who could’ve been... should’ve been mine.”

His stance weakened and his head tilted. “West...”

“I know, I know. We’re both on the same page of keeping this strictly platonic. And I know that’s for the best, especially with this new job.”

“Yeah, love is distracting,” he added quickly. “We support each other like crazy, but when I love on you romantically, that shit is going to consume you. I want you at your best for this job with no distractions.”

I couldn’t keep myself from pouting as I pushed his arms down. “You said that like it would make this better. It only made it worse.”

Ali chuckled as he grabbed my arm and kept me from walking away. “I’m telling the truth. And I’m only looking out for you. For us.” He placed a kiss to the center of my forehead. “Us remaining friends is for the best, at least for now. This job is the confirmation I needed. It may not be what we want, but until we find ourselves closer and you settled into your new position, it’s definitely what we need.”

“I agree, but I need something else too.”

“What?”

“You.”

With one side of his mouth, Ali smiled. “I need you too. Been needing you since the last time I had you.”

I turned him slowly, so that he was leaning against the table. The sight of his eyes lowering as he bit down on his bottom lip had chills covering my arms. Taking my time removing his clothing, I weakened with each kiss he placed on my neck. It was hard to maintain focus when he started massaging my ass, but still, I wanted to please him for a change.

“Ali,” I almost purred as his nose slid across my neck.

“You smell so fucking good,” he complimented before groaning low and smacking my ass.

“If you don’t stop, I won’t be able to get on my knees...”

The haste in which he released me caused me to laugh, but as promised, I lowered myself in front of him. His dick was springy, bobbing right in front of my face. Licking my lips, I gripped his thighs before swirling my tongue around his head. I knew I wasn’t capable of taking his full length into my mouth, so I focused on getting half of his shaft saturated with my saliva so I could stroke him with my fists while licking and sucking his head.

When I worked my way up to a medium pace, quiet moans began to pour from his lips as he gripped the back of my head. I loved looking up at him, watching pleasure reveal itself in his eyes and face. The way his abs clenched. How he would hiss and nibble his bottom lip.

“Fuck, West,” he moaned, leaning further into the table.

We’d done this enough for me to know his weakening was the first signal of his pending orgasm. Lifting his shaft, I continued to stroke it while sucking his balls and licking the space between them and his asshole. In mere seconds, his entire body was jerking as his seeds shot out of him.

“Shit,” he groaned, trying to push me away as he convulsed, but I continued my pleasurable assault until his head was dry.

Dick still hard, Ali helped me to stand before sitting down. I straddled him, giggling softly as he lifted my breasts and began to lick and suck my nipples. My breathing slowed down as he nibbled them. Taking his shaft into my hand, I slid down it softly, gasping as he stretched and filled me.

My pace started out slow, but the more he pulled my hair and sucked my nipples, the better it felt and faster I went. Ali slipped his fingers into my mouth and wet them before circling my asshole. Our lips connected, and I fed him my moans.

“Can I come in?” he requested softly against my lips.

“Yes,” I agreed through my moan. “Gently. I’m a virgin there.”

Ali chuckled before kissing me again. He thumbed my clit with his left hand while his right middle finger began to enter my asshole. The movements were gentle and slow, and between each one, he broke our kisses to ask if I was okay. By the time he was in fully, I was experiencing so much pleasure I could no longer kiss him back. I’d never felt so full and warm in my life.

My pussy felt even tighter as it leaked. It wasn’t long before my ridges swelled and my pussy pulsed as I came. He continued to finger my ass and lift his hips, stroking my pussy while I climaxed. When I was done, he carefully slipped his finger out, wrapped his arms around me, and stood.

I was so sated, I could barely keep my legs spread when he positioned me on the edge of the table. Head flung back, I pulled in choppy breaths as Ali dropped me down onto his dick. Each time he did it, my legs shook and closed around him a little more.

“Open your legs,” he commanded, stroking me harder.

The sound of our bodies pounding against one another covered my whimpers as I gripped the table. Eyes rolling into the back of my head, I cried out as he hummed. My legs closed again, and instead of telling me to open them, Ali twisted my body sideways and put my right leg on his shoulder while the left dangled against his side. My whimpers turned into loud moans as he continued his medium-paced steady strokes. The top half of my body weight rested against my elbow as I choked him.

The animalistic growl he released as he picked up the pace of his strokes had waves of pleasure cascading out of me and onto his shaft. Back arched and toes curled, I stuck my pointer finger into his mouth as I came, and he sucked it, keeping up the same pace as I convulsed.

Ali pulled out quickly, shooting his seeds on my pussy as he jerked. I wrapped my legs around him, pulling him closer so we could kiss. His arms circled me, hugged me, while he

kissed me so deeply, I was willing to never breathe again if it meant not breaking our kiss. And it was in that moment that I was no longer able to deny things between us would never be the same again.

Ten

A li
“Ali,” she called, voice shaky.

Her arm wrapped around mine, and she placed her chin on my shoulder.

So far, the flight had been fairly decent. Westley had only had a brief anxiety spell when we first took off. Now, we were going through a little turbulence, and I was trying to keep her calm. It hardly rained in Malibu in June, but of course, it rained on our way there. I felt like that was a test of her faith and belief in herself to handle this change in her life, because the old Westley would have demanded the pilot turn this hoe around and take her back to Memphis.

Today, though, even with tears in her eyes and fear in her heart, she was still committed to embracing this new chapter in her life.

“Breathe,” I instructed, needing her to stay present and grounded.

“I’m sca—”

“Breathe,” I repeated, brushing her hair out of her face with my free hand. Kissing around her face, I repeated the mantra about five times before she was actually breathing deeply. “You’re okay,” I assured as we passed through the turbulence.

Placing soft kisses on her lips, I slid my hand under the blanket across her lap. Since I wanted to train her mind to not see turbulence as something to fear, I deepened our kiss while

slipping my hand into her shorts. Instantly, her widened eyes lowered. She smiled before biting down on my shoulder gently. Keeping our eyes locked, I took her to a new height with my fingers until she came.

When she did, I pulled my hand out and licked her cum from my fingers.

“You are so nasty.” She gushed, leaning back in her seat.

“It worked.”

“I won’t deny that,” she replied, eyes closing as she breathed deeply.

For the rest of our flight, Westley remained calm. Her nerves didn’t start to rattle until it was time to land, but they passed quickly after that. After taking a picture to send to her folks and let them know that she had survived her first flight, we grabbed an Uber for that long ass drive from LAX to Malibu. Time passed rather quickly, though, because she was so excited, she couldn’t stop talking. It was good to see her in this element.

I was sure she was tired of me repeating how proud of her I was, but I couldn’t help myself. I really was proud of my best friend, and I wasn’t going to let anything or anyone take away this monumental moment for her—even herself.

When we arrived at the Airbnb penthouse I was renting for the weekend, the shit was so beautiful, I didn’t even want to leave. Both Memphis and Miami had some beautiful sights, but Cali had always been and would always be my favorite place to visit in the United States. Everything about the vibe was different here.

“Jesus Christ, this is beautiful,” Westley complimented as we entered the penthouse.

I couldn’t deny that, either.

The layout was large, bright, and spacious. Large windows gave an amazing view of the ocean. It had white and cream décor, accented by plants and abstract paintings. Mirrors lined almost every wall that didn’t have windows. All of the rooms and the kitchen were large as hell. I think both of us liked the

patio most. The patio furniture and dining table definitely gave grill, smoke, and chill vibes.

“I can’t wait to be able to afford a place like this,” Westley almost sang. “I know it’s going to take me years before I make this level, though.”

“Not at all,” I countered, making my way behind her and placing a kiss on the side of her neck. She smiled widely as her body crumbled in my embrace. “If you want something like this, it’s yours. Just put it on your list for us to see today.”

Westley sighed. “Ali, I can’t afford this. I mean, the cost of living is higher here, so I’ll definitely be getting paid more, but I’ll also have to spend more. The apartments on my list are all one bedroom with less than a thousand square feet, and they are all three and four thousand a month. I’m sure something like this would be eight to ten. Do you know how many jobs I’d have to work to afford that?”

“None if I’m offering to pay it for you.”

“Ali, I can’t let you do that.”

“Then sell the house and use that money to pay up your rent for a year.”

Her head shook as her smile fell. “I could never sell that house. It was the best gift anyone has ever gotten me.”

It came as a surprise to no one that I bought Westley a car and house when I did the same for my parents.

“If you sold it to elevate, I wouldn’t mind that at all. That’ll give you a year to work here and make a name for yourself and also start your graphic design firm. You can save your money too. And if you still couldn’t afford it, you know I got you with no questions.”

As she released a long breath, Westley turned in my arms.

“You’re so wise. You always have the answers to everything.”

My head shook as I smiled softly. “Not everything. I just know if I don’t know, I at least know who to go to.”

Mirroring my smile, she wrapped her arms around me. Lifting onto the tips of her toes, she started to kiss me, but she pulled back.

“I really want to kiss you,” she said quietly, like that wasn’t obvious.

“Then kiss me.”

“Is that really okay? We’re not together.”

“I don’t care about us not being together. I only care about craving you more with each second that you keep our lips apart.”

With a grin, she stood on her tiptoes again. This time, she connected her lips with mine. Her body relaxed against me immediately and I lowered myself, allowing her to relax more.

When she told me that she was having second thoughts about us being just friends, my heart skipped a beat. I wanted to tell her she was mine in that moment, but I couldn’t do that to her. I’d spent all of my twenties living for myself and using my dreams to make my reality better. Getting into a serious relationship was the last thing on my mind, and I think that’s why I held on to Westley as much as I did too.

Now, it was her turn to go after what she truly wanted, and I couldn’t stand in the way of that. No matter how much I wanted her to be mine, I would give her the grace and space to get settled into her career first. Shit, as far as I was concerned, she was already mine just without the title. I would be by her side every step of the way just like she’d done me, and there wasn’t a damn thing she could do to keep me out of her pussy. When the time was right, we’d have the title, but for now... I was more than content with our bond.

Eleven

Westley

As much as Ali was trying to behave, I could tell he was interested in the bartender. She was absolutely gorgeous and charming. I couldn't even say it was because she was trying to work up a good tip. They genuinely were having a good time going back and forth with each other. Even though Ali was trying to remain respectful and not flirt or entertain her too much, he was unable to deny his attraction when he looked at her. At first, him trying to avoid looking at her was cute but then it started to make me feel bad.

Technically, we weren't in a relationship, and I didn't want him to feel like we weren't still true friends. I didn't want him to feel like he couldn't be himself around me. Yes, it stung a little, but I was a grown woman. Ali hadn't committed to me with his words, so I wasn't expecting it with his actions.

When I saw her heading back in our direction to give us the bill, I stood and told him, "Handle that."

"Handle what?"

"Get her number."

He chuckled and shook his head. "Nah."

"Go ahead," I granted as she leaned against the bar. "That'll give you something... someone... to do while you're visiting me and I'm at work."

His grin was wide as he licked his lips and tucked the bottom one between his teeth. "Are you sure, Westley?"

"Positive," I assured with a wink before walking away.

Truth was, I didn't want to actually see him get her number. Didn't want to hear the lower octave he'd use to lure her. Didn't want to hear the smooth words pouring from his lips.

And if I couldn't handle this, how would I handle him dating? Introducing his new girl to the crew? Getting married? Having babies?

Jesus.

My heart began to palpitate as I looked at myself in the mirror. I was okay with us being friends for the time being, but I hadn't taken into consideration how I would feel if he dated anyone in the meantime. If he fell in love and ended the possibility of us. Now I was starting to understand why he'd reacted the way he did to Derrick. All I could think about was watching the man that I knew was for me be with and love on someone else.

So much for having faith in fate...

Twelve

A li

Westley had been off for the past week or so. She was trying her hardest to be her normal self, but I knew her so well that I could tell when something was wrong and she was overthinking. I asked her if she was starting to have second thoughts about moving and she said no, so I didn't know what it could be.

I was supposed to be heading back to Miami in the morning, but I wanted to make sure she was really straight before I did. Instead of asking her again, I went upstairs to Westley's game room to talk to Uriah. If it was something she didn't want to tell me for whatever reason, Uriah was the only other person she'd tell. She looked up at me and smiled before taking a long pull of her CBD joint.

Sitting next to her, I casually looked at the TV to see what unfamiliar song was playing on Pandora.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"That's what I'm trying to figure out. Does West seem okay to you?"

Uriah shrugged as she put the joint out. "She's in her feelings."

"About what? Why didn't she come to me?"

Her eyes rolled. "Because it's about you."

That caught me so off guard, I frowned as I sat up in my seat. "Fuck you mean it's about me?"

She chuckled. “You can’t be this damn slow. When did she start acting funny to you, Ali?”

Thinking it over, I cupped my hands and spread my legs a little further as my tongue rolled over my teeth.

“Right after we came back from Malibu.”

“And what happened in Malibu?”

I shrugged. “We had a good time. Looked at the apartments and condos she liked. Mya invited us to a party to welcome her in.”

“And the last night y’all were there?”

“Nothing abnormal. We went to the beach and hit a bar before we packed for our flight but that’s it.”

“Ding ding ding!” Uriah squeezed my knee as she laughed. “Did you not hook up with the bartender?”

I laughed in disbelief. “I didn’t hook up with her. We exchanged numbers and I did kick it with her when she got off, but West was sleep when I left.”

“No she wasn’t.”

“So what? She think I fucked her?”

Uriah shrugged. “She doesn’t know what happened. She just knows she doesn’t like how it felt to even consider you being with someone else.”

Releasing an extended sigh, I scratched my scalp. “We agreed to be just friends, Uriah.”

“Which is why she’s trying her hardest to act normal. She doesn’t want to make you feel bad about it because y’all are just friends. She’s just in her feelings, that’s all. Once you leave, I’m sure it’ll be easier for her to heal. And she’ll be in Malibu permanently next month, so I’m sure that’ll help too.”

I nodded, unsure of what the hell to say. I was confused as hell. Westley was the one who told me to talk to Lindsey. Yeah, she was flirting, and I was flirting back, but I wasn’t going to actually exchange numbers with her. And even the flirting was casual because I was with West. It wasn’t like I

was complimenting her beauty or no shit like that. So I wasn't thinking much of it.

"I 'preciate you letting me know," I muttered as I stood, needing to talk to Westley even more now.

If we were really going to make this friend thing work, we would have to get some boundaries in place. I couldn't even feel some type of way because of how I reacted when she introduced us to Derrick, but I also didn't want to do anything to make her feel uncomfortable. Pussy was pussy, and I could get that from anyone. There wasn't a need for me to bring a woman around the crew if it was going to make her uncomfortable. Westley would always be my highest priority. But, if this was a sign that we needed to take things to the next level now, that was something we both needed to be on the same page about too.

When I found Westley, she was standing outside, giving Saint a foil pan for the grilled salmon she'd requested.

"I need to talk to you," I told her, using her arm to gently pull her away.

"Oop." She tripped slightly over her own feet before falling in line next to me. "Okay. Is everything okay?"

I remained silent until we were in her room. As I locked the door, I told her, "I need you to tell me how you really feel... what you really want. And don't lie or withhold any part of the truth."

"Ali..."

"Don't say what you think I want or what I want to hear. Tell me how you really feel."

Westley fluffed her big curls as she sighed and plopped down on the edge of her bed.

"About what?" she asked innocently, and I had to keep myself from smirking.

"You know what. About me. Us."

Westley patted the bed next to her and I sat down. She took my hand into hers, and I mentally prepared for her to tell me

that she couldn't handle seeing me with other women.

"I thought I could handle you dating other women, but I don't think I can." I nodded. "That's not to say you can't. I think it'll just be easier on the both of us if we keep our romantic partners away. I didn't really understand how threatened Derrick made you feel until you left to spend time with Lindsey. Not threatened because of jealousy... but in the sense of... she was going to possibly have you in a way that I wouldn't. And I'm sure it was the same with you and Derrick."

"That's true."

She nodded softly. "So that experience definitely humbled me." Westley chuckled quietly. "It was easy for me to toss your feelings to the side while I entertained another option. But seeing you with her and thinking about you being with her or anyone else... that really fucked with me. And I know I have no right to feel that way..."

"Yes, you do," I interrupted. "You're entitled to feel everything you feel. I just need to know what that feeling is so we can move accordingly."

"Okay," she agreed softly. "Right now, I feel like this is a time of elevation in my life. For the first time, I'm so happy and at peace and content with everything. I'm finally going for mine. And I know my career is going to take a lot, but I want you too. So... I want to go after you too."

My heart fucking skipped a beat. Had me feeling weak as shit. But Westley was the only person I'd allow to let me feel like that.

"You don't have to go after me. I'm already yours."

Her smile widened. "So what does this mean?"

"It means... if you think you can handle it, maybe we shouldn't wait. If you want this, let's make it happen now."

Westley wrapped her arms around me, and I couldn't resist connecting my lips with hers. Even though we were finally taking things to the next level, I didn't feel the need to seal the moment with sex. Right now, just having her in my arms and

on my lips... close to my heart... was enough to make this moment perfect.



WESTLEY WAS POUTING hard as hell as she watched me pack my bags. It was hard as hell holding my laughter back. I kept telling her if she wanted me to stay to just say that. She said this was the year she was going after hers... so I wanted her to have everything she wanted. But I wanted her to actually ask for it. All it took was for her to do that, and I would stay.

She was going to be leaving for Malibu in a month and I wanted us to take advantage of our time together while we could, but I didn't want to feel like I was making all of the choices for us. Yeah, I was the man, but we were partners. It was my job not just to lead her but to do so with her influence.

"Westley," I called when she crossed her arms and kicked air. My chuckle erupted, which only made her pout more, making me laugh harder. "What the hell is wrong with you, woman?"

"I don't want you to go," she whined, finally making her way from the doorframe over to the bed.

"So why didn't you just say that?"

"Because I didn't want to seem clingy and spoiled."

"That ain't stop your ass when we were just friends, so I'm not expecting it to change now."

Even though she was smiling as she sat down, she rolled her eyes. Westley looked up at me with those dark, beautiful, slanted eyes... and she could have had anything she asked of me in that moment.

"Just because we're together, I don't want your life to revolve around me."

"It doesn't, but my schedule can. I'm at a comfortable stage in my life where I have the flexibility to make our relationship a main priority. The businesses I invest in run

themselves, and I can always talk to kids at schools in Tennessee on a biweekly basis. I have the time and wealth to do whatever the fuck I want whenever the fuck I want.”

“I guess this is still so new that I’ve forgotten I have a man who can make things happen with no hesitation.”

“Damn right. So if you want me to stay... just say you want me to stay.”

“I want you to stay.”

Lifting her off the bed, I pulled her into my arms. “I’ve been waiting for you to say that,” I confessed before kissing her.

I always rented my home out when I took trips, so I would do the same thing for the next month. Right now, I just wanted the time and opportunity to get to know Westley in this new way. I wanted to see how the role of being my woman would differ from her role as my best friend. Hopefully, it only changed for the better. But if it didn’t, at least we would be able to say we’d tried...

Epilogue

Westley

A month and two weeks later...

I WAS SO glad Mya was flexible with my start date. I didn't want to leave Memphis until my home was sold, which was a hard enough task because I didn't want to sell it. Still, I knew it would be the final thing I needed to release in order to prepare for this new phase in my life. A part of me really didn't want to let it go because Ali had purchased it for me, but since I had him in this new way, it didn't feel necessary to hold on to it so tightly anymore.

Thankfully, I was able to sell it for a little under half a million, which was way more than what I was expecting. The value had increased over the years with all of the updates we'd made and how well I had kept it up, so the price had almost doubled from what he'd spent on it so many years ago.

Even though I felt like I would be in love with my new life in Malibu, I didn't want to invest all of that money into buying a home or even a condo. I did, however, put up six figures to cover a year's rent on a beautiful condo on the beach. The rest was tucked safely into a bank account, waiting for my next move.

After partying hard with my family and friends, I headed to Malibu with Ali, and it took us about four days to get the condo cleaned and decorated like I wanted. I'd been working with a virtual interior designer and she had picked out furniture for every room and had it all shipped so that it would

be waiting for me when I arrived. I was so grateful for Ali coming with me because having his help made the process take a lot less time than if I was doing it on my own. I was confident that I'd be ready for my family and friends to visit for my housewarming in about a month.

With my hands on my hips, I looked out of the window at the beautiful, deep blue waves rippling within the ocean. If anyone would have told me going into quarantine and losing my job would have led to all of this... I would have laughed in their face. That virus, even though it wasn't raging as much and causing as much damage, had taken a lot from me. From the world.

From jobs and lives loss to relationships ending and security and mental and emotional stability being threatened.

The moment that I thought would be the deepest, darkest of my life, forced me to search within and understand that the only person I could fully rely on and trust in was myself. If I didn't love anyone else or feel happy with anyone else, I had to learn to love and be happy with myself. Above all, I was the one I would spend the most time with in my life, and the past year had shown me just how important it was for me to have a healthy relationship with myself and my spouse. Hell, even my family and friends. I'd been taking inventory of the relationships in my life like crazy now. Any relationship that no longer served me healthy love had to go.

"Alright, bae." My eyes closed at the sound of his voice. We had agreed that he would go home today since I was all settled in. I was so excited about my new job and enjoying this new city, but I was also going to miss my homie lover friend. My whole heart. My Ace.

"You done taking your stuff out?"

"Yeah."

Ali made his way next to me.

"Isn't it beautiful?"

He looked down at me. "Absolutely."

Looking up at him, I smiled. “Thank you for everything. You made this a smooth and less stressful transition.”

“Always.”

Ali wrapped me into his arms and placed a kiss on my forehead.

“I’m going to miss you. I can’t wait to see you again and you haven’t even left.”

I chuckled even though I was serious.

“I’ll be back before you know it. And with your three-day weekends, you can come to me whenever.”

He didn’t know, but I planned to take that flight to Miami Thursday as soon as I got off work. Now that he’d been dicking me down on the regular, I wasn’t trying to go back to my fingers and toys.

He kissed my pout away, turning it into a smile.

“I love you, Ali.”

“I love you too.”

I’d never questioned that before, but I was even more convinced of his love now. The past six weeks as his girlfriend had been wonderful. It was fun and interesting dating him and getting to know him on a more intimate level. Ali the boyfriend was pretty much exactly the same as Ali the friend. I guess because we already were so close with so much in common. Only difference was we were just nasty as hell.

“Walk me to the door before I change my mind,” he commanded, squeezing my ass and pulling me closer.

Lord knows I didn’t want to say goodbye to him, but I nodded and took his hand. We walked to the door together in silence. With small steps, we eventually made it to my front door.

“Check in with me when you get to the airport. And when you land. And call me when you get home.”

“Okay. Don’t come out this door if you’re going to cry.”

I nodded, squeezing my eyes shut. He laughed and gave me another soft kiss before grabbing his carry-on bag and heading out. I didn't open my eyes until a few seconds had passed. Even though I would miss him, it wasn't like I felt like I wouldn't be able to carry on without him. The transition had been healthy. I knew we would miss each other's touch and spending as much quality time together as we were used to, but we would make it work.

With a sigh, I walked through my new home again, sure that would lift my spirits. The only area I hadn't started working on yet was my sacred prayer room. I wanted to make sure that area wasn't tainted by anyone else's spirit, so I hadn't allowed the delivery men or Ali to enter it. I peeked my head inside, excited about the possibilities of what I would turn it into before deciding to make me a jar of green juice before I got started.

By the time I'd gotten all of my fruit and vegetables out and onto the counter, my phone was ringing. I knew Ali hadn't made it to LAX already, so I grew alarmed, thinking something was wrong. Answering the phone quickly, I asked, "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah. You told me to call you when I got home. I'm home."

Leaning against the granite island, I chuckled in confusion. "How are you in Miami already? That must have been the fastest flight in life."

He laughed. "I'm not in Miami. I'm in Malibu."

I looked around, like he was still in my condo. "How? Where?"

"In a condo a few doors down from yours."

"The peach one that was for rent too?"

"Yeah."

Jogging out of the kitchen, I headed for my room to slip into a pair of sandals, needing to see this for myself.

"How? Are you serious? Are you really moving here?"

“Yes.” I squealed as I rushed to the front door. “I want you to have your space and life to maneuver your way through this new city and career, but I also wanted you to know that I love you and that our relationship is a priority to me. Being damn near three-thousand miles away from you just wouldn’t do.”

Instead of shedding the tears that were threatening to fall, I dropped my phone onto the table by the front door and headed out of my condo. Making my way down the walkway as quickly as I could, I tried to contain my excitement. It was one thing for Ali to say he loved me and was committed to making our relationship work, but if he had really made this move...

As soon as I saw him open the door, I jumped and squealed, making him laugh. He crossed his arms over his chest as he shook his head and licked his lips.

“Ali,” I whispered, charging up the stairs and almost falling into his arms.

“Mmm,” he hummed, lifting me up and carrying me into his condo.

I didn’t even care to see if he’d had any of his belongings packed up and shipped here or not. If he’d started decorating or anything yet. All I cared about was the fact that my best friend, my baby, was at my side for the next phase of my life... and I was so grateful to be able to spend the rest of my days with him.

The End!

AS ALWAYS, if you enjoyed Westley and Ali’s story, please recommend it to a friend and leave a review on Amazon/Goodreads.

If you rave about the story on social media, make sure you tag me (@authorblove) and let me know. I love showing my readers love! 😊☐

And if you want to read about the next woman in the boss babe novella series, you can download her book [here](#).

AFTERWORD

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